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Virginia Woolf's Illnesses

Douglas W. Orr, M.D.

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Douglass W. Orr, M.D.



Edited by Wayne K. Chapman



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Contents

Preface viii

Acknowledgments xiv



| | |
|---|----|
| <i>Chapter One: The Stephen Family</i> | 1 |
| Leslie Stephen | 3 |
| Hereditary Madness | 4 |
| Julia Stephen | 5 |
| The Marriage | 6 |
| Virginia's Views of Her Early Family Life | 8 |
| | |
| <i>Chapter Two: Virginia's Childhood</i> | 11 |
| The Setting When Virginia Was Born | 12 |
| Virginia's Early Years | 13 |
| Separations and Losses | 16 |
| Some Especially Crucial Years | 17 |
| "A State of Anxious Growth" | 22 |
| | |
| <i>Chapter Three: Traumatic Early Adolescence</i> | 25 |
| Early Medical History | 26 |
| 1895: After Julia's Death | 27 |
| 1896 | 29 |
| 1897 | 30 |
| Adolescence | 33 |
| Summary | 35 |
| | |
| <i>Chapter Four: The Second Major Breakdown</i> | 38 |
| Relations with George Duckworth | 39 |
| Leslie Stephen's Death | 41 |
| Virginia's View of Her 1904 Breakdown | 43 |
| The Second Madness | 44 |
| The Rest Cure | 47 |
| A New Life | 49 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Chapter Five: The 1910 Illness</i> | 53 |
| Why This Illness? | 55 |
| | |
| <i>Chapter Six: Engagement and Marriage</i> | 57 |
| Preliminary | 58 |
| Leonard Woolf Returns | 59 |
| Reasons for Doubts | 62 |
| | |
| <i>Chapter Seven: Madness Again: 1913</i> | 65 |
| The Decision Not To Have Children | 67 |
| Virginia's Letters: First Half of 1913 | 70 |
| Another Rest Cure | 73 |
| Curious and Fateful Mistakes | 75 |
| | |
| <i>Chapter Eighth: Madness Once More: 1915</i> | 79 |
| The Wise Virgins | 81 |
| Notes on Psychopathology | 84 |
| Conclusion | 85 |
| | |
| <i>Chapter Nine: Books and Illnesses: I</i> | 87 |
| General Observations | 88 |
| <i>Night and Day</i> | 90 |
| <i>Jacob's Room</i> | 93 |
| | |
| <i>Chapter Ten: Books and Illnesses: II</i> | 97 |
| <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> | 98 |
| <i>To the Lighthouse</i> | 100 |
| <i>Orlando</i> | 103 |
| <i>The Waves</i> | 104 |
| | |
| <i>Chapter Eleven: Books and Illnesses: III</i> | 109 |
| <i>Flush</i> | 110 |
| <i>The Years</i> | 111 |
| The Menopause | 118 |
| Winding Up <i>The Years</i> | 119 |
| | |
| <i>Chapter Twelve: Books and Illnesses: IV</i> | 123 |
| <i>Three Guineas</i> | 124 |

Roger Fry: A Biography 126

Chapter Thirteen: Virginia's Account of Her Final Year 131

Invasion Expected 132

The Battle of Britain 134

The Final Month 141

Chapter Fourteen: Virginia's Suicide and the Aftermath 149

Quiet Suffocation 151

The Suicide and Its Aftermath 152

Why Did Virginia Commit Suicide? 154

Chapter Fifteen: Notes on Diagnosis 159

Hereditary Illness? 160

Manic-Depressive? 161

Reactive Psychosis? 162

Narcissistic Personality? 163

Sexuality 167

Summary 168

Notes (by Chapter) 173



A Note on the Author 182

Preface

The opportunity to edit and publish this book began with a lucky coincidence. In June 2002, I presented a paper at the Twelfth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf at Sonoma State University. The paper had enough of a Julian Bell connection to have been placed in a panel generally about Julian and Quentin Bell. The coincidence was that a fellow presenter, Nancy Orr Adams, who might not have attended the conference had it been anywhere but in California that year, gave a rousing account of the unfortunate history of her father's work in the hands of conventional publishing houses, both commercial and academic. A marriage, family, and child counselor from Ukiah, she had collaborated with him on his last published book, *Life Cycle Counseling* (1987; see the biographical note on p. 182, below). Naturally, she tried to steer *Virginia Woolf's Illnesses* toward an appropriate press after his death in 1990. Overall, the way proved daunting but more so after cancer surgery and strokes had sidelined his pursuit of a publisher, leaving "the ms. to a much younger writer" who was to "revise it," he said, "becoming my co-author" (unpublished letter, D. W. Orr to Quentin Bell, 4 June 1988). The more the pity the book missed that moment to make the "real and valuable contribution to our understanding of Virginia as a person" that the late Professor Bell predicted in a letter he gave to the manuscript as an Introduction. I have kept the letter in its place but have attached it to the Acknowledgments on p. xiv. The audience at Sonoma State suggested that discussions generally known to be taking place in the International Virginia Woolf Society's business sessions—on an emerging consortium for publishing scholarship on Virginia Woolf online and on-demand—might offer this book to interested readers without undue delay and expense. And this is precisely what has come to pass in the work you have before you.¹

Nancy Adams's paper was, as its subtitle declared, "a story about the author [Douglass W. Orr], his wife and Professor Quentin Bell." Her approach suggested my own interest in writing couples. For she said, "My story is not specifically concerned with Virginia Woolf herself, but with a married couple named Jean and Douglass Orr. Professionally, Jean was a social worker and Douglass a pioneer and prominent West Coast psychoanalyst." As she drew on her father's unpublished Preface at that point, it seems best here to quote Dr. Orr himself on the origin of the study and his affinity for Woolf as a subject. It all began when he and his wife made a trip abroad in 1969. In 1984, he wrote:

About fifteen years ago a fellow tourist in London gave me a newspaper clipping about Bloomsbury the district and the Group. The article included the episode of Virginia and Leonard Woolf buying a hand-operated printing press in 1917, and it dawned on me that this was the beginning of the

Hogarth Press. As a psychoanalyst I already knew that the Press had published the Standard Edition of Freud in English, and a good many other psychoanalytic writings, as well.

I began reading about those in, or on the fringes of, the Bloomsbury Group who were involved with psychoanalysis: the Woolfs as publishers, James and Alix Strachey as translators, Adrian and Karin Stephen as practitioners, and Lytton Strachey, whose works James sent to Freud, who in turn complimented Lytton on his psychological understanding of Elizabeth and Essex. There was also Roger Fry who disagreed with Freud about the sources of artistic creativity in a pamphlet published by the Hogarth Press.

As a physician and psychiatrist, as well as a psychoanalyst, I was caught up in the problem of Virginia Woolf's "madness." This book is my attempt to shed additional light on the origins and symptoms of her various illnesses, both mental and physical. I shall suggest different perspectives from those in other writings about her mental breakdowns.

In those days, Quentin Bell's famous biography was but a work in progress. The Orrs had begun to immerse themselves in the works of Virginia Woolf, her family, friends, and critics. Dr. Orr wrote a 52-page paper entitled "Psychoanalysis and The Bloomsbury Group," which was read at a meeting of the San Diego Psychoanalytic Society on 21 April 1978. Adams recalls that, although never published in the *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, for which it was intended, this "contribution to the history of psychoanalysis . . . whetted [her father's] appetite to delve further into the world of Virginia Woolf, her family, and various Bloomsbury Group members."² In time, the book he wrote needed to be defined and qualified professionally in terms of everything that ought, or might, be said:

This is not a psychobiography. I am not telling everything I know or, as a psychoanalyst, can surmise about Virginia's psychic development and functioning. I cannot, for example, analyze the somatic delusions of two of her illnesses or the episodes that suggest anorexia nervosa. I shall mention a number of diagnostic possibilities, granting that I have not examined my "patient." I venture to do so because diagnoses in psychiatry particularly are based upon careful history-taking, and, except for infancy, we have a good deal of Virginia's life history both in her own words and in the reminiscences of others.

According to Adams, in the fall of 1983, the book began in earnest with a journey the Orrs referred to as their "Bloomsbury Quest," visiting, as Jean Orr noted in her diary, "the places where the so-called Bloomsbury group of writers, artists, and others lived and worked was natural for us as we had for some years been

reading about this group, starting with Professor Quentin Bell's biography of his aunt, *Virginia Woolf* [published in 1972-1973]. We started our quest by going to the house at 22 Hyde Park Gate where Sir Leslie Stephen and his wife lived with their children.[. . .] In my imagination as I looked at the house, I could see the four Stephen children starting out for a walk in Hyde Park, probably accompanied by a nurse or governess according to the custom of the time." She described Russell Square and No. 52 Tavistock Square, where Leonard and Virginia operated the Hogarth Press until bombed out in the Second World War. They toured Gordon and Fitzroy Squares, and, as Jean Orr recorded in her diary, they visited Quentin Bell and his wife in their home in Sussex:

As we got out of the car, Professor Bell came around the corner of one of the outbuildings to greet us. He was dressed in a sort of blue coverall and apologized for dusty hands, but we shook hands anyway. He didn't say so but he may have been working on pottery. A versatile man, he is potter, painter, sculptor and writer.[. . .] In the house we met his wife, Anne Olivier Bell. She was on crutches as she had broken an ankle some weeks before. This didn't cramp her style as she led us into a small room, which she said was the warmest in the house. It must have been her study as she pointed to her desk, piled high with papers. She is still in the process of editing the diaries of Virginia Woolf [published between 1977 and 1984], and in writing footnotes.

They visited Berwick Church—decorated by Duncan Grant and Vanessa and Quentin Bell—as well as Charleston and, of course, Monks House, the last home of Leonard and Virginia Woolf, especially impressive for its "garden [. . .] extensive with flowerbeds, shrubs, trees and some statues," from which Virginia ventured to the river to drown herself on 28 March 1941, the last words of her diary being (on 24 March): "L. is doing the rhododendrons. . . ."

In *Virginia Woolf's Illnesses*, the author has no axes to grind as a retired psychoanalyst, nor, assuredly, does he have anything in particular invested in the industry that catapulted his subject, rightly, into the galaxy of greatness, along with a few celebrity scholars who, occasionally, have ground axes with Quentin Bell's view of her mental condition. Indeed, part of the significance of Douglass Orr's book lies in the fact that Bell approved of it as an outsider's unbiased appraisal of all the evidence he and his wife had amassed in making their important contributions to the world of letters. Orr's view of his own addition to that work was sensible and characteristically stated in the humblest of terms. He said:

My general thesis is that, however neurotic Virginia may have been, her usual, day-to-day self was within normal limits. This normal self was,

even so, extremely vulnerable to traumata in the area of separations and losses, on the one hand, and, on the other, to direct blows to her self-esteem. In the context of this normal but, in some respects, fragile personality, I take Virginia's five or six experiences of "madness" to be separate and distinct illnesses having quite different proximate causes. This view differs from the common assumption that Virginia had a single, life-long psychiatric disease, such as manic-depressive disorder, or manic depression.

I believe, furthermore, that Virginia probably had a mild case of rheumatic fever at about the age of thirteen that may have contributed significantly to the illness following her mother's death. An embarrassing, even upsetting, menarche almost certainly complicated matters. Rheumatic fever may have been a factor in Virginia's 1904 illness also, during which the diagnosis of scarlet fever was made; and in the symptoms of heart disease that were most conspicuous in the 1920s. I have also included details of the infamous "rest cure" that Virginia dreaded so much.

According to the author's wishes, I have omitted from this book a short, digressive chapter on rheumatic fever (including Woolf's cardiac symptoms and her family history with the disease). I have also cut the longer "Postscript: Virginia Woolf and Freud," which formed the basis of Orr's article "Virginia Woolf and Psychoanalysis," in the *International Review of Psycho-Analysis* (1989; see n. 2 above), a source neglected by Woolf scholars. Wary of the blind spots of his own discipline, Dr. Orr endeavored to confirm his findings in what was, by the mid 1980s, the *vade mecum* of Woolf studies, especially in primary materials:

Much of what I have to say is implied, but not always elaborated, in Quentin Bell's biography of Virginia. Jean O. Love's book, *Virginia Woolf: Sources of Madness and Art*, has the developmental approach that I think is essential to an understanding of anyone. I did not discover this work until my own first draft was completed, but I anticipated many of Love's findings about Virginia's early family life from my own clinical experience as well as from Bell, Leslie Stephen's *Mausoleum Book*, Vanessa Bell's memoir on Virginia's childhood, and Virginia's own reminiscences, especially in *Moments of Being*. Other essential sources of data include Virginia's *Diary*, with introductions and richly informative footnotes by Anne Olivier Bell, and Virginia's *Letters*, with most helpful introductions and notes by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann. Leonard Woolf's *Autobiography* is important, of course; but he has a selective memory at times and may be guilty of some special pleading. [Again, see n. 2.]

Shirley Panken's book, *Virginia Woolf and the "Lust of Creation,"* appeared some months after my work was written. The many points of agreement

about Virginia's illnesses were arrived at quite independently. Panken calls her book "a psychoanalytic exploration," whereas I have used psychoanalytic concepts and insights sparingly; and I pay considerable attention to the evidence for physical (organic) as well as psychosomatic components in Virginia's frequent illnesses. Our scholarly and scientific aims are therefore quite different.

Orr's concern about the competition seems to anticipate the criticism of commissioning editors who might wish to publish his manuscript. Perhaps this worry was groundless because the authors of those books with which this one will be compared tend not to address each other's opinions.

Indeed, Douglass Orr sought the advice of authorities on Virginia Woolf. He was sometimes referred to them by Quentin Bell. However, Bell was just as likely to refer them to Orr, as he did in the case of Frederic Spotts, whose ambitious edition of selected letters by Leonard Woolf was itself a work in progress until 1989. Following a visit with Bell in Sussex, Spotts wrote to Orr (on 23 Dec. 1986) to introduce himself and to ask to read Orr's manuscript, not to quote it but merely to "inform" himself. Spotts was interested in three issues arising from Leonard's correspondence and Spotts's own general knowledge of manic-depressive disorder. The first involved scientific knowledge of this condition "in 1913 and the following two decades." The second involved its treatment (if recognized). And the third was Orr's opinion of Leonard Woolf's relying on the conventional "rest cure" rather than taking his wife to see a psychiatrist. In spite of a serious illness, Orr responded with a long letter, evidently as a cover to pp. [i], iv-xi, and 250-301 of the book's typescript, or, in this volume, the preliminary pages plus Chapter Fifteen (pp. 159-172) as well as the "Postscript" chapter that soon became Orr's article in the *International Review of Psycho-Analysis*. In a corresponding letter of acknowledgment (6 Jan. 1987), Spotts himself answered the last of his questions, having found, meanwhile, a letter in which Leonard himself had taken exception to the diagnosis of manic-depression. Spotts and Orr subsequently met on 30 July 1987 and discussed Virginia's breakdowns during her marriage (in 1913, 1915, and 1941). The work of Roger Poole and Stephen Trombley was discussed although no record survives of what was said.³

To be fair to everyone, the methodology of psychoanalysis requires the psychiatrist to immerse himself in his subject, virtually to the exclusion of everything and everyone else (particularly secondary resources), with the exception of primary agents such as the subject's parents, siblings, and other loved ones. Much to his credit and probably as much due to his long years of experience in practice as to his love of literature, Dr. Orr listened carefully and extensively to his subject:

I have quoted extensively from Virginia's letters and diary because there is

no way for me to paraphrase her elegance of expression, not to mention her irony, exaggeration, whimsy, fantasy, and shifting moods. There can be no substitute for reading Virginia's work *in toto* together with the distinguished and sensitive prose of her biographer and editors. I sometimes think that Virginia's generation of writers and their heirs are the true psychologists.

Despite personal reservations about the application of psychoanalysis to the interpretation of creative literature, the editor of this book finds the same sound judgment and unbiased sensibility in it that Virginia's nephew applauded in both the man and his work. "I must apologize," Orr wrote in the original Preface, "for my frequent use of the first-person singular." Without affectation, he conceded that he might not have produced "the 'intense personal document' of the blurbs on dust jackets." But the work "is filled with my own inferences, speculations, and diagnostic conclusions. Being quite direct in expressing my views seems to me to be the most candid way to go."

Virginia Woolf's Illnesses is not written by a literary man, nor does it feign to be "literature." Its kinship to biography bears the virtues and defects of a trained, independent observer dedicated to inductive procedures. We have both science and art here. The last chapter, "Notes on Diagnosis," derives from the formulae of technical reports that were probably in use at the Seattle Psychoanalytic Institute in the time of Orr's directorship. The pointedness of these notes—on hereditary illness, manic-depressive disorder, reactive psychosis, narcissistic personality, and sex—is precisely why they were useful to Spotts, who was not interested in evidence for sake of itself so much as he was interested in the conclusions that might be induced from that evidence, such as finding fault with Leonard Woolf. And, finally, as art goes, the penultimate chapter ("Virginia's Suicide and the Aftermath") is the unfortunate dramatic anticlimax to the catastrophic events narrated in the preceding chapter, "Virginia's Account of Her Final Year."⁴ For art's sake, the author removed (but see our website) an otherwise informative epilogue, "Virginia Woolf and Freud," which, by no means, is an exhausted topic.⁵ Like all serious art and science, Dr. Orr's thesis should be subjected to debate now that his work is "out there," at last, electronically and in print. Hard, honest, competent writing deserves to be read.

My thanks to several members of the International Virginia Woolf Society for stimulating suggestions that elicited this project (they know who they are), and special thanks to Nancy and Jenny Adams for their help and sustained enthusiasm.

—Wayne K. Chapman
Editor, CUDP

Acknowledgments

When Professor Bell agreed to read my typescript, I was pleased. I thought he would be interested. I was not prepared for the full measure of his support, and for this I am most grateful. He not only made important corrections, but also prevented major miscalculations by suggesting that I read Virginia's unpublished diary for 1897. I am indebted to the staff of the Henry W. and Albert B. Berg Collection, New York Public Library (Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations) for making this possible.

In addition to Professor Bell and all others who have made the lives of Virginia Woolf and her Bloomsbury circle so fascinating, I wish to thank my wife, Jean Walker Orr, for sharing these interests and for fostering this book, including a studious reading of the typescript, much to its benefit. Our friend, Barbara Kerr Davis, Ph.D., did the same, providing valuable suggestions as to content and style as well as moral support during revisions.

Sanford Shapiro, M.D., a La Jolla, California, psychoanalyst, also read the entire typescript and helped crucially with formulations of Virginia Woolf's narcissistic vulnerability from the viewpoint of self-psychology. Psychoanalysts Loretta R. Loeb, M.D., and Felix F. Loeb, M.D., Portland, Oregon, added wisdom about adolescence, psychosomatic aspects of Virginia's illnesses, and problems of diagnosis. Finally, my agent, Mrs. William Weber Johnson, has been most helpful and has provided imagination, enthusiasm, and encouragement beyond the call of duty.

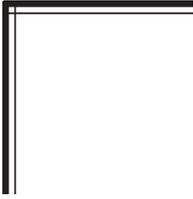
—Douglass W. Orr, M.D.



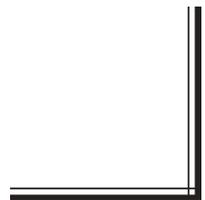
Commendatory Letter

I have read, and indeed reread, *Virginia Woolf's Illnesses* and I do certainly feel that this is a book that ought to be published. My chief interest in Virginia Woolf is, as you know, biographical and I am in no sense a literary critic. The great virtue of *Virginia Woolf's Illnesses* is that, unlike almost everything else that has been written about Virginia Woolf during the past twenty years or so, it actually brings new knowledge and new material to light and is, in fact, a real and valuable contribution to our understanding of Virginia as a person. For the rest, it is a careful, scholarly, well-written and eminently readable book and will, I think, command the attention of a fairly large public both in this country and even more in the United States.

—Quentin Bell to Douglass Orr, 14 July 1986
(qtd. with the permission of the late Professor Bell).



Chapter One



THE STEPHEN FAMILY

Imagine, if you can, that you are Virginia Woolf at the age of a year and a half. Then you were Adeline Virginia Stephen, but were usually called Ginia or, later, Goat. Just now you are the baby in a household that includes your parents, three brothers, three sisters, and as many as seven servants including children's nurses. You are a toddler, a little slow learning to talk clearly, and very likely in your "terrible twos."

When you see your mother, which is not often, you sense a change in her. In fact, she is six months pregnant. She did not welcome this pregnancy, and she may not have wanted the one that produced you. (You learn much later that your parents used "checks" to no avail.) Three months from now a baby brother will arrive—Adrian Leslie Stephen—and will become your mother's favorite. If you are like many little girls you will wonder if there is something wrong with you that your mother had Adrian; and you may conclude, as you certainly did later, that girls are less favored than boys in the opportunities afforded them.

Gradually you learn that your sister, Vanessa, is just two years and eight months older; and that your brother, Thoby (pronounced *Toby*), is a year and four months older. So there you are, all under five years of age, spending most of your time in the day and night nurseries on the fifth floor at 22 Hyde Park Gate, London; but close by Kensington Gardens with its Round Pond, where you go twice a day with nurses or sometimes your father. And then, every year until you are twelve, you go for two months to St. Ives, on the Cornwall Coast, for perhaps the happiest times of your young life.

The other brothers and sisters are much older, and you learn with the passage of time that they are the children of your parents' previous marriages. George Herbert Duckworth, now fourteen, was born when your mother, Julia, was twenty-one. Then sister Stella came a year later, followed by Gerald some months after his father died when your mother was just twenty-four. The other sister, Laura, was about twelve when you were born; and she was another mystery for you to contend with as you grew older.

You will learn in time that your father's first wife was Minny Thackeray, and that Laura Makepeace—their only child—was named for her famous grandfather. By the time you were born, Laura was unmistakably retarded and in the care of nurses, mostly apart from the other children. Efforts to teach her made your father extremely impatient, and often caused your mother to admonish him; but Laura took her toll on her as well. In the course of some years, your father came to terms with Laura's retardation and sometimes destructive behavior, and at about the time of your mother's death—when you were thirteen—Laura was sent away permanently. You will also learn about your mother's first marriage that

produced “the others,” as you privately called the three Duckworth children. This feeling of two alien families was mutual at times, although Stella, as she grew older, became like a second mother to you. Your parents, of course, expected all of the little birds in the nest to agree.

This superficial sketch of the highly complex household into which Virginia was born is intended only to hint at the myriad of emotional and intellectual currents to which she must learn to adapt and out of which her personality would develop. I shall review very briefly the lives of her parents and their marriage and then return to the theme of Virginia’s childhood. Unfortunately the known facts are relatively few, but I shall suggest something of the sometimes highly charged interpersonal relationships, including those of nursemaids and other servants, that affected Virginia as she grew out of babyhood and had eyes and ears for more and more. Out of this matrix, of course, came the older Virginia in illness and in health.

LESLIE STEPHEN

Her father was fifty when Virginia was born. He had been frail and nervous as a child, but later became an oarsman and a noted Alpinist. Educated as a clergyman at Cambridge, he turned agnostic, if not atheist. He went on to become a noted historian and biographer, considered by some, after Matthew Arnold’s death, the foremost writer of Great Britain. His *History of English Thought in the 18th Century*, published in 1876, was still in print more than 100 years later. At the time of Virginia’s birth he was editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, writing 378 biographies himself—almost any of which (someone said) would have earned an American Ph.D.

Leslie Stephen had a distinguished background of professional men and many of his own friends were noted writers and intellectuals, including Americans—James Russell Lowell, Charles Eliot Norton, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. One of his four honorary degrees was from Harvard. Social events at 22 Hyde Park Gate might include Thomas Hardy, Henry James, or George Meredith as well as friends of Julia and her Duckworth children. The younger Stephen children watched and listened unobserved.

During Virginia’s childhood, however, Leslie Stephen was increasingly a “gaunt and difficult man”—and progressively deaf. Work on the *Dictionary* exhausted him and he had severe and debilitating headaches. On the verge of complete collapse, he would escape to walk in Cornwall or to climb in the Alps. As his health declined and his mind was distracted by Laura’s behavior problems, he was more and more irritable at home and demanded more and more emotional support from the women around him, Julia most of all.

At the same time Sir Leslie could be a warm and imaginative father. He took

the younger children for walks to the Round Pond in Kensington Gardens, telling them stories and encouraging them to tell theirs. I think this is what he had hoped to do much oftener than his health permitted. A friend once asked him why he lived in Kensington (with its then unpaved streets) and Sir Leslie answered that a beloved nurse took him to the Gardens and provided the happiest times of his childhood. So far as I know, the Stephen children had no such nurse; nurses are mentioned, but never individually by name; and there is no record of an especially warm or happy attachment to one nurse, nanny, or governess over a significant period of time. Sir Leslie and Julia undoubtedly intended to provide such a relationship themselves, but neither one could manage the time or the energies during the time of Virginia's childhood.

Both Leslie and Julia Stephen tried teaching their children but both were too impatient for the task. After Thoby and Adrian went off to schools, the girls had dancing class and music lessons; and, later, Vanessa went to art school and Virginia learned Latin and Greek. Sir Leslie, then, during Virginia's childhood years, was a perplexing combination of the remote, harassed editor and writer, a (usually) genial host, sometimes a jolly companion to his children, and often a domestic tyrant demanding all the prerogatives of a Victorian paterfamilias.

HEREDITARY MADNESS?

Leslie Stephen certainly had an obsessional and depressive personality, but never a major psychiatric condition. His histrionic qualities are portrayed in Virginia's novel *To the Lighthouse*, in which the character of Mr. Ramsey is drawn from Leslie Stephen, who was capable of moaning and groaning, even in company, exclaiming, "Why doesn't he go home?" or "What a bore you are!" But Leonard Woolf points out that he thinks Tennyson was such a groaner, as well as the painter Watts. He suggests that this was a prerogative of distinguished Victorians, especially widowers.¹ There is no doubt that Leslie was highly neurotic in many ways, including his perpetual fear of bankruptcy even when his capital was intact and his wife and step-children had—or would have—their own money.

The nervous breakdowns—or near-breakdowns—of Leslie Stephen and his forebears were, I think, more situational than inherited. Even if not unduly burdened by traditional religious beliefs, they were driven by Conscience, Principle, and Duty (stern daughter of the voice of God). No matter how much they achieved, it wasn't enough; and so they sometimes drove themselves to physical and nervous exhaustion. I doubt if this should be called madness.

So far as I know, the only bona fide psychotic in the Stephen family was J. K. Stephen, a nephew of Sir Leslie. He was a great success at Eton and Cambridge until, at twenty-seven, he suffered a severe head injury and thereafter a marked personality change, and he died four years later. His insanity was almost certainly

post-traumatic and due to organic brain damage in which predisposition, if any, had a minor role.

In view of Virginia's episodes of "madness," the question of predisposition must be asked. But does one mean inherited predisposition or one arising from the vicissitudes of infancy and childhood? Diseases or illnesses that run in families are not necessarily inherited. A high incidence of cancer in families may arise more from carcinogens in the environment than from genetic susceptibility, though the one does not exclude the other. The same principle holds for mental illnesses. An important, if not prevailing, body of psychiatric opinion has it that an inherited predisposition to mental illness may sometimes exist, but that it takes environmental (often early childhood) circumstances to nourish the seeds and (usually) later traumatic or highly stressful situations to make them germinate and blossom. Equally important, of course, may be chemical or other physiological influences along an individual's developmental course.

Granting unknown inherited tendencies and undetermined organic factors, the principal well-established determinants of neurotic and many psychotic illnesses are those of early family life and development. We no longer think in terms of one or two traumatic childhood experiences, but rather of a large number of lesser, but injurious, experiences of insensitive parenting, multiple separations, severe emotional deprivations, and excessive frustration of normal childhood strivings and expectations. Of course, death, divorce, or long separations in wartime (for example) can be major traumata at any age. Except for war and divorce, Virginia knew most of the insecurities and emotional traumata listed here: inconsistent parenting; no object constancy (that is, no reliable warm and loving adult upon whom she could always count to be there); multiple separations from significant adults, frequent talk of sickness, insanity, and death in the extended family; and, finally, the death of her mother when Virginia was thirteen and her mother-substitute, Stella, when Virginia was fifteen. I shall discuss some of these events in greater detail later, but I mention them here to suggest that the basis for Virginia's later mental illnesses is to be found as much in her early family environment as in any genetic predisposition.

JULIA STEPHEN

Julia Stephen was thirty-six years of age when Virginia was born. As we have seen Julia had three children within four years in her early twenties and was to have four more in her mid-thirties. In addition, she had Laura—retarded, sometimes wild, and at best no easy task—from Sir Leslie's first marriage.

Julia's background was as distinguished as Sir Leslie's, but quite different. She could claim aristocratic French descent on her maternal great grandmother's side; but more important was the fact that her mother was one of the six Pattle sisters,

most of them noted beauties. Two married titled husbands, one became a distinguished photographer whose works are still published and exhibited, and one had a notable salon at Little Holland House, Kensington. The most renowned Victorian artists and writers were entertained there: Hunt, Millais, Rossetti, Watts, Burne-Jones, Tennyson, Thackeray, and the Brownings among others.

Maria, the fourth of the Pattle sisters, married Doctor John Jackson, a leading physician in Calcutta where they had three daughters, including Julia, Virginia's mother. Poor health caused Maria to return to England when Julia was two, and she didn't see her father again until she was nine. Mrs. Jackson had a chronic rheumatic condition and remained in poor health for many years. Julia, evidently taking on some of her father's dedication to duty, took care of her mother, who made constant bids for sympathy and was excessively demanding—just as Leslie Stephen proved to be after Julia married him.

After Dr. Jackson returned from India, Julia had some experience of family life, and, as she grew into her teens, enjoyed the brilliant society of Little Holland House. She was in demand by the artists who sketched or painted her. At twenty she visited her sister, Mary, and her husband in Venice where she met and promptly fell in love with Herbert Duckworth, a handsome, well-bred graduate of Eton and Trinity (Cambridge), now a young barrister. As noted earlier, their marriage lasted only four years because Herbert died suddenly from the rupture of an internal cyst or aneurysm.

Although it is said that Julia would go to lie on her husband's grave, her care of three babies left little time for mourning. She resolved to deal with grief by converting its energies into compassion, for her children, for her mother, and (over the years) for almost everyone who let her know that they needed her.

Julia and her children were neighbors of the Stephens in Hyde Park Gate, Kensington. Indeed, Julia knew Leslie's first wife, Minny, and was a close friend of her sister, Anny Thackeray. After Minny died and Anny took over the care of Sir Leslie's household, including Laura, Julia heard from Anny how inconsiderate Sir Leslie could be. This cemented her friendship with Anny, and she spoke sharply to him about his behavior toward her. This, of course, only caused him to find Julia indispensable, and he began pressing his suit for Julia to marry him.

THE MARRIAGE

Sir Leslie and Julia were married in 1878, three years after Minny's death. Julia had been a widow for eight years, and her eldest child was ten. She knew well, by now, that Sir Leslie could be equally charming and impossible, and that he needed her for himself and for the increasingly retarded and disturbed Laura. Meanwhile, Anny had taken herself out of the household by a somewhat scandalous marriage to Richmond Ritche, a university student seventeen years her junior. In any case, Sir

Leslie needed Julia all the more, and he knew well that she was not only a great beauty but also a highly proficient nurse, an experienced hostess, and a devoted member of a large extended family.

By the time Virginia was born (1882), Laura was even more of a problem. George Duckworth complained to Sir Leslie, at this time, that Laura was too much of a drain on Julia's energies, and I suspect this protest was a mild expression of his resentment toward Sir Leslie and the second crop of children. I think it is clear from the record that Julia's own nature was the principal cause of her spreading herself too thin. Laura had a nurse to herself, and the young Stephen children spent much of their time in the day nursery or on walks to the Gardens so that Julia had little to do with child-rearing. But she wanted to do more than she realistically could while remaining at the beck and call of her mother or other relatives who sought her as their nurse. Beyond that, she rarely refused any other plea for her help, and it is my personal fantasy that she unconsciously welcomed these appeals in order to escape the numerous clinging demands of her husband. In the sick room she could at least be in charge.

Julia has sometimes been pictured as a saint, but even in Leslie Stephen's *The Mausoleum Book*, which expresses his adoration of her memory, one finds between the lines that she could be stern, impatient, imperious, and controlling. One of her hobbies was match-making. These qualities stand out in Virginia's portrayal of her as Mrs. Ramsey in *To the Lighthouse*. Vanessa, for one, testified that Virginia had brought their mother back to life.

After Julia's death, Sir Leslie recalled with highly sentimental nostalgia how beautiful and perfect she was in her pictures. There is one, taken when she was forty-six, reading alongside Sir Leslie with Virginia, then ten, watching them from behind. Julia's features are still young, still beautiful. She could pass for thirty-five. Less than three years later, however, a family group photograph shows her looking tired, depressed, and ugly—as if she had aged twenty-five years, or more.² Not long after this picture was taken, Julia had a serious case of influenza from which she improved only to become fatally ill with what the family doctor, Dr. Seton, diagnosed as rheumatic fever. She died on May 5, 1895, a few months after Virginia's thirteenth birthday.

Leslie wrote what was called *The Mausoleum Book* not long after Julia's death. It was addressed to his children, and it combined a sanctification of Julia, an orgy of self-pity, and a plea to the children not to blame his demands upon her for her death. He said: "I cannot venture to speak of the last terrible time. No doubt her unsparing labors for us and for others had produced that weakness of the heart, of which we knew something, though not the very slightest foreboding of the reality had ever crossed my mind. I thought that she had fully recovered from her influenza and even in that last week when the ominous word 'rheumatic fever' had been pronounced, I hoped against hope. . . ."³

VIRGINIA'S VIEWS OF HER EARLY FAMILY LIFE

Writing about *his* background and early family life, Leonard Woolf wrote: "The first wounds to one's heart, soul, and mind are caused in and by the family, and deep down unconsciously one never forgets or forgives them. One loves and hates one's family just as—one knows and they know—one is loved and hated by them. Most people are both proud and ashamed of their families, and nearly all Jews are both proud and ashamed of being Jews. There is therefore always a bitterness and ambivalence in these loyalties."⁴ A psychoanalyst could hardly say it better. I do not know to what extent Leonard felt these things from his own experience and introspection or only knew them intellectually as publisher of numerous psychoanalytic books.

Except in her writing, Virginia was inhibited in the expression of love and hate, and yet Leonard's words apply equally to her—except for being Jewish. The ambivalence of Virginia's relationships is quite clear in her letters and diary as well as in accounts of her by others, and this is equally true in her writings about her parents. The rather devastating picture of them in *To the Lighthouse*, although in no way a portrait, was confirmed by Vanessa Bell. Describing life at 22 Hyde Park Gate after her mother's death, when she was thirteen or so, Virginia recalled:

. . . When I look back upon that house it seems to be so crowded with scenes of family life, grotesque, comic and tragic; with violent emotions of youth, revolt, despair, intoxicating happiness, immense boredom, with parties of the famous and the dull; with rages again [against?] George and Gerald; with love scenes with Jack Hills; with passionate affection for my father alternating with passionate hatred, all tingling and vibrating in an atmosphere of youthful bewilderment and curiosity—that I feel suffocated by the recollection. The place seemed tangled and matted with emotion. . . .⁵

Those were the years of Virginia's own tempestuous adolescence, of course, between her mother's death and her father's death when she was only twenty-two.

Just over three months before she committed suicide, Virginia wrote of her parents: "How beautiful they were, those old people—I mean father & mother—how simple, how clear, how untroubled. I have been dipping into old letters & fathers memoirs. He loved her—oh & was so candid & reasonable & transparent—& had such a fastidious delicate mind, educated & transparent. How serene & gay their life reads to me: no mud, no whirlpools. And so human—with the children & the little hum & song of the nursery. *But if I read as a contemporary I shall lose my child's vision & must stop. Nothing turbulent; nothing involved: no introspection.*"⁶ The italics are mine because I wish to underscore how much Virginia wished to pre-

serve her child's vision and protect it from the harsh realities of her life. I am convinced that she wished equally, but unsuccessfully, to blind herself to the realities of her despair during the months before her death.

In idealizing her parents, Virginia also idealized her early childhood in this diary entry. She did not always do so. She had a keen and vivid memory for some childhood experiences although, like most of us, she forgot many others. The following chapter deals with Virginia's childhood.

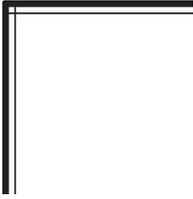


A vast amount of additional material on the lives of Sir Leslie and Julia Stephen and their marriage can be found in Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, Vol. I. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972. This is the standard and most authoritative biography at this writing. The most important autobiographical material to appear recently is the second edition of *Moments of Being*, edited by Jeanne Schulkind and published in 1985 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. Virginia's "A Sketch of the Past," in this edition, contains totally new material about her ambivalent view of her father. Leonard Woolf's autobiography, from the same publisher, is also important.

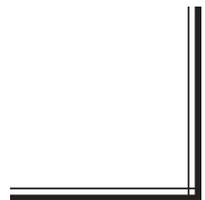
There are two principal biographies of Leslie Stephen. The first was by a close friend: Frederic William Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (London: Duckworth, 1906). This has been republished by the Gale Research Company (1968). The virtue of this work is that Maitland portrays the best of Leslie Stephen throughout the years and has some pages about him as a father written by Virginia. Maitland was unable to listen when Vanessa or Virginia tried to tell him that their father could be a monster at home. Noel Annan's *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984) is a conventional biography that evaluates Sir Leslie's writings and his position in nineteenth-century intellectual life. Lord Annan's forthright evaluations of other writings about Virginia are refreshing.

Finally, there is Jean O. Love, *Virginia Woolf: Sources of Madness and Art* (Los Angeles and London: The University of California Press, 1977). This work is a searching, sometimes harsh portrayal of Leslie and Julia Stephen and their family life; and probably more realistic than most others. Even though I developed some of Love's insights, we are by no means in total agreement.





Chapter Two



VIRGINIA'S CHILDHOOD

In "Notes on Virginia's Childhood," her sister Vanessa Bell says: "The more I see of children . . . the more I realize that their world is quite unlike ours. It is so different from ours that . . . to describe it needs a particular kind of imagination and understanding. And I think any real account of a childhood would necessarily be long, for how much happens in an hour or a day of a child's life, and what changes come in a year!"¹

When I asked you to imagine yourself as Virginia at the age of one and a half, I had this complexity in mind. A child sees and hears everything and, as the child analyst Susan Isaacs once said, has all of the reasoning powers of an adult—lacking only experience. As Virginia grew, so, of course, did her siblings—and the Duckworths, well into their teens, must have seemed to be grownups. Add nurses and three or four other servants, and she had countless influences: frowns, admonitions, awe of master and mistress, all sorts of "no-nos" or "I'll tell your mother," whispered gossip, teasing, occasional praise, and all sorts of other overt and covert messages that were highly significant for Virginia's development, but matters of speculation for us.

In what follows I may seem to dwell too much on the family environment at the time of Virginia's birth and during her childhood, but I must take it for granted that "as the twig is bent, so the tree is inclined," or, to be contemporary, "as the seed is nourished, so the plant will flourish." One must understand Virginia's growth and development, to the extent possible, in the context of her total environment: most of all her parents, siblings, servants, relatives, and friends.

THE SETTING WHEN VIRGINIA WAS BORN

We have already suggested that the Duckworth children, all still under the age of twelve at this time, must have been less than enchanted when their loving (though always busy) mother married the difficult Sir Leslie Stephen with his problem daughter, Laura. When their mother got pregnant a few months later, their feelings must have been mixed at best, and again when she had a difficult labor as a new sister, Vanessa, was born. Then Julia recovered only in time to rush off to nurse her own mother who had recurring rheumatic fever. Inasmuch as Mrs. Jackson remained a partial invalid, Julia went often to visit her.

The next year, 1880, was almost a repetition. Julia was pregnant, Thoby was born in September, and Julia's older sister, Adeline Vaughan, was failing with heart disease (rheumatic?) at the beginning of 1881. Julia nursed her until she died on April 14; and Julia promptly got pregnant once more, with Virginia. The other principal event of this year was that Sir Leslie, on a walking tour of the Cornish

Coast, discovered Talland House, St. Ives, where the Stephen family would spend two months every summer for the next thirteen years. This in the course of time was to be the locale for Virginia's novel, *To the Lighthouse*.

VIRGINIA'S EARLY YEARS

Virginia was born on January 28, 1882. The pregnancy had probably been unwanted (so Virginia came to believe); but 'Ginia was to become her father's favorite, partly because she learned very early to play up to him. Meanwhile, Virginia was weaned at ten weeks because Julia was not well. Sir Leslie did not approve willingly, but agreed that Julia's health must come first. One may surmise that he may have devoted more time than usual to Virginia, feeling that she was deprived by her mother's poor health.

This is the time when George Duckworth, at thirteen, complained to his stepfather about the burden imposed upon Julia by Laura. I suspect that this was but a small fraction of his feelings about Julia's successive pregnancies, her frequent absences to nurse relatives, and the limitations of her own health. The Duckworth children could easily feel concern for their mother, but could hardly express openly their anger and resentment, either at her or at Sir Leslie, for having progressively less of their mother's time and energies. Laura was a natural target for their indignation, but she was doubtless a scapegoat as well.

A major event of 1882 was that Leslie took on a tremendous new project: editorship of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. This was to become the apex of his literary career, but also an albatross around his neck. This new responsibility entailed recruiting, and then supervising, large numbers of contributors as well as much more additional administrative work than he had ever encountered before. The result, in brief, was that he was nervous, irritable, and exhausted throughout the first nine years of Virginia's childhood. The inevitable consequence, of course, was that Julia was in greater demand than ever before to provide Sir Leslie with encouragement, sympathy, and emotional support.

When Virginia was just a year old, Julia was pregnant again. After some months, as Virginia inevitably discovered, there was no longer a welcome lap upon which to be held. In addition, the family was upset about Gerald's health. He was considered a delicate child and, now thirteen, apparently had rheumatic fever. Someone recommended that he be taken to Australia; but this was out of the question. Then Adrian was born; and he too proved to be a delicate child and, perhaps for that reason, was soon considered his mother's favorite. Perhaps for this reason also, Sir Leslie paid little attention to Adrian.

A few months after Adrian's birth, Julia was "watching anxiously" over Mrs. Lushington's last illness—a very dear friend of the family. On top of this, Sir Leslie undertook twenty lectures on English literature, which he delivered during

the May term at Cambridge. This kind of life-style suggests to me that neither he nor Julia could say "No" and that both were compulsively driven.

Vanessa Bell, in her memoir, recalls Virginia at about this time as "a very rosy chubby baby, with bright green eyes, sitting in a high chair at the nursery table, drumming impatiently for her breakfast. . . . How worried I was too, not much later, because she couldn't speak clearly. . . ."2 At about this same time, Sir Leslie wrote to his friend Charles Eliot Norton: "Miss Virginia, aged 2 1/2, scratches her brother, aged 4. I insist upon and ultimately obtain an apology or kiss. She looks very thoughtful for some time and then says, Papa, why have we got nails?"3 In this and in many other ways Virginia learned and absorbed her father's abhorrence of aggression and his pacifism. When she was older, perhaps six or seven, the following incident occurred:

I was fighting with Thoby on the lawn. We were pommelling each other with our fists; just as I raised my fist to hit him, I felt: why hurt another person? I dropped my hand instantly, and stood there, and let him beat me. I remember the feeling. It was a feeling of hopeless sadness. It was as if I became aware of something terrible; and of my own powerlessness. I slunk off alone, feeling horribly depressed. . . .4

Virginia wrote this many years later, to be sure; but for me it illustrates the degree to which her father's admonition about scratching (and many others like it, no doubt) formed her conscience; and I think it helps to explain Virginia's depression on many occasions after she has had to back down from being assertive or had to suppress fury that she would have found it unseemly to express openly. One of Virginia's most quoted admissions to her diary was to the effect that it was impossible for her to hate anyone when they were present in the flesh.

We know from both Vanessa and Virginia how precious were their two months each summer at St. Ives. There were sunshine and freedom as contrasted with the general gloom of 22 Hyde Park Gate and sometimes didactic walks with Leslie in the Kensington Gardens. One somewhat surprising aspect of the summers at St. Ives is that the little ones ran naked on the beach. Virginia apparently forgot this and, when reminded, said that her father threw her naked into the sea. A certain Mrs. Swanwick, who knew Leslie Stephen at St. Ives, wrote in her autobiography: "We watched with delight his naked babies running about the beach or being towed into the sea between his legs, and their beautiful mother."5 Virginia's distortion is interesting because she makes a group experience into one happening only to her and something probably accompanied by screams of excitement into something totally sadistic on her father's part. Of course, we don't really know. Being propelled into the water between her father's legs may have had an erotic component, but apart from that the total experience may have been

as frightening as if she had been thrown into the sea. There was also the unintended sex education involved. The “babies” were not too young to note the differences between the sexes, and what they made of their observations is anybody’s guess. And what did the nurses’ words or facial expressions say about this nudity; and how were the “babies’” comments and questions handled? We know now that even this degree of sexual freedom for young children can be a mixed blessing unless parents or their surrogates can be equally frank and relaxed in responding to a child’s questions and fantasies—over and over again. Anna Freud once remarked that the sex education of young children has been largely a failure because children do not believe what they are taught; rather, they have a deep need to believe their own fantasies. From this point of view, perhaps Leslie Stephen really did throw his naked baby into the sea!

In 1885, when Virginia was three, Leslie published *Henry Fawcett*, the biography of a Cambridge friend who died just the year before. At about this same time, Henry Vaughan (widower of Julia’s older sister) died, and Julia went to comfort the children. When these concerns with death and mourning were out of the way, the family went to St. Ives, where Julia was soon busy matchmaking. One has to wonder what the young children thought and felt about such preoccupations.

I return to Vanessa’s comment about Virginia being slow to speak clearly. She adds:

That cannot have lasted long, for we were not very old when speech became the deadliest weapon used by her. When Thoby or I were very angry with each other or with her, we used good straightforward abuse, or perhaps told tales if we felt especially vindictive. How did she know that to label me “The Saint” was far more effective, quickly reducing me to the misery of sarcasm from the grown-ups as well as the nursery world.⁶

Vanessa and Thoby got their revenge, however; probably by taunting and teasing. Virginia was reduced to “purple rages.” Quentin Bell has wondered whether these betrayed the seeds of future madness;⁷ but I rather doubt it. Temper tantrums are common in young children as a reaction to frustration, and in this situation the frustration would be the inability to cope with bigger and stronger siblings who have other weapons beside words.

I think it possible, however, that rage and loss of control came to be equated with madness. Insanity is often conceptualized, even today as a loss of control—from orgasm to extreme violence—especially by people with inhibitions against expressing their emotions. In any case, as Vanessa supposes, the nurses must have interfered quickly in situations producing “purple rages.” If the children were then

required to kiss and beg forgiveness, one can foresee a conscience with strong taboos against expressions of rage.

SEPARATIONS AND LOSSES

In what I have written about Virginia's childhood thus far, note the references to one or both parents going away and to deaths among relatives or friends of the family. In addition, there was talk about Gerald going to Australia; and there must have been discussion of what to do about Laura. One doesn't know, of course, in what ways such talk and events were understood or fantasied by Virginia. To a young child, any separation creates a feeling of loss, whether due to her mother's being pregnant and withdrawn; father's being distant, irritable, and on the verge of nervous collapse; mother's being away nursing *her* mother; or both parents' vacationing in the South of France. A child cannot understand in adult terms, even when explanations are offered; and to her such separations are a rejection. She is likely to assume that she has been bad and is being punished. For her own "security system," the child needs to view grown-ups as omniscient and omnipotent; and so if they go away or send her away, the fault must be hers. A quite recent survey found that young people most often listed parents as their heroes and heroines.

Looking ahead, I think that both Vanessa and Virginia suffered from these early separations and losses. Vanessa, too, had some fear of abandonment and had a tendency to hold on to the people close to her—as with Roger Fry, Duncan Grant, and her sons. Virginia, somehow, found a very reliable husband, but tended to cling to several close women friends. She was terribly insecure about her writing, and drove herself toward her ideal of perfection. Both Virginia and Vanessa seemed to be living out such anxious questions as, Am I good enough as a person? What must I do to keep people from leaving? How can I find emotional security?

The children were reared mostly by nurses, of course; but we know little about their stability or tenure. Still, the parents were always there as "psychic presences." Children are quite aware of the deferential behavior of nurses and servants when one or the other of the parents appears. This is a mixed blessing because, while it enhances the authority of the parents, it makes them more formidable. Nurses, on their part, are likely to use the parent as a threat or a promise: "I'll tell your father" or "What would your mother say. . . ." Even so, nurses are highly important as surrogate parents, and the children may have suffered if there were no lasting warm and loving relationships with any of them.

Two-career parents are likely to confess that they have too little time with their children, but to claim that they provide "quality time." This can be true, but hardly if they are exhausted when the time comes for "quality time." I think Julia

Stephen was as busy in and out of her home as if she had a professional career. Virginia could not recall ever being alone with her mother. Virginia and Vanessa both said that Julia was a very impatient teacher, and both suggested directly or indirectly that they frequently heard Julia saying: “Hurry up children!” What I am saying is that I find little evidence for “quality parenting” for Virginia and Adrian especially, except for the two summer months at St. Ives. Their kind of childhood somehow led to intellectual and artistic achievement, but could not foster emotional security or high self-esteem.

Another aspect of Virginia’s childhood, as described by Vanessa, is that both she and Virginia adored Thoby, but were rivals for his companionship. They also emulated him for a time, and became tomboys. Vanessa continues:

Children are jealous little creatures, and brothers and sisters in a large family have one great disadvantage over only children. No one ever says how nice Mary is or how lovely Jane, but always Mary is nicer than Jane and Jane prettier than Mary. It’s inevitable, and comparisons are the easiest form of criticism, no doubt, but it may lead to trouble. I don’t remember being jealous of the fact that her appearance and her talk had obviously the greatest success with the grown-ups. They laughed at her jokes but so did we all, and probably I was as aware as anyone of her brilliance and loveliness to look at. . . .⁸

Vanessa might have added that it is not only invidious comparisons that make mischief among children, but also that because of them the children compete harder and harder bidding for the adults’ attention. I think it is apparent that Virginia suffered envy and being envied, and deep conflicts about such feelings, as well as her competitiveness, must have contributed to the turmoil in which she slaved at her writing as well as to the anxieties with which she awaited the verdicts of friends and reviewers.

SOME ESPECIALLY CRUCIAL YEARS

“We lived in a state of anxious growth,” Virginia wrote about the early years; “school, reports, professions to be chosen, marriage for the elders, books coming out, bills, health—the future was always too near and too much of a question for any sedate self-expression. All these activities, too, charged the air with personal emotions and urged even children, and certainly ‘the eldest,’ to develop one side prematurely. To help, to do something was desirable, not to intrude diffident wishes, irrelevant and possibly expensive.”⁹ I do not know what one-sided development Virginia refers to here, but probably concern for “harsh reality.” And the girls, whatever lessons they had, were expected to emulate Julia in dedication to a

life of service.

Shortly after Virginia's fifth birthday, her maternal grandfather became fatally ill, and Julia went to nurse him. When he died (March 31, 1987), Mrs. Jackson "broke down," and so Julia remained to nurse her as well. By now, her mother was crippled from chronic rheumatic disease. Then, by summer, Sir Leslie fled the intense pressures of the *Dictionary* for his old haunts at Zermatt, coming back to join the family at Cobham. I think that Virginia at five, listening to talk of nervousness, sickness, and death must have been as sensitive to these separations as to those of her younger years.

At some point about this time Virginia was explored sexually by her half-brother, Gerald, now seventeen or so. Years later she wrote:

Once when I was very small Gerald Duckworth lifted me onto this [small slab for dishes], and as I sat there he began to explore my body. I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes; going firmly lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But it did not stop. His hand explored my private parts too. I remember resenting, disliking it—what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling? It must have been strong, since I still recall it. . . .¹⁰

There has been much speculation about the effect of this sexual molestation on Virginia. Freud once believed that such recollections by adult women were fantasies dreamed up to enable them to forget childhood masturbation. Child sexual abuse is so prevalent today that the weight of current opinion would accept Virginia's memory as factual. But whether masturbation or molestation, the impact is partly determined by how the grown-ups react. Virginia's situation was especially difficult because Gerald must have been a grown-up in her eyes, and she almost certainly couldn't tell anyone. Her sense of shame and revulsion was not inherited, as she suggested; but rather the result of direct or indirect messages from parents, nurses, or siblings. Running around naked to the delight of some onlookers is by no means the same as touching, clutching, or playing with one's private parts. By the time she was six, Virginia had very likely been admonished (in a no uncertain tone of voice) for touching, scratching or exploring her genitalia; or, heard a sibling lectured on this subject.

There is no way of knowing the effect of this episode on Virginia's later sexuality. We have her word for it that she already had a deep sense of shame about this part of her body. If she could not tell anyone about this experience, it must have been very difficult to bear this guilty secret alone; but, if the adult she might tell proved to be an extremely tense, nervous, or "hysterical" nurse—who might be discharged for letting Virginia out of her sight—the damage could have

been much greater. In later years, however, Gerald was Virginia's first publisher. She remained friendly, but distant, with both half-brothers—Gerald and George deploring their values and considering them snobs.

In April 1888, when Virginia was three months past her sixth birthday, the Stephen children got whooping cough. Vanessa writes:

we all had whooping cough, for of course there was no question of one alone getting any infectious disease. I believe children on the whole love being ill, but that particular disease did seem to last a very long time . . . and in the end [we] emerged four little skeletons and were sent to Bath for a change. The rest of us quickly recovered, but it seemed that Virginia was different. She was never again a plump and rosy child and, I believe, had actually entered into some new layer of consciousness rather abruptly, and was suddenly aware of all sorts of questions and possibilities closed to her. I remember one evening as we were jumping about naked, she and I, in the bathroom, she suddenly asked me which I liked best, my father or mother. Such a question seemed to me rather terrible; surely one ought not to ask it. I feel certain Thoby would have snubbed the questioner. However, being asked, one had to reply, and I found I had little doubt as to my answer. "Mother," I said, and she went on to explain why she, on the whole, preferred my father. I don't think, however, her preference was quite as sure and simple as mine. She had considered both critically and had more or less analyzed her feelings for them which I, at any rate consciously, had never attempted.¹¹

I wish we knew the exact sequence of Virginia's sexual experience, whooping cough, and expression of preference for her father. Vanessa described some kind of physical and personality change in Virginia following whooping cough, but we can assume, I think, that the sexual experience might have made Virginia subdued and reflective. On the other hand, a child jumping about naked with her older sister is not overly worried about her body, and so her expressed preference for her father may have come before either the sexual experience or the whooping cough. If this were the case, she might easily have taken both the sexual assault and a severe case of whooping cough as punishment for what Vanessa, at least, regarded as unthinkable thoughts. I can add only that as one studies the development of personality, the exact sequence and timing of such experiences can be highly important; and a knowledge of a child's own fantasies and feelings about them even more so.

I must add also that whooping cough, with its often very severe paroxysms of violent coughing and sometimes gasping for breath in between, can cause brain damage. One must remember here that such damage can be subclinical; that

is, too slight to produce overt symptoms. And yet a few minute (microscopic) hemorrhages might have affected Virginia's ability to thrive, or (for example) her emotional controls, without in any way affecting her higher cerebral centers. I mention this only to suggest that organic and emotional factors may have combined to produce the personality change noted by Vanessa.

The events just discussed were followed by, and perhaps partly a cause of, what Virginia calls one of her most vivid memories from childhood. She recounts the following as from when she was six or seven:

There was a small looking glass in the hall at Talland House [the same hall, by the way, in which Gerald explored her sexually] . . . By standing on tip-toe I could see my face in the glass. When I was six or seven perhaps, I got into the habit of looking at my face in the glass. But I only did this if I was sure that I was alone. I was ashamed of it. A strong feeling of guilt seemed naturally attached to it. But why was this so? One obvious reason occurs to me—Vanessa and I were both what was called tomboys; that is, we played cricket, scrambled over rocks, climbed trees, were said not to care for clothes and so on. Perhaps therefore to have been found looking into the glass would have been against our tomboy code. But I think that my feeling of shame went a great deal deeper. . . . I am almost inclined to think that I inherited a streak of the puritan. . . . At any rate, the looking-glass shame has lasted all of my life. . . . I cannot now powder my nose in public. Everything to do with dress—to be fitted, to come into a room wearing a new dress—still frightens me; at least makes me shy, self-conscious, uncomfortable.¹²

Virginia speculated at some length about her shame and guilt (she used both terms) about looking into mirrors, and then, in the same context, remembers a dream:

Let me add a dream; for it may refer to the incident of the looking-glass. I dreamt that I was looking into a glass when a horrible face—the face of an animal—suddenly showed over my shoulder. I cannot be sure if this was a dream, or if it happened. Was I looking into the glass one day when something in the background moved, and seemed to me alive? I cannot be sure. But I have always remembered the other face in the glass, whether it was a dream or a fact, and that it frightened me.¹³

A psychoanalyst listens to a patient's free associations—associations that come out with a minimum of censorship—and takes note of what topic leads to another; and he wonders how various elements in a sequence of associations may

belong together. I have noted here that Virginia writes of this sequence of events at St. Ives: (1) the sights, sounds, and smells that give her a highly sensual feeling; (2) the furtive looking into the looking glass in the hall; (3) pride and pleasure in her mother's and Stella's beauty, but a need to deny her own; (4) the sexual episode with Gerald; and (5) the dream of the monstrous face behind her in the mirror.

There are many ways of putting this sequence of thoughts together. I am reminded of the fact that Julia's mother was one of the Pattle beauties, and that she and all of her daughters—Stella, Vanessa, and Virginia—were beauties also. At the same time, I recall Vanessa's lament about too many invidious comparisons, including who was prettier. As a child, she felt that Virginia was more favored; later, for whatever reasons, Leonard Woolf considered Vanessa lovelier than Virginia. In childhood one can be very uncomfortable being caught up in such comparisons or in feelings about who is mother's favorite, or father's; and why. Competitive as Virginia could be, I think that she had reason to deny it and to withdraw from it. The dictum "we must not scratch" can easily be extended to become an inhibition against all forms of aggressive and competitive impulses.

I suspect, however, that Virginia's sexual experience led her, in fantasy, to fear her childhood prettiness, to wonder if all of this talk about beauty caused Gerald to do what he did. Afterward, she may well have wondered if she was a beast, or if some hidden monster within her would suddenly show up in the mirror. There is no end to childhood sexual fantasies, quite apart from masturbation or other sexual experiences. Virginia's dream of the horrible face in the mirror came from within herself, from her own fantasy life, and was just one childhood version of "The Picture of Dorian Gray"—which itself doubtless derived from childhood sexual fantasies. At the most superficial level, Virginia may well have wondered whether her sexual experience would somehow show in her face, and the dream may well indicate the consequences she feared. In the absence of more data, it is really impossible to know how this constellation of events affected Virginia's further growth and development. Only a psychoanalyst, perhaps, would suspect a connection between this childhood dream of the horrible, animal face in the mirror and her pet name for herself once she was married: Mandrill—the most hideous and most ferocious of the baboons. If this self-image persisted, even for the most part unconsciously, it is quite understandable that she had constant need of reassurance that she was attractive and loveable.

Whatever emotional turmoil Virginia suffered during the year she was six must have been heightened by her father's ordeal with the *Dictionary of National Biography*, including a collapse into unconsciousness, followed a year later by fainting in the London Library. Julia, having lost one husband suddenly, must have been terrified; and these episodes only intensified her hatred of the *Dictionary*. Despite Julia's "at homes" and dinners for distinguished guests and happier family life for two months at St. Ives, the Stephen home lived very much in the shadow

of Sir Leslie's "nervous depression" and insomnia until 1891—when Virginia was nine and he gave up the *Dictionary* entirely.

Julia's mother, Mrs. Jackson, died in 1892, shortly after Virginia turned ten. She had lived in the Stephens's home for some months before. After tier death, Julia herself seemed very weak and so the family—or part of it—spent a month in a small house lent by Julia's sister, Lady Somers. Sir Leslie wrote later: "Our 'darling of darlings' loved her mother so well that it might seem as if they had been alone together in the world. But in my Julia's heart there was room for many affections and one only seemed to strengthen the others."¹⁴ I doubt very much if he really felt that way when Julia's drive to minister to others took her away from him so often; and I suspect this is an example of a Victorian writer holding frail human life up to literature.

"A STATE OF ANXIOUS GROWTH"

Two additional memories of Virginia's seem to have much more meaning than the events themselves. One of them appears in her "Sketch of the Past" shortly after she has told of being unable to go on hitting Thoby, and being left feeling horribly depressed. This, too, happened at St. Ives:

Some people called Valpy had been staying at St. Ives, and had left. We were waiting at dinner one night, when somehow I overheard my father or my mother say that Mr. Valpy had killed himself. The next thing I remember is being in the garden at night and walking on the path by the apple tree. It seemed to me that the apple tree was connected with the horror of Mr. Valpy's suicide. I could not pass it. I stood there looking at the grey-green creases of the bark—it was a moonlit night—in a trance of horror. I seemed to be dragged down, hopelessly, into some pit of absolute despair from which I could not escape. My body seemed paralyzed.¹⁵

Unfortunately, we do not know where this experience fits into the events of Virginia's childhood. We do know that she was twelve years of age or younger because her mother is living and the family are at St. Ives. We have no notion as to why a stranger's suicide had such an impact. Whatever else may have been going on at the time, we may assume that Virginia was approaching adolescence—she is out at night, alone—and that she had an adolescent's need to dramatize what she had heard. A kind of emotional paralysis was certainly possible considering her earlier experiences of tragedy.

The other memory is less dramatic, but perhaps far more revealing. Virginia recalled how they went fishing from St. Ives and how thrilling it was to feel a tug

on the line and to pull a fish into the boat. Then, she adds:

Once father said to me: “I don’t like to see fish caught; so I shan’t come; but you can go if you like.” I think it was very admirably done. Not a rebuke, not a forbidding; simply a statement; about which I could think and decide for myself. It made me decide that I disliked fishing; though the passion I had for it—for the thrill and the tug—had been beyond words. The desire to fish faded, leaving no grudge.¹⁶

I think the bitterness of this experience is in the words: “I think it was very admirably done.” But this is looking back over many years. At the time, Virginia had no choice. She desperately needed to win her father’s approval; and what better way than to let him know how thoroughly she agreed with him? To the degree that she identified with him she could hope to find favor in his eyes and compete successfully with her siblings. This is perhaps one source of her fear of violence, though—as we have seen—part evidently stemmed from repressed violence within herself.

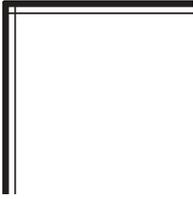
Quentin Bell has written: “From the outset, Virginia’s life was threatened by madness, death, and disaster. . . . And of course there was madness in the home; Laura, ‘Her Ladyship of the Lake,’ . . . So far as I can make out she was regarded as a joke by her half-sisters. . . .”¹⁷ But what we do not know is the emotional impact on Virginia when Laura was sent away. A thirteen-year-old might wonder: Was it because she was stupid? Because she threw scissors into the fire? Because she was naughty in some mysterious way? We would like to know what she was told and what her fantasies were. The fact that Laura was banished—a separation with unknown implications for Virginia—may have been much more traumatic than the fact that Laura was “mad.”

I have no reason to believe that Virginia’s later madneses were inherited, except for some hypothetical predisposition. I do think that the kind of childhood she had, as summarized above, left her emotionally fragile and insecure, with deep conflicts about her sexuality, very inhibited as to expressions of anger, uncertain of her self-worth, compulsively driven to prove herself through creative achievement, and perfectionistic in her goals. Intellectually precocious and a literary genius, she remained—because of the emotional deprivations and turmoil of her childhood—like a child herself in her way of relating to significant people in her life, needing from them constant overt expressions of their affections, reassurances, and other “food” for her self-esteem.

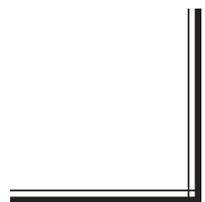


I must remind the reader that I am not writing a biography of Virginia Woolf. I have neglected many happier aspects of her childhood, especially pleasantly exciting excursions to Kensington Gardens and the summers with her family at St. Ives. From the age of ten to thirteen she was the principal publisher of the *Hyde Park Gate News* which won praise and encouragement, helping in some measure to secure her future as a writer. We know, too, that Julia had her moments of whimsy and outlandish fantasy in entertaining her children and that Leslie encouraged them to read and to exchange opinions with him.

Virginia wrote extensively about her childhood in *Moments of Being* and in many scattered recollections in her letters and diary. The definitive biography is, of course, that by Quentin Bell. This is at times supplemented in Nigel Nicolson's introductions to the six volumes of *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* and by Anne Olivier Bell's splendid prefaces and footnotes in the five volumes of *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. These, together with the other works to which I refer, give a vastly more complete and well-rounded account of Virginia Woolf's background and life. I must limit myself to a much narrower focus.



Chapter Three



TRAUMATIC EARLY ADOLESCENCE

The most devastating period of Virginia's life may have been that of her early teens. I noted earlier that Julia appeared ill and aged rapidly from about the time Virginia was ten and that she died of rheumatic fever in May 1895 when Virginia was thirteen. This was followed by Sir Leslie's histrionic and pathological mourning which made intolerable demands upon all of the children and, for a time, scarred Virginia's love for him with bewilderment, resentment, and fear. There is some reason to believe, in addition, that Virginia began her menstrual periods within a few months after her mother died and, in view of her later inhibitions and embarrassment about her body and its functions, this could only have compounded her emotional difficulties. It is generally agreed, in any case, that the crushing burden of such a turn of events caused Virginia to have her first major mental illness during the second half of 1895. I shall suggest that she may also have had a mild case of rheumatic fever during this same time, so a physical illness might have been added to all of the grief and the strain of her father's abnormal mourning at a time of the emotional instability of early adolescence.

The record of Virginia's illnesses at this time of her life is somewhat confused. I shall therefore summarize her medical history prior to her mother's death. Then I can indicate the events and illnesses that followed in 1895, 1896, and 1897.

EARLY MEDICAL HISTORY

We know that all of the Stephen children had whooping cough in 1888 when Virginia was six. For some reason, she never became chubby and rosy again and seemed introspective. In 1893, when she was eleven, Virginia was sick and Dr. Seton, the family doctor, saw her several times. Julia was away at the time and so Sir Leslie wrote to her, but apparently did not hear or remember the diagnosis. In any case, Julia found no reason to return. At eleven, Virginia might have had any childhood disease or an upper respiratory infection, and it is fruitless to speculate.

On March 4, 1895, the *Hyde Park Gate News* (written mostly by Virginia) reported that her mother had been ill with influenza, and on March 18th that she continued to improve. By April 8, she was well enough so that the Duckworth children—George, Stella, and Gerald—went to the Continent a few days later. Julia herself then took a trip accompanied by Virginia. On April 16 Julia wrote to Sir Leslie about Virginia's "difficulties"; but what difficulties these were is unknown. It may be noteworthy that they were before Julia got sick again and died. Sir Leslie replied that he was vexed that Julia had to cope with such problems,

adding: “Poor darling ‘Ginia, it is maddening.”¹ Was Virginia herself ill or simply being “difficult,” and if the latter, in what way? We do not know. We do know, however, that Julia herself was at the point of a relapse, and that she died three weeks later, May 5, 1895, of rheumatic fever or its complications.

Virginia, at thirteen, might have been a difficult traveling companion under the best of circumstances, but Julia, aged and exhausted before her time, must have been difficult also. Beyond that, if she was to die of rheumatic fever, we know now that the earlier influenza must have included a streptococcus infection, or aggravated an earlier rheumatic heart condition. Under the circumstances we have no way of knowing whether Virginia’s difficulties, while traveling with her mother, were physical, emotional, behavioral, or some combination of these. She may have been reacting to her perception of her mother’s irritability and failing strength, or she may have been showing the first symptoms of rheumatic fever herself. I think it important to note that these difficulties—whatever they were—preceded Julia’s fatal illness and therefore also Sir Leslie’s impossible behavior afterward. Virginia’s problems, then, may simply have continued into the period of mourning for Julia, and gone unnoticed in the frenzy of Sir Leslie’s histrionics, the efforts of Stella and others to support and reassure him, and the comings and goings of various other mourners.

1895: AFTER JULIA’S DEATH

Julia’s death must have been a shattering experience for all of her children, especially the younger four. Virginia’s perspective, writing in her late fifties, was this: “The tragedy of her death was not that it made one, now and then and very intensely, unhappy. It was that it made her unreal; and us solemn, and self-conscious. We were made to act parts that we did not feel; to fumble for words that we did not know. It obscured, it dulled. It made one hypocritical and enmeshed in the conventions of sorrow. Many foolish and sentimental ideas came into being. Yet there was a struggle, for we soon revived, and there was a conflict between what we ought to be and what we were. Thoby put this into words. One day before he went back to school, he said: ‘It’s silly going on like this . . .’ sobbing, sitting shrouded, he meant. I was shocked at his heartlessness; yet he was right, I know; and yet how could we escape?”² Virginia’s first mental illness occurred at this time, but she deleted her account of it from the final version of “A Sketch of the Past.” Quentin Bell adds the following about the aftermath of Julia’s death as reflected in Virginia’s health:

She did not, could not, admit all of the memories of her madness. What she did recall were the physical symptoms; in her memoir of this period she hardly mentions the commotions of her mind and although we know

that she had already heard what she was later to call “those horrible voices,” she speaks of other symptoms, usually physiological symptoms. Her pulse raced—it raced so fast as to be almost unbearable. She became painfully excitable and nervous and then intolerably depressed. She became terrified of people, blushed scarlet if spoken to and was unable to face a stranger in the street. . . .

The *Hyde Park Gate News* came to an end; for the first and only time Virginia lost the desire to write. . . . But she read feverishly and continually. She went through a period of morbid self-criticism, blamed herself for being vain and egotistical, compared herself unfavorably to Vanessa and was at the same time intensely irritable.³

Although Virginia may have had a need to forget her mental symptoms, what she does remember suggests the likelihood of rheumatic fever with pain and tachycardia. If her nervousness included the “fidgets” that Virginia mentioned later, I suggest that they could have been symptoms of a mild chorea.

Granting that a sensitive girl in beginning adolescence could easily have been overwhelmed by the family situation created by Julia's death and by unknown “difficulties” that began before, the onset of Virginia's menstrual periods at about this same time could only make bad matters worse. The entire endocrine and emotional experience of puberty, including the beginning of menstrual periods, might well account for much of the self-consciousness, morbid blushing, and embarrassment with strangers that Virginia suffered in the later months of 1895.

The evidence for dating the beginning of Virginia's menstrual periods to 1895 is a diary kept for much of 1896 by Stella Duckworth. As we know, Stella took Julia's place in the Stephen household, catering to Leslie and caring for the younger children. She was no domestic slave, however; she had time for excursions with the children and for occasional luncheons and other social events with her own friends.

Stella also kept track of her menstrual periods, and those of the girls. About every thirty days, X SD appears opposite the date; or, at other times, X Nessa and X Ginia. Now, Stella's record is not complete. Jack Hills was courting her, and there are blank pages during the summer months; but she has X Ginia for January 18, February 11, October 17, and November 17. For me, the first is the most significant date because the entry implies that Virginia's menstrual periods were by then routine. Had this been Virginia's first experience, Stella would surely have noted that fact. One could reasonably expect a brief comment, at least, on how Virginia reacted to this transition from childhood to adolescence, what questions she asked, and how Stella dealt with this momentous event. Granted that Virginia doubtless was already informed by Vanessa and by Stella herself, I doubt if Stella, in her diary, would leave Virginia's first period unremarked. All of this enables me

to speculate that Virginia's menstrual periods began sometime during 1895 and may have been a part of, or aggravated, the considerable emotional upset after her mother's death.

1896

There is no indication in Stella's diary that Virginia was ill in any way at the beginning of 1896. She must have recovered from whatever "madness" she had the year before. Stella had no reason, apparently, to comment on Virginia's physical or mental health. The diary is filled with such day-to-day entries as Adrian being sick and missing school, Thoby's clothing requiring alterations, and Stella doing errands, making calls, visiting the Workhouse, and having lunch with friends. On some of these excursions Virginia went along, sometimes—as for some years now—simply as a chaperone. I should note in passing that I recall no indication in Stella's diary that she, Vanessa, or Virginia spent a day in bed—contrary to some prevailing medical advice—on the first day of their menstrual periods.

On March 6, 1896, Virginia typewrote a letter to Thoby. She mentioned current events and reported seeing a woman's skirt blown over her head, revealing red flannel drawers, much to the amusement of a Curate coming out of his church. She playfully calls Thoby "your Highness" and "your Mightiness." Leslie dictated a postscript: "I want to see how quick this wretched girl can typewrite. I think that she does it rather better than I expected. . . ." ⁴ Thoby evidently did not reply, and this is Virginia's only published letter for 1896.

Judging from Stella's diary, Virginia was well until October 1896. On the 13th, Stella took her to Dr. Seton, but she does not say why. Dr. Seton found Virginia's pulse to be very high and that she should do less lessons, as Stella put it; and be very careful not to exert herself. Stella added that Leslie was in a great state, but does not make a clear connection to Virginia's health. On October 21, Dr. Seton saw Virginia again and said that she must give up lessons entirely and must be out [of the house] four hours a day. She was to have seen Dr. Seton again in four weeks, but then Dr. Seton himself was sick. I found no other notes on Virginia's health in Stella's diary. ⁵ One should note that Jack Hills had been courting Stella since the time of Julia's death, and that they had become engaged on August 22, 1896. One is entitled to ask whether Virginia's rapid pulse two months later might have been the product of her "nervous excitement" over this romance or a consequence of an attack of rheumatic fever the year before. The one possibility does not exclude the other. In her "A Sketch of the Past," Virginia recaptured her feelings during the period of Stella's engagement—August 22, 1896 to April 10, 1897. Some of these are in Virginia's own diary for 1897, but Virginia was, of course, more sophisticated and emotionally more expressive in her fifties. She felt that she had absolute recall, but I wonder if her memory was selective as to these

exciting times. She wrote (1940):

And it was through that engagement that I had my first vision—so intense, so exciting, so rapturous was it that the word vision applies—my first vision then of love between man and woman. It was to me like a ruby; the love I detected that winter of their engagement, glowing, red, clear, intense. It gave me a conception of love; a standard of love; a sense that nothing in the whole world is so lyrical, so musical, as a young man and a young woman in their first love for each other. . . . It derives from Stella and Jack. It springs from the ecstasy I felt, in my covert, behind the folding doors of the Hyde Park Gate drawing room. I sat there, shielded, being half insane with shyness and nervousness . . . and feeling come over me intermittent waves of very strong emotion—rage sometimes; how often I was enraged by father then!—love, or the reflection of love, too. . . .⁶

Virginia described also the unnecessary cruelty of the long engagement, due principally to Leslie's overt jealousy of Jack and his demand that the couple agree to live with the family at 22 Hyde Park Gate after their marriage. Stella was able to rebel against this, however; but compromised when she and Jack found a home of their own at 24 Hyde Park Gate.

1897

In quoting Virginia's "A Sketch of the Past," I have already taken us into the year 1897. The most important sources of information about her health during 1897 include her unpublished diary for that year, her eight letters to Thoby, and two entries in Leslie's *The Mausoleum Book*. The diary is being prepared for publication by Professor Mitchell Leaska, however, and cannot be quoted. Fortunately, Quentin Bell was not so restricted and his biography of Virginia contains most of what is needed for our purposes.

As the year 1897 opened, Virginia was still subject to Dr. Seton's ban against lessons. But, as she wrote to Thoby, she got books for her birthday, including Lockhart's *Life of Scott* (in ten beautifully bound volumes) from her father and an equally handsome life of Queen Elizabeth by Creighton from Mrs. F. W. Gibbs.⁷ At about this same time, Jack Hills had a minor operation and proposed going with Stella to Bognor for convalescence, taking Virginia as chaperone. She thought this a terrible idea—according to Quentin Bell, citing her diary—and told the family that she would not go with them alone. Leslie also took a dim view of this holiday.

I find it noteworthy that Virginia could be so assertive at the age of fifteen.

Her motives are unknown; but she certainly knew that “three’s a crowd” and that she would be left alone much of the time. She must have felt, at least unconsciously, that Stella was abandoning her and this impending loss might account for her irritability and anger. At the end of February, Virginia wrote to Thoby about going out with Stella in the hopes of seeing the Queen, and perhaps getting a glimpse of her bonnet. Then George Duckworth returned from France with expensive presents for everyone, Virginia’s and Adrian’s being portfolios such as French schoolboys use. And, finally, she took a few lessons with Stella every morning, certainly with Dr. Seton’s permission. On April 10, 1897, Stella and Jack Hills were married, and Sir Leslie wrote this in his chronicle:

Today Stella was married. . . . This household will be changed for the better, let us hope. Just now my mood is to resent such assurances. . . .

Adrian seems to be getting acclimatized at Westminster. Thoby is doing well at Clifton having waked up from some slackness due to rapid growth. I hope that he has stopped now. Virginia has been out of sorts, nervous and overgrown too; I hope that a rest will bring her around. Nessa has been hard at work at her drawing class and is, I hope, getting on well. ‘Ginia is devouring books, almost faster than I like. . . . Well, the young ones are satisfactory.⁸

This is a kind of summary, the sort of thing that one might do on the last day of December; but it is the only reference to Virginia in the nearly two years since Julia died. Leslie’s jottings, after his more formal exposition of *The Mausoleum Book*, began on October 20, 1895, five and a half months after Julia died. I find it almost incredible that he did not mention Virginia then, or for another year and a half. But, if Virginia’s “madness” occurred during the period of Leslie’s own frenzy after Julia’s death, he may not have noticed her.

They may have had a kind of *folie à deux*, actually. And Leslie’s ability to pull himself together sufficiently to give a lecture on October 20 may have enabled Virginia to recover from the most severe emotional symptoms of her illness. Much of what she was reacting to after Julia’s death, certainly, was Leslie’s wild and self-centered mourning.

One of the normal tasks of early adolescence is that of consolidating, or struggling against, identifications with one’s parents. But to have one parent die when one has just turned thirteen and the other parent regress to being a demanding and guilt-ridden child, can play havoc with an early and fragile teenage identity. All that her father saw, apparently, over a period of two years after Julia died, was that Virginia had been out of sorts, nervous, and overgrown, besides devouring books faster than he would have liked yet satisfactorily. One has to wonder how blind he had been, or else how “mad” his favorite daughter really was.

We know that the Stephen family went to Brighton after Stella's wedding and returned to learn that she and Jack had returned early from their honeymoon because Stella was sick. She was ultimately diagnosed as having peritonitis and also, later, pregnancy. Quentin Bell, making free use of Virginia's diary for 1897, describes the course of Stella's illness and Virginia's health.⁹ The spring and summer were unusually hot, and Virginia was often irritable. She (with Stella and George) saw an accident on Piccadilly, and this apparently caused a return of her fears and fantasies about accidents. Whatever the reasons, she was seen by Dr. Seton again, as comes out in her letter to Thoby of May 14, 1897:

By the bye—yesterday, while conducting some evacuations in the back garden (for purposes which I will explain later on) we discovered a repulsive shiny brown chrysalis—kicking its tail with the greatest animation. After some discussion we (The President [Leslie Stephen] and I) decided that the pupa was only that of a beetle . . . [;] he said evacuations have been organized by my revered father: he has presented me with a set of gardening tools—and commands me to convert the back garden[.]—Already we have created a flower bed (minus the flowers it is true) and we propose to renew the grass. . . . There mi'lord—this is a truly business like account of my occupations. . . . My Dear Dr Seton says I must not do *any* lessons this term; so I am cast upon the four winds—or whatever the proverb is. . . . Now mi'lord: this is a model letter: four closely packed sheets: go thou and do likewise!¹⁰

In June, a month or so after Virginia's lessons were suspended because of her health, Stella had partially recovered. Virginia was then upset and angry at the proposal that she should go as Stella's companion for convalescence in the country. But Stella's improvement did not last, and Virginia herself was put to bed at Stella's house because of fidgets, rheumatic pains, and fever. Stella left her bed to comfort Virginia, but after that they could only call to each other from nearby rooms. Then they said their "Goodbyes" to each other as George carried Virginia past Stella's room on their way back to 22 Hyde Park Gate and her own room.

Stella became much worse again, had emergency surgery, and died on July 19. None of the children went to her funeral two days later. Virginia was up and about after June 22, and Jack took them all to visit Stella's grave which was next to Julia's. On July 27, Dr. Seton examined both Virginia and Adrian, who had been sick also, and pronounced them to be flourishing.

The Stephen family went to Gloucestershire from July 28 to September 23. The next day Leslie made his second and final note on Virginia's health (except in 1900 when she had measles): "We returned last night from Painswick, where we spent the holidays. We had a quiet time. . . . 'Ginia, I hope, is improving, though still

nervous.”¹¹ Yet three days later Jack took her and Vanessa to visit his parents at Corby. As can be seen in letters to Thoby, they were thoroughly bored; but after this visit, Virginia and Vanessa were both involved in comforting Jack, the latter to the point of a brief romantic attachment.

Vanessa perforce took Stella’s place in the home, and she and Virginia now had their own bed-sitting-rooms. Virginia’s was the former night nursery now furnished with her wicker chair and Stella’s writing table. Virginia remarked that, with this promotion to separate rooms, she and Vanessa had become young ladies—Virginia at fifteen and Vanessa at eighteen. She wrote:

how often I was in a rage in that room and in despair; and in ecstasy; how I read myself into a trance of perfect bliss; then in came—Adrian, George, Gerald, Jack, my father; how it was there I retreated to when father enraged me; and paced up and down scarlet; and there Madge [Symonds] came one evening; and I could scarcely talk for happiness; and there I droned out those long solitary mornings reading Greek. . . . And it was from that room Gerald fetched me when father died. There I first heard those horrible voices. . . .¹²

Note that Virginia mentions first hearing “those horrible voices” in the context of her father’s death (when she was twenty-two), and I shall return to this matter in Chapter 5. Meanwhile, Virginia suffered no further significant illnesses except measles in 1900, when she was eighteen. Looking back at the variety of symptoms Virginia had in her early teens, during the years 1895, 1896, and 1897, I have suggested that puberty and the onset of adolescence might explain some of them; and that a mild case of rheumatic fever could account for others. Accordingly, I shall devote a few pages here to these possibilities.

ADOLESCENCE

Lionel A. Schwartz of Harvard University Medical School writes:

Adolescence—the period between puberty and young adulthood (approximately 12 to 20) is marked by a great surge of physical development and major social and psychological adjustments. . . . There are marked endocrinologic changes during this phase of life. Hormonal variations may well contribute to the intensity and quality of feelings that the adolescent experiences. Hence, these hormonal changes may play a definite role in creating the disturbed inner climate that the adolescent must face.

Normal adolescence is characterized by a multitude of personality changes. These may prove to be quite distressing to parents, teachers, and

other adults . . . [and] the adolescent's strivings toward maturity may be characterized by awkward, often disconcerting physical and emotional blunderings before a stable adult personality is achieved. Much of this turmoil involves the adolescent's attempts to establish himself as an independent individual. . . . The previously quiet, well-behaved youngster (age 8-12) may become rebellious, defiant, and aggressive[;] . . . the polite, courteous youngster may become rude and sarcastic. . . .

The bizarre, frequently irritating behavior and performance of the adolescent is the individual's untutored and inexperienced attempt to assert independence without becoming completely independent. The young person usually lacks the skill and experience to be himself aware of the strangeness of his performance. . . .

The "normal" adolescent almost always shows evidence of emotional turmoil and personality changes. . . .¹³

Schwartz goes on to discuss adolescent problems that, in his opinion, require therapy. He lists six, but I think only two are pertinent here:

Prolonged or repeated mood disturbances such as real depressions—sadness, crying, insomnia, loss of appetite, loss of ability to perform daily routines, preoccupation with suicide, a feeling of "hopelessness" . . .

Evidence of bizarre mental symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions of persecution, ideas of reference (people talking about him in, usually, uncomplimentary ways).¹⁴

We have no details of Virginia's illusions, delusions or hallucinations, but she certainly must have undergone a personality change. Adolescence was little understood at that time, and it is little wonder that she was considered mad. If the transition period of puberty can be difficult in a fairly normal household, consider again Virginia's predicament: her mother dead, her father at his frantic worst, the older children disgusted with him, Stella trying to take Julia's place, and Virginia herself perhaps having a mild case of rheumatic fever.

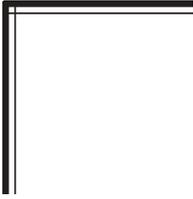
As Virginia recovered from a home in turmoil, she had to cope with her fascination and excitement with the blossoming love of Stella and Jack. Dr. Schwartz would add that the adolescent tends to be concerned, and often quite distressed, about his or her sexual feelings, desires, thoughts or activities, including masturbation. In as much as masturbation (often avoiding direct manipulation of the genitals) is virtually universal in both sexes, there may also be fantasies of physical or mental damage (fear of insanity) or heightened feelings of self-consciousness, inadequacy, wickedness, shyness or embarrassment. All of this, of course, might have been tied in with Virginia's feelings about her first menstrual periods. All we

know is that she had many of the symptoms of a very difficult early adolescence.

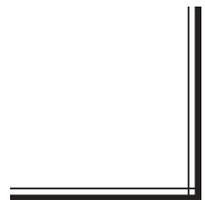
SUMMARY

I have reviewed the symptoms of Virginia's first major episode of "madness." What emerges, for me, is the picture of a pubescent and young adolescent girl living in, and reacting to, a succession of emotionally traumatic events, probably reinforced and complicated by rheumatic fever. Her large household was disrupted and totally involved, overtly and otherwise, in Julia's death, Leslie's pathological mourning which he imposed upon everyone around him, Stella's valiant efforts to carry on in Julia's place—and the rest. It was bad enough that all young adolescents are schizophrenic (to use an old and very imprecise rule of thumb); it was worse that all this, swirling about Virginia, exaggerated what might otherwise have been within normal limits, blew up her inevitable ambivalence about her parents into intolerable conflicts, and forced her to deal with these by means of highly neurotic, if not psychotic, symptoms. Add the effects of a mild case of rheumatic fever and one can account, I believe, for this first tragic episode of "madness" as a reaction to Virginia's highly complex internal and external milieu, particularly in the summer of 1895.





Chapter Four



THE SECOND MAJOR BREAKDOWN

Virginia was essentially well—physically and emotionally—from shortly after Stella's death in 1897 until after her father died in February 1904. This span of time took Virginia from mid-adolescence to the age of twenty-two. Vanessa took over the duties left by Stella's death, but was able to continue her painting lessons (with John Singer Sargeant for a time) while Virginia read widely in her father's library, set writing exercises for herself, and corresponded with her brother, Thoby, and several women friends. The most important, toward the end of this period, was Violet Dickinson with whom Virginia fell ambivalently in love wanting constant love and reassurance, but testing the relationship to its limits.

I must refer the reader to Quentin Bell¹ for more details of this period in Virginia's life. Here I shall add a few scattered incidents to suggest its flavor. In a letter to her favorite cousin, Emma Vaughan, she wrote:

The only thing in this world is music—music and books and one or two pictures. I am going to found a colony where there shall be no marrying—unless you happen to fall in love with a symphony of Beethoven—no human element at all, except what comes through Art—nothing but ideal peace and endless meditation. This world of human beings grows too complicated, my only wonder is that we don't fill more madhouses: the insane view of life has much to be said for it—perhaps its the sane one after all: and *we*, the sad sober respectable citizens really rave every moment of our lives and deserve to be shut up perpetually. My spring melancholy is developing in these hot days into summer madness.²

These words were precipitated partly by Virginia's lingering adolescent idealism and partly by the rude fact that another cousin had just been committed to the Bethlehem Asylum. But her fantasy of a commune for unmarried lovers of the arts has a timeless quality, perhaps inspired by Plato.

Virginia's letters to Thoby are filled with family news and reports of her own readings. At one point she thanks him for a volume of Greek epigrams, suggesting that her enjoyment of them signifies a female mind. She adds that the pony is very helpful. Then, at age twenty, she writes to Violet Dickinson: "I was just this moment pulling up my sleeves to paint my floor in a sudden fit of inspiration when Adrian brought up your letter."³

In January 1903, when Virginia was just twenty-one, all of the Stephen children inherited money from an old family friend, and George Duckworth opened bank accounts for them. Virginia wrote to get Thoby's signature for the bank, and

he demanded to know why. She then wrote: "I suppose the Bank wants your signature not from mere curiosity or for purposes of decoration—or to put in its autograph book but simply so that unscrupulous persons may not forge your cheques. . . ."4 I think Virginia must have enjoyed instructing her older brother in the ways of banks.

An encounter with a distinctly unpopular cousin on the Stephen side of the family is described in another letter to Emma Vaughan. This was Dorothea who, for some reason, disliked being reminded that her mother was Lady Stephen. So, Virginia baited her:

We had a final burst of Dorothea . . . entirely triumphant as far as I am concerned. . . . I had her and Pernel Strachey to tea at the [bookbinding] workshop, and with some malice contrived to say "Lady Stephen" in the course of conversation. This is a thing she [Dorothea] feels strongly about. She got purple like an apoplectic Alderman after dinner—took up a plate of hard biscuits that I had laid in for her rapacious and capacious maw—and pelted me viciously with each in turn, which was rather painful. And then the savage old beast threatened me with fat strawberries if I wouldn't unsay what I had said. Of course I wouldn't, so she deluged me with squashy strawberries and stained all my white dress. . . . She came to the end of missiles, so got up like the ponderous elephant she is, trumpeting loudly, and pounded round the room after me. I shrieked with laughter, which irritated her all the more, and she got me in a corner and pummelled me—till I told her she was too heavy to take such exercise in the heat and her behavior was that of an infuriate cow. . . . England will be lighter when she is gone—*that* is undeniable. . . ."5

Whatever the facts, Virginia was certainly polishing her descriptive style.

RELATIONS WITH GEORGE DUCKWORTH

As Leslie Stephen aged and then developed cancer (undiagnosed for months), he relied on George Duckworth in many ways, though he still stormed at Vanessa about the household accounts. George, on his part, was in most respects a good and generous brother. He took Vanessa and Virginia to the theater and on trips, and, when he was away, Virginia wrote newsy and affectionate letters to him.

Both girls knew that George wore his feelings on his coat sleeve and was very demonstrative. Virginia wrote much later:

It was quite a common thing to come into the drawing room and find George on his knees with his arms extended, addressing my mother,

who might be adding up the weekly books, in tones of fervent adoration. Perhaps he had been staying with the Chamberlains for the week-end. But he lavished caresses, endearments, enquiries and embraces as if, after forty years in the Australian bush, he had at last come home and found an aged mother still alive to welcome him. Meanwhile we gathered round—the dinner bell had already rung—awkward, but appreciative. Few families, we felt, could exhibit such a scene as this. Tears rushed to his eyes with equal abandonment. For example when he had a tooth out he flung himself into the cook's arms in a paroxysm of weeping . . .⁶

Virginia read this at an early meeting of the Memoir Club which included Vanessa. As someone has said in another connection, she was expected to be amusing but would almost certainly be checked if she did violence to the truth.

During this period, also, George undertook to introduce Vanessa to Society. She went to its parties for a time but became bored, and finally refused. He then turned to Virginia, but failed with her too. On one occasion Virginia ventured upon a discussion of Plato's *Symposium* when she should have restricted herself to the weather; and on another George himself blundered by taking his somewhat aristocratic guests and Virginia to an extremely risqué French play.

At about this time, apparently—when Virginia was about twenty—George's own attentions to Vanessa and Virginia went beyond the limits of even his customary demonstrative behavior. In the final paragraphs of her paper for the Memoir Club, Virginia describes the climax of one evening's round of parties and receptions:

Sleep had almost come to me. The room was dark. The house silent. Then, creaking stealthily, the door opened; treading gingerly, someone entered. "Who?" I cried. "Don't be frightened," George whispered. "And don't turn on the light, oh beloved. Beloved—" and he flung himself on my bed, and took me in his arms.

Yes, the old ladies of Kensington and Belgravia never knew that George Duckworth was not only father and mother, brother and sister to those poor Stephen girls; he was their lover also.⁷

After Leslie Stephen's death and Virginia was mentally ill again, Vanessa told Dr. Savage about George's behavior, apparently thinking (perhaps quite correctly) that this contributed to Virginia's illness. Savage apparently confronted George, who came up with the possibly sincere excuse that he was only comforting Virginia for the impending death of her father. Certainly, at the time of her memoir, Virginia considered George stupid as well as undisciplined.

Virginia's paper was entitled "22 Hyde Park Gate" and was in large part a

portrait of George Duckworth. Again, Vanessa was probably at the meeting of the Memoir Club when the paper was read and would have refuted gross distortions of fact. The modern reader should know that “lover” was more like “suitor” and did not imply sexual intercourse. Virginia says in her memoir that Jack Hills told her that George was chaste until his marriage. Virginia also noted in her diary a conversation with Maynard Keynes: “‘The best thing you ever did,’ he said, ‘was your Memoir on George. You should pretend to write about real people & make it all up.’ I was dashed of course . . . for if George is my climax I’m a mere scribbler.”⁸

LESLIE STEPHEN’S DEATH

About two months before Sir Leslie died, Virginia wrote to Violet Dickinson:

The Relations Swarm. I liken them to all sorts of parasitic animals etc etc: really I think they deserve no better. Three mornings I have spent having my hand held, and my emotions pumped out of me, quite unsuccessfully. They are good people, I know, but it would be merciful if they could keep their virtues and affections and all the rest of it to themselves. Why I like you is that you are vicious. Entirely vicious.⁹

Virginia was very close to Violet Dickinson at this time and later, but never told her about George. She reported that the Stephen children were planning to live in Bloomsbury after their father died. She added: “We are the sanest family in London and talk and laugh as if nothing were happening; Adrian and Thoby are going to sing the new year in! We should never get on without this kind of thing. . . .”¹⁰

Sir Leslie mellowed during his terminal illness, taking it with equanimity. Virginia was closer to him than before, and he greatly pleased her by calling her a good daughter. Later, however, she had serious doubts as to whether he had really wanted to live or to die; and she reproached herself for what she considered her failures in their relationship.

After Sir Leslie’s death on February 22, 1904, Virginia sent letters to relatives and friends. Her father died peacefully, she said. She does not know what they will do without him, but the Stephen children have each other. When they are together, their parents do not seem far off. The obituaries are stupid; she could have written better herself.

The family moved for a time to Pembrokeshire where Virginia is reminded of St. Ives. They make queer little expeditions each day with “Georgie” who thinks they help pass the time; and perhaps they do, she says. She begins to reproach herself for not being closer to Father, for not doing more for him, for

not telling him of her love for him. In this, I think she is keeping her father alive by identifying with his thoughts and feelings after Julia died. To Violet Dickinson: "I cant believe that all of our life with Father is over and he dead. If one could only tell him how one cared, as I dreamt I did last night. You dont mind my filling my letters with egotistical complaining—very dull, but I cant help writing them to you. It is so hard to speak even to ones own brothers and sisters."¹¹ Other letters of this period indicate normal mourning, but not much of that. Virginia and her siblings could not talk about their feelings, and she apologized when she wrote about them even to an intimate friend like Violet.

Gerald Duckworth had business in Venice, and proposed that they all go; so from April 1 to May 8 the four Stephens were in Venice, Florence, and Paris—sometimes together, sometimes not—with Gerald as well as with Violet Dickinson, who joined them for part of the time. They encountered numerous friends and relatives—in those days *everyone* went to Venice, Florence, Rome, or the Riviera in the spring. In Paris they met Clive Bell (one of Thoby's close friends at Cambridge), and had a "real Bohemian party" with him and two friends, followed by a visit to Rodin.

I cannot find evidence of an impending "nervous breakdown" in Virginia's account of this trip to the Continent. The Stephens arrived in Venice without hotel reservations and therefore had to put up with inferior accommodations until they splurged and went to the Grand Hotel. Virginia was quite enthusiastic about Venice and Florence, but complained, along with Adrian, about beggars, people who cheated them, and the sometimes dirty or uncomfortable accommodations. For some reason, however, Violet Dickinson returned to England ahead of the Stephen party, and Virginia wrote to her about smoking numerous cigarettes at a common Paris cafe, and arguing long and loudly about art, sculpture and music—notably Wagner.

Nigel Nicolson believes that meeting Clive Bell in Paris was a turning point in Virginia's life in that she discovered in him the type of friend and conversation that she most enjoyed.¹² She had heard about him from Thoby for years and had met him before; but they were freer in Paris. In writing to Violet about this eventful evening, Virginia abruptly made an apology:

Oh Lord, how cross I have been, how dull, how tempersome—and am still. You had much to stand: I wish I could repay all the bad times with good times. There should be some system of repayment in this world. . . . Oh my Violet, if you could only find me a great solid bit of work to do when I get back that will make me forget my own stupidity I should be so grateful. I *must* work. . . .¹³

I cannot help wondering if something is missing from accounts of the Stephen

family trip to the Continent. Why Violet Dickinson returned ahead of the others is not known; but Virginia states clearly that Violet must have found her very difficult. Virginia asks for hard work to do; and she must know (if only unconsciously) that this is a good outlet for pent-up anger and depression. The fact is that she was “mad” again within a week of her Bohemian party in Paris.

Virginia was almost certainly under more emotional tension than was evident on her tour. Some of it was expressed in being “difficult” with Violet. She could not be as liberated as her siblings were, and she may have felt both envious and angry that they took their father’s death so lightly. Her pent-up emotions certainly intensified as George escorted her and Vanessa back to 22 Hyde Park Gate and to fresh memories of her father’s last illness and death. And now George was the head of the family, and Virginia had reason to fear all that he might demand of her personally and socially.

In the context of such feelings, one can imagine also a heated discussion of the Stephen children’s plan to move to Bloomsbury and a dramatic emotional display by George, leaving Virginia upset and Vanessa stubbornly unmoved. Indeed, the prospect of giving up her childhood home must have torn at Virginia’s stability. The impending move would mean renewed feelings of separation and loss—leaving her cherished room, her books, her father’s library, and many other familiar surroundings—with Gerald going his own way and George disapproving but insisting on moving with them—all coupled with having to face a myriad of uncertainties. These and other intense emotional pressures, combined with Virginia’s already intense conflicts about her father and his death, probably help to explain, in part at least, her explosion into madness the day after she returned to London. One may speculate that “madness” was the safety valve for the caldron of repressed conflicts within her.

VIRGINIA’S VIEW OF HER 1904 BREAKDOWN

About 1922, Virginia read a paper to the Memoir Club entitled “Old Bloomsbury.” She must speak from her own angle, she says; and so she must approach Bloomsbury from 22 Hyde Park Gate. After describing the house itself and its seventeen or eighteen occupants during her childhood, she adds:

Here the four of us were born; here my grandmother died; here my mother died; here my father died; here Stella became engaged to Jack Hills and two doors further down the street after three months of marriage she died too. When I look back upon that house it seems to me so crowded with scenes of family life, grotesque, comic and tragic; with the violent emotions of youth, revolt, despair, intoxicating happiness, immense boredom, with parties of the famous and the dull; with rages

again, George and Gerald; with love scenes with Jack Hills; with passionate affection for my father alternating with passionate hatred of him, all tingling and vibrating in an atmosphere of youthful bewilderment and curiosity—that I feel suffocated by the recollection. The place seems tangled and matted with emotion. I could write the history of every mark and scratch in my room, I wrote later. . . . It seemed as if the house and the family which had lived in it, thrown together as they were by so many deaths, so many emotions, so many traditions, must endure forever. And then suddenly in one night both vanished.

When I recovered from the illness which was not unnaturally the result of all these emotions and complications, 22 Hyde Park Gate no longer existed. While I had lain in bed at the Dickinsons' house at Welwyn thinking that birds were singing Greek choruses and that King Edward was using the foulest possible language among Ozzie Dickinson's azaleas, Vanessa had wound up Hyde Park Gate once and for all. . . .¹⁴

This, for me, is a brilliant summary of most of the predisposing causes of Virginia's breakdown. In the preceding section, I attempted to reconstruct more proximate causes. Both remote and proximate causes help explain any illness.

In Chapter 3, I quoted Virginia's "A Sketch of the Past," in which, after describing her room at 22 Hyde Park Gate, she says, "And it was from that room Gerald fetched me when father died. There I first heard those horrible voices. . . ."¹⁵ I judged, from the context, that she first heard the voices at the outset of the 1904 "madness," immediately after returning from the Continent. In what I have just quoted, however, Virginia clearly dates them to a time some days, if not weeks, later—after Violet Dickinson had taken her to Burnham Wood, Welwyn.

I really do not know how important the chronology is. Virginia may, to be sure, have heard voices when her room was still the night nursery—e.g., at the time of the breakdown after her mother's death. In the summary I have just cited, however, Virginia writes almost as if her illness in 1904 was her first mental illness. This would be consistent with her description of her early teenage sickness in terms of physical symptoms. Furthermore, her use of the term "horrible voices" would certainly be compatible with "hearing" King Edward using the foulest possible language in the Dickinson garden. Whether this was the first time or not, I shall suggest that the hallucinations on this occasion might have been precipitated by the scarlet fever that Virginia is known to have had during her three months at Violet Dickinson's place at Welwyn.

THE SECOND MADNESS

An ideal world would provide a detailed sequence of the events beginning

May 9, 1904. As we know, George Duckworth met Virginia and Vanessa coming from Paris and escorted them to 22 Hyde Park Gate. The next day, Emma Vaughan—one of Virginia’s closest friends—came to visit and found her confused and irrational. Dr. Savage was called, and Virginia soon had three nurses; but she was too much for Vanessa to manage and so was taken to Burnham Wood to stay with Violet Dickinson. At some point during her three months at Burnham Wood, Virginia jumped out of a window (just a few feet off the ground) and also had scarlet fever. I wish I knew just when in relation to her other symptoms!

Virginia’s illness was marked by antagonism toward Vanessa, excitement, and exaggerated guilt feelings about having failed her father. She struggled with nurses over eating and remaining in bed. She had the delusion that food was a cause of her illness. And at some point, as we have quoted her, she had hallucinations of birds singing in Greek and of Edward VII calling out obscenities or urging her to do vile things.

I have already suggested that Virginia may have *had* to be “mad” in order to express pent-up fury, including conflicting feelings about Vanessa’s sense of liberation after their father’s death. Hearing birds singing in Greek might have included the wish for an idealized mother figure derived from the women who taught her Greek, especially since Violet Dickinson was now “the enemy” in urging Virginia to eat. I think it possible that the high-living Edward VII may have been a projection of Virginia’s own forbidden and repressed oral and sexual self—wanting to break down all inhibitions, but inexorably in conflict with the dictates of her Victorian conscience.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch said once that one may have to learn to hate one’s parents before one can learn to love them. I think this did not happen to Virginia until she went through the catharsis of writing *To the Lighthouse*. She was a child when Julia died and never intimate with her. Virginia was denied the adolescent “separation and individuation” process of development in a structured environment provided by loving and consistently firm parents. Sir Leslie, although he did his best and eventually mellowed, was deaf, demanding, depressed, or sick, and therefore frequently unavailable during these crucial years of Virginia’s early life. Certainly Virginia’s ambivalence, repressed hatred, and newly restored love had not been fully resolved and integrated at the time of her father’s death. I think that she tortured herself with what might have been, forgetting that George, Gerald, Vanessa, and Adrian would marry or just move away, leaving her the “designated old maid” alone with her ageing and perhaps even more difficult father.

But what if Virginia was also coming down with scarlet fever just as she returned from Paris? This is also a Type A streptococcus infection, and it too may be followed by rheumatic fever. If she was at 22 Hyde Park Gate a week or more before going to Violet Dickinson’s place, then the episode of scarlet fever prob-

ably had nothing to do with Virginia's regression into "madness." It could, however, have contributed to Virginia's symptoms—especially hallucinations. After an incubation period of up to a week, scarlet fever blossoms into a very sore throat, fever, chills, headache, rapid pulse, strawberry tongue, swollen lymph glands of the neck, and a rash that may last up to ten days. This is a highly contagious disease, and formerly called for a strict quarantine of the house and fumigation after the patient recovered. None of this is mentioned in connection with Virginia's case, but I suggest again that the toxic effect and high fever of scarlet fever may have influenced the symptomatology and course of her "madness." This would be even more the case if scarlet fever set into motion another bout of rheumatic fever.

When Angelica Bell had scarlet fever in 1934, Virginia wrote to Vanessa: "God! What an utter curse! . . . I believe I've had it—didn't that odious doctor at Welwyn swear I had?"¹⁶ This refers to 1904 and Virginia's stay with Violet Dickinson, and it suggests that Virginia or Violet might have questioned the diagnosis—or Virginia the treatment. But, again, if one only knew how the course of the scarlet fever fitted into the course of Virginia's mental symptoms, one might be able to suggest causal relationships with, for example, her hearing voices and jumping out of the window. A classmate of mine in medical school got a severe streptococcus sore throat at a time when all of us were chronically tired. He was hospitalized and, during the height of his fever, had delusions and hallucinations. Recovered from the streptococcus infection, he was as normal as before and he went on to become a successful surgeon. I do not propose to hold type A streptococcus infections responsible for all of Virginia's illnesses, but I think they contributed significantly to several of them.

Much has been written about Virginia's rejection of food during her illnesses. At least one writer considered that she was excessively preoccupied with food in her novels. Food is, of course, equated with maternal care. We recall that as a baby Virginia, awaiting breakfast, impatiently drummed on the tray of her high chair, and was no doubt scolded by her nurse for doing so. I do not know how to interpret her delusion that food was making her sick. From one point of view she might have been stubbornly rejecting the "mothering" that a part of her devoutly desired from Vanessa and Violet, feeling that they had now turned against her. Her unconscious wish to be nursed at all levels of development may, in her anger at Vanessa, have turned into its opposite—and so her actual nurses, who wanted her to eat, became fiends. If she regressed to the "terrible twos" she might fight anything that was offered as good for her. Again, if the very well-nourished King Edward VII represented a repressed part of Virginia herself, she could disown him by refusing to eat and hearing his voice as obscene. Who knows? There are numerous possibilities. But I think that Virginia's latent conflicts surfaced in her illness, and merged with those from her childhood, and so she fought with every-

one who tried to tell her what was best for her or angered her in other ways.

THE REST CURE

Although Virginia was being cared for in Violet Dickinson's home, the doctors and nurses wished to impose inactivity, quiet, and wholesome food. This regimen was derived from the so-called Weir Mitchell treatment, and Virginia was to encounter it most of her life, especially in rest homes and sanitariums. One of the reasons for her suicide, I think, was the fear that she would have to endure the "rest cure" again.

Bad as the rest cure may have been for Virginia, it was standard treatment at the time. Even as late as the 1930s, the best private psychiatric hospital in the Chicago area had a program derived from Weir Mitchell's: a few drops of tincture of opium three times a day, moderate exercise such as bowling on the green, but plenty of rest, excellent food, and sodium amytal for sleep. There was no provision for individual psychotherapy or understanding of the need for it. So, in Virginia's day, how could one quarrel with Harley Street?

The rest cure that Virginia knew was more drastic, and it clashed head-on with her perhaps compulsive need to keep busy: writing intensively, walking two hours a day, reading widely, and eating indifferently or well according to whim. The following, taken from a 1925 standard textbook of therapeutics in its 19th Edition, is what Virginia's doctors had in mind with or without their own modifications:

The rest cure is a method devised and elaborated by the late S. Weir Mitchell, of Philadelphia, for the relief of a large class of patients who, for various reasons, are generally ailing from apparently no organic disease, and yet whose condition is often so alarming as to lead to the belief that some hidden cause of a severe train of symptoms must be present. In many such instances a careful study of the case will show that there is a cause, near or remote, which has exhausted the patient's vital forces without producing anything else than functional disturbances of the body. Thus a prolonged nerve-strain in nursing a sick relative may so exhaust the strength of a hitherto healthy woman as to produce *hysteria*, *anemia*, and great disturbances of nutrition, or, in another instance, cause *neuralgia*, *disordered menstruation*, and *uterine or ovarian pain*. In males, mental, sexual, or physical vigor may be impaired, owing to prolonged anxiety in business. Be the symptoms what they may, as long as they are dependent upon nerve-strain, this "cure" is to be resorted to, and if properly carried out is often attended with surprising results. It is also a valuable means of treating functional and organic heart disease. Before describing the method in

detail it is proper to state that its entire *rationale* rests upon the remembrance that every movement is an expenditure of force, and that a system which has already overdrawn its reserve fund of strength must be as careful with its funds that remain as a bank should be under the same circumstances.

It having been decided that the rest cure is to be employed, the directions are given as follows:

A bright, airy, easily cleaned, and comfortable room is to be selected, and adjoining it, if possible, should be a smaller one for an attendant or nurse. The patient is put to bed and kept there for from three to six weeks, or longer, as may be necessary, and during this time is allowed to see no one except the nurse and the doctor, since the presence of friends requires conversation and mental effort. No correspondence is permitted. The patient in severe cases must be fed by the nurse in order to avoid the expenditure of the force required by the movement of the arms. No sitting up in bed is allowed, and if any reading is done it must be done by the nurse, who can read aloud for an hour a day.

In the case of women the hair should be dressed by the nurse to avoid any physical effort on the part of the patient.

To take the place of ordinary exercise two measures are employed, the first of which is massage or rubbing of the body, the second electricity. By the kneading and rubbing of the muscles and skin the liquids in the tissues are absorbed and poured into the lymph-spaces and a healthy blush is brought to the skin. This passive exercise is performed in the morning or afternoon, and should last for from one half to one hour, every part of the body being kneaded, even the face and scalp. In the afternoon or morning the various muscles should be passively exercised by electricity, each muscle being made to contract by the application of the poles of the battery to its motor points, the slowly interrupted current being used. Neither of these forms of exercise call for any expenditure of nerve-force, though they keep up the general nutrition. The following programme for a day's existence is an example of what the physician should order:

7:30 A.M. Glass of hot or cold milk, predigested, boiled, or raw, as the case requires.

8 A.M. The nurse is to sponge the patient with tepid water or with cold and hot water alternately, to stimulate the skin and circulation, the body being well wrapped in a blanket, except the leg or portion which is being bathed. After this the nurse should dry the part last wetted with a rough towel, using some friction to stimulate the skin.

8:30 A.M. Breakfast. Boiled, poached, or scrambled eggs, milk toast,

water toast, or a finely cut piece of mutton-chop or chicken.

10 A.M. Massage.

11 A.M. A glass of milk or milk-punch, or egg-nog.

12 P.M. Reading for an hour.

1 P.M. Dinner. Small piece of steak, rare roast beef, consomme soup, mutton broth, and any one of the easily digested vegetables well cooked.

3 P.M. Electricity.

4:30 P.M. A glass of milk, or milk-punch, or egg-nog.

6:30 P.M. Supper. This should be very plain, no tea or coffee, but toast and butter, milk, curds and whey, or a plain custard.

9:30 P.M. A glass of milk or milk-punch.

In this way the day is well filled, and the time does not drag so heavily as would be thought. If the stomach rebels at overfeeding, the amounts of food must be cut down, but when all the effort of the body is concentrated on respiration, circulation, and digestion a large amount of nourishment can be assimilated by the exhausted body, which before this treatment is undertaken may have had its resources so shattered as to be unable to carry out any physiological act perfectly.

For the treatment to be successful the rules laid down should be rigidly followed.¹⁷

As I have indicated, Virginia did not get the “full treatment” during her three months with Violet Dickinson, but the rationale for prescribed inactivity and lots of milk was essentially the same. Later, she complained of the doctor to Violet, calling him an ignoramus and saying she would have been much better off with Vanessa, who understood and ignored her moods. This was not Vanessa’s view, however, and—partly on doctor’s orders—Virginia remained away from London. She went to an aunt in Cambridge where she was also near Adrian. Feeling very much out of things, Virginia wrote to Violet Dickinson: “I heard from Nessa, very happy, in the arms of Kitty [Maxse], who comes of course the moment my surly back is turned. . . .”¹⁸ Then, a week later, she wrote to Violet: “Nessa contrived to say that it didn’t much matter to anyone, her included, I suppose, whether I was here or in London, which made me angry, but then she has a genius for stating unpleasant truths in her matter of fact voice!”¹⁹

A NEW LIFE

During Virginia’s convalescence, the Stephen family moved from 22 Hyde Park Gate to 46 Gordon Square in Bloomsbury. Virginia visited there from November 10 to 18, and during this time she sent articles to *The Guardian*, one of which became her first publication a month later. The family also had Leonard

Woolf (one of Thoby's good friends at Cambridge) to dinner just prior to his departure for six years in Ceylon. Virginia then stayed elsewhere during December, but joined the family for Christmas. She finally settled down at 46 Gordon Square in early January 1905 and was pronounced well by Dr. Savage.

The years from 1905 to 1910 were filled with pitfalls for Virginia, but she maintained her emotional stability. With George Duckworth married (late 1904) the four Stephens had their new home to themselves. Then Thoby began his "at homes" for Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, and other Cambridge friends, with Vanessa and Virginia included. These gatherings were highly unconventional, lasting into the early hours of the morning as these unchaperoned young men and women argued the meanings of Beauty, Truth, and Goodness. Quentin Bell's biography of Virginia and memoirs by Vanessa and Virginia themselves trace the history of the group that came to be known as "Bloomsbury"—the title of a separate book by Bell.

In late August 1906 the four Stephens and Violet Dickinson went to Greece where Vanessa, Violet, and Thoby became very ill. Violet, too sick to help, returned early; leaving Virginia and Adrian to deal with doctors and then get their patients back to London. There, they ran the household and helped with nursing. Thoby, thought to have malaria, did not improve, was then diagnosed as having typhoid fever, and died on November 10. Violet, who now had the same diagnosis, was too ill to be told of Thoby's death, and so Virginia, writing frequently, kept up the fiction of his recovery. Two days after Thoby died, Vanessa agreed to marry Clive Bell. The wedding took place in February 1907, and in March Virginia and Adrian moved to 29 Fitzroy Square, just a short walk from Gordon Square.

During these years Virginia published reviews and articles, and began work on a novel that would eventually be called *A Voyage Out*. She and Adrian continued the Thursday night "at homes"—not always happily—while Vanessa and Clive began Friday groups where the emphasis was on art. The two were more overlapping than competitive. Virginia and Adrian went to the Continent together, teased each other, flipped butter balls at each other when words ran out, but in general had an uneasy relationship. Virginia got into a triangular relationship with Vanessa and Clive, and repeated this later with Clive and his mistress, Mary Hutchinson. (The first triangle was with Vanessa and Thoby, with a vague Oedipal triangle in the background. Virginia evidently wanted the love, approval, and emotional support of both "parent substitutes" simultaneously; and it is likely that she was still working through unfulfilled and unresolved childhood needs and conflicts.)

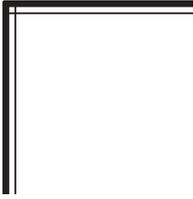
Virginia was briefly engaged to Lytton Strachey in 1909 and had several other suitors, one or two of whom proposed marriage. Almost as soon as Lytton was disengaged, he wrote to Leonard Woolf in Ceylon to come home and marry

Virginia. Leonard's reply was, in effect, Would she have me?

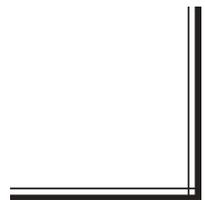
When Vanessa was pregnant in 1909, she and Clive became sexually estranged, and Clive returned to a former mistress. He still flirted with Virginia, but less seriously; and Vanessa no longer felt so threatened by Virginia. She was much more involved with her son and her prospective second child.

Virginia had her twenty-eighth birthday in January 1910. The first big event of this year was the epic "Dreadnaught Hoax" in which Virginia joined Adrian and four other young men, disguised as the Emperor of Abyssinia and his suite, to pay an "official" visit to H.M.S. "Dreadnaught" whose officers included a Fisher cousin of the Stephens. The story was leaked to the press and caused a sensation. Newspapers clamored for photographs of Virginia, and young officers of the "Dreadnaught" sought revenge on the pranksters. Virginia was delighted by this caper, but later disillusioned by the brutality of the ship's officers. Some say that this pushed her even more into feminism and to a view that men are responsible for wars. Vivid accounts of the "Dreadnaught Hoax" may be found in Quentin Bell's biography of Virginia²⁰ and in Adrian Stephen's whimsical report.²¹





Chapter Five



THE 1910 ILLNESS

About two months after the “Dreadnaught Hoax” Virginia developed severe headaches and was highly nervous. For some time now she had been addressing envelopes on behalf of women’s suffrage. Her interest in “the women’s movement” dated from January 1910, but may have been reinforced by the aftermath of the “Dreadnaught” affair and to the opposition of the Conservative government to women’s suffrage. The work was dull, but she did it for the “cause” and to please her longtime friend, Janet Case. At the same time, Virginia wrote frequently to Violet Dickinson, but had difficulty arranging a meeting. “How fond should you think you were of me now?” she asked; and then “I wish you would enlighten me upon human nature. The deeper one gets, the muddier it is.”¹

Virginia’s principal correspondents were Clive and Vanessa Bell. Clive helped Virginia with her novel through 1909 and continued to do so. Virginia’s letters in early 1910 are very close to love letters. The situation is complicated by Vanessa’s second pregnancy. Her normal preoccupation with that caused an inevitable withdrawal from both Clive and Virginia and doubtless intensified their flirtation. Virginia was also seeing Saxon Sydney-Turner, a friend from the early Bloomsbury Group, but soon discouraged any ideas he may have had of marrying her.

When the “nervousness” became serious, Vanessa and Clive took Virginia to Cornwall for a rest, and then to a resort at Studland; but these holidays provided only temporary relief. Virginia was at her home in Fitzroy Square during parts of March, April, and May, and her letters do not reveal significant distress; and she was having some social engagements. In early June, however, she wrote a very affectionate letter to Clive—the day before she was to join both Clive and Vanessa near Canterbury. She wants Clive to know how much she is attached to him, and how much more she expects to appreciate him in the future; but she isn’t quite certain in what ways.

I do not know if Vanessa read this letter, but in any case the holiday near Canterbury did nothing for Virginia and so Vanessa, now seven months pregnant, consulted Dr. Savage about Virginia. This time Virginia went willingly for a rest cure at the private nursing home of Miss Jean Thomas. She may have been relieved to get out of the triangle with the Bells. She was not overly restricted this time and so had some visitors (including Clive) and wrote letters. By the middle of August—two months later—Virginia and Jean Thomas went on a walking tour in Cornwall, during which time Quentin Bell was born on August 19 at 46 Gordon Square.

WHY THIS ILLNESS?

Virginia's emotional life in 1910 was probably upset. She was often worried about being unmarried; and Vanessa was pregnant, with less time or patience for Virginia. Clive was less attentive than before. Her years of Bloomsbury emancipation could not change her emotional needs. She was attached to Vanessa and professed to love her, but she was testing the outermost limits of Vanessa's tolerance.

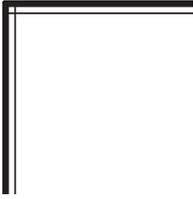
Virginia mentioned at least once during this time how often she found herself thinking of Thoby. One explanation of her situation with the Bells is that she was regressively trying to recreate the loving, but competitive, relationship with Vanessa and Thoby in their childhood years. Following Thoby's death, Virginia lost Vanessa to Clive; and now both Virginia and Clive were losing Vanessa to her children—or so it must have seemed to them. Whatever the explanation, I think that Virginia was both frightened and guilty about her intense feelings for Clive. Beyond that, after the “Dreadnaught” affair, she hated what we now call the macho image of men; and so may have been suspicious even of Clive.

Another factor in Virginia's emotional turmoil may have been her relationship with Adrian. They were still living alone at 29 Fitzroy Square, but they were “the most incompatible of people. We drove each other perpetually into frenzies of irritation or into the depths of gloom. . . . True, we still had Thursday evenings as before. But they were always strained and often ended in dismal failure. . . .”² Virginia goes on to relate the strain partly to the fact that she was the only woman in the company of “buggers.” This was not always the case, of course, but Virginia must have been caught in some of the passionate cross-currents generated by the fluctuating attachments of Adrian, Duncan Grant, Maynard Keynes, and Lytton and James Strachey.

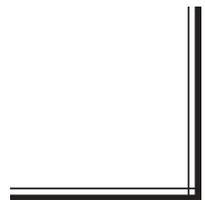
Virginia's appeal to Violet for help with the muddiness of human nature might well have arisen from her own confused and tortured feelings. I think that she suffered a kind of narcissistic crisis in that Violet and Vanessa were no longer as available to her as they had been, while Clive was perhaps too close for comfort. As I have suggested, I think she unconsciously sought the love and emotional support of idealized parent figures—both of them—or of Vanessa and someone to take Thoby's place, because both of them had formerly been her prime sources of strength and stability.

Virginia was also working on her novel, *A Voyage Out*, as it would finally be named. She may have completed her first draft during the spring of 1910. Clive helped her considerably in 1909, but I do not know how long this continued. Nor is it clear that Virginia exhausted herself writing. If she did, I would wonder to what extent she was in conflict about writing about her family and friends in a novel. Clive wrote to her: “Helen [Vanessa] is by far the best character . . . [but]

Of Helen I cannot trust myself to speak, but I suppose you will make Vanessa believe in herself.”³ Clive seems not to have been critical of the sources of Virginia’s material, but only on matters of style and authenticity; but Virginia was bound to be concerned about how her first novel would be viewed—as much by family and friends as by professional critics. So, whatever the combination of reasons—past and current—for Virginia’s emotional upsets, she benefited from a modified rest cure and was essentially well after a few months.



Chapter Six



ENGAGEMENT AND MARRIAGE

PRELIMINARY

After Virginia's overnight engagement to Lytton Strachey in 1909, Lytton wrote to Leonard Woolf—as I have noted—suggesting that he might come home from Ceylon to marry Virginia. Lytton apparently promoted this idea with Virginia and her friends as well, but Leonard did not return until 1911.

During these years, Virginia was seeing Walter Lamb, Rupert Brooke, James Strachey, Saxon Sydney-Turner, and Sydney Waterlow, the first and last of whom proposed marriage but were refused. Misunderstandings apparently arose between some of them and Clive, who broke entirely with Walter Lamb. Virginia entertained in London at Fitzroy Square, then Brunswick Square, and at country places she took at Firle, then Asham. Adrian was frequently included as well as such women friends as Marjorie Strachey, Ka Cox, and Vanessa with Clive or Roger Fry.

Virginia was still working on her novel during the early months of 1911. The work went well except for times of being blocked. Writing to Vanessa in early June she described a storm that failed to lighten the air:

Did you feel horribly depressed? I did. I could not write, and all the devils came out—hairy black ones. To be 29 and unmarried—to be a failure—childless—insane too, no writer. I went off to the Museum to try and subdue them, and having an ice afterward, met Rupert Brooke, with, presumably, a Miss Olivier. . . .

Today things are less sultry, in spite of the fact that we have just had Saxon to dinner. . . .

Marjorie [Strachey] has just telephoned goodbye. Tomorrow she goes into a Rest Cure. . . . She has some strange symptoms which do not get better. At the same time Elly [Rendel (later Virginia's doctor)] has broken down; she too goes into a nursing home. . . .¹

From this I wonder how readily the rest cure was prescribed for young, unmarried women in Virginia's day. In any case, I think that Virginia's wave of depression and despair at this point was due to heat, humidity, and passing inability to write. Such an impasse almost always led to a litany of self-accusation: I am a failure, childless, and insane. The contrast with Vanessa was always there: currently painting well, sexually happy with Roger Fry, and mother of two attractive babies. Virginia could put comparisons aside if she was writing well and if her external

sources of self-esteem were generous.

LEONARD WOOLF RETURNS

After six and one-half years as a civil servant in Ceylon, Leonard Woolf returned to England on leave. For much of that time, despite his youth, he had been the Raj for large populations of natives. He was accustomed to authority and to the exercise of power in administrative and judicial functions, but he was disenchanted with British colonial policies and methods. Later, he would write *The Village in the Jungle*, a novel that a Malay student told Alec Waugh got into the native mind far better than Kipling, Maugham, or Forster.²

Leonard looked up his friends from Cambridge days and began seeing Virginia. At the end of August she invited him to Little Talland House, Firle, and suggested also that it would be nicer to use Christian names—forgetting that he was Jewish. She added that Desmond MacCarthy and Marjorie Strachey will most likely be on the same train. In October Virginia saw part of Wagner's "Ring Cycle" in Leonard's box at the opera.

In November 1911 Virginia and Adrian moved to 38 Brunswick Square where they had Maynard Keynes and Duncan Grant as paying guests for room and board. Leonard joined them in early December. In his autobiography he wrote: "On December 4 I went into residence and from that moment began to see Virginia continually. We often lunched or dined together, we went together to Gordon Square to see Vanessa or have a meal there, we walked in the country, we went to the theatre or to the Russian Ballet."³

Leonard proposed marriage in January 11, 1912. Virginia replied that she did not know. She must have time—she did not know how long—to make up her mind. But they must go on seeing each other. Leonard pressed his suit in two letters to which Virginia replied: "There isn't anything really for me to say, except that I should like to go on as before, and that you should leave me free, and that I should be honest. As to faults, I expect mine are just as bad—less noble perhaps, But of course they are not really the question. . . ."⁴

Leonard was sufficiently encouraged to resign from the Civil Service and to venture forth on a career as a writer. Virginia, however, developed symptoms again. To Ka Cox she wrote that she had been ill (in late January) but was better again. "It was a touch of my usual disease, in my head you know. I spent a week in bed, but now that's all over, except for miraculous dreams at night. . . ."⁵ A week or so later, she wrote to Violet Dickinson that Dr. Savage is making her spend a fortnight in bed; and in fact she returned to Jean Thomas's nursing home. Vanessa told Leonard that he must not see or write to Virginia at that time, but he was permitted to write again after two weeks or so.

By March 5 Virginia was back at 38 Brunswick Square and wrote a rather

wild letter to Leonard. I think that she exaggerated her experiences at the nursing home as a way of testing his reactions. She said:

You hit off my taste in reading very well. I should have thanked you before, but writing was forbidden. I shall tell you wonderful stories of the lunatics. By the bye, they've elected me King . . .

I had other adventures, and some disasters, the fruit of too passionate and enquiring a disposition. I avoided both love and hatred. I now feel very clear, calm, and move slowly, like one of the big animals at the zoo. Knitting is the saving of life; Adrian has taken to it too. . . .⁶

The pressures on Virginia seem partly due to the ardor of Leonard's suit and partly to the numerous internal conflicts stirred up and intensified by it, including her own ambivalence about men. A few weeks after her enforced rest she wrote to Molly MacCarthy, a friend from the Bloomsbury Group, apparently continuing a discussion:

I didn't intend to make you think that I was against marriage. Of course I'm not, though the extreme safeness and sobriety of young couples does appall me, but then so do the random melancholy old maids. I began life with a tremendous, absurd, ideal of marriage, then my bird's eye view of many marriages disgusted me, and I thought I must be asking what was not to be had. But that has passed too. Now I only ask for someone to make me vehement, and then I'll marry him! The fault of our society always seems to me to be timidity and self-consciousness; and I feel oddly vehement, and very exacting, and so difficult to live with and so intemperate and changeable, now thinking one thing and now another. But in my heart I always expect to be floated over all crises, when the moment comes, and landed heaven knows where! I really don't worry about W[oolf]: though I think I made out that I did. . . .⁷

Still another pressure on Virginia was that Vanessa promoted the match, and it may have helped when she, Clive, and Roger went off to Italy.

Virginia was aware of Leonard's position with the Civil Service. He might still have reconsidered his resignation, but she might have ruined his career by her indecisiveness. She had promised to be honest, and so she wrote her very mixed feelings in her letter of May 1:

It seems to me that I am giving you a great deal of pain—some in a most casual way and therefore I ought to be as plain with you as I can, because half the time I suspect, you're in a fog which I don't see at all. Of course

I can't explain what I feel—these are some of the things that strike me. The obvious advantages of marriage stand in my way, I say to myself. Anyhow, you'll be quite happy with him; and he will give you companionship, children, and a busy life—then I say, By God, I will not look upon marriage as a profession. The only people who know of it [the proposal?], all think it suitable; and that makes me scrutinize my own motives all the more. Then, of course, I feel angry sometimes at the strength of your desire. Possibly, your being a Jew comes in also at this point. You seem so foreign. And then I am fearfully unstable. I pass from hot to cold in an instant, without any reason; except I think that sheer physical effort and exhaustion influence me. All I can see is that in spite of these feelings which go chasing each other all day long when I am with you, there is some feeling which is permanent, and growing. You want to know of course whether it will ever make me want to marry you. How can I say? I think it will, because there seems to be no reason why it shouldn't—But I don't know what the future will bring. I'm half afraid of myself. I sometimes feel that no one ever has or ever shall feel something—Its the thing that makes you call me like a hill, or a rock. Again, I want everything—love, children, adventure, intimacy, work. (Can you make any sense out of this ramble? I am putting down one thing after another.) So I go from being half in love with you, and wanting you to be with me always, and know everything about me, to the extremes of wildness and aloofness. I sometimes think that if I married you, I could have everything—and then—is it the sexual side of it that comes between us? As I told you brutally the other day, I feel no physical attraction in you. There are moments—when you kissed me the other day was one—when I feel no more than a rock. And yet your caring for me as you do almost overwhelms me. It is so real, and so strange. Why should you? What am I really except a pleasant attractive creature? But its just because you care so much that I feel I've got to care before I marry you. I feel I must give you everything; and that if I can't, well, marriage would only be second-best for you as well as for me. If you can still go on, as before, letting me feel my own way, as that is what would please me best; and then we must both take the risks. But you have made me very happy too. We both of us want a marriage that is a tremendous living thing, always hot, not dead and easy in parts as most marriages are. We ask a great deal of life, don't we? Perhaps we shall get it; then, how splendid!¹⁸

By the 29th of May, 1912, Virginia had resolved her doubts and had come to know how much she admired, respected, and cherished Leonard. She told him that she loved him and would marry him. Quentin Bell says it was the wisest

decision of her life, and perhaps it was; but it would be very difficult for both of them. Virginia promptly wrote some of her friends that she was marrying a penniless Jew, and both of them signed a card to Lytton Strachey, the match-maker, saying only: Ha! Ha!

They were married on August 10, 1912 at the St. Pancras Registry Office during a violent thunderstorm. During a service that faltered because of a fumbling Registrar, Vanessa suddenly recalled that she wanted to change the name of her younger son; and she interrupted the service to ask how this should be done. Only a psychoanalyst would make something of this perhaps, but weddings are usually interrupted when, as part of the ceremony itself, the congregation is asked if anyone has good cause to object to the marriage. I have to wonder, then, if Vanessa unconsciously wished to substitute changing her son's name for Virginia's changing hers. But no one can know what was underlying Vanessa's impulsive act.

REASONS FOR DOUBTS

One can easily assume that Leonard, one of the most mature and masculine of the Bloomsbury Group, was greatly disappointed and chagrined on their honeymoon by just what Virginia had warned him about—her lack of sexual response. His masculine “ego” may have assumed that he could overcome her rock-like qualities, just as some men like to fantasize that they could convert a beautiful lesbian. But Leonard wrote somewhere that he was chaste, with one lapse only, during his six and a half years in Ceylon. Some writers assume, however, that he was visited frequently by native prostitutes. Whatever the case, Leonard himself had described Virginia as a snow maiden, and whether he was inexperienced or equated sexuality with prostitutes, he himself may have contributed to their sexual difficulties. The madonna/prostitute dichotomy has caused grave difficulties for men who could not love both aspects of a woman in one person.

Virginia faced her problems as well as she could in her long letter of May 1st. She knew that she feared sex, that aggressive sexuality angered her, that she was unwilling to make a profession of marriage, that she loved being admired and cared for, and that she wanted everything. She thought herself a pleasant, attractive person, wondering what else he could see in her. I think that her letter was a warning to Leonard about her childlike self, her low self-esteem, her great need for protection and reassurance, her emotional instability, and her fear and resentment of male sexuality. To anticipate a bit, one can see in these fears and doubts about herself the same doubts and anxieties she was to have about her major creative work—that is, to have her inner self revealed.

Apart from her inner conflicts about sex and other aspects of marriage, Virginia must have been worried about her fate as a wife. Much as she may have idealized her parents' marriage, she knew perfectly well the demands imposed by

her father on all of the women around him. She had seen Stella imposed upon equally, then marry, get pregnant, and die. She knew that Clive and Vanessa now had a platonic relationship by mutual agreement and that Vanessa, at least, was far from secure in her ties to the men around her. I think, therefore, that Virginia was bound to be fearful, to hold back, and to avoid the very intimacy that she consciously wanted so much. From her earliest years Virginia must have protected herself against the suffering of countless separations and losses. Although wanting intimacy in new relationships—especially in marriage—her old defenses remained and she could not permit herself the healing closeness that she yearned for.

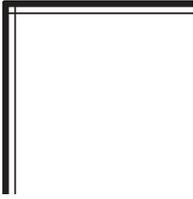
Less than a month after the marriage, Virginia wrote to her friend, Ka Cox:

Why do you think people make such a fuss about marriage and copulation? Why do you think some of our friends change upon losing chastity? Possibly my great age makes it less of a catastrophe; but certainly I find the climax immensely exaggerated. Except for a sustained good humor (Leonard shan't see this) due to the fact that every twinge of anger is at once visited upon my husband, I might be still Miss S.⁹

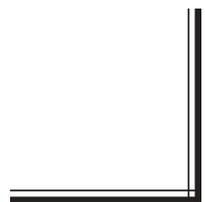
Despite Virginia's reservations and concerns, she and Leonard soon worked out a happy relationship. Their honeymoon included six weeks in France, Spain, and Italy. They talked endlessly, read a good deal, and enjoyed the beauties of the countryside as well as the usual sites. They returned eager to get on with their writing and their marriage.

I think it important to mention the fact that Virginia and Leonard completed their novels shortly before they were married. Leonard was now Virginia's advisor, and he had a high opinion of her creative potential. There would be revisions, of course; but up until now there had been no major emotional upsets because of the book or the marriage.





Chapter Seven



MADNESS AGAIN: 1913

When Virginia and Leonard returned from their honeymoon they lived temporarily in Virginia's quarters at Brunswick Square, but soon moved to Clifford's Inn, off Fleet Street. Vanessa was involved in her affair with Roger Fry, and this somehow made Clive more attentive to her. At the same time he was reluctant to yield Virginia to Leonard. All of them, however, got involved in Roger's Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition for which Leonard took the job of secretary.

Virginia had married with the image of herself as wife, writer, and future mother. She and Leonard had already begun a routine of writing in separate rooms from nine until one. They had lunch together and then took time for walks, reading, and social life at tea or dinner followed by conversation with guests or going to the opera, theater, or ballet.

Leonard's novel, *A Village in the Jungle*, was accepted for publication in November 1912 while Virginia was revising *The Voyage Out*. Her story is assumed to be autobiographical and to deal with Virginia's own emancipation from her conventional life at 22 Hyde Park Gate, symbolized by the move of the four Stephen children to Bloomsbury. The principal character in the novel, representing Virginia, is an inexperienced young woman making a voyage on one of her father's ships from England to South America. The others aboard and in the South American port where they go ashore are men and women of Virginia's parents' generation as well as younger people who suggest new friends and members of the Bloomsbury Group. The heroine, Rachael Vinrace, has to cope with all of the conflicts of falling in love, including reluctance to give up her new freedom, her privacy, and her music for the dubious promise of a conventional marriage as well as the pain of separating from a loving, but possessive, aunt. Everything comes to an end without resolution, however, when Rachael contracts a jungle fever and dies.

Can one ever repudiate one's background and childhood values with impunity? To reject one's past is psychologically to reject one's parents. But the internalized parents do not disappear, and they may exact guilt and a need for punishment. Virginia was to deal with such issues in much of her writing, and one might view Rachael as having to die for seeking her voyage out. In real life all of the Stephen children had emotional problems to start with, but in addition they paid dearly for throwing over their past.

Competition was one of Virginia's lifelong problems in that she was uncomfortable winning, but devastated by losing. This theme appears in a letter to Lytton Strachey not long after her marriage. She has heard that he is staying on a farm whose owner breeds horses: "Do the race horses champ beneath you? I dreamt

of race horses all night which is partly why I take up the pen—when I ought to be reading and reviewing. Isn't it damnable to have begun that again? and yet it's rather inspiriting. . . . Our great event is that [Edward] Arnold has taken Leonard's novel with great praise. . . ."¹ Virginia said also that she was helping their friend Desmond MacCarthy who was floundering with a review.

As I have said, Virginia was revising *The Voyage Out* at the time of her letter to Lytton. Considering the intensity and thoroughness with which she wrote, I have to assume that she was like one of the race horses herself, on the track with her husband, Lytton, and other friends seeking recognition as writers. In this race Virginia would succeed brilliantly, but other parts of her dream of marriage would be cruelly shattered.

THE DECISION NOT TO HAVE CHILDREN

In December 1912 Leonard had a recurrence of malaria while Virginia had headaches and insomnia. I do not know which came first, but the high fever, sweats, and chills of malaria can be frightening to anyone; and Virginia might well have feared that Leonard might die. This in itself might account for symptoms connected with Virginia's earlier experiences of separation and loss. But Leonard, accustomed to malaria, was in turn alarmed by Virginia's symptoms and began a record of her health. Rightly or wrongly Leonard related Virginia's illness to her writing. She was, he said: "rewriting the last chapters of *The Voyage Out* for the tenth or, it may have been, the twentieth time. She finished it in February and I read it in early March. . . ."²

Early in the marriage Leonard had misgivings about Virginia having children. Virginia was aware of his doubts as early as January 1913. Quentin Bell says:

At the end of January Virginia and Vanessa were discussing the question of whether Virginia should have children. Leonard talked to Dr. (now Sir George) Savage, and Sir George, in his breezy way, had exclaimed that it would do her a world of good; but Leonard mistrusted Sir George; he consulted other people: Maurice Craig, Vanessa's specialist, T. B. Hyslop, and Jean Thomas, who kept a nursing home and knew Virginia well; their views differed but in the end Leonard decided and persuaded Virginia to agree that, although they both wanted children, it would be too dangerous for her to have them. . . .³

Vanessa Bell's biographer, Frances Spalding, adds some details:

Leonard, following Virginia's custom, turned to Vanessa for advice . . . Vanessa told him to obtain all the advice they could and then make up

their minds themselves. In a letter to Virginia, she pointed out that all women run some risks in having a baby, but that Virginia should be warned against it if it meant an appreciable risk of another breakdown or a permanent state of nerves which would prevent her from enjoying the child when it arrived. On the whole Vanessa felt that if Virginia waited a while and took adequate care of herself there would be little danger to her health, and she repeated Jean Thomas's view that a baby would do Virginia good. The case against her having children was, at least in January 1913, less clear-cut than Leonard Woolf in his autobiography *Beginning Again* suggests. . . .⁴

To this I would add that Violet Dickinson, who knew Virginia in illness and in health, sent her a cradle for a wedding gift. Leonard and Frances Spalding both suggest that the decision not to have children was not made until later in the year. In my view, Leonard had already decided in January when he ignored the more optimistic opinions. Even so, the very fact that Leonard had doubts, however reasonably worded, could only be a staggering blow to Virginia's self-esteem, reinforcing her feelings of inferiority as compared to Vanessa and her insecurity about anything else that she might wish to create, especially, at this time, her novel.

Years later Leonard wrote:

The diary [his diary] shows that after she finished the book [*The Voyage Out*] and I had taken it to the publisher in March, she was continually suffering bouts of intense worry and insomnia, and every now and then from the headache which was the danger signal of something worse. From time to time Sir George Savage was consulted, and some time in the spring it was at last definitely decided that it would not be safe for her to have a child. . . .⁵

Note that "sometime in the spring" might coincide with taking Virginia's novel to the publisher; and, as there had been a number of consultations with Sir George, the topic of whether Virginia should have a baby was evidently as great a concern as the fate of her book. In addition, as I shall show later, Leonard was taking on new activities in which Virginia had little interest and that took him away from her, and I think this situation threatened her ideal of their marriage.

I suggest that Leonard, writing fifty years later, had a highly selective memory (even with his diary), and that the accounts of Quentin Bell and Frances Spalding are more detailed and accurate. I think also that her headaches and insomnia were as much the product of Virginia's repressed fury at being denied a baby as at being concerned about her novel. The two go together, of course, because she often equated completing a book with having a baby. To be considered incompe-

tent to have a child could only reinforce life-long feelings that she ought to be perfect, but was fated to fall short. As an aside, I think Leonard and others were right to think that Virginia's headaches and insomnia might be a prelude to "madness." They were, I think, her last defenses against madness, and they expressed symptomatically the real "madness"—i. e., fury at Leonard and others—that came out in the open when she lost her defenses and had the symptoms of psychosis: paranoid delusions, anorexia, and hallucinations.

I think therefore that it is impossible to exaggerate the impact of Leonard's decision that Virginia should not have a child. The fact that Virginia was persuaded to agree says nothing about her deeper feelings. The objective possibility that the decision was wise is beside the point. What was important for her emotional health in 1913 was that she had recently married wanting and expecting to have children. She looked forward to the kind of fulfillment that she saw and envied in Vanessa. Denied this, she can only have felt—at some level of her being—the old inferiorities, the old sexual shame, and the old childhood fantasy that she might be ugly and deformed. Even at the fully conscious level the decision meant that she was too frail, too delicate, or too unstable to have children; and this would further destroy her self-confidence.

Just as one mourns for the loss of a relative or friend, one may mourn for the loss of a dream. But more than grief is involved in mourning. A sense of abandonment is also there; and a feeling of guilt as if one is being punished for real or imagined sins; and anger—intense anger—because of what feels like a betrayal, a broken promise, and a loss. When a person is gone, there is guilt for one's ambivalent feelings or even death wishes, but with destruction of a dream shared with others, there is shame. "What will people say? What can I tell Violet Dickinson except: No, I am not pregnant, but we would still like to have children"—ambiguous as that has become. Finally there is the need for a scapegoat, the need to shake one's fist at Fate, or God. Virginia, I suspect, had to hold firmly in check, or even repress and deny bitter feelings of resentment toward Leonard and the doctors as well as equally bitter envy of Vanessa. But of course the decision not to have children was made to seem reasonable—intellectually sound—and Virginia was trained to be reasonable. She could hardly explode at her agreement with Leonard: although they both wanted children, it would be too dangerous for her to have them. The principal alternatives to an explosion are insomnia, headaches, and depression.

Another cause of Virginia's headaches at this time, in my opinion, was that Leonard, after seeing the deplorable living conditions in the East End of London, turned to Socialism and related causes. One of these was the Cooperative Movement and one of its leaders, Margaret Llewelyn Davies. She was a gifted and handsome woman and an older family friend of Virginia's from her childhood. The day after Virginia's manuscript went to the publisher (still in March

1913, about when the decision not to have children was pending or had been made), Leonard took her on a two week tour of the Northern industrial centers—Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, and Glasgow—in the course of which Leonard not only studied the co-operatives but also realized even more than before the need for social reform. Virginia tried to share Leonard's concerns but was really not interested except for local color here and there. I think she resented Leonard's fascination with Margaret Llewelyn Davies, the distraction from her own writing, and the disruption of her dream of a marriage in which she and Leonard worked and played side by side. Virginia learned from both of her parents how to turn resentful feelings into their opposites, but I think some bitterness shows through in the letters I am about to quote.

VIRGINIA'S LETTERS: FIRST HALF OF 1913

Virginia wrote seventeen letters during the first six months of 1913. The first, to Violet Dickinson, says that Vanessa (who has been sick) is better, but Virginia wonders how she can recover in the midst of family life. The second letter remarks to Lady Ottoline Morrell that everyone seems on the verge of publishing a book, but she makes no mention of her own. Writing from Manchester Virginia expressed her delight to Lady Robert Cecil that she enjoyed Leonard's novel, *The Village in the Jungle*. She adds: "We are going about to see factories, and as we spent 8 hours walking through them today, I'm very sleepy. Why the poor dont take knives and chase us out of our homes, I cant think. . . ."6

Virginia wrote to Ka Cox from Leicester about watching someone she took to be a female gynecologist: "pointing very low down in the body of a large diagram of the female body and saying to a sad elderly woman, 'That's what we must have out'—ovaries, I presume. . . ."7 In the case of an elderly woman, it would probably *not* be the ovaries, but possibly a cyst or a fibroid tumor. I think Virginia's fantasy expressed an unconscious feeling that she has been "castrated" by the ban against her having children.

"We have been to Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Glasgow," Virginia continued, "and now end with a boot factory here . . . nothing—except perhaps novel writing—can compare with the excitement of controlling the masses . . . if you could move them you would feel like a God. I see now where Margaret (Llewelyn Davies) and Mary McArthur get their Imperial tread. The mistake I've made is mixing up what they do with philanthropy. . . . L. and I seriously consider branching out in some such line. I mean *he* should branch [*italics mine*]. . . ."8

Finally, she observed: "I'm glad you liked L's novel—(you can't see how insincerely I say that, and its no use grinning at me in Berlin). He gets a terrible lot of praise. . . . My novel—but having said that, I'm trained to stop short: isn't it wonderful? It's all Leonard's doing. Don't marry till you're 30 if then."9 To these

last remarks, Leonard himself adds: No reflection on me.

I understand that all of this is good, clean fun; but it seems to me that Virginia is very tired of visiting factories and listening to the problems of the working class. She regards Margaret Davies as something of a female tank and knows well that Leonard too has known the “Imperial tread.” When she says *we* consider joining the effort to control the masses, she quickly changes to an equivalent of “Let Leonard do it.” Virginia’s sentiments were certainly socialist, but I think she feared that Margaret Davies—or what she stood for—would take Leonard away from her and their writing partnership. Unconsciously, perhaps, she dreaded what happened with her mother. Julia Stephen, too, could confuse philanthropy with controlling people, and her dedication to the welfare of others frequently deprived her children of a mother. Virginia would say much later—in jest, of course—that she would like to wreck Leonard’s career, and I think she would willingly have wrecked whatever took him so often away from home or involved her in meetings that bored her in order to be with him.

After her trip to the industrial towns, Virginia divided her time between London and Asham, the country place shared by the Bells and Woolfs. In early April, Leonard went to visit his mother in Putney while Virginia had a visit from Marjorie Strachey. Virginia wrote to Leonard, quoting Marjorie: “my book is lost, or rejected. God! I wish you were here. It would have been a splendid day. . . . We’ve discussed Clive’s article, Jane Austen, novels, pessimism, Roger—I broke off abuse of Henry Lamb to write this. She says he’s poisoning Lytton. . . .”¹⁰

A letter to Vanessa in early April asked some favors and praised her work in the garden at Asham. She gave some news, then concluded: “We may meet again, or we may not, but I do not forget the scenes of passionate love which you did not succeed in repressing—though you did your best. Yr V. W.”¹¹ Virginia frequently wrote love letters to Vanessa and, when visiting, demanded kisses. Angelica Garnett writes in her autobiography, *Deceived With Kindness*, that such demands for demonstrative affection were very embarrassing to Vanessa, as Virginia well knew; but Vanessa usually compromised with a peck of a kiss. This ambivalence was life-long, but Virginia could be giving, comforting, and supportive of Vanessa when she was sick or suffered a loss.

Virginia wrote a long letter to Violet Dickinson on the 11th of April. She spoke of their plan to spend three weeks a month at Asham. Then she announced:

We aren’t going to have a baby, but we want to have one, and 6 months in the country or so is said to be necessary first. . . .

All morning we write in two separate rooms. Leonard is in the middle of a new novel [*The Wise Virgins*]; but as the clock strikes twelve, he begins an article upon Labour for some pale sheet, or a review of French literature for the Times, or a history of Co-operation.

We sew [sic] articles over the world—I am writing a lot for the Times too. . . . I've sent my book to Gerald [her half-brother], but have heard nothing so far, and expect to have it rejected—which may not be in all ways a bad thing. . . .

We spent a fortnight moving from factory to factory in the North. . . . As you can imagine, I don't follow these economic questions very easily, but Leonard seems to be able to read and write and talk to enthusiasts without turning a hair. His book seems to be a great success—the reviews all compare him with Kipling. . . .¹²

A letter to Vanessa is mostly domestic news, including the fact that a neighbor's daughter has grown to great size with what the mother calls dropsy, but the girl's symptoms suggest pregnancy to Virginia. A brief letter to Clive Bell is about a confusion of dates and about a meeting on management where Leonard may speak. On April 16 Virginia wrote to Ka Cox who is on the Continent: "as we are sitting over the fire, and Leonard wants to work, I shall write to you—Otherwise, as you know, I am always looking up and saying 'now do tell me honestly, am I more clever than beautiful, or beautiful than clever, or good than either'—which is the very devil when you want to read economics. . . ." ¹³

This bit of whimsey suggests to me that Virginia did in fact wish to interrupt Leonard's new, outside interests and get him to pay more attention to her. He was, however, writing an article for the Manchester Guardian that would compound the felony by bringing him to the attention of Beatrice and Sydney Webb who, in turn, would involve him heavily in the Fabian Society.

A letter to Lady Cecil is about coming to tea, but another to Violet Dickinson hints at dissatisfaction: they are going to Newcastle upon Tyne to join "the Cooperative Women" and that it seems impossible for her to foretell where life will take her; Gerald has accepted her book and she is correcting the proofs; and that the charwoman's daughter, aged 18, has produced an illegitimate child. Virginia sends the same news, in slightly greater detail, to Molly MacCarthy on May 28.

About this same time Virginia wrote again to Lady Cecil: "My Dear Nelly, It isn't often that I address you upon public matters, and it is now only upon compulsion from Miss Llewelyn Davies who could compel a steam roller to waltz. . . ." ¹⁴ Lady Cecil was invited to join a deputation to the Prime Minister on the Divorce Question. Letters to Ka Cox and Molly MacCarthy are unremarkable except for a question as to whether James Strachey left a Bloomsbury party in disgust. Such parties—and there were some—caused Leonard to withdraw from the more Bohemian elements of Bloomsbury; but as these included Vanessa at the height of her emancipation, I think Virginia was caught in the middle.

These letters of the first six months of 1913 refer, at times lightly, to what I believe were cumulative emotional pressures for Virginia. On the surface there

was mild protest, sarcasm, or wry humor; underneath, I think, there was frustration and fury. A young girl can have a baby, but Virginia cannot. Leonard is pulling away from Bloomsbury, and taking Virginia with him. He blames her book and life in London for her headaches, but has no insight into the extent the “Cooperative Women” and related interests disrupt her writing with his meetings or his being away. This is not the marriage Virginia envisioned at the beginning of 1913.

I think it was meetings more than her book that precipitated Virginia’s next period of “madness.” They went to the Women’s Co-operative Conference from June 9 to 12. They returned to London with Margaret Davies, and Virginia was not well; but there are few details. She recovered, however, and they entertained friends at Asham. They spent time in London where they attended the Russian Ballet, the opera, the theater, and parties. They also had lunch with the Webbs, and Leonard was recruited for a speech at the Fabian Conference toward the end of July.

ANOTHER REST CURE

When they returned to Asham on July 16, Leonard was concerned about Virginia’s headaches, insomnia, aversion to food, sense of guilt, and danger of suicide. They nevertheless had Lytton Strachey as a guest at this time, and Virginia insisted that nothing was wrong with her. She went to the Fabian Society conference at Keswick, where Leonard spoke on July 22 as planned. Virginia was confined to her bed, however; and returned in a state of collapse. After a consultation with Sir George Savage, she was again sent to Twickenham and the rest cure.

Quentin Bell has pointed out that this separation was a serious mistake. His point is that Leonard was the best person to support and sustain Virginia.¹⁵ I believe also that separations from Leonard, due to his new commitments to the Co-operative Movement and the Fabians, were now the greatest threat to her emotional stability. Her vision of their writing side by side each morning, though in separate rooms, was becoming a chimera, and Leonard must have appeared all too willing to sacrifice her needs on the altar of his ambition. They had now been married nearly a year.

Virginia spent about two and a half weeks at Twickenham and was not as sick as anticipated. At first she was furious with Leonard, but regressed into guilt and childlike supplication when she saw how tired and drawn he was. She wrote six letters to him during this time, expressing her undying love for him and her concern about his welfare. Leonard may have felt guilty himself, however, because she reassured him on August 4:

Darling Mongoose, I did like your two letters this morning. They make all the difference. . . .

Nothing you have ever done since I knew you has been in any way beastly—how could it? You've been absolutely perfect to me. Its all my fault. . . . Anyhow you've given me the best things in my life. . . .

I do believe in you absolutely, and never for a second do I think you've told me a lie—

Goodbye, darling mongoose—I do want you and I believe in spite of my vile imaginations the other day that I love you and that you love me. Yr M.¹⁶

What words (or letters) passed between Virginia and Leonard to provoke this kind of response from her? What “vile imaginations” made her attack him? Did she retract accusations of hers or refute some self-recriminations of his? This is more than the supplication of a chastened little girl saying that it is all her fault, though that message is there. The disturbance is not about her book, but rather about her relationship with her husband.

Virginia soon returned to Asham but was far from well. Leonard consulted Sir George Savage who again poo-h-pooed his fears. Sir George and Dr. Henry Head, who was also consulted, agreed that Virginia should have her promised holiday; but the latter, in effect, kept his fingers crossed as to whether it would help. Leonard took Virginia to the place where they had begun their honeymoon barely more than a year before. This could only remind Virginia of her sexual inadequacies and, in any case, the holiday was a disaster. Virginia felt responsible for everyone's problems, thought that people were laughing at her, and considered that she should be punished for her sins. She had somatic delusions involving her mouth, stomach, and feces, and so refused food.¹⁷ These, I believe, are regressive and psychotic statements about her sexual failures and not being allowed to have children. I think her symptoms express the common childhood theory that babies are conceived through the mouth and born through rectum, as well as Virginia's own feeling that she is “damaged goods” because of her experience of child abuse. In the language of childhood she could also say angrily: If I cannot have a baby, why should I eat? These are my associations, of course; but psychotic symptoms do have meanings, and I think that Virginia's are an expression—in regressive symbolism of her feelings, perhaps about her novel, but even more about being denied children and about Leonard's moving into a host of new activities that, for her, add up to the destruction of her expectations for their marriage.

Despite these psychotic symptoms, Virginia had lucid intervals during the day. Leonard called Ka Cox to help him, and they all returned to London. Virginia feared going to see a doctor, but unexpectedly agreed to go to Dr. Head. But both he and Dr. Maurice Wright—still another consultant—recommended the rest cure as the best way to recover. Although Virginia seemed better, she

seized an unguarded moment to take 100 grains of veronal—a lethal dose.

Quick action with a stomach pump by Dr. Geoffrey Keynes—Maynard's brother, who lived nearby—saved Virginia's life. Leonard and the family avoided having Virginia certified [committed to an asylum] by accepting George Duckworth's offer of his country home and staff of servants, augmented by four nurses. Here Virginia let go of her hitherto repressed fury, abusing Leonard, making cutting remarks to Vanessa, and attacking the nurses—surely scapegoats for the doctors. One of the worst symptoms was Virginia's refusal to eat, and she had to be coaxed, bribed, or threatened into taking food, bite by bite.

Virginia gradually recovered with this modified rest cure and was reasonably well from November 1913 until February 1915. Before discussing her new illness at that time, I shall mention several episodes connected with the ordeal she had just survived. One might have thought that, as with Tess, the gods were having their sport with her.

CURIOUS AND FATEFUL MISTAKES

Virginia's mental illness of 1913 was complicated—and even partly determined—by fateful mistakes. We who write about these matters have 20-20 hindsight, to be sure; but, even so, well-intentioned blunders and other lapses must be mentioned. They became part of the illness.

Two of these are mentioned by Quentin Bell. First was Virginia's enforced separation from Leonard for the rest cure at Twickenham. By now he knew how to take care of Virginia, and he knew that she hated the rest cure. Beyond that, separations from the vital people in her life upset her: Vanessa to some extent still, but Leonard himself most of all.

Then Leonard took Virginia for a holiday to the first stop on their honeymoon just a year before. This, for her, must have been a reminder of failures, coupled now with the decision not to have children. Virginia's self-esteem was always fragile, and these reminders of her failure as a woman in her estimation—combined with excessive guilt and, I assume, rage about decisions that she accepted unwillingly conspired, when turned against herself, to make her suicidal.

Leonard himself takes the responsibility for Virginia's nearly successful suicide. He writes:

I had always kept my case containing the veronal locked. In the turmoil of arriving and settling in at Brunswick Square and then going to [Dr.] Head, I must have forgotten to lock it. . . . [Virginia] must have found that it was unlocked and have taken the veronal. . . . I felt [in retrospect] that it was almost impossible sooner or later not to make a mistake of this kind. For the two previous months I had had to be on the watch day

and night to prevent a disaster of this kind. No person by himself could really do this, and even after Ka came and we were two, it was not enough. . . .¹⁸

Leonard exaggerated here. Virginia was at a rest home for two weeks of that time, and Leonard was not required to assume the responsibility for Virginia's medications. Even if a mistake was almost inevitable, Leonard's forgetting to lock his case was still a slip; i. e., an expression of his rage at Virginia quite unconscious, of course—for all of her problems as well as for causing him so much mental and physical fatigue.

At about the time of Virginia's suicide attempt, someone made the decision to delay publication of *The Voyage Out*. I agree with Spater and Parsons that this too was probably a mistake.¹⁹ She was sufficiently recovered by the end of 1913 to have read the reviews—even unfavorable reviews though the notices were mostly favorable—and these would have enhanced her self-esteem as a writer. This point of view, however, rests too heavily on the assumption that anxiety about the fate of her book was the major cause of Virginia's illness, and I have considered this to be questionable.

I think also that Leonard relied too much on Margaret Llewelyn Davies in caring for Virginia. Margaret was a symbol of all that was taking Leonard away from Virginia. Leonard mistakenly assumed, in my view, that Margaret would be as welcome to Virginia as she was to him, but after Margaret came for lunch one day, it took two nurses to get Virginia to eat. In my opinion, Margaret Davies was the enemy; and so too perhaps were the Webbs, who increasingly drew Leonard into the work of the Fabian Socialists and, from 1918, into the Labour Party as well.

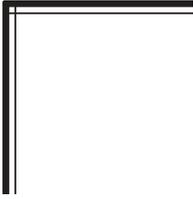
I noted earlier Virginia's frequent references to a girl of eighteen who had an illegitimate baby. In 1914, after Virginia had recovered, she or Leonard hired Lily, a young woman who had been living in a convent with her illegitimate child. She had been recommended by the nuns and came to work as a housemaid when Leonard was out of town. Virginia wrote "and now the prostitute is arriving, and Ellen [a maid] is gone. . . ."²⁰ A few days later Virginia wrote to Leonard that Lily was a real servant in the way of brushing one's clothing and that sort of thing.

For whatever reasons, Lily went to work subsequently for a Mrs. Hallett with good references from Virginia, but she quit when accused—rightly or wrongly—of entertaining soldiers in the kitchen. Virginia scolded her, but wrote another letter on her behalf. Then, still later, Lily returned to the Woolfs and moved with them to Hogarth House, Richmond, in March 1915. She again entertained soldiers unwisely and went tearfully, not wanting to disturb Virginia who, by then, was plagued by another illness.

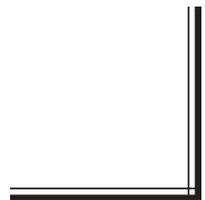
I find it remarkable that Leonard devotes four pages to Lily in his autobiog-

raphy, and this comes just after his account of Virginia's 1915 illness. He too seemed to think that the gods were moving in mysterious ways, but he makes no connection with Virginia's condition. I think that Virginia was emotionally involved with these girls who had babies when she couldn't; and who apparently were not allowed to keep them. Of Lily's baby, Virginia wrote: "I heard from Emphie Case this morning [January 15, 1915], who wishes me to find out about the Home at Lewes where Lily had her child—as she knows a young woman who also wants to have a child. I wonder how Emphie comes across these things. . . ." ²¹ I note that Virginia says "also wants to have a child," and I have the impression that she and others talked about such matters more than she realized. For whatever reasons, Leonard made a kind of tragic heroine of Lily, concluding by quoting: "When lovely woman stoops to folly, and finds, too late, that men betray; what can sooth her melancholy?" and "There is no armour against fate." ²²





Chapter Eight



MADNESS ONCE MORE: 1915

The year 1914 began with Virginia relatively well, but one nurse remained. This was partly because Leonard was away at the end of December and early January. He was becoming involved in politics as well as the Co-operative Movement. Virginia's letters are loving and contrite, apologizing for the trouble she has caused him.

Shortly after the last nurse left (February 16, 1914), Leonard went also for ten days, while Ka Cox, Janet Case, and Vanessa took turns staying with Virginia, who, restless at not being able (or permitted) to write, asked Lytton Strachey for work of his to read and copy on her typewriter. She also volunteered to do typing for Violet Dickinson, who had sent some unsolicited checks.

Leonard left for ten days in March because of his fatigue, headaches, and loss of weight. Virginia wrote loving, solicitous letters, telling him to stay in bed as long as he wished and have Lytton take care of him. She let him know that she was reading manuals on the Co-operative Movement as well as Clive Bell's book *Art*. They both wrote every day, and Virginia urged Leonard not to return early; she was doing very well and the house was being thoroughly cleaned by the new cook and maid. If Virginia was still having symptoms, she was nevertheless able to enjoy visitors, to deal with an angry farmer whose animals had been disturbed by one of the dogs, and to supervise her new cook and housemaid.

Shortly after Leonard's return on March 18th, Virginia wrote to Janet Case:

Leonard is better. . . . I think if only I can behave now, he will soon be quite right. [Dr. Maurice] Craig gave him a new medicine, and said he would get well if he was sensible. He's now fixed his mind on weighing eleven stones. . . .

By occupying myself with typewriting and Co-operative manuals, I keep cheerful, which I see does more to inspirit L. than anything else, and induces submission (on my part).¹

I must note for future reference that Leonard was determined to weigh eleven stones (154 pounds); and this is reasonable for one who was six feet tall, or more. But in later years he was upset if Virginia (who in pictures of the two together was two inches shorter) dropped to 140 pounds; his standard for her was more like 168. This was part of the rest cure regimen, including milk or eggnog five or six times a day, that Leonard tried to perpetuate at home.

I note also that Dr. Craig told Leonard to be sensible, and I think it is clear that it was not only caring for Virginia that exhausted him. When she, in effect, promised to be good I think she implied that she would drop her opposition to

his new political and other activities; but the record indicated throughout the years that Leonard took on more and more, and was little better than Virginia at saying “no.” I think much of this is implied in Virginia’s remark that what she is doing pleases Leonard and induces submission—on her part. This is one of Virginia’s little jokes, to be sure; but a joke with more than a grain of truth. There is no reason to believe that reading co-operative society manuals really made Virginia cheerful—except to please Leonard—or that she planned to be that submissive for long.

The remainder of 1914 was uneventful for Virginia. She and Leonard took a number of trips. The outbreak of World War I affected her little, although she followed the news to some extent. Virginia wished to return to London, but Leonard was opposed; and, after diligent looking, they compromised on the suburb of Richmond and finally found Hogarth House.

THE WISE VIRGINS

Leonard began his second novel on his honeymoon, and Virginia apparently knew only that it was about the suburbs. In early 1913 she wrote to a friend that he was in the middle; and then, in February 1914, that Arnold [publisher] will be glad to publish it if Leonard will eliminate a few sentences. A day or two later she added: “Leonard has gone to London to see Arnold about his book. Arnold is anxious to publish it, but the question is what L’s family will think. . . .”²

Virginia knew nothing about the book, apparently, except that it was about the suburbs and that Leonard’s family might take offense. Leonard’s mother, reading the manuscript, did indeed take offense and let Leonard know that if it was published in that form there would be a serious break between them. When the book was published in October 1914, Leonard’s mother and sister, Bella, suffered keenly.³ There is no indication that Virginia knew when the book was published or that various people were upset by it. Anne Olivier Bell is of the opinion that Virginia was being protected: “The book contains generally unsympathetic portraits of LW himself, VW, and their families and friends; and it was perhaps for this reason together with the state of her health that VW had not hitherto [before January 31, 1915, that is] read the book.”⁴ Both Vanessa Bell and E. M. Forster viewed with alarm the resemblance of Leonard’s characters to some of his friends.⁵

I find it odd that Virginia heard nothing about *The Wise Virgins* before she did. There must have been a conspiracy of silence; or else she ignored what she heard. She picked it up on a day when there were no callers, and read it through to the end. Then she wrote in her diary: “My opinion is that it is a remarkable book; very bad in parts; first rate in others. A writer’s book, I think, because only a writer perhaps can see why the good parts are so very good, & why the bad

parts aren't very bad . . . I was made very happy by reading this: I like the poetic side of L. . . ."⁶

Despite Virginia's delight in Leonard's poetic side, she was again under considerable emotional stress. They were on tenterhooks about closing the deal on Hogarth House; Leonard had taken on new commitments (including a major report for the Fabian Society that in time became a cornerstone for the League of Nations); Virginia had to see a dentist; and a March publication date had been set for *The Voyage Out*.

Granting the multiple determination of any behavior, the fact is that Virginia was plunged into madness soon after she read *The Wise Virgins*. She went to the dentist two weeks later and developed a severe headache for which Leonard immediately prescribed bed rest and veronal. A few days after that she was hallucinating, and was overheard talking to her mother. Following this she became agitated and incoherent.

In a lucid interval that followed, Virginia wrote an abject letter of gratitude to Margaret Llewelyn Davies for "saving Leonard" by giving him work to do. This was followed by two inappropriate letters that Virginia dictated to Leonard. In one of these she promised, in effect, to dedicate herself to social reform by writing all the novels of Mrs. Humphrey Ward and all of the diaries of Mrs. Sydney Webb. She adds that Leonard has not laughed at her little jokes, but that she thinks them rather good.

I think that there is considerable denial of hostility in these letters, but that some of it comes through in the mirthless irony of her little jokes. These mounting political and social service activities of Leonard must have conjured up for Virginia too many painful recollections of her mother's excessive involvement in good works out of the home. Such activities had too many emotional connections for Virginia with separation and loss, including death.

Virginia knew that Leonard's recent need for rest and medical care was not entirely, perhaps not primarily, due to her; and she held Margaret Davies and the Webbs responsible. For Virginia to thank Margaret Davies for saving Leonard by giving him things to do that took him away from home and his writing was not, I think, what Virginia felt underneath. This in itself may have been a bit of madness; or, if not, heavy sarcasm—conscious or unconscious. I can understand why Leonard was not amused.

But back to *The Wise Virgins*. The impact of this novel, as I feel it on Virginia's behalf, is suggested by Spater and Parsons:

Its interest today is in its portrayal of character, since the principal actors are Leonard and Virginia. The story, although dealing with their courtship, has a different ending: the hero is forced to marry the girl next door, whom he has compromised. Leonard appears as Harry Davis, a young

Jewish painter living with his family in Richstead. Virginia is represented by the beautiful, passionless Camilla Lawrence, also a painter, who lives with her wealthy father in London. She is bound by a “curiously strong love” to her sister Katherine, a writer, who is described as being “real flesh and blood.” The Davis culture is contrasted with the Lawrence culture: Woolf-Putney with Stephen-Bloomsbury, to the disadvantage of Putney.⁷

A majority of women I have known in the past fifty years, including sensitive and insightful patients who were not “mad,” would have been deeply wounded and outraged to be portrayed as Virginia was in *The Wise Virgins*. They would have felt: Leonard is telling the world that I am frigid and that I have an unnatural—read lesbian—attachment to Vanessa. He is describing her by contrast as a passionate, complete woman who can have children when I cannot. He also attacks Bloomsbury conversation, including my flights of fancy, as he does when he tells people how it *really* happened. He is compelled, in the novel, to marry the girl next door—a nice, simple girl who can have babies—and I believe this is what a part of him feels he should have done anyway.

There were other blows to Virginia’s self-esteem. The novel’s portrayal of Clive Bell was an attack on one of Virginia’s good friends, granting the complexities of her past triangular involvement with him and Vanessa. Quite possibly, moreover, Virginia may have sensed Leonard’s envy of Clive, who married—in terms of the novel and perhaps Leonard’s feelings as well—the more desirable of the two sisters.

Finally, Leonard took the words “I want them all” (she said “everything”: love, children, adventure, intimacy, and work) from the most intimate letter Virginia ever wrote to him. This was before their engagement. And from his reply he took for the novel his description of her as made of the eternal snow and of the rock which forms the center of reality. After a silence, Virginia had said that Leonard had not made her soft or loveable enough; but she must have deeply hurt at the time, more than she could permit herself to express. But now, two years married, frigid, and not allowed to have children, what an intolerable blow for her to encounter her snow-maiden image in her husband’s novel!⁸

Virginia’s need to be loved was surely excessive, and her self-esteem especially fragile. One must remember that she did not create this self of hers; indeed she was only partly aware of it. Even so, most women wish to be loved and most would be deeply hurt and offended at being characterized as Virginia was in Leonard’s novel.

If anything could destroy Virginia’s self-confidence and self-esteem, it was a reminder of her inadequacies vis-à-vis Vanessa. The narcissistic wound of her portrait in the novel was all the greater because it was partly true. From time to

time, throughout her life, she would exclaim some version of *I am childless, worthless, and mad besides*.

In reading *The Wise Virgins* Virginia was in a double bind. In addition to the fact that her loving husband wrote the novel, her background and Bloomsbury training required that she be objective and understanding. This was, after all, a point of view to be considered. What she wrote in her diary was mostly the response of a critic. Then, she too had drawn pictures of friends and relatives for her novel, so how could she object rationally to Leonard's doing so? But logic is no match for emotions; and I, for one, think that Virginia was profoundly upset by what she read in *The Wise Virgins*.

NOTES ON PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

I have been suggesting that Virginia Woolf didn't really know her own mind when she admired the poetry of Leonard Woolf's novel and thanked Margaret Llewelyn Davies for saving Leonard by giving him things to do. In a letter to Lytton Strachey at about this same time, Virginia reports: "I have to keep lying down, but I am getting better. Our happiness is wonderful. Your loving, V. W."⁹

All of this may have expressed Virginia's conscious feelings, but I think that she was working very hard to deny just the opposite (perhaps totally unconscious) feelings. Exchanging love for hate is a common ego defense, and we have a symbolic prototype from her early childhood in being required to kiss Thoby after being forbidden to scratch him. Then, later, she made herself stop hitting Thoby (as an act of conscience) and absorb his blows instead, afterwards feeling horribly depressed.

A part of what I am saying is that Virginia protests too much her gratitude to Margaret Davies and her happiness to Lytton Strachey. One can see these defenses beginning to crumble in her "joke" about devoting her life to writing the novels and diaries of noted social reformers. Another defense, as I see it, is in the letter to Strachey quoted above: "Also a bright idea strikes me. Let us all subscribe to buy a Parrot for Clive. It must be a bold primitive bird, trained of course to talk nothing but filth, and to indulge in obscene caresses. . . ." ¹⁰ There is more, and it is a more vicious than usual attack on Clive himself. Here, I think, Virginia aligned herself with Leonard's characterization of Clive in *The Wise Virgins*. Virginia is using another defense: identification with the aggressor. That is, she adopts Leonard's view of Clive and says, in effect, I feel the same way as Leonard does, so how can I be critical of him? This is just what she did as a child in giving up her love of fishing to identify with her father's dislike of the sport.

Virginia's defenses collapsed, however, and she decompensated into psychosis. She was sent to a nursing home for about a week while Leonard moved into Hogarth House, and then Virginia was brought to her new home under the care

of four nurses. Virginia was by this time more violent than ever before, and most of her vitriol was directed at Leonard. This tells me again that Virginia had to “go out of her mind” in order to release all of her feelings. A result of this was that Leonard hardly saw Virginia for two months. He kept having Margaret Llewelyn Davies to tea, but I do not know if Virginia saw her. I am sure it would not have helped.

Vanessa wrote to Roger Fry during this period:

I saw Woolf yesterday. He too was very dismal. Virginia seems to go up & down. . . . The only thing to do is to hang on as long as possible he thinks in the hope that she may get well enough . . . not to have to go to an asylum. . . . The question is whether the nurses will stand it. Woolf himself seemed to have reached a state when he didn't much care what happened which was rather dreadful; & one couldn't say anything much.¹¹

Leonard naturally had reasons for despair. He was disillusioned with Virginia and with Bloomsbury as *The Wise Virgins* reveals. But his story is in his autobiography, and this part of it can be found in *Beginning Again*.¹²

CONCLUSION

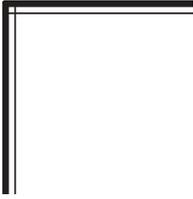
After Virginia's violent period she went into what was called a coma, and she came out of this exhausted but calmer. From that point she improved and by late summer enjoyed the favorable reviews—some exceptionally so—of *The Voyage Out*, which had been published in March. Her first letter, after a 140 lapse of six months, was to Margaret Llewelyn Davies: “But my dear Margaret, what's the use of my writing novels? You've got the whole thing at your fingers ends—and it will be envy not boredom that alienates my affections. . . .”¹³ The fact is that Margaret was considered a bore by Sir Leslie Stephen, Leonard, and Virginia herself, who can now dare to hint at some of her negative feelings by calling them envy.

Virginia had no major emotional disturbance from 1915 until 1941, a few weeks before her suicide. If she became exhausted, however, or had symptoms of insomnia or headache, Leonard was quick to apply the “rest cure” at home. She was usually strong enough, however, for two-hour walks around London or in the country.

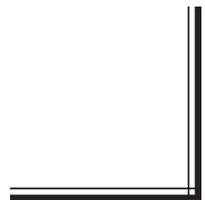
Despite Leonard's supervision, Virginia was hardly confined. He once complained that he needed her more than she needed him, citing her long walks without him. But she was working on these walks, sometimes—as she said—talking to herself. And she was absorbing the sights, sounds, and smells of London—to take just one example—as one can discover in *Flush*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and

The Years.

Other health problems persisted, however; and Virginia had to spend days or even a week or two in bed. She had influenza often and cardiac symptoms that I attribute to the childhood rheumatic fever that I have assumed she had. She was sometimes depressed, but not seriously; she referred to this (sometimes accurately, I think) as a writer's depression. I shall use the next four chapters to see if I can shed any light on these many illnesses and especially to see how they are related, if at all, to her major books.



Chapter Nine



BOOKS AND ILLNESSES: I

During 1916, Virginia Woolf got back into the stream of her customary life to the extent permitted by the War. She enjoyed continuing praise for *The Voyage Out*, and she wrote many letters and occasional reviews for the *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS), but ignored her diary until August 1917.

Virginia and Leonard continued to live at Hogarth House, Richmond, but many of their London friends were in the country, including pacifists working on farms. Leonard was exempt from military service because of a long-standing tremor of his arms and hands. In March 1917 they bought the small printing press they had talked of for years; and they combined Virginia's *The Mark on the Wall* with Leonard's *Three Jews* to make Publication No. 1 of the Hogarth Press. After a slow start and unanticipated success, the Press would come to dominate their lives for years; but it would enable them to publish their own and others' work as they pleased.

Even though Virginia was to escape serious mental illness for twenty-five years, she had an assortment of other illnesses before, during, and after writing her major books. Headaches or insomnia were taken as signs of grave danger, and she would be put to bed by her doctors or by Leonard for a modified rest cure at home.

Virginia's symptoms were usually attributed to the intensity with which she wrote in finishing a novel or to the excitement and late hours of social life in London. As I read her letters and diary, I am astonished at her stamina as she wrote, set and sorted type, read proof, packaged books, went to concerts and opera, entertained or was entertained, and dealt with crises with servants, the family, or the Press. I think that Angelica Garnett noted Virginia's toughness more clearly than most.¹

In discussing Virginia's illnesses in relation to her writing, I shall limit myself to her novels, *Three Guineas*, and her biography of Roger Fry. I have already suggested that the serious mental illnesses of 1913 and 1915 were only partly connected, at most, with the writing and publication of *The Voyage Out*. I shall discuss Virginia's final work, *Between the Acts*, in a chapter on the prelude to her suicide.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

As I read the available sources—Virginia's own writings in particular—I discern a variety of situations in which Virginia developed symptoms or became ill. One may seem to see cause and effect connections without all of the data, and so the conclusions may be wrong. I know the pitfalls of *post hoc* inferences such as I shall suggest, but they rest on an empirical base.

As one example, Virginia deeply resented interruptions to her writing schedule. Inasmuch as she had to regard many interruptions as “reasonable,” she could only suppress her anger. The consequence was frequently a headache or insomnia. Long visits from Leonard’s mother, or Leonard’s wanting her to hold his ladder in the garden, or the inexorable demands of her older friend, Ethyl Smyth, were such intrusions. But, after all, Virginia knew her everlasting debt to Leonard, and she badly needed the attention of her friends; and so she often compelled herself to put her wishes aside but paid the price of pent-up frustration expressed in symptoms.

We know, too, that Virginia was acutely sensitive to criticism. She herself would play with the feelings of others but reacted badly to being teased or made fun of. On one occasion she was devastated when Clive Bell ridiculed her hat and soon after asked Vanessa to buy clothes for her, including a hat. Headaches and depression, I think, were at times the equivalent of the “purple rages” of her childhood, no longer permitted by her conscience. Virginia could bring these symptoms on herself (unconsciously) by making comparisons, especially with Vanessa; and she was competitive with other writers. When she came off second, if only in her fantasies, she might go into a slump and be unable to write.

This competitiveness coupled with perfectionistic strivings were driving forces in Virginia’s writing, and sometimes intensified the pace and pressure as she neared the end of a book. There was bound to be a letdown when she finished and then awaited, almost in terror, for the verdict of Leonard, her friends, and the critics. She spent much of her life resolving to be prepared for adverse judgments of her writing, but she seldom was; and fortunately the good reviews usually outweighed the bad.

Equally significant is the fact that Virginia’s nature abhorred a writing vacuum. Before completing one book, she had begun another—or at least had one in mind. I think that this was an important fact of her emotional economy. Writing itself, like any compulsive behavior, may be a defense—a way of discharging anger and other feelings and of warding off depression. Virginia was just as likely to be depressed when she was prevented from writing as she was of being unable to write because depressed by unfavorable reviews or loss of self-esteem from some other cause. This is one reason why the rest cure that prohibited her writing, walking, and talking with friends was such bad medicine for her. She did better when the rest cure was modified to allow her normal activities in moderation.

Almost everyone coming out of an early childhood marked by emotional turmoil and deprivation (especially separations and losses) has an underlying depression. A common defense against such a depression is striving for conspicuous success. A Type A personality, when the person is compulsively driven, is an example—as with one who persists in running for office long after he has been

elected. Just as Virginia met emotional needs by writing compulsively, it follows that she must avoid a hiatus in writing to ward off a depression.

During the period of Virginia's freedom from serious mental illness—that is, 1916 to 1941—she endured great pressures apart from her writing. One of these was Leonard's increasing worry about the war he knew was inevitable after the vindictive Treaty of Versailles. All of this was intensified by the rise of Hitler, and this led him to become even more involved in his own writing about politics and ways of preserving peace.

The very success of the Hogarth Press and, later, of Virginia's personal fame brought new demands on her time and emotional energies. Beyond these, her love affair with Vita Sackville-West, then her love-hate relationship with Ethel Smyth were emotionally demanding and often exhausting. Leonard was often unhappy about these complications, although he rather liked Vita; but up to a point he had only his own numerous projects to blame for the hectic pace of their lives.

NIGHT AND DAY

Virginia began her second novel in the spring of 1917 and finished it on November 21, 1918—ten days after the end of World War I. After revisions, she took it to her publisher, Gerald Duckworth, in April 1919, and saw it published on October 20, 1919.

Night and Day is described as a conventional novel in the tradition of George Eliot and Henry James. The setting is comparable to 22 Hyde Park Gate during the best of times and portrays upper middle class lives and loves, with mostly happy endings. Modern themes of feminism, sexual emancipation, and social consciousness appear for contrast, but traditional mores prevail. The Great War of 1914-1918 is ignored.

Virginia told Vanessa that the heroine, Katherine, was to be somewhat like herself at eighteen, but later denied an autobiographical intent. Most writers assume that Katherine was drawn more from Vanessa, while Spater and Parsons—who call *Night and Day* Virginia's answer to *The Wise Virgins*—see Katherine as the counterpart of Leonard's Catherine.² Virginia, in any case, had the lighter touch and much wider appeal. Quentin Bell calls this a safe novel after one that brought emotional disaster,³ though I have blamed other circumstances for her breakdown (see Chapter 8).

During the writing of *Night and Day*, Leonard and Virginia Woolf founded the Hogarth Press, as we have seen, and brought out a number of small books that were typeset by Virginia. They were among the founders of the socialist 1917 Club, which included such notables as Ramsey MacDonald and Elsa Lanchester. Virginia dropped by frequently, encountering younger intellectuals such as Alix

Sargent-Florence (later Strachey).

During 1917 and after, Leonard worried constantly about Virginia's health. If her weight dropped to ten stone (140 pounds), he pushed for more milk and rest. Her health was generally good, though she had influenza several times. She also saw the dentist seven or eight times and lost three or four teeth, one severely abscessed.

Virginia's principal physician at this time was Dr. D. J. Fergusson. Leonard, however, had great confidence in Sir Maurice Craig, who was called as a consultant. The two physicians continued to prescribe the home rest cure: rich milk, inactivity, and sedatives. When Vanessa had influenza early in 1918, Virginia advised her to drink milk, saying that she now has her own supply. When Duncan Grant became ill, Virginia advised him that he must drink lots of milk and thereby avoid being sent to a rest home. Part of the irony here is that milk was scarce because of the War.

After one consultation with Craig, Virginia had a tooth extracted under gas anesthesia. I think it likely that he was following the "focal infection" theory in trying to account for some of her illnesses. The influenza at this time, however, was probably related to the pandemic of 1918 affecting hundreds of thousands in Europe and America. Despite these interruptions, Virginia had written 100,000 words of *Night and Day* by the middle of March 1918.

Virginia was essentially well for the remainder of this year. She went to the dentist again on November 12 recording the fact that both she and the dentist were restless because of the excitement of Armistice Day. By this time Vanessa was nearly eight months pregnant, and one wonders if Virginia relived old feelings of rivalry, envy, and despair at not having children of her own. Even so, she completed *Night and Day* on November 21, 1918, and on Christmas Day Angelica Bell was born.

Leonard's activities during the writing of *Night and Day* are important partly because Virginia was competitive with him as a writer and partly because she was threatened emotionally by whatever took him away from her. The Hogarth Press kept them both busy, of course; they were bringing out *Poems* by T. S. Eliot, *Kew Gardens* by Virginia and *Critic in Judgment* by J. Middleton Murray. Leonard, in addition, was editor of *The International Review* and was writing a book, *Empire and Commerce in Africa*, which would be published in 1920. He was by now involved in the inner councils of the Fabians and of the Labour Party.

On January 1, 1919 Virginia developed a severe toothache followed by an extraction the next day. This was followed by severe bleeding and a headache "of the old kind." Dr. Fergusson came twice and prescribed the rest cure at home. Meanwhile there was a crisis at Charleston because Angelica was not thriving. Julian and Quentin came to stay with the Woolfs but had to be sent to their father at Gordon Square because of Virginia's illness after the tooth extraction. Leonard

was upset at this time because Virginia had sent Nelly to help Vanessa and he now felt that Nelly was more needed at home. Virginia was both sick and caught in conflicting loyalties to Vanessa and Leonard. For a vivid account of this complex interaction see Quentin Bell.⁴

On March 6 Virginia had an abscessed tooth extracted without unpleasant after effects. The next day she wrote that *Night and Day* is about ready to go to Gerald Duckworth, "as soon as I can get through with these niggling, bothersome corrections."⁵ A week later Vanessa wanted to borrow Nelly again, and Virginia was once more in the middle. By March 27 Leonard had read *Night and Day* and liked it very much, but was pessimistic and depressed. Virginia wondered if feelings about her family were a reason. At the same time Virginia recorded her delight in writing *Night and Day*. "no part of it taxed me as *The Voyage Out* did. . . ."⁶ She took the book to Duckworth on April 1 and they had a combined social and business conversation. Gerald told her that he was sure he would wish to publish her new novel.

In early September 1919 Virginia was somewhat depressed. *Night and Day* had been accepted in May, but Virginia was plagued with fantasies about indifferent reviews. She had offered the novel to Macmillan's for publication in America, and she imagined a polite refusal from them. What came, in fact, was partly what she predicted, but also a request for five hundred to a thousand sheets from both of her novels and for the manuscript of her next book. The same mail brought a refusal of Leonard's book, but a request for sheets of that also.

During this same period of time, the Woolfs moved from Asham to Monk's House which they had bought for £700. Virginia soon protested to Leonard that he spent too much time in the garden. They agreed to take two walks a week together, on Sundays and Wednesdays. Virginia viewed her depression with some detachment this time and concluded that it was an ordinary writer's depression. She added: "And I always remember the saying that at one's lowest ebb one is nearest a true vision. I think perhaps 9 out of ten never get a day in the year of such happiness as I have almost constantly; now I'm having a turn of their lot. . . ."⁷

In the same diary entry Virginia wonders if she envies Vanessa her "overflowing household." But she adds: "everything flourishing & humane there; perhaps I can't help a contrast which never occurs when I'm in full flood of work." This is a remarkable insight, and confirms the importance for Virginia of sustained work as a protection against invidious comparisons, low self-esteem, and other sources of depression.

When *Night and Day* was published, on October 20, 1919, Virginia was in good spirits, saying that she was more excited and pleased than nervous. Clive called *Night and Day* a work of genius, and Vanessa was enthusiastic. Forster, however, did not like it as well as *The Voyage Out*. Virginia was downcast at first but then took Forster's comments as a realistic evaluation; and she was further

encouraged by a good review in *The Times*.

Virginia's only ailment at this time was rheumatism in her hands. She said she was tired of writing, but in a few days was busy reviewing and hoping to slack off if *Night and Day* was a financial success. She remained well and busy until December when Leonard had an episode of malaria and Virginia herself had influenza for two weeks or more. Dr. Fergusson kept her in bed, but she read a two-volume biography of Samuel Butler and several volumes of the *Greville Memoirs*.

JACOB'S ROOM

Beginning in January 1920 Virginia put together a number of her short stories, beginning with *The Mark on the Wall* and *Kew Gardens*, already published; and others recently written. These were published in April 1921 as *Monday or Tuesday*. The major work of this period, however, was *Jacob's Room*—her first experimental novel. This she began in the spring of 1920, completed in November 1921, and published on October 27, 1922. During the time that Virginia was finishing *Jacob's Room*, Leonard was standing for Parliament.

Jacob's Room is a memorial to Thoby Stephen, Virginia's brother, who died fourteen years earlier. But this is no conventional biography; it is fiction and impressionistic. His personality is painted by a series of allusions to his room, his lovers, and his comings and goings in London. Jacob's death in the War is expressed symbolically whereas Thoby died of typhoid fever contracted on a trip to Greece.

Except for working on the short stories to be included in *Monday or Tuesday*, Virginia was between novels in January 1920 when she was "attacked by heart disease."⁸ Dr. Fergusson told her that it was only the nerves of her heart affected by influenza. As we shall see, there was to be serious concern about her heart from 1920 to 1932, but little mention of cardiac problems after that. I shall assume, as suggested earlier, that she had rheumatic involvement of the conduction pathways to the heart and that the irregularities were eventually controlled by digitalis.

Virginia was remarkably well during the first eight months of 1920. In April she had two more teeth extracted, but was hurt more by an unfavorable review in *The Times* of an article on Henry James. This, she said, "slightly checks me from beginning *Jacob's Room*. But I value blame."⁹ She recovered quickly, however, and reported two days later that her dental pain was dying as she began *Jacob's Room*.

Beginning in September 1920 Virginia had three periods of illness that I shall describe in the context of her life and work as they occurred. I cannot know all of the variables, but they were all within the period of her writing *Jacob's Room*—and also of an active social life and the demands of an expanding Hogarth Press.

The first of these illnesses began just after the Woolfs had T. S. Eliot as a weekend guest at Monk's House. There was a wide-ranging discussion of personalities and books, especially the works of Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce. Eliot expressed a wish to turn to externals in his writing, but *Ulysses*, he said, describes internals—and is extremely brilliant. The Woolfs had not yet seen *Ulysses*, but said they would consider publishing it. Virginia concluded this diary entry: "Now in all this L. showed up much better than I did; but I didn't much mind."¹⁰

Six days later Virginia added this: "But I think I minded more than I let on; for somehow Jacob [*Jacob's Room*] has come to a stop. . . . Eliot coming on the heel of a long stretch of writing fiction (2 months without a break) made me listless; cast a shade upon me. . . . He said nothing—but I reflected how what I'm doing is probably being better done by Mr. Joyce."¹¹ Virginia wondered if she had thought enough about what she was doing, whether it was a waste of time. She might have done better to write a paper on women, as a counterblast to Mr. Bennett's contention that both intellectually and creatively man is superior to woman.¹² Then she adds: "An odd thing the human mind! . . . Perhaps at the bottom of my mind, I feel that I am distanced by L. in every respect."¹³ She neither read nor wrote for five days because of threatening headaches and, very likely, enforced rest.

Now, threatened headaches are not serious illnesses, but I wish to note that these came in the context of intense competitive feelings toward both Leonard and Joyce. She had the impulse to strike out (a blast at Arnold Bennett) or to feel discouraged (perhaps what she does is a waste of time). We have mentioned the childhood episodes that evidently led to a strong prohibition against aggression. Much as she hated to lose to Leonard at bowls, for example, she apparently confined her feelings to her diary. I believe, then, that anger held in, competitiveness restrained, and resentment or humiliation (as at being criticized) unexpressed was the cause or one of the causes—of many of Virginia's headaches, insomnia, and other symptoms.

About a year later—on April 6, 1921—Virginia's collection of short stories, *Monday or Tuesday*, appeared. It was one of the worst printed books ever published, according to Leonard; in addition, because of an oversight, review copies were sent without a publication date, and the *Times* gave it scant notice. Virginia suffered acute misery when Lytton Strachey's *Queen Victoria* got extended coverage and almost unqualified praise. A few days later Virginia noted the symptoms of her "disease": "The first day one's miserable: the second happy . . .,"¹⁴ as good reviews follow the bad. The next stage: "the philosophic, semi-depressed, indifferent . . . phase, an indication to go shopping; then, meeting Leonard for tea, hearing Lytton's praise for her "String Quartet."¹⁵ A few days later she adds: "Now I notice the latest symptom—complete absence of jealousy. What I mean

is that I shall feel instantly warm & pleased (not only after an hour & a sharp pang) if there's a long & sound appreciative review of L[ytton Strachey] on the Lit. Sup. tomorrow. I think this is perfectly true. Most people, though, would not have to write this down. I suppose I had a qualm or two. . . ."¹⁶ Virginia repeats her good resolutions many times. If her feelings are fractured when others are praised or she is criticized, she will note the symptoms and resolve to avert them in the future; but, sadly, she remained vulnerable to the end.

In early May Virginia had another blow to her self-esteem: "Hamilton Fife in the Daily Mail says that Leonard's story P. & S. ["Pearls and Swine"] will rank with the great stories of the world. Am I jealous? Only momentarily. But the odd thing is—the idiotic thing—is that I immediately think myself a failure—imagine myself peculiarly lacking in the qualities L. has. I feel fine drawn, misty, attenuated, inhuman, bloodless & niggling out trifles that don't move people. . . ."¹⁷

In June, a few weeks later, T. S. Eliot came for another visit having just had tea with J. Middleton Murray. Leonard burst out about what he and Virginia considered a dishonest review of Gorky's *The Notebooks of Tchekhov* as translated by Leonard and Koteliansky. A hate session against Murray ensued. Then Eliot praised two of Virginia's short stories but felt that a third was not successful. She was pleased that she could discuss her work openly with him, but was stoical when he went on to say that *Ulysses* is prodigious. With irony, she applauds herself for writing Eliot's praise of *Ulysses* without cringing, but it clearly bothered her as before.

A few days later Virginia was sick again, and remained so for more than a month. When she resumed her diary in August she wrote:

These, this morning, the first words I have written to call writing—for 60 days; and those days spent in wearisome headache, jumping pulse, aching back, frets, fidgets, lying awake, sleeping draughts, sedatives, digitalis, going for a little walk, & plunging into bed again—all the horrors of the dark cupboard of illness once more displayed for my diversion. . . .¹⁸

On the face of it, there were two bad reactions—about a year apart—to visits from T. S. Eliot and his praise of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Both times she stopped work on *Jacob's Room*. But the connections I have made may represent coincidence. The illness just described sounds like more than emotional upset, and might even have been rheumatic fever; or something psychophysiological. Apart from the question of what may have caused Virginia's illness in 1921, it looks as though her principle problems with *Jacob's Room* were her feelings of inferiority to Leonard, Eliot, and Joyce.

Virginia's illnesses resumed during the first months of 1922. Here the organic factors seem most significant, and yet Virginia's envy of Vanessa and feelings of

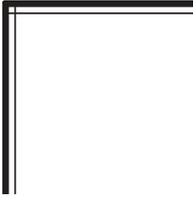
failure at not having children crop up several times in her diary. She had finished *Jacob's Room* and was postponing its revision when she was struck down with influenza and was put to bed for two weeks. Dr. Fergusson forbade her to work for another two or three weeks after that. He told her that her erratic pulse had passed the limits of reason and was in fact insane. Her temperature behaved just as abnormally. She was sent to two specialists one of whom diagnosed heart disease and said she had little time to live; and the other said it was her lungs. Dr. Fergusson disregarded the consultants, and Leonard willingly went along with him. Later, a dentist diagnosed infected teeth and extracted three. After this Virginia improved and revised *Jacob's Room* for publication the following October.

Dr. Fergusson's common sense approach to Virginia's illnesses won out over the Harley Street consultants, and it may well be that the chronically infected teeth combined with strep. Sore throats (considered influenza) were sufficient to stir up rheumatic fever reactions, especially those manifested in cardiac symptoms. Dr. Fergusson doubtless knew more than he told his patients, and I wonder if there are unpublished reports of electrocardiograms that would shed light on Virginia's often rapid and irregular heart.

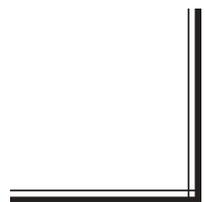
Jacob's Room was published on October 27, 1922. As if to avoid a vacuum in her writing, Virginia had already decided to make a novel instead of another story out of Mrs. Dalloway. She would portray "the world as seen by the sane & the insane side by side—something like that."¹⁹

Lytton Strachey read a pre-publication copy of *Jacob's Room* and praised it lavishly. Virginia remained calm, she said; and wanted to swim in calm waters again. She worked at various projects as the reviews came in. She valued most a letter from Morgan Forster. "This time," she said, "the reviews are against me, & the private people enthusiastic. Either I am a great writer or a nincompoop."²⁰

Later reviews were more favorable and the book sold well. Donald Brace accepted it for publication in America. There were no serious emotional upsets connected with the birth—as Virginia would call it—of *Jacob's Room*.



Chapter Ten



BOOKS AND ILLNESSES: II

MRS. DALLOWAY

Clarissa Dalloway appeared in *The Voyage Out* and in one or two of Virginia's short stories. She had plans for another to be called "Mrs. Dalloway on Bond Street" when, as noted, she changed her mind as she was finishing *Jacob's Room*. During this time there were management difficulties at the Hogarth Press; and Virginia, with other writers, was raising money so that T. S. Eliot could be free to write full time.

Mrs. Dalloway emerged as the parallel stories of one day in the life of its heroine, who is planning an important party to which the Prime Minister will come, and a "shellshocked" veteran who cannot recover from the loss of his buddy in combat. Clarissa Dalloway, in the course of her day and her party, reflects on questions of friendship and love, as well as the meaning of life itself. Septimus Smith has similar preoccupations as he sits with his "little Italian wife" in Hyde Park and then visits a noted specialist on Harley Street who, without really listening to Smith, recommends the standard "rest cure." Although his wife *can* listen and get him to laugh, Smith commits suicide as he is about to be taken to a rest home. In what Virginia called "the doctor chapter," she really interrupted her novel and "got up on a soap box at Hyde Park Corner" to attack the insensitive but socially lionized Sir William Bradshaw. The portrayal of the insanity of Septimus Smith is doubtless derived in part from Virginia's own experience, including especially that with consultants whose knowledge of psychiatric treatment was limited to the rest cure. The comparison should not be carried too far, however, because what precipitated the illnesses and the symptoms themselves could be quite different. More important is Virginia's point that the concerns of the sane and the insane may be essentially the same, and the borderland between them is often difficult to discern.

Virginia worked slowly on *Mrs. Dalloway* through early 1923. Her fever of undetermined origin persisted, and she was thought to have tuberculosis, but various laboratory tests ruled out that diagnosis. She was somewhat haunted by the death of Katherine Mansfield, but then met Vita Sackville-West. There would be an interval of a year before they became friends.

Except for influenza early in 1923 and the mysterious fever, Virginia was well throughout the year. She was upset to the point of panic in October, however, when Leonard did not return from London as planned. This was a "psychological crisis" related to fears of loss; but she handled it by what is called "active mastery," and she worked out much of the emotional upset in her diary.¹

Virginia was badly shaken also, a few weeks later, when Adrian and Karin

separated. "I am too shaky to write. . . . I felt come over me the old despair; the crouching servile feeling which is my lowest & worst; the desire for praise, which he never gets; & the old futile comparisons between his respect for Nessa & his disrespect for me came over me. To my amusement, I found that Nessa, who had been cordial and sanguine about him had changed her view . . . & now only foretells with despair several long silent sittings. . . . Karin did it; and Karin felt it more than he did. She felt all I used to feel: the snub; the check; the rebuke; the fastidiousness; the lethargy. Poor old Adrian! . . . the DNB [meaning their father's overwork and nervous tension as editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*] crushed his life out before he was born. It gave me a twist of the head too. I shouldn't have been so clever, but I should have been more stable, without that contribution to the history of England."² These entries show once more Virginia's dread of separations and possibilities of loss. They stirred up related childhood feelings, as well as those of inferiority to her siblings, and are the basis of her constant need of reassurance and love. But there is evidence of her increasing insight, too; and, with insight, there is less fear and greater control over what emerges from the dark recesses of her mind.

Early in 1924 Virginia bought a ten-year lease on 52 Tavistock Square. Leonard took a dim view of this return to London. Virginia records his gloom and depression, and these aroused doubts in her when her heart "turned like a wounded eel" in her breast; "it was serene as a summers day yesterday; now its sore and choppy. But I like myself for taking my fences. . . . Suppose it all fails, anyhow I shall have tried to bring it off. . . . I see difficulty upon difficulty ahead. None of this would much matter if L. were happy; but with him despondent or grim, the wind is taken out of my sails, & I say what's it all for?"³ Despite these misgivings the move was a success for the Woolfs—conspicuously so for the Press and they remained at 52 Tavistock Square until 1939, when the noise and dust of demolition next door forced them to move.

By April 5, 1924, Virginia had finished the "doctor chapter" of *Mrs. Dalloway* and was furbishing an article "on the Greeks." She adds: "the usual depressions assail me. My criticism seems to me pretty flimsy sometimes. . . ."⁴ Note that the depression is about her literary criticism, not about her novel; and yet she might also be reacting emotionally to her bitter attack on the Harley Street specialists. In addition, she had recently moved to a new home and suffered a family crisis when Angelica and her nurse were hit by a car. Virginia was very active in this emergency, and the subsequent analysis of her feelings is a lyrical case study in ambivalence.⁵

Virginia worked away at *Mrs. Dalloway* during the second half of 1924. She led an active social life and became better acquainted with Vita Sackville-West. She records one minor writing crisis: "Only Karin & Ann: only a hole blown in my last chapter. There I was swimming in the highest ether known to me, & thinking I'd

finish by Thursday, [but Karin came] . . . blowing everything to smithereens. . . . And its down in ruins my house; my wings broken; & I left on bare ground. . . . A bad night (K's doing again) may partly account. But how entirely I live in my imagination; how completely depend upon spurts of thought, coming as I walk, as I sit; things churning up in my mind & so making a perpetual pageant, which is to me my happiness. This brew cant sort with nondescript people. . . ."⁶

Even so, Virginia did finish *Mrs. Dalloway* on October 8, nine days later. As she revised her manuscript she wondered if the book would be better without the mad scenes, but rejected this idea as an afterthought. She spent a freezing afternoon with Dadie Rylands wrapping the first two volumes of Freud's *Collected Papers*, just published by the Press; and then she completed the revision of her own book in subsequent weeks. In early February she broke her usual rule and sent proofs to a friend, Jacques Raverat, who was dying. *Mrs. Dalloway* was published on May 15, and by this time she was already planning *To the Lighthouse*.

Except for Virginia's almost annual bout of influenza in January 1925, there were no adverse reactions to *Mrs. Dalloway*. She worked hard at the Press, led an active social life, and saw more and more of Vita. When the novel was published and started to sell, Virginia was as concerned about requests for interviews and photographs as she was about the reviews. She was now a celebrity and demands on her time would only increase.

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

Virginia got her idea for *To the Lighthouse* in a sort of a rush, she said, as she walked in Tavistock Square, but she did not begin writing it until 1925—two years later. The characters are drawn from her own family at the time when her parents were alive and spending summers at St. Ives, often with a number of guests. In the novel, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsey are described in such a way as to evoke an emotional letter from Vanessa saying that it is as if Virginia has brought their parents back from the dead: you have given a portrait of mother which is more like her to me than anything I could even have conceived of as possible. . . . You have given father too I think as clearly. . . . So you see as far as portrait painting goes you seem to me to be a supreme artist & it is so shattering to find oneself face to face with those two people again that I can hardly consider anything else. . . ."⁷ From one point of view the central character is a painter, Lily Briscoe, who is attempting an abstract Madonna and Child based upon observing Mrs. Ramsey reading to her youngest son whose fantasy of a trip to the lighthouse has been crushed by his insensitive father. The narrative includes a ten year interlude during which Mrs. Ramsey dies. Then the family and guests return, the father imposes a trip to the lighthouse on his now indifferent children, and Lily Briscoe resolves the problem of her painting—a synthesis of past and present.

When Virginia and Leonard went for the summer to Monk's House, Virginia hoped to have two months relatively free for her novel. But soon after she and Leonard went to a party at Charleston celebrating Quentin's fifteenth birthday and the recent marriage of Maynard Keynes and Lydia Lopokova, and at this party Virginia fainted. She was sick from exhaustion and headache for many weeks afterward; but from time to time she wrote letters, kept up her diary, and slowly continued *To the Lighthouse*.

The context of this illness is important. The summer of 1925 was very hot, but Virginia kept a busy social schedule because of her new fame as an author. In July, Leonard developed sciatica which limited his work at the Press. This came at a time when Volumes III and IV of Freud's *Collected Papers* were published and these, with other books, had to be wrapped and distributed. On top of this, the Press handled an emergency run of ten thousand copies of Maynard Keynes's pamphlet, *The Economic Consequences of Mr. Churchill*. Under the circumstances Virginia's physical and emotional energies were drained to the limit when they left for Monk's House in August. As usual, Virginia's collapse was blamed on the excitements of living in London, but those have to be balanced against the long hours of manual labor for the Press in the basement of 52 Tavistock Square. There is no indication that a doctor was called after Virginia fainted, and so one does not know if she had serious heart symptoms.

In September Virginia mentioned a fantasy, shared with Leonard, "of selling Monks, & spending our summers, quit of Press, quit of Nelly, quit of Nation, quit of polar blasts, in the South of France."⁸ They were both too busy; again they resolved to change but never did. Virginia also had a misunderstanding with Karin about household help and wrote: "I was flung into a passion with Karin, & so precipitated another headache. . . . Only it is a curious reflection that a little strain with servants more effectively screws the nerves at the back of the head than any other I am aware of. Now why? It is because it is subterranean, partly."⁹ Virginia has a partial insight here—that problems with servants upset her unduly. She could not be as strict and demanding as her mother was but, instead, wanted servants to love her. She needed them in the role of mother-substitutes: devoted and dedicated to taking care of her.

Virginia was moderately active, with occasional lapses, until December 1925, when she had a combination of fever, headache, and nagging backache. When a rash appeared, Dr. Rendel diagnosed German measles, but the rash disappeared almost at once; and so this might have been an episode of rheumatic fever. There was friction between Vanessa and Leonard at this time, with Virginia once more caught in the middle.

By the end of February 1926 Virginia wrote in her diary: "I am blown like an old flag by my novel. This one is *To the Lighthouse* . . . I am now writing as fast & freely as I have written in the whole of my life, more so—20 times more so

than any novel yet. . . . I live entirely in it, & come to the surface rather obscurely & am often unable to think what to say when we walk around the Square, which is bad I know. Perhaps it may be a good sign for the book though. . . ."¹⁰ She continued this pace, completing the first part of her novel by the end of April and the second part by the end of May.

But there were distractions. Virginia involved herself in another triangle by falling in love with Vita, which Leonard barely tolerated; and she made Vanessa angry by playing her off against Vita. Then, Leonard and Virginia negotiated a new agreement about the money they made. Virginia agreed to put the first £200 that she made each year into ordinary expenses and then share with Leonard all that she earned beyond that. Something about all of this made her depressed. She felt pressured to write more reviews for the income they brought; and she was angry at Leonard who spent for the garden money that might have gone for travel on the Continent.

As Virginia neared the end of *To the Lighthouse*, her domestic life was unsettled. She complained that Leonard spoiled a visit with Vita by being gloomy and caustic. He replied, in effect, that she was witty and brilliant with Vita at his expense. He commented further that their relations lately had not been so good.

Despite problems, Virginia was well until the end of the year. She wrote in her diary that *To the Lighthouse* was easily the best of her books, and not complicated by madness. I think that her insights increased, and were helpful. In December she wrote: "I have also made up a passage for *The Lighthouse*: on people going away & the effect on one's feeling for them."¹¹

Leonard read *To the Lighthouse* in January 1927 and pronounced it a masterpiece. He and Virginia were both headachy in March: ". . . Finishing, correcting the last proofs . . . of a book is always a screw."¹² The Woolfs soon took off for the Continent, however; and they returned shortly before *To the Lighthouse* was published on May 5, 1927.

Virginia was not happy with all of the reviews, but for the most part they were very favorable; and she took them in stride. Vanessa was deeply moved, as I've said; and Virginia was especially grateful for Vanessa's letter. Later in May, Virginia and Vita went to Oxford, where Virginia spoke to both men and women undergraduates on "Poetry, Fiction, and the Future."

In June 1927 Virginia had her only significant illness of the year: a succession of headaches. With her new novel selling well and the reviews attracting attention, she was again lionized at the height of the social season. But her success was a mixed blessing because, while she could now afford a car, it bothered her to be better off than Vanessa. She can think of herself as an established writer, and yet the old invidious comparisons recur. Virginia found it nearly as difficult to be more fortunate than to feel inferior to Vanessa. In any case, she had now conceived the idea of *The Waves*; but decided first to write *Orlando* as a joke.

ORLANDO

Orlando was written in record time. Virginia began it in October 1927 and finished it in March 1928. She and Leonard then spent three weeks on a motor trip to Southern France. In May, Leonard read and enjoyed *Orlando*, and it was published on October 11, 1928.

If anything Virginia wrote justifies Shakespeare's "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet, / Are of imagination all compact: . . ." it is *Orlando*. Nigel Nicolson called it "the longest and most charming love-letter in literature."¹³ It illustrates Virginia's delightful, but sometimes annoying, talent for creating an elaborate fantasy image of someone—Vanessa, Vita, or a total stranger—and then, they sometimes felt, expecting them to live up to her invention.

The character, Orlando, is fabricated of traits known to be aspects of Vita, and the setting is mostly her beloved Knole. Orlando is originally a young man who wins favor with the first Queen Elizabeth. He falls in love with a Russian princess while skating on the frozen Thames, but she betrays him—a reference to one of Vita's lesbian loves. A century later, Orlando, still young and talented, is the Ambassador to Constantinople where he falls in love with a dancer, Pepita—as Vita's grandfather, Lord Sackville, had done in Spain. Next, Orlando falls into a coma from which he awakens a beautiful woman who returns to England in the Eighteenth Century and is immediately accepted by the staff of her great house when recognized by a faithful elk-hound. All of this continues to modern times with Orlando having aged hardly more than five years in as many centuries.

Virginia was again ill during the influenza season of early 1928. She wrote to Clive Bell at the end of January: "By God—I mean never to spend February, March, April in London again . . . anywhere anywhere out of this damp, dull, dripping dustpan. . . . But I am reentering the arena. I lunch with Sybel [Colfax] to meet Noel Coward. . . ."¹⁴

This was a period of some melancholy because Virginia was consoling Vita for the loss of her father, Lord Sackville, for the unpredictable, often psychotic, reactions of her mother, and most of all for the fact that, as a woman, she could not inherit Knole. At this time Vita was only dimly aware of what Virginia was writing, but her requests for pictures of Knole, family portraits, and Vita herself must have made her curious.

Beyond this, Leonard was in conflict with employees at the Hogarth Press. He talked gloomily about giving it up; and Virginia was inevitably affected by this. Somehow, as so often, she compared her life with Vanessa's. She was delighted with Angelica's growing talents, but discounted her own wish to have had a child. She hoped she could leave at least one good book as her creative legacy.

Some weeks before *Orlando* was published, Virginia and Vita spent a week

together in France. Shortly thereafter, the Woolfs took Vita, Vanessa, and Angelica to Cambridge where Virginia read a paper to students of the women's colleges. That, and another paper given a week later, became the basis for Virginia's feminist statement, *A Room of One's Own*, published in 1929.

Orlando appeared October 11, 1928. Vita was astonished and delighted. She voiced some reservations to her husband, Harold Nicolson, but he reminded her that now she and Knole would be inseparable forever. Virginia took the reviews with aplomb, mostly; and was highly pleased when a third printing was ordered ten weeks after the first.

THE WAVES

A letter from Vanessa gave Virginia the idea for a novel to be called *The Moths*. She mulled it over for several years. She had to finish *Orlando*, she wrote "Phases of Fiction," and she revised her Cambridge lectures into *A Room of One's Own*. Then in January 1929, she went, with Leonard, Vanessa, Roger Fry, Angelica, and Duncan Grant, to Berlin where Virginia saw Vita, whose husband, Harold Nicolson, was Counsellor of the British Embassy. Returning, Vanessa gave her sleeping medicine, but somehow it was too much and was followed by some weeks of backache, headache, flu, and a pulse ". . . beginning to rear like a kicking horse . . .";¹⁵ but she was not too ill to read manuscripts for the Hogarth Press.

There were other upsets, and other headaches: Vita was "unfaithful," Leonard's mother came to visit, there was another blowup with Nelly [the cook], and still another misunderstanding with Vita. When this last was explained and Virginia appeased, she wrote: "These tumults over, then I had a headache. . . . And if I had time, I would here dissect a curious little spotted fruit: this melancholy. It comes with headache, of course. . . . Writing this compressed article, where every word is like a step cut in the rock—hard work, if ever writing was; & done largely for money; & whats money, compared with Nessa's children; & then the—"¹⁶

A month later she wrote: "Leonard is having a picnic [at Charleston] and I am here—'tired'. But why am I tired? Well I am never alone. This is the beginning of my complaint. I am not physically tired so much as psychologically. I have strained & wrung at journalism & proof correction; & underneath has been forming my Moths book [*The Waves*]. Yes, but it forms very slowly; & what I want is not to write it, but to think it for two or three weeks say—to get into the same current of thought & let that submerge everything, writing perhaps a few phrases at my window in the morning. (And they've gone to some lovely place . . . & yet when the time came to go, all I wanted was to walk off into the hills by myself. I am now feeling a little lonely & deserted & defrauded, inevitably)."¹⁷

These words recall to me Virginia's vision of a writer's life with Leonard: side by side in separate rooms all morning, but together otherwise (except for her

walks). Virginia needed to be alone to think, to have day-dreams, to observe all that popped into awareness, and to write; but she badly needed Leonard and others for company, reassurance, and protection against memories and visions of separation, desertion, and death. Lacking just the right balance of solitude and togetherness, Virginia became depressed, feeling worthless and envious of Vanessa's life with her children as being happier, more creative, and more fulfilled.

When October came, the Woolfs returned to London, and Virginia encountered inner resistance to writing *The Waves*. She had a bit of insight, however—an emotional connection that removed the barrier to her writing: “these October days are to me a little strained & surrounded with silence. . . . No, its not physical silence; its some inner loneliness . . . I was walking up Bedford Place . . . & I said to myself spontaneously, something like this. How I suffer, & no one knows how I suffer . . . engaged with my anguish, as I was after Thoby died alone; fighting something alone.”¹⁸

The Waves is partly about Thoby, portrayed as the absent Percival. In writing about him Virginia unconsciously lapsed into the mood of despair that followed his death. But she went on to point out to herself that her current reality cannot really explain her mood; but then it dawns on her that she misses Clive. Clive was Thoby's close friend, of course; and was easily equated with him. We can usefully recall here that Vanessa accepted Clive's proposal of marriage soon after Thoby died and that Virginia moved in between them to form a new edition of her childhood triangular situation.

The Waves is about six characters who are very close in early childhood, who meet often as they attend different schools, and then who dine annually in their adult years. They are drawn from Thoby Stephen and his Cambridge friends as well as from Virginia, Vanessa, and possibly Clive's glamorous mistress, Mary Hutchinson. Each character lives in a kind of reverie of self-observation and commentary with no dialogue and little indication of communication. One may read *The Waves* as poetry or as the story of a group of friends. Virginia wrote once that they were all aspects of one person, possibly herself. Drawing from the rhythm of the sea and from the play of light on waves, on leaves of shrubs and trees, and through windows of the house, Virginia gives us her perceptions of friends discovering themselves and each other throughout life—all, of course, parts of her own subjective reality. In this sense, certainly, all are facets of herself.

Virginia continued *The Waves* at the end of 1929 and the beginning of 1930. She and Leonard both had influenza during the winter. Other interruptions included considerable fan mail from *A Room of One's Own* and the search for a new home when threatened with eviction from 52 Tavistock Square. In addition, a much older woman and a noted musician, Ethel Smyth, having read *A Room of One's Own*, descended on Virginia like a tidal wave. This both pleased and distracted Virginia. They became intimate but ambivalent friends, and it was years

before Virginia could set necessary limits to preserve her privacy from this intrusive admirer.

Despite responsibilities and distractions, Virginia completed a first draft of *The Waves* by the end of May 1930. During this time she had a voluminous correspondence with Ethel Smyth, partly a result of Ethel's demand to know the details of Virginia's life, past and present. When she had a tension headache in June, Virginia wrote a long account of her health problems to Ethel, including episodes of madness. Now, she added, she felt stronger than since she was a child.

August 1930 was very hot, even at Monk's House, and Virginia had more guests than she really welcomed. On a Sunday, Vita and her sons came for breakfast and the Keyneses were due for tea. A visit with Leonard's mother loomed ahead. Virginia would have preferred a quiet visit with Vanessa and her children.

The Keyneses did come for tea and Virginia fainted while showing them the garden. Four days later she wrote:

I was walking down the path with Lydia. If this dont stop, I said, referring to the bitter taste in my mouth & the pressure like a wire cage of sound over my head, then I am ill, very likely I am destroyed, diseased, dead. Damn it! Here I fell down . . . the drumming of my heart, the pain, the effort got violent at the doorstep; overcame me; like gas; I was unconscious. . . . Had I woken in the divine presence it wd. have been with fists clenched & fury on my lips. 'I don't want to come here at all!' So I would have exclaimed. . . .¹⁹

One cannot know how much of this Virginia actually felt as she was fainting, but her fantasy of confronting God in a fury will be repeated. She wants to live, she has more books to write, and she will need at least another ten years. This theme recurs after 1939 when the Battle of Britain is overhead and when Leonard talks of suicide if the Nazis come to England.

Virginia's symptoms, as she described them, suggest that the heat combined with social duties brought on a migraine headache coupled with a rapid, irregular cardiac reaction. One cannot know how much was psychogenic, but she was compelled to rest for two weeks.

By September 8 Virginia was completing a review of Hazlitt's works, planning two days with Vita, and counting on returning to *The Waves* right after that. Despite the illness, she noted that this had been the happiest summer she and Leonard have spent at Monk's House. When they returned to London, Virginia's writing did not go well, and so she returned to Monk's House where she did better. Her problem was with Bernard's final summing up. She may well have had Molly Bloom's soliloquy haunting her. Virginia had not liked *Ulysses*, but she considered the soliloquy incomparably good.

As Virginia neared the end of writing *The Waves*, she got the idea of another book—eventually *Three Guineas*—and this excited her. At Christmas time, she went to bed with a sore throat and fever, the “usual influenza” that lasted into January 1931. Despite her illness and other distractions caused by Vita and Ethel Smyth, Virginia recorded the fact that she had returned to *The Waves* and “have this instant seen the entire book whole, & how I can finish it. . . .”²⁰ One week later she added: “. . . never have I screwed my brain so tight over a book. . . . I have any rate the feeling that I have wound up & done with that long labour: ended that vision. I think I have done what I meant. . . . I have insisted upon saying, by hook or crook[,] certain things I meant to say. . . .”²¹

Finally, on February 7, 1931, she observed:

. . . I must record, heaven be praised, the end of the Waves. I wrote the words O Death fifteen minutes ago, having reeled across the last ten pages with some moments of such intensity & intoxication that I seemed only to stumble after my own voice, or almost, after some sort of speaker (as when I was mad). I was almost afraid, remembering the voices that used to fly ahead. Anyhow it is done; & I have been sitting these 15 minutes in a state of glory, & calm, & some tears, thinking of Thoby. . . . How physical the sense of triumph & relief is!²²

Virginia’s words, just quoted, have suggested to others that she was close to madness again in the whirlwind finish of *The Waves*. I think rather that she was reminded of earlier experiences and that she was “almost afraid” that they might recur. She did relive the loss of Thoby, and in working through those ancient feelings, while paying tribute to his memory, she effected a catharsis that was healing rather than a second trauma.

Virginia typed and corrected *The Waves* from February until mid-June 1931 except for two weeks in France with Leonard. She was mildly depressed out of envy of the Huxleys who traveled widely, while Leonard, she felt, spent too much time and money on his garden. She had several migraine headaches attributed to Ethel Smyth’s pounding her with personal grievances and trying to prescribe calomel for Virginia’s liver, assumed to be the cause of all her ills. Virginia had to warn Ethel that Leonard would not tolerate such medical advice from her.

Despite continued exhausting exchanges with Ethel Smyth, Virginia gave her revised manuscript to Leonard on July 19. He pronounced it a masterpiece—the best of her books. She sent corrected proofs to the publisher on August 18 and was already thinking about her next novel, *Flush*.

This time the waiting period caused problems. Leonard had sent an advance copy of *The Waves* to the Book Society against her will, she told Vita—and she dreaded Hugh Walpole’s judgment. She expected the worst from Clive Bell and

from John Lehmann. Her fantasies ran away from her, and she wrote that Leonard accused her of a sensibility verging on insanity. She added that, in any case, most of her tumult of feelings is reserved for her diary.

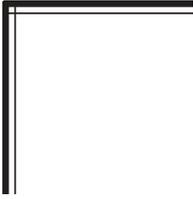
Virginia was right, as it turned out, about Hugh Walpole, who found *The Waves* unreal. But, after the book's publication on October 8, 1931, the reviews varied mostly from highly favorable to worshipful. Vanessa and Forster were equally enthusiastic, and their views counted most after Leonard's. She was delighted and gratified that John Lehmann was so perceptive but alarmed that he had seven thousand copies printed. As it turned out, the Press sold ten thousand copies in about three months.

Except for Virginia's pre-publication jitters, there were no serious emotional upsets due to *The Waves*. But the Woolfs were again faced with having to move and made an offer for 47 Gordon Square, but their landlord, The Duke of Bedford, changed his mind and so they remained at 52 Tavistock Square until 1939. At about this same time, Leonard published his book, *After the Deluge*, which was reviewed with praise by Harold Laski; but the adverse opinions of most of the reviews and the disappointing sales left Leonard as discouraged and dispirited as Virginia herself might have been.

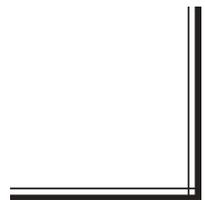
The Woolfs meanwhile had a busy social life, giving a dinner party, going to others, enjoying a concert, and seeing "The Master Builder." After this, Virginia developed headaches and was persuaded to lead the life of a semi-invalid until Christmas. Writing to Vita, Virginia blamed her headaches on *The Waves*, but made it clear that she meant Vita's lukewarm praise. Vita and Dorothy Wellesley (both poets) had called it "the stunt book,"²³ so Virginia struck back quoting G. Lowes Dickinson as calling her the greatest living *poet*.

In mid-December the Bloomsbury friends learned that Lytton Strachey was seriously ill, and they had many discussions of losing friends, old age, and the inevitability of death. In January Lytton died; and then his devoted Dora Carrington committed suicide. In April the Woolfs went to Greece, returning early in May. This was followed by a new barrage of intrusiveness by Ethel Smyth, which always irritated Leonard; and it complicated his difficulties with John Lehmann at the Hogarth Press, with Virginia again caught in the middle.

Virginia was somewhat depressed in the spring of 1932, but hardly more than can be accounted for by the deaths of Lytton and Carrington, new troubles at the Press, the usual ambivalent relationship with Ethel Smyth, and a foolish quarrel with Eddy Sackville-West. She attempted to analyze her depressed feelings and her fear of all the violence and unreason around her. She wondered if writing a book about it would bring order and speed into her world again. Nothing in her diary or letters suggests that Virginia was profoundly or consistently depressed. Her diary for May and June, apart from moods of gloom and doom, is filled with parties and the usual searching observations of those she met.



Chapter Eleven



BOOKS AND ILLNESSES: III

FLUSH

Virginia began writing this delightful novel at the end of July 1931 when she was finishing *The Waves*. Flush is Elizabeth Barrett's cocker spaniel, and the story is told through his eyes. His devotion to his mistress is sorely tested when Robert Browning wins her affections. Then Flush himself is abducted and held for ransom in the slums of London's East End. When he is returned, Elizabeth and Robert elope to Florence; and Flush goes with them, now reconciled to the marriage. Flush and his mistress live into old age, and their story is the vehicle for wit, pathos, and social satire. *Flush* is an easy, graceful, and light-hearted story.

By the time *Flush* was published, on October 3, 1933, Virginia had been working for a year or more on her most difficult novel, *The Years*. She had a number of illnesses during this period, but—at this point—they seem unconnected with either novel. In July 1932, for example, Virginia felt faint while lunching with Clive and had to be led out to a cab. Was it the conversation with Clive or the very warm day?

A month later, at Monk's House, Virginia fainted. This happened in the cool of the evening, but after entertaining Leonard's mother and one of his brothers. She recorded how her heart leapt suddenly, then stopped, then leapt again; and she had a queer bitter taste at the back of her throat. Then the pulse, she felt, jumped into her head and beat faster and more painfully—at which point she fainted. She revived, but required help into the house and into bed: "Then pain, as of childbirth; & then that too slowly faded; and I lay presiding, like a flickering light, like a most solicitous mother, over the shattered splintered fragments of my body. A very acute & unpleasant experience."¹ Leonard called the doctor who sought consultation in London, and the episode was attributed to the effects of heat; but Virginia referred to it as her old intermittent pulse.

Virginia described a pulsating, bursting migraine-like headache, but why the comparison to childbirth? Once again, the headache followed a visit from Leonard's mother. Had she talked too much about her children? Did she talk about grandchildren? Or pity Virginia for her childless state? One has to suspect that something combined with the heat of the day set off this combined headache and cardiac episode.

If Virginia had been working hard at this time, she did not mention it. She was tired of correcting the second *Common Reader*, but probably she meant bored. The hot weather continued, but Virginia recovered. She and Leonard took their car and visited a dozen or more friends between August 20 and September 2.

After their tour Virginia resumed work on *Flush*. By the middle of September she felt that she had botched the final chapter; but she seemed more concerned because her photograph was to be published, and the wrong one at that. She will be revealed as an old woman, she feared; but, worst of all, it was an invasion of her privacy. She expected no sympathy from Leonard.

Virginia remained well and active until November 1932 when cardiac problems recurred. Dr. Rendel said Virginia had put a strain on her heart, and Virginia resolved to avoid the parties she did not wish to attend! She had, however, gone to a Labour Party Conference simply to please Leonard, and they were now confronted with John Lehmann's resignation from the Press. There is no evidence that publication of the second *Common Reader* bothered her, or beginning to write an "essay-novel" called *The Partigers*—later *The Years*.

Dr. Eleanor Rendel was still treating Virginia and prescribed limited activity and digitalis. One week later, Virginia wrote to Vita that the digitalis had slowed her pulse—and presumably the irregularity as well. I have the impression that Dr. Rendel was able, at this time, to get Virginia successfully digitalized, for there is almost no mention of heart problems in Virginia's letters or diary after 1932. Many internists today would keep such a patient digitalized for life.

The first half of 1933 was uneventful so far as Virginia's health was concerned. She completed *Flush* and plunged into *The Partigers* [*The Years*], writing 50,000 words before she and Leonard took off to France and Italy for most of May. After a successful holiday on the Continent, Virginia's problems were much less with her writing than with her social life, and especially the incessant demands of Ethel Smyth for attention to her writing and her other concerns. Virginia had a few days of exhaustion and bed rest at Monk's House in early August, but after that entertained many visitors.

On October 2, Virginia wrote that *Flush* would be published on the 5th. She expected to be depressed by the kind of praise she anticipated; she did not want it to be a popular success. With these gloomy thoughts and other pressures, she took to her bed with headache and backache; but she was greatly cheered on the 5th when the *Times Literary Supplement* and another review treated *Flush* as a serious novel. Virginia recovered rapidly and drove with Leonard to visit Vita at Sissinghurst and on to a two-day Labour Party conference at Hastings. There were more minor ripples about the reviews of *Flush*, but Virginia remained well—though worried about Leonard's health and problems at the Hogarth Press—throughout the final months of 1933.

THE YEARS

When Virginia Woolf began *The Years* as an essay-novel, she worked intermittently at it while completing *Flush*. In 1934, she changed the name to *Here and Now*,

but in the end it became *The Years*. This proved to be her most difficult book. Later I shall suggest some reasons why.

The surface story of *The Years* is about a Colonel and Mrs. Pargiter and their three sons and four daughters from 1880 to the present—1936. This Victorian family is confronted at the outset with a dying wife and mother and then as the years move on the children seek emancipation from the rigidities of their formal and inhibited upbringing in ways that—as with Virginia and her siblings—were successful only at the price of emotional stultification and suffering. The men succumb to the traditional restrictions of University education and the War while the women, in their rebellion, end up in their own futility. Some have suggested that Virginia herself could not break her emotional ties to the past and therefore could not allow her characters more than limited liberation from theirs.

The central character is the eldest daughter, Eleanor, who retains her Victorian standards and values, remaining with her aging father until his death, then travelling to India. More than most, however, she is receptive to new experiences and ideas, trying to find universal meanings in the changing mores through World War I and into the 1930s. She is the only one of her generation who is admired by her niece, Peggy, a tired and cynical doctor in her own mid-30s.

The eldest son becomes an Oxford don in the classics and the second son goes into the Law. The third makes money in the market while wishing that he had become an architect. Of the remaining girls, one marries a politician who breeds horses; the second, deformed from childhood but brilliant and highly imaginative, lives in the slums and has an enduring relationship with an expatriate Polish homosexual; and the third, a militant feminist, goes to jail for throwing a brick through a window, but mellows considerably with age.

Virginia's original conception of *The Years* would return to the real world of *Night and Days* contrasted to the poetic vision of *The Waves*. Her initial working plan called for a succession of historical and sociological studies alternating with fictional illustrations. Fiction was to be the handmaiden of fact in *The Years*. The facts to be faced in this novel were those outlined in *A Room of One's Own* and, later, in *Three Guineas*—the brutality of men, the horrors of war, social inequities, and the need for emancipation of women. In the end, Virginia dissolved the facts into her fiction, saving them for the more strident *Three Guineas*. In *The Years*, the reader is exposed to poverty, infidelity, sexual depravity, crime on behalf of the suffragettes, homosexuality, and—above all—an overriding sense of futility in which educated persons isolate themselves because they are afraid to communicate or are unable to make sense of the lives they are leading. I shall suggest that Virginia wished to please her husband and their younger friends by taking a stand in favor of social reform; but her characters, who talk of a bright New World during an air raid in 1917, find themselves in 1936 with little to talk about, dealing with a next generation drowning their bitterness or perplexity in drink or jazz. *The*

Years deals with time, and it suggests that while everything changes, nothing changes very much.

The motives for Virginia's ambitious scheme were mixed. One element, at least, was that Virginia was becoming self-conscious about her age. She was keenly aware of a younger generation of writers, many of whom were caught up in anti-Fascist causes. She was keenly aware of arguments about the appropriate subject matter of writing. She felt great pressure from the young to reflect "the real world" in hers.

External events themselves involved Leonard more than ever before, and Virginia could hardly ignore the intensity of his commitments. As Virginia was writing *The Years*, Hitler consolidated his power in Germany and Franco suppressed the Asturian miners, sending shock waves through labor circles everywhere. At home, Sir Oswald Mosley formed the British Union of Fascists and by 1936 was marching them into the East End of London to provoke street fights with the predominantly Jewish people there and the numerous liberals who joined them. A deputation from the Jewish People's Council presented petitions signed by 100,000 persons to the Home Office while artists and writers (Leonard Woolf among them) wrote letters of protest to *The Times*.

Virginia was revising *The Years* in early 1936 when the Woolfs attended meetings of anti-fascist intellectuals and in July when the Spanish Civil War broke out. A Spanish Medical Aid Committee was immediately formed and dozens of volunteers came forward. Quentin Bell was active in anti-fascist meetings, causing Julian to come home from China for a more active political role. All of this ferment, including Leonard's incessant meetings, could only create divided interests and distractions. Shortly before Julian returned from China Virginia wrote about Vanessa and Duncan at Charleston: "How I envy them! There they sit, looking at pinks and yellows, and when all Europe blazes all they do is screw their eyes up and complain of a temporary glare in the foreground. Unfortunately politics get between one and fiction."²

Peter Quennell has stated Virginia's predicament as follows: ". . . I hated the idea of fascism and authoritarian government. But I am an 'idiot' . . . as the Greeks originally defined the noun 'a person in a private station,' of whom Pericles declared that 'we do not say that the man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he had no business here at all.'"³ He adds that the "idiot" was hardly less unpopular among intellectuals during the Spanish Civil War than he had been in the Athens of Pericles. But he adhered to his belief that the "socially conscious" writer who deliberately espouses a cause is bound to curtail, if not distort, his vision.

This, according to Phyllis Rose, is the trap into which Virginia fell in writing *The Years*:

The literature of the thirties that survives tends to present the self in conflict with the times, engaging the times, or trying to engage—with history, with a public cause—and failing. . . . Sadly, it was Woolf who abandoned the self in the thirties, responding to the demand for public commitment not with a frank assertion of the value of private experience, but by embracing impersonality and anonymity. For a writer whose greatest impact derives from a private understanding of life's precariousness, the escape from the personal meant cutting herself off from the roots of her art. Had she been less sensitive to her times, more truly Olympian, she would have survived the thirties better. As it was, she exhausted herself in a futile fight against the very principle of self-consciousness.⁴

Alice van Buren Kelley cites a dozen or more critical opinions of *The Years*. At least one, by James Hafley, found it “possibly the best, and certainly one of the most interesting, of Virginia Woolf’s novels.”⁵ But apart from its reception at the time or since, the book was exhausting to write; and the reason, in part, seems to have been that Virginia’s need to accommodate herself to the times was in conflict with her deepest artistic convictions. Virginia’s illnesses during the writing of *The Years* were many and varied. She usually had influenza in the late winter or early spring. In 1934, the flu was related in time to an unasked-for redecoration of 52 Tavistock Square and to another crisis with Nelly Boxall, who departed for good. Virginia had the flu again in May after visiting Elizabeth Bowen in Ireland. When she was unable to write for a time, Virginia reassured herself that she had no need to hurry: “I’ve enough money to last a year. If this book comes out next June year [i.e., 1935] its time enough. . . .”⁶ This comment contrasts with Virginia’s usual position of “running scared” about earning enough for her share of expenses. Then, she had a rash of wakeful nights as she neared the end of her novel, and in August recorded a hot violent gale after which she dreamed ferociously of the dancer Massine.

Roger Fry died on September 9, 1934, leaving Virginia feeling dazed and wooden. They will go to the funeral, she said, and she will cry; but she doesn’t know why—perhaps mostly with Vanessa. She recalled again her mother’s death and her fear that she did not feel enough. The writer’s temperament, perhaps, she said.

Virginia completed the manuscript of her “nameless book” on September 30. She felt calm except for the thought of rewriting. But she had a migraine-type headache the very next day, and complained that her head will never let her enjoy a few moments of triumph and relief. Her social life went on nevertheless, and she wrote in her diary that this had been the best of summers up to the time of Roger’s death.

In October Virginia had no headache, just a typical migraine! Then, in early November, she had two teeth extracted with a cocaine anesthetic; and no complications except slight bleeding. She began rewriting her novel on November 15th. Her social life continued to be very active, and she had been warned that she might be asked to write Roger Fry's biography. Her health was good until the end of 1934.

Virginia had two headaches early in 1935, apparently related to unexpressed anger first at the London Library Committee, then at Leonard's being upset with the cook. She was also seized with a sudden wish to write an anti-fascist leaflet. In May, the Woolfs had a successful tour on the Continent. Virginia was briefly depressed in June. She wished for death, but then saw how the last 200 pages of *The Years* would work out. By July 17, 1935, she finished the first retyping. The Woolfs spent August and September at Monk's House where Virginia worked steadily on *The Years*. In one diary entry she could speak of suffering hell and ecstasy while writing, then note that they have entertained two little girls overnight, had T. S. Eliot for a weekend, and discussed the possibility of war with Clive Bell, just returned from an Hellenic Cruise. Indeed, she was essentially well until the end of 1935.

On December 29 Virginia wrote:

I have in fact just put the last words to *The Years*. . . . And I am not in such a twitter as usual. And is it good? That I cannot possibly tell. . . . Well there still remains a great deal to do. . . . Yes, it needs sharpening, some bold cuts, & emphases. . . . And I must subconsciously wean my mind from it finally & and prepare another creative mood, or I shall sink into acute despair. . . . Anyhow the main feeling about this book is vitality, fruitfulness, energy. Never did I enjoy writing a book more, I think: only with the whole mind in action, not so intensely as *The Waves*.⁷

Whatever Virginia's fatigue was from writing, what worried her was a vacuum in her creative mood. This is one reason why interruptions were so upsetting to her, and often led to headaches. The next day, in fact, she had a headache and could not write a word; but she was intrigued by the odd posthumous friendship she now had with Roger Fry, from reading his letters and other papers; and she had a burst of ideas about how to write her war book, possibly the future *Three Guineas*.

The year 1936 was the most critical time in the writing—revising really—of *The Years*. Leonard felt, at times, that Virginia was again on the verge of insanity. Certainly she was often frantic or in despair; but the reasons were more than her book. Hitler invaded the Rhineland in March and the Spanish Civil War broke out in July. Virginia was distracted by the noise and confusion of Leonard's intermi-

nable meetings as well as by the direct demands on her time for involvement in anti-fascist causes. She kept thinking, also, of her projected feminist and anti-war book that would in time become *Three Guineas*.

The agitated meetings and discussions were an assault on Virginia's personal and artistic values. These were already somewhat compromised by the book she was struggling to write—coming to grips with sordid realities—in an attempt to please her socially conscious relatives and friends. With almost everyone else now preoccupied with the possibility of war, she questioned the value of what she was doing. The book would have to be perfect if she could justify it at all in such a crisis. If Virginia was close to madness in 1936, the causes were as much the anxieties engendered by world events as by her writing—as her letters and diary show clearly. We know that Virginia often expressed in symptoms the feelings that she could not express openly—if, indeed, she was more than dimly aware of them.

At the beginning of 1936 Virginia had headaches for several days. She was undertaking the chore of a final revision. This became urgent because Leonard informed her that she had not earned enough to pay her share of the house. She had to dip into her “hoard.” This must have increased the pressure on Virginia to get on with her book as well as her concern as to whether it would sell. The headaches continued.

On March 24, Virginia recorded a very good weekend at Monk's House. All the same “. . . I was so absorbed in *Two Guineas*—that's what I am going to call it [though it became *Three Guineas*]. I must very nearly verge on insanity I think. I get so deep in this book I don't know what I'm doing. Find myself walking along the Strand talking aloud. Old Mrs. W[oolf] in great spirits yesterday. . . .”⁸ Whether she was so deeply preoccupied with *Three Guineas* or *The Years*, Virginia was not on the verge of insanity. She had just refused an invitation from David Cecil because of a writing deadline, but suggested another time; and, as a favor to Maynard Keynes, she agreed to invite a friend to see Lydia Lopokova in “The Master Builder.”

Virginia wrote on April 9 that she posted the last batch of manuscript to the printer, and that Leonard was then reading a copy. His reaction was tepid, she thought. “The horror is that tomorrow, after this one windy day of respite[,] . . . I must begin at the beginning & go through 600 pages of cold proof. Why oh why? Never again, never again. No sooner have I written that, than I make up the first pages of *Two Guineas*, & begin a congenial ramble about Roger [Fry's projected biography]. . . .”⁹

During May, June, and July 1936, Virginia was incapacitated much of the time with headaches and insomnia. She neglected her diary for two months, after April 9, but wrote a fair number of letters. She mentioned four weeks of headaches to Julian Bell, together with family news, on May 2. She added that Leonard

was at a Labour Party meeting last week: “. . . but he tells you his politics, so I wont. Its not at all pleasant—our state; I have never dreamt so often of war.”¹⁰ To Vita, Virginia complained that she can’t face the proofs and would like to drop the book into the Atlantic.

A letter to Violet Dickinson on June 3 included the following report: “We are both alive and Leonard [is] holding a meeting to protest something at this moment in the next room; and as they talk so loud, I cant write sense.”¹¹ Virginia complained to Ethel Smyth about having to take chloral, but she mustn’t tell Vita. One or both of them apparently attempted to get her to do without sleeping medicines. The fact is that reasonable amounts of chloral might have been helpful. In any case, Virginia wrote to Ethel again, on June 6, that she can only manage three quarters of an hour correcting; but this had been prescribed by Dr. Rendel two weeks earlier. Virginia continued: “Never trust a letter of mine not to exaggerate thats written after a night lying awake looking at a bottle of chloral and saying no, no, no. . . .”¹² Later, Leonard would set limits to Ethel’s visits.

A letter the next day to Lady Ottoline Morrell added: “I cant bring myself to face London . . . never a moments peace, what with politics, meetings, and the insane traffic of ‘seeing’ people. . . .”¹³ And writing to Vita on June 9, she said: “. . . We go up tomorrow for a time, since there’s so much to see to, for Leonard anyhow, in London. . . . London seems to me a parrot cage—a lion house—all thats roaring, glaring, cursed, and venomous.”¹⁴

Virginia returned to her diary on June 11, writing: “I can only, after 2 months, make this brief note, to say at last after 2 months dismal & worse, almost catastrophic illness—never been so near the precipice to my own feeling since 1913—I’m again on top. . . .”¹⁵ This calls for comment because Virginia reverts, in her reference, to the 1913 illness rather than to that of 1915. Perhaps she refers to its principal causes which, I think, included Leonard’s plunge into a variety of activities that took him away from Virginia. In 1936, the terrifying time, as Leonard called it, he had the wisdom to curtail his political involvements in order to take Virginia on trips or spend more time with her at Monk’s House. If Leonard had left a systematic account of his activities in 1936, it would have included attending a conference with the future Prime Minister of India, Nehru, in February; meeting frequently with the Labour Party Advisory Committee at the House of Commons; managing the Hogarth Press; publishing his own *The League and Abyssinia*; helping found and promote the International Peace Campaign; and participating in the many vociferous committee meetings of which Virginia complained in her letters and diary.

Virginia’s most vehement statement about the effect on her of the political scene was in a letter to Ethel Smyth:

So why these headaches now? . . . Did I tell you of my great political

shindy, in the worst too, of my coma, when I was drowsy and painful as a crushed snake? How I was hauled out to Committees and meetings and abused and rooked and at last resigned, and now will never sign a petition or even read a report let alone attend a conference again? Still though I withdraw, Leonard doesn't. Last winter the bray and drone of those tortured voices almost sent me crazy—meetings in the next room. . . .¹⁶

Granting Virginia's tendency to exaggerate, especially to Ethel Smyth, she was blasting out her feelings. This may have been therapeutic and should have happened oftener. In a later letter, however, she wrote to Ethel that Leonard never dragged her to meetings—at least not recently!—but that E. M. Forster had pressured her into joining Vigilance, the anti-Fascist committee that involved her in endless correspondence.

But a month earlier Virginia had written in her diary (on June 11 and 21) that she had written "1880"—the first segment of *The Years*, and then "the Robsons," which she considered good. She found consolation in reading Flaubert, for whom writing had been equally difficult. On June 23 she added: "A good day—a bad day—so it goes on. . . . Yet I see it now, as a whole: I think I can bring it off, if I only have courage & patience: take each scene quietly: compose: I think it may be a good book. And then—oh when its finished!"¹⁷

THE MENOPAUSE

Virginia hinted at a new reason for some of her symptoms in a teasing letter to Ethel Smyth: "I saw my Dr. [Eleanor Rendel] She says in 10 years they'll be able to cure me completely by injecting hormones. At present she says its too risky. Its all the glands in back of my neck, she says."¹⁸ One can be certain that Dr. Rendel did not locate any endocrine glands at the back of the neck. After a brief quarrel with Virginia about other concerns, Ethel wrote to attribute Virginia's headaches to the "time of life." Virginia denied such a connection on July 25:

My head . . . remains so firmly screwed I'm getting along fast with the disgusting paring and fiddlefaddling which I've got to go through with, and am entertaining 4 Wolves to tea. No: psycholggically I think you were wrong about my being "happy" when you mentioned the time of life . . . which . . . came and passed, as gently and imperceptibly as a lamb, 2 years ago. So I dont think my headaches are due to that—indeed I cursed the Dr the other day, who always said, as they all say, you'll be much better then. So why these headaches now? . . .¹⁹

And Virginia goes on to let out her fury about the political meetings.

But Virginia Woolf completely contradicted herself in a subsequent diary entry of November 24: “. . . Today the old symptoms—t. of l. [time of life], cant get rid of it—the swollen veins—the tingling; the odd falling; feeling of despair. Brain not fully blooded. Hot & cold. . . .”²⁰ In March 1937, when *The Years* was about to be published, Virginia wrote: “I wish I could write out my sensations at this moment. They are so peculiar & so unpleasant. Partly T[ime] of L[ife]? I wonder. A physical feeling as if I were drumming slightly in the veins: very cold: impotent: & terrified. . . . Very lonely. L. out to lunch. . . . Very apprehensive. As if something cold & horrible—a roar of laughter at my expense were about to happen. . . . It affects my thighs chiefly. And I want to burst into tears, but have nothing to cry for. I looked at my eyes in the glass & saw them positively terrified. . . .”²¹ The next day, she adds: “I’m going to be beaten, I’m going to be laughed at, Im going to be held up to scorn & ridicule—I found myself saying those words just now. Yet I’ve been absorbed all morning in the Un[iversity] part of 3Gs. . . . It is partly the T. of L. I think still. . . .”²² One wonders if this terrified expectation of ridicule in the forthcoming reviews is derived in part from the teasing that led to the “purple rages” of Virginia’s childhood.

Virginia has described a severe anxiety attack, and it may or may not be partly due to the menopause. This diagnosis is suspect because the menopause usually occurs before the age of fifty, and Virginia was fifty-four when she quoted Dr. Rendel, or fifty-two when she went through the experience smoothly, as she told Ethel Smyth. The menopause may indeed come and go without symptoms, or periods can stop while the signs of estrogen deficiency persist—slight or severe.

The menopause is both a physiological and a psychological process. Hot flushes and sweating are the only purely endocrine symptoms. But these, combined with the real and symbolic facts of infertility, cessation of menstruation, and aging, may result in irritability, insomnia, lassitude, general nervousness, and depression. We conclude, therefore, that Virginia probably passed through the menopause as she was writing *The Years* and that it intensified the pressures of the work itself and of the distracting world around her.

WINDING UP *THE YEARS*

Although Virginia took time off from revising her novel and neglected her diary entirely from June until the end of October, she worked slowly through her proofs. When she resumed the diary, it was with a cryptic comment: “I do not wish, for reasons I cannot now develop, to analyze that extraordinary summer.”²³ Inasmuch as she wrote thirty-three letters during that period and virtually completed work on her proofs, the “extraordinary summer” can hardly apply to *The Years*. The fact that she made no mention in her letters of the Spanish Civil War—

and the inevitably frantic talk and activity of those around her—may point to what Virginia herself was determined to ignore.

She finished work on the proofs about November 1 and observed :

I will put down the facts. . . . When I had read to the end of the first section I was in despair. . . . I made myself read on to Present Time. . . . I must carry the proofs, like a dead cat to L. & tell him to burn them unread. This I did. And a great weight fell off my shoulders. . . . Now I am no longer Virginia, the genius, but only a perfectly insignificant yet content—shall I call it spirit? a body? And very tired. Very old . . . And L. said he thought I might be wrong about the book. . . . We went home & L. read & read & said nothing; I began to feel actively depressed. . . . Suddenly L. put down his proof & said he thought it extraordinarily good—as good as any of them.²⁴

Two days later, Virginia added: “The miracle is accomplished. L. put down the last sheet about 12 last night; & could not speak. He was in tears. He says it is ‘a most remarkable book—he likes it better than *The Waves*’ & has not a spark of doubt that it must be published. I, as a witness, not only to his emotion, but to his absorption, for he read on & on, can’t doubt his opinion.”²⁵

Thirty years later, Leonard wrote that he had not been candid with Virginia, but that the book would have satisfied many authors and publishers. He feared that his honest judgment would have caused Virginia to have a serious breakdown; and so his only criticism was that the book was much too long.²⁶ Virginia herself remained ambivalent about *The Years*, cut it ruthlessly, and sent it to the printer at the end of December 1936. On December 30 she noted the end of the abdication crisis, which had been more pleasantly diverting than the war in Spain, and recorded her intention to work on Roger Fry’s biography and *Three Guineas*. She added:

I cd. make some interesting perhaps valuable notes, on the absolute necessity for me of work. Always to be after something. I’m not sure that the intensiveness & exclusiveness of writing a long book is a possible state: I mean, if even in future I do such a thing—& I doubt it—I will force myself to vary it with little articles. Anyhow, now I am not going to think can I write? . . . Perhaps I’m now again on one of those peaks where I shall write 2 or 3 little books quickly: & then have another break. At least I feel myself possessed with skill enough to go on with. No emptiness.²⁷

With *The Years* in the hands of the publishers, Virginia was in excellent health

during the first two months of 1937. Leonard was not, however; he was thought to have diabetes or prostate disease. Some weeks of worry passed before tests for both were negative and his health returned. In March, as mentioned in connection with menopausal symptoms, Virginia again had severe pre-publication anxiety attacks; but, as before, they proved unwarranted. *The Years* had a substantial advance sale and the reviews were mostly favorable or better. Virginia was especially relieved by the prospect of increased income and of a new car for Leonard.

Virginia's health was good, except for a mild case of influenza in December, through 1937. The principal worry was Julian Bell's talk of going to Spain as an ambulance driver, and this was very upsetting to Vanessa. Leonard became angry because he considered Vanessa self-centered in her preoccupation with her children and at Julian for keeping everyone on edge by not revealing his intentions. Except for a headache at the end of March, Virginia was well.

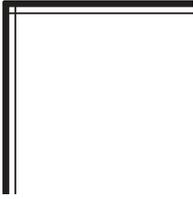
On July 18, 1937 Julian died in Spain from a shrapnel wound. Vanessa collapsed completely, and Virginia was with her constantly. Vanessa told Vita later that Virginia's voice kept her in touch with life and sustained her. When Vanessa was moved from London to Charleston, Virginia went nearly every day from Monk's House. For months Virginia stayed with Vanessa if, otherwise, she would have been alone. Virginia's grief was intense—almost as much for Vanessa as for Julian. She wrote that she had loved Julian deeply but also that they could hurt each other. She was jealous of him as a gifted, younger writer. She opposed his going to Spain and got others to do so also; but, when he went, she gave him a loving sendoff.²⁸

Virginia added later that

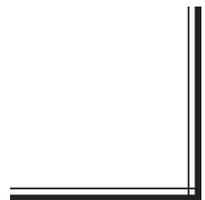
there was a kind of comfort in being there with Nessa, Duncan, Quentin & Angelica, & losing completely the isolation, the spectator's attitude in being wanted; & spontaneous. Then we came down here [Monk's House] last Thursday; & the pressure being removed, one lived; but without much of a future. That's one of the specific qualities of this death—how it brings close the immense vacancy, & our short little run into inanity. Now this is what I intend to combat. How? how make good what I protest, that I will not yield an inch or a fraction of an inch to nothingness, so long as something remains? Work of course. . . .²⁹

The entire diary entry, only partly quoted, is a kind of epitaph for Julian; and, through him, for *The Years*, because his influence—and that of other younger writers—was partly responsible for *The Years*. Virginia resolved to get her accounts—that is, her plans for working—in order again. Paramount on the agenda were *Three Guineas* and *Roger Fry: A Biography*.





Chapter Twelve



BOOKS AND ILLNESSES: IV

THREE GUINEAS

Virginia had *Three Guineas* constantly in mind while she slaved over the proofs of *The Years*. With them virtually out of the way, she said on November 24, 1936: "I began 3 Guineas yesterday. & I liked it."¹ But there were interruptions, as we have seen, so she wrote most of *Three Guineas* during late 1937. She finished the book in January 1938, completed revisions in March, and saw it published on June 3. Virginia had only minor illnesses during 1937 and 1938, some of which have been noted as related to publication of *The Years*; others are vaguely connected with *Three Guineas*.

In December 1937, for example, Virginia was in bed for three days with the flu. But her main concern was with Leonard, who, as noted above, was thought to have kidney or prostate trouble. During this period, Leonard and Virginia were negotiating with John Lehmann over his purchase of Virginia's share of the Hogarth Press, and Virginia signed over her rights about March 1. By this time she was working on her biography of Roger Fry.

Three Guineas is often compared with *A Room of One's Own* as a feminist tract, but Virginia herself said it belonged to *The Years*. John Lehmann called it: ". . . a forcefully argued and thoroughly documented polemic against male privilege, male prejudice, male vanity, and the state to which male domination has brought the world. . . . It is strident."² He suggests that Virginia can hardly have been as good humored nor have had such a light touch as in *A Room of One's Own* because of the menace of Hitler, the Spanish Civil War, and her own anguish and anger over Julian's death as she was writing *Three Guineas*. Quentin Bell called this book "the product of a very odd mind and, I think, of a very odd state of mind."³ He quotes Virginia as saying that writing the book served as a spine to her, upholding her through the horror of Julian's death and Vanessa's collapse. Virginia sensed the book's limitations while reading the proofs—not a good time for her to judge anything—and she wrote: ". . . How can it all have petered out into diluted drivel? But it remains, morally, a spine: a thing I wished to say, though futile."⁴

In many respects *Three Guineas* was ill-fated. In reaffirming the feminist arguments of *A Room of One's Own*, she was again making herself irrelevant as most of her friends were wrapped up in anti-fascist causes. She herself was supporting Leonard, Julian, and others while writing that men are makers of war, but women, if given a chance, are makers of peace. While Julian was still in China, Virginia let him know that she subscribed to *The Left Review* and wrote "Why Art Today Follows Politics" for *The Daily Worker*. Even Adrian and Karin, who deprecated politics, she told him, marched in an anti-fascist procession in the East End of

London.

Julian had been dead six months or more by the time Virginia completed *Three Guineas*. Her fury and despair about his fate and about war must partly account for the harshness of tone and the imperfections of her writing. Even though there was much that she wished to say, and she had marshaled her data and arguments, she may well have abandoned her usual high standards as she rushed through the final revisions.

Moreover, her timing was inadvertently poor when she gave *Three Guineas* to Leonard to read. He was barely over a period of illness, and limited activity; but his intense concerns about the international situation were no less. In addition, discussions with John Lehmann about partnership in the Hogarth Press continued; and Virginia herself was just over the flu.

On February 4th she recorded: “. . . L. gravely approves 3 Gns. Thinks it an extremely clear analysis. On the whole I’m content . . . But I’m much more indifferent, thats true: feel it a good piece of donkeywork, & dont think it affects me either way as the novels do.”⁵ During this time Virginia had a slight fever and her doctor diagnosed a sinus infection, but did not recommend surgery.

On March 11, 1938, the Nazis invaded Austria and much of Europe expected war. Virginia wrote of endless meetings, telephone ringing, and agitated editors arriving to meet with Leonard. By March 22 she wrote:

Almost war. . . . And England, as they say, humiliated. And the man in uniform exalted. Suicides. Refugees turned back at Newhaven . . . L. up to his eyes in the usual hectic negotiations. . . . And I looked at Quentin & thought Theyll take you. . . .

. . . Now I must ward off the old depression: the book finished, whats the use of it, feeling. . . .⁶

But then they had T. S. Eliot over for dinner and went to Stephen Spender’s *Trial of the Judge*. Here again we have separation reactions: Virginia had given birth to another book, and Leonard was more than ever away on Labour Party business.

By April 12, Virginia recorded the fact that she was working on the biography of Roger Fry: “And it is an immense solace to have this sober drudgery to take to instantly & so tide over the horrid anti climax of 3 Gns. I didnt get so much praise from L. as I hoped. He had to swallow the notes at a gulp though. And I suspect I shall find the page proofs (due tomorrow) a chill bath of disillusionment. . . .”⁷ But there would be no vacuum in her creative mood because Virginia had arrived at an idea that would eventually become *Between the Acts*.

By the publication date, June 3, 1938, Virginia already knew what she wanted to know, that the book would be taken seriously. The *Times Literary Supplement* called her the most brilliant pamphleteer in England. For the most part feminists

were ecstatic, but others were less than enthusiastic. Maynard Keynes was especially critical, and Vita—so Virginia believed—called the book dishonest; but this turned out to be a misunderstanding.

When people compare *Three Guineas* unfavorably to *A Room of One's Own*, they overlook this part of the June 3 diary entry: “Anyhow thats the end of six years floundering, striving, much agony, some ecstasy: lumping the Years & 3 Gns. together as one book—as indeed they are. . . . I talked to Nessa about Julian on Wednesday. She can hardly speak. What matters compared with that? Yet I was always thinking of Julian when I wrote.”⁸

Virginia wanted *The Years* to be an essay-novel. This was unmanageable, and with great effort she incorporated many of her social and political ideas into fictional expression. But she was not satisfied, apparently, and so the essay part of her original conception evolved into *Three Guineas*. In this sense, then, the two books remained one. Assuming that Virginia wished to impress Julian with her awareness of economic and social problems, she must also have wanted him to accept her feminist concerns; but all of this was as nothing after his death and, later, when her appeals for women's rights were drowned out by the sounds of troops marching to war.

ROGER FRY: A BIOGRAPHY

Virginia was a close friend of Roger Fry from 1911 until his death in 1934. He was forty-four in 1910 when he was “discovered” by Clive Bell and brought into the Bloomsbury circle of friends. Fry's advocacy of Cézanne and the First Post-Impressionist Show in London caused a furor in London with the Bloomsbury artists aligned with Fry.

Born in 1866—thirteen or more years before the founding members of Bloomsbury—Fry was educated as a scientist, but had turned to the arts as a painter and scholar. Vanessa had met him briefly about 1905, by which time Fry was already an established lecturer on art. In 1906, Fry went to the Metropolitan Museum in New York as curator of paintings; later, he became a buyer of old masters in Europe. By 1910, Fry had somehow alienated J. P. Morgan, chairman of the Museum's board, and so was let go; and he returned to England partly because of his wife's incurable mental illness. She was certified that same year and sent to an asylum where she remained until she died.

In the spring of 1911, Fry, Harry Norton, Vanessa and Clive Bell went to view Byzantine art in Turkey. There Vanessa became ill, and Virginia rushed to her bedside. But Roger Fry took charge, nursed Vanessa, and they fell in love. Virginia came home with them on the Orient Express; and by then Vanessa had become indifferent to Clive's interest in Virginia. Although Clive remained possessive of Virginia, she found time to become better acquainted and deeply impressed with

Fry's brilliance and erudition.

Toward the end of 1911, when Leonard returned from Ceylon and saw more and more of Virginia, Fry helped to transform "Bloomsbury" and, with Clive, Vanessa, and others, planned the Second Post-Impressionist show of October 1912. By that time, Virginia and Leonard had married, and Leonard had gone to work as secretary of the Exhibition, just a few days after returning from their honeymoon.

Virginia's friendship with Roger developed slowly over the years. In December 1921 she and Leonard entertained Roger at tea and dinner. Virginia wrote in her diary: "Roger's visit went off specially well. I mean we are grown rather intimate, & sit talking at our ease—practically of everything. This was not so a year ago. It is partly the good effect of having friends in common—not, as used to be the way, my seeing Roger alone, while Leonard stayed at home. . . ."⁹

Roger Fry's affair with Vanessa lasted only two or three years, and evolved into friendship as Vanessa turned more to Duncan Grant. Roger needed to be close, however, and, as late as 1920, he took a place in the country near Charleston. By 1926, however, he had formed a relationship with Helen Anrep who moved in with him; and they lived as man and wife until his death in 1934. Subsequently, Helen Anrep and Margery Fry, Roger's sister, pressed Virginia to write Roger's biography. By the time Virginia began serious work on this, however, international crises distracted her, and she felt obligated to support the anti-fascist and peace movements. As noted above, she had another novel in mind; and she turned easily to that when the biography became a drudgery.

One of Virginia's problems in writing about Roger was in knowing too much about him. She could hardly recount his affair with her sister or, later, the details of Helen Anrep's leaving her husband and children for Roger. Virginia was writing to please Roger's sisters, among others; and her Victorian conscience dictated the utmost discretion. So she hit upon the plan of using the public records of Roger's life and writings, as well as selected correspondence, as the principal sources of her biography.

Mitchell A. Leaska has suggested that Virginia's resistences to writing about Roger came from largely unconscious sources.¹⁰ Evidence from her diary and letters suggests that her emotional reaction to Roger's death included the feeling—as with her father—that she had not done enough for him or told him how important he had been to her. But it was Vanessa who was more nearly devastated—she howled her grief uncontrollably and then turned to Helen Anrep because, with her, she felt closer to Roger.

To whatever extent Roger was an ambivalently regarded father-figure, it follows that both Vanessa and Helen Anrep were mother substitutes. Virginia's situation may have been triangular again. Having Roger, as she did after his death due to his letters and papers, implied taking him away from Vanessa and Helen. She

commented more than once about her remarkable posthumous relationship with Roger.

A curious episode involving Helen Anrep occurred while Virginia was writing Fry's biography. One night at dinner Helen was very critical of *Three Guineas*. Virginia responded that, yes, fiction was really her true medium and perhaps she should abandon the biography. Helen must then have capitulated, and the evening ended with Virginia's lending her £150 to pay her debts. After this, and for weeks, Virginia nagged herself about this loan, unrealistically convinced that she would never get her money back. This seemed a bit of craziness to Vanessa and others around Virginia, but it could be explained on the assumption that Virginia felt unconsciously that she was stealing Roger from Helen and Vanessa.

One bit of evidence for such a fantasy is in Virginia's diary entry when Fry's biography was published in 1940:

What a curious relationship is mine with Roger at this moment—I who have given him a kind of shape after his death—Was he like that? I feel very much in his presence at this moment: as if I were intimately connected with him; as if we together had given birth to this vision of him: a child born of us. Yet he had no power to alter it. And yet for some years it will represent him.¹¹

What a delightful Oedipal passage this is! In fantasy, Virginia has taken Roger away from her rivals—Vanessa and Helen Anrep, especially—and had a child with him. The fact that Roger is both father and child in this creation is not a problem in magical thinking.

In an earlier diary entry, when she was hard at work on *Three Guineas* and barely started on her biography of Roger Fry, Virginia wrote:

I've been re-writing *Three Guineas*. . . . A great strain; but how merciful a compulsion, so that I need not go into the sensation I have on drinking tea . . . with Nessa. No, no I will not describe that: dont I dread it? But I make myself all the same stay on when she's alone. . . . And I'm paid 200 by Cosmopolitan, 120 by H[arper's]. B[azaar]: another 120: then 25: which adds up to 465. . . . This a little shames me in comparison with Nessa's sales: but then I reflect, I put my life blood into writing, & she had children.¹²

This seems relevant because it was written in the shadow of Julian's death. Virginia is ashamed of her earnings at a time when Vanessa has lost a child. Virginia's earnings are equated with her books and other writings, and all of her creative efforts were equated with babies. In the context of Vanessa's mourning for Julian,

it is as if Virginia feels that she has too much—money, books, and babies being equated as possessions—just as it appeared that she had taken Roger from Vanessa and Helen, and has made his life into their child. Fantasies and thoughts such as those just quoted provide clues to Virginia’s unconscious competitiveness, expectation of retaliation, and intense fear that she will be exposed and humiliated.

When Virginia completed the manuscript of *Roger Fry: A Biography* she sent copies of the manuscript to Margery Fry and Vanessa and gave it to Leonard to read. On the next day she went to bed with influenza. This happened toward the end of February, a time when Virginia usually had the flu; but a letdown from writing might well have contributed. She had a sore throat and a fever up to 102 degrees, got better, then had a relapse and spent much of March in bed.

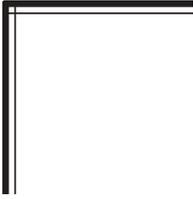
In the midst of this illness, Leonard read the manuscript and disapproved of the method—that is, the use of so many quotations. For some reason he nagged her about this:

His theme was that you cant treat a life like that: must be seen from the writers angle. . . . It was a curious example of L. at his most rational & impersonal: rather impressive; yet so definite, so emphatic, that I felt convinced: I mean of failure; save for one odd gleam, that he himself was on the wrong tack, and persisting for some deep reason. . . . Then Nessa came; disagreed: Margery’s letter “very alive and interesting” . . . N[essa]’s note “I’m crying cant thank you”—then N. & D. [Nessa and Duncan] to tea up here; forbid me to alter anything; then Margery’s final letter—“Its him . . . unbounded admiration. . . .”¹³

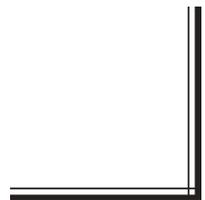
John Lehmann summarized as follows:

Roger Fry: A Biography was published at the end of July 1940, and began to boom. A third edition was ordered in less than three weeks; but by then the Battle of Britain had begun, and when London was bombed the sales of all books slowed down sharply. The reactions of her friends had not all been enthusiastic, nor had the reviews; but Vanessa’s and Margery’s approval, and the sales success reassured her, and she does not seem to have fallen into one of the usually inevitable pits of depression. . . . It is in many ways an excellent biography. . . . Nevertheless, it is difficult to see it as an outstandingly important work in the Virginia Woolf canon; rather as a labor of love, flawed by her closeness to the subject and the necessity of concealment of many of the crucial events of the life, but in spite of that carried through with the technical accomplishment she shows in so many of her shorter biographical studies.¹⁴





Chapter Thirteen



VIRGINIA'S ACCOUNT OF HER FINAL YEAR

The months following April 1940 constituted the time of German victories in Norway, Holland, Belgium, and France, including the remarkable British evacuation from Dunkirk to ports just a few miles from Monk's House. Soon afterward the Battle of Britain was overhead. During this period Virginia wrote about one hundred letters (including three suicide notes) and made eighty-six diary entries. The purpose of the following selections from both letters and diary is to show—as objectively as possible—her states of mind and feeling during the nearly ten months before her death.

INVASION EXPECTED

On May 13, 1940, the Germans swept into Belgium and Holland and Churchill took over from Chamberlain, telling Parliament: "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat." Virginia wrote: "I admit to some content, some closing of a chapter, & peace that comes with it, from posting my proofs [of *Roger Fry: A Biography*] today: I admit—because we're in the 3rd day of 'the greatest battle in history.' . . . So my little moment of peace comes in a yawning hollow. But though L. says he has petrol in the garage for suicide shd. Hitler win, we go on. Its the vastness, & the smallness, that makes this possible. . . ."¹

Two days later, Virginia wrote to T. S. Eliot that she has been dying to discuss poetry with him but had had influenza. She wrote in her diary, however on May 15:

An appeal last night for home defense—against parachutists. L. says he'll join. An acid conversation. Our nerves are harassed—mine at least: L. evidently relieved by the chance of doing something. Gun & uniform to me slightly ridiculous. Behind that the strain: this morning we discussed suicide if Hitler lands. Jews beaten up. What point in waiting? . . . No, I don't want the garage to see the end of me [suicide from car motor running]. I've a wish for 10 years more, & to write my book . . . it's all bombast, this war. One old lady pinning on her cap has more reality. . . .²

About two weeks later, Virginia wrote to her niece, Judith Stephen, that village plays, written by the gardener's and chauffeur's wives, are produced, as well as this, that, and the other thing about air-raid shelters. Leonard was in London organizing the Fabians, having just finished his book *The War for Peace*. She returns to the talk of suicide in her diary on June 9:

Another reflection: I don't want to go to bed at midday: this refers to [suicide in] the garage. What we dread (its no exaggeration) is the news that the French Govt. have left Paris. . . . It struck me that one curious feeling is, that the writing "I" has vanished. No audience. No echo. That's part of ones death. Not altogether serious, for I correct Roger [her biography of Fry]: send finally I hope tomorrow: and could finish P. H. [*Pointz Hall*, eventually entitled *Between the Acts*]. But it is a fact—this disparition of an echo.³

By June 4, the evacuation from Dunkirk was complete, and, on June 14, the Germans marched into Paris. Virginia wrote on the 22nd:

I've been beaten at bowls, feel depressed & irritated, & vow I'll play no more.

. . . I feel, if this is my last lap, oughtn't I read Shakespeare? But cant. I feel oughtn't I to finish off P. H.: oughtn't I to finish something by way of an end? The end gives its vividness, even its gaiety & recklessness to the random daily life. This, I thought yesterday, may be my last walk. . . .⁴

By June 27 Elizabeth Bowen had been to visit Virginia, and then Virginia had gone to Charleston, but she wrote:

I'm loosely anchored . . . [T]he war has taken away the outer wall of security. No echo comes back. I have no surroundings. I have so little sense of a public that I forget about Roger [her book] coming or not coming out. These familiar convolutions—those standards—which have for so many years given back an echo & and so thickened my identity are all wide & wild as the desert now. I mean, there is no "autumn" no winter. We pour to the edge of a precipice . . . & then? I can't conceive that there will be a 27th June 1941.⁵

Virginia seems to have said that her writing self was submerged by the overwhelming events of the war and threat of invasion. Beyond that, she felt isolated from her friends, her readers, and even her critics. In these ways she had lost a wall of security—an audience, an echo—that sustained her identity. Her inability to imagine a June 1941 refers almost certainly to the threat of a Nazi invasion and, perhaps, to a reluctant suicide with Leonard. There is nothing to suggest that these passages refer to Virginia's own suicide some nine months later. On the contrary, she was responding to the dangers of war—as most people do—with almost as much excitement and exhilaration as alarm or despair.

By July 24, *Roger Fry: A Biography* was about to be published, and Virginia

wrote in her diary:

I want at the moment, the eve of publication moment, to discover my emotions. They are fitful: thus not very strong—nothing like so strong as before *The Years*—oh dear nothing like. Still they twinge. . . . [She records fantasies of mixed reviews.] But as L. is combing Sally [a pet] I can't concentrate. No room of my own. . . .

All the walls, the protecting & reflecting walls, wear so terribly thin in this war. There's no standard to write for: no public to echo back: even the tradition has become transparent. Hence a certain energy & recklessness—part good—part bad I daresay. But its the only line to take. . . .

I feel tonight still veiled. The veil will be lifted tomorrow, when my book comes out. That's what may be painful: may be cordial. And then I may feel once more around me the wall I've missed—or vacancy? or chill?⁶

The threat of a German invasion of England persisted into July 1940. Meanwhile, both friends and critics—with few exceptions—praised Virginia's biography of Roger Fry. A third edition was ordered three weeks after publication. But sales dropped off after September, when Hitler called off the invasion and began the saturation bombing of London.

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

There were two principal phases in the Battle of Britain. After the fall of France, Hitler had plans to invade England and his first step included an air assault on London and on port cities in Kent and Sussex. This period—the summer of 1940—was marked by many air battles over Lewes, Rodmell, and Monk's House (among many places). Death from the air was a possibility for the Woolfs even though the threat of invasion loomed larger in their discussions at home and with friends. After Hitler cancelled his invasion plans, the nightly bombing of London began; and fighter interceptions of bombers going to or returning from London became the Woolfs' principal threat from the air. As mentioned before, this turning point in the Battle of Britain took place in mid-September 1940.

On August 31, Virginia wrote in her diary:

Now we are in the war. England is being attacked. I got this feeling for the first time completely yesterday. The feeling of pressure, danger horror. [Vita called to say that she couldn't leave Sissinghurst because bombs were falling all around and that she might have to drive an ambulance.] . . . I went & played bowls . . . Later the planes began zooming. Explosions. . . .

To bed. Planes very close: explosions. A great raid on London last night. . . . Am I afraid? Intermittently. The worst of it ones mind wont work with a spring next morning. Of course this may be the beginning of invasion. A sense of pressure. . . . L. sleeps sound all through it every night.⁷

On September 2, Virginia recorded a meeting of The Memoir Club at Charleston. She read her paper on the Dreadnaught Hoax of which only fragments remain.⁸ There was discussion of Virginia's life of Roger Fry. Maynard Keynes called it the "official life," and suggested to Virginia that she write the "real life" for the Memoir Club. He also remarked that Lydia Lopokova, his wife, didn't come to the meeting because "she feels this is not the time for brains."⁹

Writing to Ethel Smyth, Virginia reported that a plane had just been shot down on the hill beside Lewes. She added: "Thats why its so difficult to write a coherent letter. I try to write of a morning. Its odd to feel one's writing in a vacuum—no-one will read it. I feel the audience is gone. Still, so oddly is one made, I find I must spin my brain even in a vacuum."¹⁰ On the same day she wrote in her diary: "Churchill has just spoken. A clear, measured, robust speech. Says the invasion is being prepared. . . . Time bomb struck the Palace. John [Lehmann] rang up. He was in Meck[enburgh] Sqre the night of the raid. Wants the [Hogarth] press moved at once. L. is to go up on Friday. . . ."¹¹

The Woolf's home in Mecklenburgh Square was seriously damaged and made uninhabitable during the September bombing, but the Press, books, and furnishings were salvaged. Then, in October, 52 Tavistock Square (where the Woolfs still paid rent on an unexpired lease) was destroyed. Monk's House at Rodmell was now their only home, with many books and other possessions stored here and there in the neighborhood.

On November 15, Virginia wrote:

As I cannot write if anyone is in the room, as L. sits there when we light the fire, this book [Diary] remains shut. A natural slimming process. A screw over the end of P.H. [*Pointz Hall*, a.k.a. *Between the Acts*] rather made me sink into the disillusions [?] yesterday . . .

Coventry almost destroyed. . . . A bad raid there [London]. When I am not writing fiction this fact sinks in. The necessity of living in the upper air.¹²

Note again that Virginia cannot write when someone else is in the room, that there is no more "room of one's own." And she feels the need to escape from the war by being free to write fiction.

At the end of November Virginia's growing resentment of life in the country

surfaced in this diary entry:

Many deep thoughts have visited me. And fled. The pen puts salt on their tails; they see the shadow & fly. I was thinking about vampires. Leeches. Anyone with 500 [pounds sterling] & education, is at once sucked by the leeches. Put L. & me into Rodmell pool & we are sucked—sucked—sucked. I see the reason for those who suck guineas. But life—ideas—that's a bit thick. We've exchanged the clever for the simple. The simple envy us our life. Last night L's lecture attracted Suckers . . . (L. is getting logs so I cant write). From this to manners:—a thought to keep for my book [more than a hint that Virginia's feelings about Rodmell in wartime are going into the writing of *Between the Acts*].

Leech Octavia [Wilberforce] asks to come. B. & A. tomorrow [Bunny Garnett and Angelica Bell]. Now I must read Ellen Terry. . . ."¹³

Writing twenty-five years later, Leonard appears to be uncertain as to whether this outburst should have been considered as abnormally serious. Virginia knew as well as he did that their position in the community made it inevitable that both of them would be invited to attend or address meetings. Leonard was not likely to understand Virginia's need to blow off steam or that this particular blast was probably overdetermined by having him too much underfoot as well as by all other distractions from her writing. Leonard added, however: "It was only in the first days of 1941 that the deep disturbance in her mind began to show itself clearly."¹⁴ In fact, there is evidence that he was unconcerned until the first part of March, a few weeks before her suicide.

A letter to Edward Sackville-West, on December 1, conveys similiar feelings:

My dear Eddy, Forgive this typing; but my hands are so cold this bitter morning out in the garden room that I cant move a pen. . . .

I write with the usual air raid going on . . . a bomb now and then. Sometimes the country is so heavenly and reading and writing become absorbing I'm very happy; then all at sea. Its like living on an island. Rodmell of course pulls us in to various societies: all very simple; I've not seen a clever person this six months, save the family over the way [in Charleston]. I daresay its good for one; but oh lord—how bare and barren in many ways. . . ."¹⁵

Virginia's December 16 diary entry continues the theme of her feelings of deprivation:

Exhausted with the long struggle of writing 2,000 about Ellen Terry—

interrupted by 4 days of furniture moving—distracted by the chaotic state of our possessions—oh the huddle & hideousness of untidiness—oh that Hitler had obliterated all our books tables carpets & pictures . . .

Its rather a hard lap: the winter lap. So cold often. And so much work to do. And so little fat to cook with. . . . I forget what I wished to say.

. . . I cook in the damp kitchen. And the village keeps tugging & jogging. . . . My old dislike of the village bites at me. I envy houses alone in the fields . . . — but here I stop. Italy is being crushed. Laval dismissed. No raids lately. . . .”¹⁶

The last few letters and diary entries indicate a mounting accumulation of bitterness in Virginia, less bottled up than before. She dislikes housework, she resents cooking for guests with rationed supplies, she can't write with Leonard around, the garden room where she can write in peace is too cold, her social life is devoid of really interesting people, she sees herself compelled to write to feed John Lehmann as well as Leonard and herself by slaving for the Hogarth Press, and she feels the loss of her identity as a writer.

A psychoanalytic reader will sense Virginia's narcissistic rage. This rage is mostly unconscious and is precariously held in check by an intellectual acceptance of the deprivations of war, by the self-assurance that sacrifices are undoubtedly good for her moral fiber, and by attempts to convince herself that, in any case, her writing counts for nothing in the larger scale of things. The inner fury—a little of which leaks through in the excerpts quoted—is due to the fact that Virginia has been deprived of much that sustained her sense of worth and self-esteem. At the same time she has had to assume the onerous and unaccustomed tasks of cooking and housework. Her emotional economy is in a state of imbalance in that her usual gratifications are in short supply while her frustrations have multiplied tenfold.

Virginia continued these themes on December 19:

1940 is undoubtedly coming to an end. . . . It wd be interesting if I could take today, Thursday, & say exactly how the war changes it. It changes it when I order dinner. Our ration of margarine is so small that I cant think of any pudding save milk pudding. We have no sugar to make sugar puddings: no pastry, unless I buy it ready made. . . . Meat ration diminishes this week. Milk is so cut that we have to consider even the cats saucer. I spent an hour making butter from our skim of cream—a week's taking provides about 1/2 lb. Petrol changes the day too. Nessa can only come here when she goes to Lewes shopping. All prices rise steadily. . . . We dont go hungry or cold. But luxury is nipped off, & hospitality. . . .

We cant use the dining room after dark. . . . We dip into our great jars for pickled eggs & pretend they dont taste differently. We are of course marooned here by bombs in London. . . . Beaverbrook warns us that early in Feb. not only raids but invasion will come. . . . A certain old age feeling [she would be fifty-nine in about a month] sometimes makes me think I cant spend force as I used. And my hand shakes. Otherwise we draw breath as usual. And its a day when every bough is bright green & the sun dazzles me.¹⁷

A letter to Ethel Smyth on the day before Christmas sounds again the note of poverty, but it is almost certainly emotional poverty as well:

I've been so badgered, that as you can see, my hand trembles. Its partly those damned books and things [from the bombed-out London houses]; I cant make a warm hollow for myself; my mind is churned and frothed; and to write one must be a clear vessel. . . .

We're devilish poor Lord, what a bill for rent [because of possessions stored in Rodmell] and removal, and no money coming in, and the taxes! I shall have to write and write—till I die—just as we thought we'd saved enough to live, unwriting, till we died! But its a good thing—being buffeted, not cosseted. . . .¹⁸

Time was, it is said, when the Foreign Office could find in the worst disaster an occasion for self-congratulation; and Virginia was employing the same device to conceal much of her own distress. If she weren't an agnostic, she might claim that suffering was good for her immortal soul.

Then she recorded another loss—felt very much as a personal loss—on New Year's Day 1941:

On Sunday night, as I was reading about the great fire [of 1666], . . . London was burning [again]. 8 of my city churches destroyed, & the Guildhall [and] . . . old Octavia [Wilberforce] came with her market womans basket. Great white bottles of milk & cream. . . . And now its close to cooking time. . . . A psychologist would see that the above was written with someone, & a dog, in the room. To add in private: I think I will be less verbose here perhaps—but what does it matter, writing too many pages. No printer to consider, no public.¹⁹

Again, the defense against anger: O well, it doesn't matter anyway.

On January 9, Virginia wrote to Dr. Wilberforce to refuse an invitation, but thank her for milk and cream:

We cant come to the concert, as Leonard lectures, and theres the Black-out and the chairs to see to. . . .

. . . Nothing we both ever . . . write can outweigh your milk and cream at this bitter and barren moment. . . .

This hand doesn't shake from book hugging, but from rage. Louie being gone to a funeral, I cooked lunch; and the rice floored me. Thats why I rage. . . . So how am I to write *your* book?²⁰

Virginia's rage is again connected with housework. She can cook, of course; but being deprived of servants forces her into an unaccustomed role in addition to its keeping her from writing.

In a letter to Ethel Smyth on January 12, Virginia explained that their poverty was a matter of diminished income, not an encroachment on capital. And she could still write:

I've a fuzz of ideas. What I dread is bottling them to order. Didn't we start the Hogarth Press 25 years ago so as to be quit of editors and publishers? . . . [Later in the letter Virginia looks forward to a visit from Ethel, and explains why Leonard objects to Virginia going to visit her:] Never mind Leonard. He is a good man: in his heart he respects my friends. But as for *my* staying with *you*, for some occult reason, he cries No no No. I think is a bad thing that we're so inseparable. But how, in this world of separation, dare one break it? I'm working rather hard (for me) [revising *Between the Acts*] but whats the good of what I write, I havent the glimpse of an idea. . . . And now I must 1. make soup. 2. make butter. . . .²¹

On January 15, Virginia recorded in her diary that she and Leonard had been in London. She found a jam of traffic at London bridge due to streets being blown up. She went to the Temple by the Underground: ". . . & there wandered in the desolate ruins of my old squares: gashed; dismantled; the old red bricks all white powder. Grey dirt & broken windows; sightseers; all that completeness ravished & demolished. So to Buzzards where, almost for the first time, I decided to eat gluttonously. Turkey & pancakes. How rich, how solid. . . ."²² Considering how frequently Virginia walked through *her* London before the war, she was bound to feel a personal loss in its destruction. This may have been an emotional factor in her decision to eat gluttonously, but one should recall that everyone on short rations is preoccupied with food.

Virginia celebrated her fifty-ninth birthday by reviving her feminism in a somewhat envious letter to Lady Simon:

My dear Shena, . . . I had enough imagination to suppose that you'd be in the thick of it. And I rather envy you. It seems a little futile to boil with rage as I do about twice a week—in these marshes. This morning it was the soldiers saying that women were turning them out of their jobs. . . . This is incoherent, but I'm trying to light a fire, this damp day, of green wood.

No, I dont see whats [to] be done about war. Its manliness; and manliness breeds womanliness—both so hateful. I tried to put this to our local labour party: but was scowled at as a prostitute. They said that if women had as much money as men, they'd enjoy themselves: and then what about the children? So they have more children; more wars; and so on. This is not a contribution to the problem, only a groan. . . .²³

Virginia's birthday was January 25, and the next day she was depressed. Whatever the effect of devastation in London or her feeling devastated by age, the proximate cause of depression was that *Harper's Bazaar* turned down a story she had submitted and a sketch about Ellen Terry. Virginia proposes to deal with her depression by clearing out the kitchen, sending the article to another journal, revising *Between the Acts*, and working on her own memoirs. She added, in a less depressed than sardonic mood: "This trough of despair shall not, I swear, engulf me. The solitude is great. Rodmell life is very small beer. The house is damp. The house is untidy. But there is no alternative . . . There's a lull in the war. . . . But Garvin says [considerably paraphrased from the *Observer*] the greatest struggle is about to come . . . & every man, woman dog cat even weevil must girt their arms, their faith—& so on."²⁴

One week later, Virginia could not recall what she had been depressed about. She wrote to Ethel Smyth, wanting to hear from her. Her own letter, Virginia said, would be more coherent if Leonard were not sawing logs underneath her window. She wrote to thank Vita for a gift of butter, saying it took an hour of shaking a bottle of milk to get a small lump of butter that was promptly eaten by the cat. She mentioned also looking forward to Vita's visit on February 18. Then, on February 11 to 13, Virginia and Leonard went to the Hogarth Press at Letchworth, stopping in Cambridge both going and returning. This was followed by a thank you note to George Rylands on February 19 saying that Vita, Elizabeth Bowen, and Lady Jones had just been visiting at Monk's House, otherwise she would have written before.

Elizabeth Bowen recalled this visit some years later, during a B.B.C. interview, when she was asked about Virginia's reputation for both melancholy and gaiety. Her reply:

I was aware, one could not but be aware, of an undertow often of sadness, of melancholy, of great fear. But the main impression was of a creature of laughter and movement. . . . And her power in conveying enjoyment was extraordinary. And her laughter was entrancing. . . . As it happened, the last day I saw her I was staying at Rodmell and I remember her kneeling back on the floor—and she sat back on her heels and put her head back in a patch of sun, early spring sun. Then she laughed in this consuming, choking, delightful, hooting way. And that is what has remained with me. So I get a curious shock when I see people regarding her entirely as a martyred . . . or definitely tragic sort of person, claimed by the darkness.²⁵

The Rodmell visit took place little more than a month before Virginia's suicide. Apart from whatever was amusing when Elizabeth Bowen was with her, Virginia was stimulated—as she often was—by having an audience, by being the center of attention, and by the self-esteem provided by such a situation. Virginia could be very witty, of course, and she loved encounters with her intellectual peers; but, as she herself knew well, she needed the narcissistic gratifications of her audience, her echo—and visits like that with Elizabeth Bowen were rare and greatly cherished in the wartime desolation of “these marshes.”

THE FINAL MONTH

On February 26, Virginia gave Leonard the manuscript of *Between the Acts*. Superficially, this novel is the story of a village pageant that portrays the history of England, and of the intermission in which scenes of great beauty are intertwined with fleeting pictures of vanity, infidelity, rape, and the horrors of war. The writer and producer of the pageant, Miss La Trobe, is portrayed as a somewhat eccentric visionary who uses mirrors in her play to suggest to the audience that the play has been a reflection of themselves, yet—the wind having blown some of the players' lines away—she cannot be sure that her message has been heard except in fragments.

Between the Acts has been described as one long suicide note, but that hardly squares with Virginia's diary entries expressing her pleasure in writing it. She had difficulty at the end and made several revisions, but there is no evidence of the agony that accompanied *The Years*. A similar notion is that the novel contains hidden messages to Vita; and indeed the pageant might represent a history of Knole, the interlude a commentary on Vita's family, and Miss La Trobe a caricature of Vita herself. Another view is that the interlude refers to the period between the two world wars, with some of the social commentary of *The Years*; but given a much lighter touch. One might also view the book as a bittersweet por-

trait of wartime Rodmell, from the gentry to the village idiot, affected by the War but largely ignorant of its tragic scope, as seen through the eyes of a despairing Miss La Trobe.

Having given the typescript of *Between the Acts* to Leonard on February 26, Virginia does not mention it for a month. She does not use her diary to reassure herself that she has plans for another book, to be called *Anor*, or that she has no reason to fear a vacuum in her writing. She does not record any trepidation as to Leonard's verdict. Indeed, there is no evidence of physical or emotional symptoms from the separation from this "child." One may assume that, at this point, she was not concerned or, possibly, that she was past caring. Equally odd is the fact that there is no indication that Leonard read the manuscript as promptly as he usually did. When, toward the end of March, Virginia became very upset, Leonard was taken by surprise; and then, not very convincingly, he attributed her rapid deterioration to the strain of revising *Between the Acts*.

Between February 26, when Virginia finished her novel and gave the typescript to Leonard, and March 28, when she drowned herself, several perplexing events occurred. One was an atypical entry in her diary on the day of finishing the novel. She and Leonard had been in Brighton the day before, and Virginia had overheard some gossip in the ladies room of the Grill. She wrote:

They were powdering & painting these common little tarts, while I sat, behind the door, p—ing as quietly as I could. [She goes on to record conversations in a bakery, calling the women "scented, shoddy, parasitic" and Brighton itself "a love corner for slugs." Then:] No walks for a long time. People daily. And a rather common churn in my mind. And some blank spaces. Food becomes an obsession. I grudge giving away a spice bun. Curious—age, or the war? Never mind. Adventure. Make solid. But shall I ever write again one of those sentences that give me intense pleasure? There is no echo in Rodmell—only waste air. . . . Mrs. D. discontented. & said, There's no life in these children, comparing them with Londoners, thus repeating my own comment upon that long languid meeting at Chavasses. No life: & so they cling to us. That is my conclusion. We pay the penalty for our rung in society by infernal boredom.²⁶

Twenty-five years later Leonard wrote: "There are ominous signs in this entry. She had just finally finished *Between the Acts* and had given it to me to read. I saw at once now the ominous symptoms and became again very uneasy."²⁷ This is one of Leonard's ambiguous passages. Does he mean that he read Virginia's diary in February 1941 and became alarmed? I have never heard that he was in the habit of doing so. Or, was this retrospective awareness of the ominous symptoms? According to Leonard's own diary he was not deeply concerned about Virginia's

mental health until three weeks later—about March 18—as we shall see.

The cause for alarm—had anyone read these passages in Virginia's diary—was not that she may have had some emotional reactions upon finishing *Between the Acts*, but rather that she was nearly as vulgar as the voices of King Edward VII in her 1904 illness. She was on the verge of expressing, instead of projecting, her contempt for people and circumstances engulfing her as well as the bitterness that was stirred up by the stark deprivations of wartime living, including everything that interfered with her customary writing routine.

A long letter to Ethel Smyth, dated March 1, 1941, is filled with Virginia's feelings of frustration and despair:

Do you know, I have written you three separate letters, and torn each of them up? This is a fact. Partly, they were d—d dull: partly something always interrupted. Ever since we came back from Cambridge—30 hours in train journeys: £6 on hotel bills, all for Leonard to spend two hours at [the Hogarth Press]—I've been in a fret. People keep turning up. . . . You know, if one's only got a half daily maid its difficult, getting food together: and the wine ran out; and the duck was all strings and blue sinews. . . . Of course [Enid] wanted to be alone with Vita; and there I was; and it was pelting wet, the cat had scratched a hole in the chair cover, and a visiting dog had lifted his leg against the table—In short there was the atmosphere of the sordid and squalid.

. . . Do you feel, as I do, when my head's not on this impossible grindstone, that this is the worst stage of the war? I do. I was saying to Leonard, we have no future. He says thats what gives him hope. . . . But Im cross and irritable from the friction of village life. Isn't it foolish? But no sooner have I bound myself to my book, and brewed that rare detachment, than some old lady taps at the door. How is she to grow potatoes or tomatoes? If that were all, I wouldnt mind. But she spends an hour, prodding her stick into the lawn, one thing following another. My theory is that we have to pay the price of detachment by being tethered down. Do doctors widows come to your lawn, just as you are writing—and then what d'you do?²⁸

Virginia's wrath dissipated a bit as she got carried away by her prose, and she even managed some humor; but the underlying currents of anger, frustration, and discontent are clear. She somewhat wryly took note of one function of writing a week later, in her diary. She recalled Henry James' injunction to observe perpetually, and adds:

Observe the oncome of age. Observe greed. Observe my own despon-

gency. By that means it becomes serviceable. Or so I hope. I insist upon spending this time to the best advantage. I will go down with my colors flying. . . . Occupation is essential. And now with some pleasure I find that its seven; & must cook dinner. Haddock & sausage meat. I think it is true that one gains a certain hold on sausage & haddock by writing them down. . . .²⁹

Virginia was more distressed at this time than her letters or diary reveal. Something about the recent exhausting trip to Cambridge and Letchworth certainly annoyed her, and she said she was haunted by the ruins in Oxford Street and Piccadilly. There must have been a sudden change in Virginia because she had already invited T. S. Eliot to come for a visit over the weekend of April 5 and, as indicated above, Leonard wrote later that he was taken by surprise.

But, by March 18, Leonard did note that Virginia was not well. Indeed, she may have attempted suicide on that day because she came in dripping wet from a walk, saying that she had fallen into one of the dikes. Nigel Nicolson dates the first of Virginia's suicide notes to this date. In any case, Leonard may have alerted Vanessa because she came for tea on March 20. Virginia was collected enough, however, to send *Between the Acts* to John Lehmann asking him to decide if it should be published. She was now very dubious, but Leonard definitely favored publication.

When Vanessa got home after tea on the 20th, she wrote the following to Virginia:

You *must* be sensible. Which means you must accept the fact that Leonard and I can judge better than you can. Its true I havent seen very much of you lately, but I have often thought you looked very tired and Im sure that if you let yourself collapse and do nothing you would feel tired, and be only too glad to rest a little. You're in a state when one never admits whats the matter—but you must not go on and get ill just now. What shall we do when we're invaded if you are a helpless invalid—what should I have done all these past 3 years if you hadnt been able to keep me alive and cheerful. You dont know how much I depend on you. . . . Both Leonard and I have always had reputations for sense and honesty so you must believe us. . . . I shall ring up sometime and find out what is happening.³⁰

At about the time of Vanessa's letter, Virginia wrote to Lady Cecil, Lady Tweedsmuir, Vita Sackville-West, and John Lehmann. She gave personal news to the first two, and to the second sent condolences on the death of her husband about a year before. To Vita, Virginia sent a letter that had been misdirected to her

and hoped they would soon see each other again. The letter to Lehmann was about some manuscripts that Virginia read for the Press. She recommended two for publication but complained that her head was very stupid at the moment. She made no mention of her own manuscript.

Virginia responded to Vanessa's letter a day or so after she got it—March 23?—saying: "You cant think how I loved your letter. But I feel that I have gone too far this time to come back again. I am certain now that I am going mad again. It is just as it was the first time, I am always hearing voices, and I know I shant get over it now."³¹ She goes on to say how good Leonard has been to her, asking Vanessa to reassure him how happy she has been with him until the recent horror began; and also how much Vanessa and the children have meant to her. Virginia did not mail this letter, but left it with her suicide letters to Leonard.

Virginia's last diary entry is dated March 24 and suggests a stormy mood and longing for Vanessa: "A curious sea side feeling in the air today. It reminds me of lodgings on a parade at Easter. Everyone leaning against the wind, nipped & silenced. All pulp removed.

"This windy corner. And Nessa is at Brighton, & I am imagining how it wd be if we could infuse souls . . ." ³² Virginia appears to have been more resigned than devastated as a result of Vanessa's "shock treatment"—you mustn't be a bother to us if there's an invasion. But the open acknowledgment of how important Virginia was to her after Julian's death must have more than offset Vanessa's stern admonition. Vanessa seldom expressed loving feelings so openly.

Shortly after Vanessa's letter and Virginia's reply to it, Virginia had an enthusiastic letter from John Lehmann in which he strongly urged publication of *Between in Acts*. In fact he had already announced it to the *New Statesman* for their spring book number. But by now (March 27?) Virginia's doubts had overwhelmed her, and she wrote:

Dear John, I'd decided, before your letter came, that I cant publish that novel as it stands—its too silly and trivial.

What I will do is to revise it, and see if I can pull it together and so publish it in the autumn. If published as it is, it would certainly mean a financial loss; which we dont want. I am sure I am right about this. I neednt say how sorry I am to have troubled you. . . ." ³³

Whatever Virginia's turmoil about her book was, she still envisioned a future; she said that the book would be ready in the autumn. And she invited T. S. Eliot for a visit in April. Why did she wish to do more work on her novel? We well know her perfectionistic standards, and also her need to keep working as a defense against depression. Even though she had still another book, *Anon*, in mind, she must have felt a strong emotional need for the painstaking work of another

revision of *Between the Acts*. Virginia was actually scrubbing floors as an outlet for feelings—standard therapy for a depression—and another revision would be added drudgery. With such a program in mind, she was probably not yet fully committed to suicide even though she may have made one attempt.

Another reason for her to do more work on her novel was her sense of hopelessness about starting something new. She had told Dr. Wilberforce on March 21 that she was unable to write: "I've lost the art. . . . I'm buried down here—I've not the stimulation of seeing people. I can't settle to it."³⁴ And as she told Lehmann, the book must make money.

On March 27, probably the same day Virginia recalled her manuscript from John Lehmann, Leonard persuaded Virginia to see Dr. Wilberforce professionally. Virginia went protesting that there was nothing wrong with her, but what was evidently her greatest concern came out almost immediately when she demanded a promise that Dr. Wilberforce would not prescribe a rest cure. The doctor promised to do nothing that Virginia would not agree was reasonable, and she had already said that they should be able to reassure Leonard. Considering the concerns about income and the need to earn money that Virginia had expressed repeatedly in recent months, one may assume that the cost of the rest cure or round-the-clock nurses was uppermost in her mind. The overt or implied pressure from Vanessa, Leonard, and the doctor to "listen to reason" must have added up, in Virginia's mind, to some form of rest cure, and therefore spending their capital. This prospect, on top of all the other reasons for her despair, may well have persuaded Virginia to commit suicide the next day.

In any case, she wrote her last letter, which is dated March 28:

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.

I know that I shall never get over this: and I am wasting your life. It is this madness. Nothing anyone says can persuade me. You can work, and 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. Everyone knows that.

V.

You will find Roger's letters to the Maurons in the writing table drawer in the Lodge. Will you destroy all my papers.³⁵

Virginia's other suicide letter to Leonard, dated ten days earlier by Nigel Nicolson, is somewhat different in its content. As in her letter to Vanessa, she mentioned hearing voices:

Dearest, I feel certain that I am going mad again: I feel we cant go through another of those terrible times. And I shant recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and cant concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I dont think two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came. I cant fight it any longer, I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I cant even write this properly. I cant read. What I want to say is that I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that—everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I cant go on spoiling your life any longer.

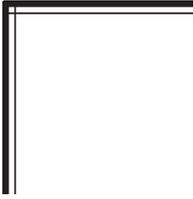
I dont think two people could have been happier than we have been.

V.³⁶

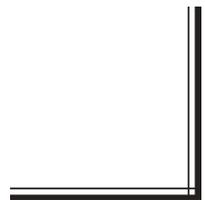
As already indicated, there is a difference of opinion as to the dating of Virginia's suicide notes. Leonard Woolf assumed that all three were written on March 28, the day of Virginia's suicide;³⁷ and that her dating two of them the 18th and the 23rd represented lapses of memory or slips of the pen.³⁸ Quentin Bell agrees with Leonard, and considers the letter just quoted to be the last of the three.³⁹ But Nigel Nicolson believes that Virginia's dating of the letters is correct, and that she did indeed make a suicidal attempt on March 18 when she came home with the story that she had slipped and fallen into a dike.⁴⁰

If Nicolson's view is correct, we are faced with the interesting fact that Virginia wrote six letters (not counting two suicide notes) after her first suicide attempt. There is little in these letters to suggest depression or reasons for suicide except perhaps for her final letter to John Lehmann about *Between the Acts* and the diary entry with its fantasy about a mystical union with Vanessa. Nicolson's dating of the suicide letters supports his view that Virginia's suicide was less psychotic (due to madness) and more the result of a rational decision although based upon fantasy and fear. The following chapter considers a variety of additional reasons for Virginia's suicide.





Chapter Fourteen



VIRGINIA'S SUICIDE AND THE AFTERMATH

By a stretch of the imagination one can attribute Virginia's suicide to the Treaty of Versailles (1919) and the harsh and vindictive terms imposed upon the Germans after World War I. Leonard Woolf knew immediately that there would be another war. This view was widely shared by such informed writers and public figures as Walter Lippman, Maynard Keynes, and Harold Nicolson. Their belief became conviction with the rise of National Socialism in Germany and, above all, the emergence of Hitler as absolute dictator.

During the 1930s, in Britain, suicide was discussed as a rational choice in the event of war. Professor C. E. M. Joad, a noted writer and lecturer on political and philosophical subjects, addressed the topic "Our Duty in the Next War" in early October 1936. *His* duty, he said, would be to put his head into the oven and turn on the gas. Such talk among intellectuals increased as Hitler's conquests multiplied and precipitated war.

When World War II broke out in September 1939, and especially after the fall of France in 1940, an invasion of Britain seemed a certainty. As we have seen, the Woolfs, the Bells, and others of their family and friends lived just a few miles from Newhaven—a certain invasion port. Virginia and Leonard felt especially vulnerable because the latter was a Jew. They had gasoline in their garage for use in "shutting the doors," turning on the motor, and committing suicide together. John Lehmann, their colleague at the Hogarth Press, had a supply of morphine; and Adrian Stephen, Virginia's brother, offered the Woolfs a prescription for morphine, indicating that he and Karin (both psychoanalysts) intended to commit suicide if the Nazis invaded England. Vita and Harold Nicolson had similar plans, Vita preferring potassium cyanide; but having to settle for something else.¹

Virginia's mood during the first part of the war was not depressed. While sharing concerns about the dangers of invasion, she was not unduly alarmed—as her diary and letters indicate—by the bombers and fighter planes overhead during much of 1940. Shortly before her suicide, Virginia wrote to Lady Cecil that this war is better than the last, and much better than the last five years of peace. She made it clear that the tensions of waiting bothered her, the uncertainty. Standing in a dentist's waiting room, she said, is what she hates. Virginia's feelings were those of common experience in that the anxieties of not knowing what will happen reinforce internal tensions whereas the actual experience of external crisis is often (unconsciously) a welcome diversion from the pressures within. Even so, the invasion threat recurred from time to time, and therefore the possibility of a joint suicide persisted in Virginia's and Leonard's minds.

QUIET SUFFOCATION

During the fifteen years that the Woolfs lived at 52 Tavistock Square, the pattern of their lives was fairly stable. About this same period, they bought and gradually improved Monk's House, Rodmell, where they spent weekends as well as longer holidays in good weather, and all of the months of August and September. From a primitive place lacking indoor toilets, hot water, gas, and electricity, they shaped it to their needs, adding a large bedroom for Virginia and, in the garden, her writing room—the lodge or garden-hut. During the years before World War II, both Virginia and Leonard wrote from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. After lunch they worked at the Hogarth Press, but Virginia frequently took long walks in London or—from Monk's House—through the countryside near Rodmell. They might walk together around Tavistock Square or, at Monk's House, play bowls (often with guests). Evenings in London were devoted to a very active social life, including ballet, opera, and the theater, whereas at Monk's House they might read, listen to music, or converse with their guests. After their "exile" at Monk's House due to the war, Leonard—if not at a meeting—might play chess with a guest while Virginia was busy with needlework or rug-making.

The dislocation of the Woolfs' lives began shortly before the war when the noise and dust of heavy construction next to 52 Tavistock Square forced them to find new quarters at 37 Mecklenburgh Square. But they unwittingly traded great inconvenience for the hazards of war as the Battle of Britain hit London a year later. By early September 1940, both the Tavistock Square and Mecklenburgh Square homes were destroyed and Virginia had no room of her own in London.

Virginia convinced herself that country living was all for the best. She wished that all of her property in London had been destroyed. She had underfoot much of her father's library as well as her own, rescued from the bombed out London homes; and other possessions were stored in Rodmell. She even congratulated herself on not having live-in help. Even so, she could become involved in her writing and forget to buy fish for dinner; and so have to improvise macaroni. And, as we saw in the previous chapter, Virginia's idealized view of village life did not survive the first winter.

Apart from disillusionment with life at Monk's House, Virginia suffered a deep sense of loss with the destruction of *her* London, the London of her long walks as well as of her homes. She missed the sounding board—the echo—of easy access to her friends, and the stimulation of dinners, parties, concerts, and visits to the London Library or the British Museum as well as the walks that provided her with fresh ideas and local color for her books.

Even her country life was curtailed. Visits to relatives and friends, especially to Charleston, that she enjoyed normally were severely restricted by the rationing of gasoline, the blackouts, shortages of food, and a very severe winter. As time wore

on, Virginia became increasingly irritated when she lost at bowls, and one suspects that this was an outlet for pent-up fury about all of the deprivations in her life.

To have admitted her disenchantment with the deprivations of living at Monk's House was virtually impossible. Virginia knew as well as anyone that "there's a war on." She was reared—by her mother at least—in the stiff-upper-lip tradition. She knew that she must "carry on." But her feelings were at odds with her reasonable self. She resented the damp and the cold. She missed conversations with intellectual peers. The Woolfs' social position dictated community involvement that interfered with her reading and writing, and was a terrible bore besides. Restrictions on fuel made Leonard a bother because they must share the same room when she wanted to think or write, and this was close to intolerable. Beyond that he had monthly Labour Party meetings at Monk's House, and there were other unwelcome intrusions and distractions.

As we have seen in Virginia's diary and letters, she felt deprived as a writer. There was no echo, she said; no meaningful communication at her level of discourse. To make matters worse, correspondence was difficult with the postal service disrupted; and publication schedules were uncertain. Despite her acute sensitivity, Virginia needed commentary, even criticism; she could not thrive in an intellectual vacuum. Taken altogether, wartime living at Rodmell added up to an overwhelming burden of separations, losses, deprivations, intrusions, and unaccustomed household responsibilities. Her own written records reveal some of her bitterness and despair, but underneath these were (largely unconscious) depression and fury. Only near the end could she write of her rage.

THE SUICIDE AND ITS AFTERMATH

On the morning of March 28, 1941 Leonard saw Virginia writing as usual in the garden Lodge, but he became alarmed when she did not appear for lunch. Virginia must have left about 11:30 that morning, first putting suicide notes to Vanessa and Leonard on the mantelpiece in the sitting room and leaving the third on her writing block in the Lodge. Nigel Nicolson is of the opinion that the letter dated March 18 is the one Virginia left in an envelope on the mantelpiece, and that the one on the writing pad was the second and final one written, but not dated, shortly before her suicide.²

Virginia had only a half-mile walk to the River Ouse. There she filled her coat pocket with a very large stone and plunged into the water. When Leonard reached the place, the only trace of Virginia was her walking stick. More than three weeks later, on April 18, her body was found downstream and was subsequently cremated, with only Leonard present, on April 21. Her ashes were buried under a giant elm outside the garden of Monk's House and her epitaph—the final words of *The Waves*—reads: "Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyield-

ing, O Death!”

Leonard’s account of this last day is in his autobiography.³ Later on, he refers to the horrible days between Virginia’s disappearance and the inquest—“the effect of a blow both upon the head and the heart.”⁴ He explains the necessity of his remaining at Rodmell and of the “immemorial fatalism of the Jew” in dealing with the ravages of Fate. Leonard found solutions for his grief in his stoicism and in his work.

One must recall that the final volume of Leonard’s autobiography appeared in 1969, shortly before his death at the age of eighty-nine. He did not explain why he alone attended the cremation of Virginia’s body. One wonders why he made no mention of other reactions to Virginia’s death—in the family, among their friends, or in obituaries. We know from Frances Spalding’s biography of Vanessa Bell that Clive, Duncan, and Quentin expected Vanessa to collapse as she had four years earlier when Julian died in Spain. Instead, a quiet settled over Charleston as everyone mourned silently; and, after that, Vanessa continued to paint and to work in the garden. She had seen Leonard soon after Virginia disappeared, and she continued to be concerned about him. When John Lehmann came to see Leonard, the two of them went over to Charleston. Lehmann recalled later that he found Vanessa mostly silent, and the entire atmosphere of Charleston gave him the impression of visiting ghosts.

Two weeks after Virginia disappeared, but before her body was found, Leonard met John Lehmann for lunch in London. Lehmann was moved by Leonard’s fortitude in discussing what had happened and the inevitable changes Virginia’s death would make in his own life and in their future as publishers. Leonard planned to undertake the enormous task of dealing with Virginia’s unpublished work, her diary, and numerous other manuscripts. He would work mostly at Monk’s House while Lehmann would manage the Press in London and Letchworth—always, of course, in consultation with Leonard.

Lehmann continued:

We talked a little about her illness, and I found that he confirmed the more or less complete conviction that I had come to myself, that the fundamental cause of the breakdown had not been the war, but the strain she had put the delicate mechanism of her mind and imagination under in bringing her new novel to a conclusion, a strain that had so nearly brought a return of madness when she was finishing *The Waves* and *The Years*. This time she had not believed she could avoid it, as her farewell letter, which Leonard told me about but did not show me, made clear.⁵

Three days after Virginia disappeared, Vita Sackville-West had letters from

Vanessa and Leonard. She replied immediately and wrote also to Harold Nicolson, her husband:

Leonard came . . . to find a note saying that she was going to commit suicide. . . . He says that she has not been well for the last few weeks and was terrified of going mad again. He says, "It was, I suppose, the strain of the war and finishing her book [*Between the Acts*]" and she could not rest or eat.

Why, oh why, did he leave her alone, knowing all this? He must be reproaching himself terribly, poor man. . . .

I simply can't take it in—that lovely mind, that lovely spirit. And she seemed so well when I last saw her [mid-February], and I had a joky letter from her only a couple of weeks ago [actually written six days before the suicide].

She must have been quite out of her mind or she would never have brought such sorrow and horror on Leonard and Vanessa.

Vanessa has seen him and says he was amazingly self-controlled and calm, but insisted on being left alone. . . . I do not see him living without her.⁶

Vita wrote a reminiscence of Virginia in *Horizon* in May 1941. According to her biographer, Vita dwelt only on the side of Virginia that was delightful, bringing out her sense of fun and the "rollicking enjoyment she got out of easy things" in contrast to the public image of Bloomsbury as cold and languid. She wrote also of the "mental excitement" that was the keynote of Virginia's life.⁷

WHY DID VIRGINIA COMMIT SUICIDE?

Human behavior always has multiple causes, and this is true for individual decisions, actions, fantasies, dreams, or anything in which the mind is involved. Aristotle listed a series of causes from the remote to the proximate, and Freud, of course, added unconscious components affecting behavior. One may therefore list what appear to be important determinants of Virginia's suicide, but without claiming to know the relative importance of any one of them.

Leonard and others, as we have seen, frequently discussed suicide as a rational option if the expected Nazi invasion occurred. One doesn't know how much Leonard's state of mind influenced Virginia, but he was clearly distraught because of events. Writing many years later in his autobiography, he said this about the summer of 1939: "With my mother's death we reached the beginning of the second world war. . . . [The last months of peace] were the most terrible months of my life, for, helplessly and hopelessly, one watched the inevitable approach of

war. One of the most horrible things at that time was to listen on the wireless to the speeches of Hitler, the savage and insane ravings of a vindictive underdog who suddenly saw himself to be all-powerful.”⁸ The force of Leonard’s feeling is paralleled to some extent in Virginia’s last letter to Lady Cecil, saying that the war is “ever so much better than the last 5 years of peace.”⁹ This may point directly to Leonard’s agitation, and that of others, throughout the period of Hitler’s rise.

Another version of Leonard’s agony is related to the remaining ten months of Virginia’s life:

The umbilical cord which had bound *Roger Fry: A Biography* to Virginia’s brain for two years was, as I said, finally cut when she returned the proofs to the printers on May 13, 1940; 319 days later on March 28, 1941, she committed suicide by drowning herself in the River Ouse. Those 319 days of headlong and yet slow-moving catastrophe were the most terrible and agonizing days of my life. The world of my private life and of English history and of the bricks and mortar of London disintegrated. . . .

Virginia’s loss of control over her mind, the depression and despair which ended in her death, began only a month or two before her suicide. Though the strains and stresses of life in London and Sussex between April 1940 and January 1941 were for her, as for everyone living in that tormented area, terrific, she was happier for the most part and her mind much more tranquil than usually.¹⁰

These are misleading and confusing paragraphs. They contain Leonard’s second statement of the “most terrible” months of his life. The first sentence appears to suggest a direct connection between cutting the umbilical cord to *Roger Fry: A Biography* and Virginia’s suicide. All of the evidence, including the second paragraph of Leonard’s comments, points away from such a connection. The two quotations are a better gauge of Leonard’s depression and despair than they are of Virginia’s.

Leonard’s agony was justified, to be sure; and it became acute with the invasion threats. His being Jewish made him vulnerable, of course; but he was not alone in making plans for suicide with his wife. His preoccupation with the war and related matters, not Virginia’s health, were Leonard’s principal concerns through 1940. All the same, Leonard’s “terrible and agonizing days,” including the talk of suicide, may have had a cumulative impact upon Virginia’s emotional stability.

What, then, about cutting the umbilical cord to *Between the Acts*? The actual writing presented few problems, and when the novel was finished on November 23, 1940, Virginia was able to say that she had enjoyed writing almost every page. On December 24, she complained of being word-drugged from copying her manuscript, and on January 9, 1941, there is only a passing reference to the copy-

ing progressing. She completed the work and gave the typescript to Leonard on February 26, as we have seen; and there is nothing more until she gave the book to John Lehmann for his decision on whether to publish it. We have already discussed what may have happened at this point and the results are inconclusive. The problem seems to have been with letting go of the manuscript and with Virginia's feeling that it should be improved; but I find no evidence that it was the intensity of writing the book or a very difficult last lap that caused her suicide.

The crisis with *Between the Acts* came only a few days before Virginia committed suicide. By this time, according to her letter to Vanessa and one of the two to Leonard, she was hearing voices. This puts the upset over her typescript into a different context than that of any other of her books. In addition to that, she wrote to Vanessa that "it is just as it was the first time, I am always hearing voices";¹¹ and by this she clearly refers to the 1904 episode of madness. At that time, of course, she had not just written a book or sent one off to the publishers. And so, whatever else entered into Virginia's decision to recall her typescript from John Lehmann, it included her concern about hallucinations the like of which she had apparently not had for more than thirty-five years. Even if there were a clear pattern of Virginia's reactions to completing her books, it would be difficult to fit this episode into it.

This is not to say that "that first time" was the only time that Virginia heard voices. She was overheard talking to her mother at the outset of the 1915 illness, and she may have been hallucinating then. The important point, perhaps, is that hearing voices was a reminder of the most disturbed periods of her life and of the violence of feeling that was a part of them. The voices were doubtless a sign that Virginia's defenses were crumbling and that her repressed fury—some of which she already felt—was at the point of another violent eruption.

Virginia's fear of another episode of madness was reinforced, almost certainly, by a fear of its expense. Her letters and diary during 1940 indicated concerns about money, as we have seen; and she was disgusted, to say the least, that the two-hour visit to the Hogarth Press in February cost £6 in hotel expenses. Added to this was her anger that she would be compelled to write to support the Press; and her intense anxiety, when examined by Dr. Wilberforce just before the suicide, that the doctor would prescribe the rest cure. Past illnesses had always included up to four nurses in a home setting or professional rest home care. We described earlier why Virginia had reason to fear the rest cure itself, but by now thoughts of the expense could only have intensified her emotional turmoil. We should recall that Vanessa had urged Virginia to be sensible so that she would not be a liability if an invasion happened; but to Virginia "being sensible" smacked of the rest cure and "being a liability" meant the cost. One finds it easy, in these circumstances, to recall Septimus Smith, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, who committed suicide just before he was to be taken away to a mental hospital for a "complete rest."

In adding up the proximate causes of Virginia's suicide, one must not ignore the remote. The childhood losses of her mother and Stella, for example, were to some extent repeated by the deaths of friends or sons of friends in the war, and emotionally by the enforced remoteness of Vanessa, Vita, and many friends. Her mother's compulsive nursing of people outside the home and then her death, coupled with her father's frantic worries and preoccupation with his writing, left Virginia a very lonely child, especially during adolescence, when her brothers and Vanessa were away. As we know, Virginia had coped with the emotional deprivations of childhood by becoming witty, charming, and brilliant. She formed many friends, and she became famous. She achieved a highly successful, if delicate, balance during her years at 52 Tavistock Square where she had leisure for writing, physical as well as mental work for the Press, time for long walks throughout her beloved London, and a highly gratifying, though often overwhelming, social life. As we have seen, all of this was wiped out by the war, and she lost not only the physical comforts she had enjoyed for fifteen years or more, but also—and more importantly—the emotional supports for her self-esteem and well-being generally—her audience, her echo as she put it. In a sense, therefore, life at Monk's House with the deprivations imposed by the war reduced her to the situation of her early adolescence—with Leonard in the role of busy, worrying, sometimes testy father frequently preoccupied with death.

All of the deprivations listed add up to a multitude of frustrations, and these, in turn, to inner fury. But Virginia knew intellectually that it was unreasonable of her to get angry or to complain; and she knew intellectually that Leonard's frustrations were as great as hers. The result, then, was inevitably that these deeper feelings went largely unexpressed or turned to despair, hopelessness, and depression. But when these states of feeling were insufficient to deal with Virginia's internal conflicts and tensions, the hallucinations appeared. These symptoms, as we know from her letter to Vanessa, reminded her of her previous episodes of madness; and I think, at some level, caused her to fear that her internal fury would erupt into verbal and physical violence as it had before.

The question of whether Virginia's suicide was a rational or highly irrational act must remain moot. Given her fears for her future as a writer and for the expense of another illness, there is a rational element. Her protestations of love for Leonard and her wish to set him free for his work are, I suspect, partial truths. She resented his work when it took him away from her and, even more, when he brought his meetings into the home. She must also have resented Vanessa's emotional withdrawal and relative isolation at Charleston even though the rationing of gasoline was no fault of Vanessa's. The constriction and deprivation of Virginia's life could only be blamed on the war, but they were perhaps the most lethal of all. There may well have been conscious (and rational) as well as unconscious (and irrational) elements in Virginia's suicide.

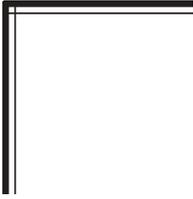
A rule of thumb in dynamic psychiatry has it that a suicide is an unconscious murder. Vita felt that Virginia must have been deranged to bring such suffering to Leonard and Vanessa, but an unconscious part of Virginia may have wanted very much to hurt them. The repressed child in Virginia may—quite unreasonably—have held them responsible for their desertion of her, as she felt it; and for the loss of everything that 52 Tavistock Square stood for in the way of emotional support and supplies for her self-esteem.

Self-destructive behavior aimed at hurting others is not uncommon. A patient in analysis brought up the subject of her smoking which, she said, she knew was harmful. This had not been an issue in her analysis, and she was asked why she had a need to smoke. One of her first responses was that she smoked most in social situations and that she had a need to isolate herself by making a kind of cocoon of smoke. If she was magically hidden, she felt, she could not be scrutinized and judged by other people. Without the analyst's help, she added later, her self-destructive behavior might be to destroy the internalized critical and demanding mother of her childhood. She was, in fact, on good terms with her parents in her current life, but in analysis she dealt with the internal images of them from childhood, and these archaic parental figures got mixed reviews in her analytic material.

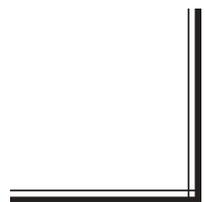
The internal objects that are destroyed by suicide include everyone, past and present, who have been perceived as diminishing, disappointing, frustrating, rejecting, or leaving the hungry, lonely, or otherwise needy self. The fact that they died, married and moved away, or had insufficient gasoline for travel makes no emotional difference to a child or to the child who lives on in an adult. And so a suicide may be a sort of temper tantrum, a self-destructive vengeful act. The alternative, for Virginia, perhaps, was a psychotic explosion of her pent-up—mostly unconscious—rage against whatever scapegoats were at hand, Leonard and Vanessa in particular.

Most readers will find more convincing Winnicott's concept of the "empty depression" and Virginia's suicide as a way of rescuing herself from overwhelming existential pain and despair. With the loss of a room of her own due to shortages of fuel, of her audience and her echo, overburdened with unaccustomed housework and cooking, too much cooped up with Leonard and his meetings at Monk's House, feeling keenly the destruction of *her* London and the continuing threat of a Nazi invasion, Virginia may have felt all of the old feelings of abandonment coupled with a sense of being trapped in her current isolation and denied most of the accustomed supports for her sense of worth, self-esteem, and well-being.

From this perspective, Virginia's suicide was a way of taking care of herself. She rescued herself from her pain and despair. Technically, she was already psychotic when her voices recurred. These, plus the threat of another rest cure, probably turned the tide for her. But how much greater our understanding might have been, were it possible to know what the voices were saying to her!



Chapter Fifteen



NOTES ON DIAGNOSIS

If Virginia Woolf had not already been given a variety of diagnoses, we might have ignored this subject. The notion of diagnostic labels is highly offensive to those who regard them as reductionistic; as if to say, for example, that Winston Churchill was an oral character, and that suffices to explain him. The cherubic face, glass of brandy, Havana cigars, and depressive episodes bespeak oral traits in his personality; but that is a partial truth at best. And the diagnosis of one's distinctive character or personality must be distinguished from a diagnosis of depression if such an episode occurs. The total person is most emphatically much more than the sum of such diagnoses.

So it must be with Virginia Woolf. I am not attempting a psychobiography, and I must add that I cannot, with any certainty, make a diagnosis if only because there is great controversy about these labels. A rule of many psychoanalysts is that the diagnosis is made at the end of an analysis; not before. How then can I pigeonhole Virginia Woolf?

What I shall do is to discuss some of the pros and cons of diagnoses that have been made, and suggest alternatives. I have treated Virginia's illnesses as discrete entities rather than episodes in a lifelong disease. Each illness seems to me to have had quite distinct precipitating causes except for that of 1904 which appears to have been only partly due to her father's death. She was free of major symptoms for almost three months, but became confused and perhaps delusional the day after returning to 22 Hyde Park Gate. Apart from the renewed, vivid reminders of her father's terminal illness and death, I have assumed that Virginia's internal ambivalence and her intense conflicts about Vanessa's evident enjoyment of her new freedom could be expressed only in a psychotic break. Vanessa was, in any case, the principal target of her fury. I have suggested also that the toxic effects of scarlet fever, which soon developed, may have brought on another episode of rheumatic fever and in turn been an important factor in Virginia's delusions and hallucinations.

HEREDITARY ILLNESS?

There is no way of proving whether or not Virginia had a hereditary predisposition to mental illness or, if she did, how quantitatively significant it was. I described in Chapter 1 the depressions or threatened "nervous breakdowns" of Leslie Stephen and his forebears as probably derived from the Victorian conscience and strivings for conspicuous success. The psychosis of Leslie's nephew, J. K. Stephen, was almost certainly due to organic brain damage.

Lord Annan reports that Thoby, Virginia's brother, developed a delirium

while recovering from influenza and attempted to throw himself out of a window.¹ Leslie, in his *Mausoleum Book*, says that Thoby “took to sleepwalking in an alarming way after an attack of influenza.”² Once again, a delirium (or sleepwalking) associated with a high fever or a toxic condition of the bloodstream may suggest an underlying emotional instability (Thoby being a young schoolboy at the time), but cannot be taken as proof of an inherited strain.

All in all it seems wise not to place too much emphasis on genetic factors in the illnesses of the Stephen family. If depressive reactions were not in the culture, they were at least common in the lives of those with the highest standards and levels of aspiration. Childrearing practices of affluent families tended to create all sorts of neurotic problems by fostering intellectual development at the expense of emotional maturity, as numerous biographies bear witness. And, as we have emphasized, important recent or immediate causal factors—environmental, organic, and emotional—contributed significantly to illnesses too easily attributed to inheritance.

MANIC-DEPRESSIVE?

Although Virginia’s Harley Street doctors regarded her as neurasthenic—physically as much as mentally ill—this may have been a euphemism. She came to be considered manic-depressive, though Leonard questioned this diagnosis. Alix Strachey, a non-medical psychoanalyst who never saw Virginia when she was ill, accepted the manic-depressive label as did her husband, James. Alix has a good discussion about whether Virginia would have benefited from a psychoanalysis, but concludes that it was contraindicated because it might have been too disruptive to her fragile personality.³ In this she was correct considering the limitations of psychoanalysis in the 1920s and 1930s. A number of subsequent writers have accepted the diagnosis of manic-depressive or manic-depression for Virginia.

Dr. Miyeko Kamiya made a most searching psychiatric study of Virginia utilizing the data available twenty years ago, “Virginia Woolf: An Outline of a Study on Her Personality, Illness, and Work.”⁴ She notes that Virginia had schizophrenic delusions and hallucinations as well as depressions. Dr. Kamiya made the diagnosis of “atypical psychosis.”

The trouble with these and other diagnoses is that they may be dated. The labels may not mean the same today as they did forty or eighty years ago. Manic-depressive patients seen in psychiatric clinics, for example, may have been diagnosed previously as psychoneurotic, only sometimes to end up in state mental hospitals as chronic schizophrenics. Virginia, fortunately, was never certified (committed), and she recovered rather than regressing to some chronic mental state.

As recently as 1969, a member of the psychiatric faculty of the Harvard University Medical School wrote: “The diagnosis of manic-depressive psychosis

is based on the following: (1) a distinct and marked phasic disturbance of affect, in which thinking is consonant with mood; (2) no intellectual or personality deterioration; (3) well-defined attacks; (4) a history of manic-depressive illness in family members; and (5) precipitating psychologic factors inconspicuous or insufficient to account for degree of illness."⁵

Some psychiatrists today believe that severe emotional traumata (such as Virginia had) can trigger a manic or depressive attack, but they would establish the diagnosis by whether the symptoms could be controlled by lithium—a test unknown to Virginia's doctors. Other psychiatrists hold that a manic patient has greatly intensified sexual drives, a condition never, to my knowledge, attributed to Virginia. Finally, it is improbable that a manic-depressive patient could go twenty-five years, as Virginia did, without periods of incapacitating manic excitement or profound depression.

My personal belief is that Virginia did not have a true manic-depressive (or bipolar) disorder. She was frequently depressed, to be sure, but the majority of her depressions were not of psychotic degree. Her manic periods are not well described, except as outbursts of fury. Great anger, overcoming repression and vented directly on its objects, is not denoted by "mania," nor are hallucinations. In any event, before one perpetuates the traditional assumption that Virginia was manic-depressive (or had "manic-depression"), he should consult the definitive work by Dr. Stanley W. Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times*.⁶ His chapters, "Melancholia and Depression in the Twentieth Century" and "The Various Relationships of Mania and Melancholia," are especially relevant. Dr. Jackson's work indicates that recent research has only intensified conflicting views as to the etiological and even descriptive diagnoses of these conditions.

REACTIVE PSYCHOSIS?

As Dr. Jackson's book makes convincingly clear, the various mental afflictions have at times been attributed to mysterious causes, and at other times have been given scientific explanations. Over the centuries they have been regarded as divine curses (or favors), plagues, diseases, illnesses, disorders, and reactions. In the 1950s, for example, Schizoaffective Reaction, Psychotic Type, might have been an acceptable diagnosis for Virginia's most striking episodes of "madness." Such a diagnosis is not up-to-date. The tendency now is to refine the descriptive aspects of mental conditions and to avoid questions of what may have caused them, i. e., the dynamics of reactive illnesses. My purpose, however, has been precisely to focus on the current precipitating factors in Virginia's episodes of "madness" and to leave unanswered the possibility of inherited or other endogenous influences. A "reactive" approach to diagnosis demarcates a relatively short, though severe,

mental illness from Virginia's usual personality, however neurotic and fraught with other illnesses that may have been. Such an approach also highlights the context in which the "madnesses" occurred and what must have been their significant proximate causes.

Virginia's early adolescent turmoil defies any simple classification. It was largely reactive, certainly: to her mother's death, to her father's exaggerated expressions of grief, and to the tumultuous family life around her. One must almost certainly add the endocrinological and emotional vicissitudes of puberty plus rheumatic fever with elevated temperature, joint pains, tachycardia, and "fidgets"—probably chorea. The major mental illnesses of 1904, 1913, and 1915 were, in my view, largely reactive psychotic episodes.

Virginia's condition before her suicide is perplexing. With very few exceptions, her letters and diary are rational, although anger shows through, but she was "hearing voices," and so was technically psychotic. She may have suffered the tension of completing a book, but she seems even more upset by the destruction of *her* London, the precarious state of the Hogarth Press, loss of her emotional support systems (frequent intercourse with family and friends most of all), progressively lower self-confidence and self-esteem, and mounting inner fury at the impositions and deprivations of wartime living. Given this context, Virginia's suicide seems to have resulted in part from a reactive depression and in part from a calculated decision to put an end to her pain.

NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY?

In speaking of Virginia's narcissistic needs and her liability to narcissistic injuries, one must remember that "narcissistic" is not a dirty word. Far from implying an excessive love of self, the term refers rather to the consequences of deficits in being loved and made to feel emotionally secure during the crucial years of personality development. I have characterized Virginia's childhood as sadly lacking in sustained, consistent, predictable, and openly warm and loving relationships with parents or nurses. This kind of childhood results in impaired self-confidence and low self-esteem, with the consequently intense need for reassurance from others that one is valued, loved, and wanted. This sets the stage for narcissistic needs, narcissistic fragility, and vulnerability to narcissistic injury. In other words, one is more sensitive than most people to rejections, loss of others' approval and absence of emotional support, and much too easily devastated by life's invidious comparisons. This aspect of Virginia's personality often caused Leonard and others to be uncommonly protective of her feelings.

Such a low opinion of oneself is not just the product of one's early childhood environment. One's early fantasy life may create, or greatly reinforce, feelings of inferiority, unworthiness, shame, or guilt. Envy and hatred of siblings,

bitterness at life's frustrations, and shame or guilt over bed-wetting, soiling, or sexual play with oneself or others, all form a poor self-image with or without reinforcement by grownups. A warm, reassuring, and consistent parental environment—always accepting the child while setting appropriate limits to his behavior—is necessary to sustain and guide a person through the vicissitudes of childhood and adolescence into a reasonably secure and self-confident adulthood.

Years ago a book entitled *Be Glad You're Neurotic* appeared. Its message was that most intelligent and creative people are neurotic and that their sensitivity and perceptiveness stem partly from their inner vulnerability and conflicts. In any event, most of us—functioning as we do mostly within “normal limits”—can be called more or less schizoid, obsessional, compulsive, oral, anal, phallic, or whatever. In this way of speaking, I consider Virginia to have had a predominately narcissistic personality, but she was certainly also a compulsive (driven) worker. When she decompensated, because of the various traumatic circumstances that I have described, then she regressed to primitive expressions of narcissism in her several mixed psychotic reactions. So, although there are dynamic connections between Virginia's normal functioning and her episodes of “madness,” it took unusual deprivation of narcissistic supports or severe blows to her self-esteem for her to fall into an overt mental illness. This is quite different from having a life-long psychosis of endogenous origins as is implicit in such a diagnosis as manic-depressive psychosis.

The category of narcissistic personalities has been transposed by some writers into that of disorders of the self. One aspect of early childhood development is the need for what are called self-objects; that is, for others or qualities of others to be seen by the child as a part of himself. The essence of this point of view is stated by Ernest S. Wolf, M. D. In all of us, he says, there was:

a psychic state of childhood when a parent was a self-object whose presence and responsiveness allowed the child to feel good with beneficial effects on further psychological development. The child's needs are for two kinds of parental self-objects, a mirroring self-object and an idealized self-object. The mirroring self-object confirms the child's valued self by an empathic responsiveness, such as a mother's warmly glowing look of appreciation even of the child's foibles. The idealized self-object is the parent who is available as a source of strength and values that the child can make his own by a psychological merger; a son or daughter, for example, may absorb an admired parent's moral strength by incorporating the admired values and ideals into his or her own character. Failure of the self-object during psychological development results in incompletely structured selves that remain even as adults grossly dependent on outside supplies of narcissistic gratification from self-objects in their environ-

ment. These fragile selves fragment when the self-object is unavailable or unresponsive. Among resulting symptoms, poor self-esteem regulation—that is, oscillations between depression and grandiosity—anxiety, hypochondriasis, sexual perversions, delinquency, and addiction are most prominent.⁷

Dr. Wolf is not writing an abstract scientific paper. The quoted passages, in fact, apply to his discussion of Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus Smith as examples of fragile selves struggling to avoid emotional disintegration. In another elegant paper, Dr. Wolf discusses Virginia's portrayal of her parents, and indirectly herself, in *To the Lighthouse*. In the language of disorders of the self, he delineates Mrs. Ramsey's narcissistic problems, particularly her tendency to use her children and others around her to bolster her self-esteem and to prevent depression. Dr. Wolf also discusses Virginia's limited self-analysis in the writing of *To the Lighthouse*.⁸

From the point of view of self psychology, one may better understand Virginia's relationships with many of the significant persons in her life—Violet Dickinson, Leonard, Vita, Ethel Smyth, and above all Vanessa. Just before she committed suicide, Virginia had the fantasy of a mystical union with Vanessa—a kind of self-object relationship that she seldom enjoyed as a child. And as we noted repeatedly in the previous chapter, Virginia lamented the loss of her mirroring self-objects due to the War—no audience, she said; no echo.

Virginia certainly had her Oedipal triangle as indicated when she shocked Vanessa by expressing her preference for her father, but there is little evidence of anxiety or guilt about it. Virginia might easily have taken her severe case of whooping cough as a punishment for preferring her father, but it is more likely that guilt and shame were attached to the early sexual molestation by Gerald. She also developed conflicted identifications with her father and her mother, taking on the inhibitions and compulsive work habits of both, but also their capacity for fanciful and playful moments.

The most meaningful diagnosis of Virginia's personality and her episodes of madness derives from the vicissitudes of her early childhood and her vulnerability to narcissistic injury. One sees her hunger for emotional responses from those around her; her reaching out for approval, praise, and love; her low self-esteem; and her compulsive striving for perfection because of the unconscious assumption that one must be perfect to satisfy those who can bestow acceptance and love. These traits were formed in a home with parents who themselves were easily depressed, had low self-esteem, used their children and others for emotional support and reassurance, and who, in their search for other self-objects, drove themselves to exhaustion in writing (in Leslie's case) and in good works outside the home (in Julia's). As noted before, no children's nurse or governess of the Stephen household is mentioned as having been a warm and loving

parent-substitute for any significant period of time during Virginia's infancy and early childhood.

All of Virginia's childhood difficulties, including especially those of self-image and self-worth, were greatly accentuated by Julia's death when Virginia was thirteen, her father's pathological, self-seeking mourning, his further disgraceful behavior with Stella's engagement to be married, and then the additional stunning loss for Virginia at the age of fifteen when Stella died. Apart from the traumatic impact of these deaths, they arrested Virginia's ego development in the sphere of her feminine identifications; deprived her of the important adolescent experience of separation and individuation from her mother, growing gradually into more of a peer relationship with her; and, because of Leslie's grotesque demands for attention and emotional support, she was denied any possibility of normal mourning and working through all of the confused and conflicted emotional reactions to these losses.

The following recapitulates Virginia's early childhood development in the language of self psychology in order to account for her life-long narcissistic vulnerability and fragility: The self-object is experienced psychologically as an extension or part of the self, and it performs a function for the individual that he cannot provide for himself. This can be an idealizing function such as soothing, comforting, or strengthening. Again, it can be a mirroring function such as validating, confirming, or acknowledging. From the earliest self-objects (if adequate) come a sense of identity, emotional security, and authenticity. The need for self-objects persists throughout life, but the quality of one's relationships with self-objects changes with maturation.

When parents or their surrogates provide the young child with adequate self-object functions, the child will gradually become able to provide them for himself. As a result, when later adult self-objects fail him, an individual will have sufficient inner resources to tide him over until a broken tie to a self-object can be repaired or a new relationship established.

When a child, as in Virginia's case, is deprived of sustained and reliable self-object relationships, there occur a variety of arrested developments. Virginia was precocious intellectually, to be sure; but she grew into adult life emotionally childlike and insecure. She continued to depend upon others for validation of her worth and acknowledgment of her personal authenticity. Whenever her adult self-objects failed her, she became depressed or, as on a few occasions, she dissolved into madness. Such disruptions were the product both of her developmental vulnerability and, as in the case of her reading *The Wise Virgins*, the impact of feeling suddenly abandoned by Leonard, a trusted self-object.

SEXUALITY

Virginia was neither heterosexual nor homosexual in any fully developed or gratifying manner. Those close to her considered that she was frigid in her sexual relationship with Leonard; and there is no evidence that she really enjoyed—except for their closeness—the relatively few homosexual relationships she may have had. What Virginia mostly wanted, and sometimes demanded, was to be held, cuddled, petted, and kissed—but more as a child or adolescent than as a genitally mature adult. All of this can be explained by the circumstances of her childhood, but there is no way of knowing how much was due to defects in ego development, to sexual seductions at whatever ages, or to the fears of being a woman derived from the tragic fates of her mother and half-sister Stella.

We have no data as to the influence of the children's nurses during Virginia's formative years. They, more than the parents, may have imparted feelings of fear, disgust, or shame about sex, excretion, or other bodily functions. No one knows how the children's questions were answered or what facial expressions influenced their attitudes. We do know that Virginia and her siblings ran about in the nude on the beach with their parents' blessing, but we do not know what happened if they explored each other or grabbed at each other's genitals as young children often do. We know also that Virginia saw an exhibitionist later on, but we do not know how she felt or how the episode was handled at home. A young girl—whatever her outward attitude—may be intrigued, excited, disgusted, frightened, or angered by this kind of experience, and the long-term effects depend somewhat on the emotional reactions of parents or others involved.

There has been much speculation about Virginia's stories of being sexually molested by her half-brother, Gerald, when she was five or so, and later—at what age is in dispute—by the other half-brother, George. The latter, from most accounts, was overly demonstrative and dramatic, making passionate (verbal) love to his mother after a brief separation; and perhaps he far overstepped the bounds of propriety with Virginia. One has to consider the possibility that she welcomed his advances—up to a point at least—because of her love of attention and demonstrative affection. There is no indication in her early diary or letters that Virginia was disgusted with George, or afraid of him; indeed, the relationship was friendly and affectionate. Her narcissistic needs may have been gratified by George's attentions when she was a young girl; and they may not have taken a sexual and embarrassing form until during Leslie's terminal illness, when Virginia was twenty-one or so. I think that her sexual problems arose in childhood, including the episode with Gerald.

SUMMARY

As indicated from the beginning, I have not attempted a psychobiography of Virginia Woolf. In writing about her periods of “madness” and her other illnesses, I have emphasized pathology. But no one, I am sure, would make the mistake of confusing her pathology with the total Virginia Woolf. As a complete personality, Virginia is quite elusive and impossible to capture whole. The best composite portrait, to date, emerges from Quentin Bell’s biography, read in combination with *Recollections of Virginia Woolf by Her Contemporaries*, edited by Joan Russell Nobel. These writings, together with her own, accentuate Virginia’s strengths as well as her frailties, and recall her beauty, wit, compassion, charm (with children especially), occasional malice, and genius.

Let me mention again the limitations of diagnostic formulations, and also that many traits and symptoms have mostly unconscious roots. Virginia did not set out to show off by being clever or by blowing iridescent bubbles of fantasy, for example; but she had learned in early childhood that such accomplishments attracted amused attention from the grownups, and so they became an unconscious part of her personality. She needed attention, and she knew how to get it, but both the needs and her means of meeting them became, as she grew into adulthood, aspects of unconscious processes. I must repeat also that any claim of mine to know Virginia better than she knew herself is simply the product of many years of exploring my own and others’ unconscious motivations and machinations.

I have described Virginia’s normal or everyday personality as narcissistic in the sense of being vulnerable to withdrawal of external emotional supports or to loss of self-esteem from whatever internal or external causes. One aspect of her emotional fragility lay in the unconscious assumption that what she wrote must be perfect and that she was doomed to failure in the goals she set for herself and the expectations she ascribed to others. In addition to these and other attributes of her usual self, Virginia had many episodes of illness; and six of these were mental illnesses. I have taken the position that these were separate and discrete occurrences and that they are best understood as psychotic reactions to severe blows to her self-esteem. I have tried to refute the traditional belief that her “madness” was an endogenous, life-long psychiatric disorder—manic-depressive, for example—marked by six overt episodes or flare-ups.

Leaving out sicknesses such as whooping cough, infected teeth, unexplained fevers, and cardiac irregularity (possibly due to rheumatic fever and in part to psychosomatic factors, perhaps), here is a summary of the periods of “madness” with some of their precipitating events:

First Instance. Shortly before Julia Stephen’s last illness, Virginia was “difficult” in some unspecified way while on a trip with her mother. After Julia’s death, when

Virginia was thirteen, Virginia had a variety of symptoms—mental and physical. Because of subsequent illnesses, I have suggested that she had rheumatic fever. Apart from her own mourning, she had to cope with her father's histrionic and self-centered grief and the general family disorganization. Complicating everything else, she was entering adolescence and her menstrual periods evidently began at this time. I noted, however, that Virginia may have regained her emotional stability about the same time that her father did, by October 1895.

We know from Stella Duckworth's diary that Virginia was essentially well throughout most of 1896. She had to assimilate Stella's growing romance with Jack Hills and, by the end of the year, the knowledge that she would lose Stella to marriage. The principal illness, later in the year, might have been "nervous excitement," as perceived by Dr. Seton, or symptoms of a smoldering rheumatic fever.

As Stella made her plans to marry, Leslie behaved badly again, although he took Virginia for more walks than ever before. Wedding plans and other demands made Virginia nervous, irritable, and ill-tempered. Soon after her marriage, Stella had peritonitis for some months. During this time, Virginia had an acute illness from which she soon recovered despite Stella's death. This may have been influenza or a flare-up of rheumatic fever. I find no evidence that Virginia was mentally ill—more than neurotic anyway—in 1896 or 1897.

Second Instance. As we have seen, a second illness—the first clearly psychotic episode—came three months after Leslie Stephen's death on February 11, 1904, when Virginia was twenty-two. The Stephen children lived for a month with George Duckworth in Pembrokeshire and then went to Venice with Gerald Duckworth where they were joined by Violet Dickinson about the middle of April. The young men went their separate ways for a time, and then—except for Adrian, who returned to Cambridge—met Virginia, Vanessa, and Violet in Paris, where they were entertained by Clive Bell and others.

No one knows all that transpired during the ten weeks or so after Leslie Stephen's death. George Duckworth evidently organized excursions and kept the family busy in and around his place in Pembrokeshire. Virginia resumed her writing and her correspondence. She expresses some guilt about not having done enough for her father, and there is a little symbolic craziness, perhaps, about an emerald ring he gave her which a jeweler said she had spoiled; but a little later it looked the same as when her father gave it to her. In a state of normal mourning, Virginia might have had the fantasy that had she been a better daughter her father might have lived, and that the fractured emerald stood for his life as well as their relationship.

In Venice, Vanessa apparently was happy and liberated, meeting artists and visiting museums, while Virginia was disgruntled, at least part of the time. Quite possibly she felt that her siblings were being frivolous about their father's death, but she might have envied their sense of freedom. She subsequently apologized

to Violet Dickinson for having been so difficult. Although Virginia was charmed by Clive Bell and his friends and found devilish enjoyment smoking cigarettes and bantering with them in the cafes, she was emotionally torn—as Vanessa was not—by their father's death. In any case, George Duckworth escorted Vanessa and Virginia back to London more than two and a half months after Sir Leslie's death, and Virginia became psychotic within a day or two, on May 10, 1904.

The psychodynamics of this illness remain obscure. One element may have been Virginia's perception of her mourning as abnormal, considering the fact that her siblings appeared emancipated and happy. This perception, coupled with the nearly three months holiday, may have interfered with the course of normal mourning—substituting attempted repression for an essential working-through of feelings. She may have resented Vanessa's joyous response to her taste of *la vie de Boheme* not only as a sacrilege to her father's memory but also as a warning that she would lose Vanessa to the world of art. I think that Virginia felt emancipated by her father's death just as Vanessa did, but that this was largely unconscious because of her love for him. Out of this ambivalence, I think, came her depression, her guilt, and her subsequent psychotic expressions of rage toward Vanessa, hallucinations, and various self-destructive symptoms. Another precipitating factor may well have been Virginia's return to 22 Hyde Park Gate with George Duckworth now head of the family, which might have increased her anxiety about George's social or other plans for her as well as a revival of intense mourning for her father.

The principal mystery of Virginia's 1904 madness is the role of scarlet fever, which she had at this time. Depending upon just when it began and the course it took, the high fever and toxic effects of this streptococcus infection might have contributed to Virginia's suicide attempt and to the bizarre hallucinations that she had. In any case, the various symptoms may be understood as outlets for her fury at Vanessa, a highly ambivalent expression of deep cravings for mothering, and a projection of unacceptable, largely unconscious and regressive oral and sexual strivings.

Third Instance. Virginia's 1910 illness was less severe. She had been in considerable emotional turmoil because of having several suitors, whom she refused, and being in a triangular relationship with Clive and Vanessa, wanting them—I think—to be parent substitutes. Vanessa refused to play this role, having a child of her own and, by 1910, pregnant again. Besides, she resented the "romance" of Clive and Virginia. Clive, on his part, may have made the timeless mistake of reading much more than was intended into Virginia's smiles and dancing eyes. She may unconsciously have wanted to take him away from her sister (as with Thoby when they were growing up), but probably asked nothing more than his attentiveness and advice about her writing. In any case, Clive's intensity probably frightened her, and then both Vanessa and Violet Dickinson withdrew from her at this time, and all of this was enough to precipitate a narcissistic crisis of separation and loss. In

these circumstances, Virginia might even have welcomed the prescribed rest cure as an escape from a very difficult set of interpersonal relationships. As it turned out, Vanessa became the villainess in insisting that Virginia be a good patient, Clive wrote and visited frequently, and Miss Thomas, the owner of the rest home, made Virginia her favorite and wound up the treatment by going with her on a walking tour of Cornwall. So, Virginia got lots of rest, outdoor exercise, and special attention as well. I doubt if the “Dreadnaught Hoax” had much, if anything, to do with this illness except, perhaps, in accentuating for her the potential brutality of men.

Fourth Instance. In discussing Virginia’s psychotic breakdown in 1913, I emphasized the destruction of her vision of marriage: to write with Leonard at her side and to have children. Whatever the realities of her disappointment—that is, her intellectual agreement that it would be unwise for her to have children and the financial urgency for Leonard to find employment out of the home—these developments early in the marriage (including Leonard’s close working relationship with Margaret Llewelyn Davies) were terrible blows to Virginia’s emotional security system and to her self-esteem. She might have absorbed the decision not to have children even though it perpetuated for life her feeling of being inferior to Vanessa, but Leonard’s increasing emotional, and often physical, absences (partly to earn money, of course) were—I think—too much of a repetition of the many separations and deaths of her earlier years and therefore too great a narcissistic loss—that is, of her principal self-object. These factors, more than writing *The Voyage Out*, appear to explain Virginia’s 1913 illness, including her attempt at suicide.

Fifth Instance. Virginia’s 1915 “madness” was, in my view, a direct result of the worst possible kind of narcissistic injury. One must separate an intellectual acceptance and tolerance from the powerful feelings (many unconscious) having to do with self-esteem and self-confidence. I think reading *The Wise Virgins* was at some level a devastating narcissistic assault on Virginia, so much so that she became psychotic again very soon afterward. Having decompensated and lost her normal defenses, she became so vindictive toward Leonard that he hardly saw her for several months. I believe that she was so dreadfully hurt and, at the same time, so afraid of offending someone she desperately needed that she could express her outrage only by regressing to a psychotic state in which she could “blow her stack” in spite of her normal controls.

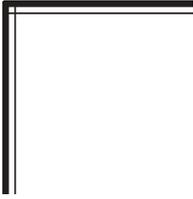
Sixth Instance. When Virginia recovered from this illness, she was free of mental breakdowns for twenty-five years. She did, however, have many physical illnesses, some of which—such as migraine headaches—were probably psychosomatic. I have traced these in relation to her writing, and I find little correlation. Indeed, she often got headaches when people and events interfered with her writing. As Virginia’s fame increased, so did the distractions; but she enjoyed many

of them despite their drain on her time and energies. Neither she nor Leonard were good at setting limits to their commitments. Virginia's bouts of cardiac irregularity were in all probability an aftermath of rheumatic fever, but emotional tensions might have set off many particular episodes.

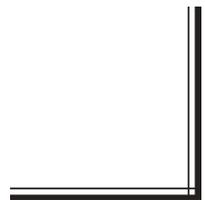
Final Instance. The probable causes of Virginia's suicide can be stated in terms of separation and loss. When 52 Tavistock Square was destroyed, she lost the home of her greatest happiness and success; and many of her favorite landmarks disappeared. Family and friends were scattered. Entertaining and travel were greatly curtailed by rationing. There was no assurance of a profit in publishing and her readership was unpredictable. Unheated rooms and housework, for which she was untrained, interfered with her writing. She was too much cooped up with Leonard and disturbed by his meetings at their home. Talk of suicide was all around her, to become a reality if the expected invasion occurred.

From the point of view of narcissism, Virginia's supports for her self-esteem were largely cut off, and she was angered and humiliated by unwonted tasks at home and in Rodmell. Moreover, toward the end of 1940, she felt abandoned by her most vital self-objects: Vanessa, who was holed up at Charleston due to petrol rationing, and Leonard, who was, as usual, overburdened by talks, meetings in Rodmell, meetings in London, and efforts to keep the Hogarth Press alive.

Just how depressed Virginia became is not clear, but because of the war, and of the restrictions imposed by the war, she felt like an exile. I think she had both a "guilty depression" and an "empty depression"—guilty because she hated having Leonard so much underfoot and because she bitterly resented conditions that others accepted with a stiff upper lip; and empty because she was cut off from those who provided external supplies for her self-esteem, self-confidence, and sense of identity. Virginia might have echoed Hobbes: "No arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continued fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."⁹ Once her voices returned, it did not require an invasion to convince Virginia that suicide was the way to drop out quietly and to escape from her pain.



Notes



NOTES (BY CHAPTER)

Citations are given in full at their first listing. Abbreviations are used thereafter. References made to the volumes of Virginia Woolf's *Diary* and *Letters*, respectively, are from

The Letters of Virginia Woolf, ed. Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautman, 6 vols. (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975-1980); hereafter cited by title, vol., and page; and—

The Diary of Virginia Woolf, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, 5 vols. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977-1984); hereafter cited by title, volume, and page.

PREFACE

1. This book may be accessed online though copies of the print edition are available for purchase from the Clemson University Digital Press website. Go to the university's home page and then follow the pathway to the Center for Electronic and Digital Publishing, at <www.clemson.edu/caah/cedp>. The book is listed under "Monographs" but also linked to the *South Carolina Review* Online Library (SCROLL) series called "Virginia Woolf International," after the issue of *SCR* that featured the international symposium presentations from the Sixth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf, hosted by Clemson University in 1996. The editor's paper, read at the Sonoma State conference in company with Nancy Orr Adams and Patricia Laurence, may be found in the *Selected Papers* from that meeting, on the website of the Center for Virginia Woolf Studies, California State University, Bakersfield, to which this book is linked. See also Wayne K. Chapman, "'L's Dame Secretaire': Alix Strachey, the Hogarth Press and Bloomsbury Pacifism, 1917-1960," *Women in the Milieu of Leonard and Virginia Woolf: Peace, Politics, and Education*, ed. Wayne K. Chapman and Janet M. Manson (New York: Pace University Press, 1998), pp. 33-57.
2. As the author acknowledges, on p.9, in bibliographic observations at the end of Chapter One, the biographical work on which he had most to rely, by necessity and due to the helpfulness of Woolf's family, is Quentin Bell's *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, 2 vols. (London: Hogarth Press; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972-1973). To name but two major biographies to appear since Orr's death in 1990, there are now James King's *Virginia Woolf* (London: Norton, 1994) and Hermione Lee's magisterial *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1996). On the subject of Woolf's psychiatric, or mental, condition in connection with her writing, Dr. Orr cites Jean Love's 1977 study *Virginia Woolf: Sources of Madness and Art* (cited in full on p. 9), avoiding the issues of Roger Poole's controversial *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). Subsequent works in or around the field would include Stephen Trombley's *All that Summer She was Mad": Virginia Woolf and Her Doctors* (London: Junction Books, 1981), Shirley Panken's *Virginia Woolf and the "Lust of Creation": A Psychoanalytic Exploration* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), Elizabeth Abel's *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), Thomas C. Caramagno's *The Flight of the Mind: Virginia Woolf's Art and Manic-Depressive Illness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), Peter Dally's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: Manic Depression and the Life of Virginia Woolf* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), and, apropos the dreaded "rest cures" prescribed by Woolf's doctors, Allie Glenn's *Ravenous Identity: Eating and Eating Distress in the Life and Work of Virginia Woolf* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999). Dr. Orr is silent on Trombley's book, which might have been included in this study as it developed, in 1985-1986, into a manuscript. Still, Woolf studies seem equally unaware Orr's article "Virginia Woolf and Psychoanalysis," *International Review of Psycho-Analysis* 70.2 (1989): 151-161. Derived from an omitted last chapter from *Virginia Woolf's Illnesses*, the oversight is partly remedied with the online edition our digital press has made from the original chapter, entitled "Virginia Woolf and Freud," now available at <www.clemson.edu/caah/cedp/Woolf%International>.
3. Leonard Woolf, *Letters of Leonard Woolf*, ed. Frederic Spotts (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989). Unpublished letters from Frederic Spotts to Douglass W. Orr, 23 Dec. 1986

and 6 Jan. 1987 (courtesy Nancy Orr Adams); and Spotts's reading notes with two chapters of *Virginia Woolf's Illnesses*, Box 3, folder 13 of the Frederic Spotts Papers, Mortimer Rare Book Room, William Allan Neilson Library, Smith College. Reflecting several commercial publishers' reservations about "trade book" issues, Juliet Nicolson's letter of 17 Oct. 1986 referred Dr. Orr to an academic press; the interests of Weidenfeld & Nicolson (London) are exhibited in the example of Nigel Nicolson's *Virginia Woolf* (2000) and (though by another publishing house) Quentin Bell's *Bloomsbury Recalled* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

4. At the end of Chapman and Manson (eds.), *Women in the Milieu of Leonard and Virginia Woolf*, are recommended accounts of Virginia's last physician in Evelyn Harris Haller's "Octavia Wilberforce: A Portrait Unrealized" (pp. 213-238) and "'Octavia [Wilberforce]'s Story' by Virginia Woolf," edited by W. K. Chapman and E. H. Haller (pp. 239-242).
5. The interest that the Woolfs shared in the works of Freud is evident in some 17 books by him that they owned, including works such as *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) and *Civilization, War and Death* (1939). See Julia King and Laila Miletic-Vejzovic (comp. and eds.), *The Library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf: A Short-title Catalog* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 2003), pp. 80-81. And that's just to view the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

CHAPTER 1

1. Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911 to 1918* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964), p. 92n.
2. George Spater and Ian Parsons, *A Marriage of True Minds: An Intimate Portrait of Leonard and Virginia Woolf* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), pp. 11 and 16 (illus.).
3. *Sir Leslie Stephen's Mausoleum Book*, ed. Alan Bell. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 96.
4. Leonard Woolf, *Sowing: An Autobiography of the Years 1880 to 1904* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), p. 196.
5. Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind, 2nd ed. (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), p. 183.
6. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 5, p. 345.

CHAPTER 2

1. Vanessa Bell, *Notes on Virginia's Childhood: A Memoir by Vanessa Bell*, ed. Richard J. Schaubeck, Jr. (New York: Frank Hallman, 1974). N. pag.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, p. 23n.
4. Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* p. 71.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 70n.
6. Vanessa Bell, n. pag.
7. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, p. 35.
8. Vanessa Bell, n. pag.
9. Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* p. 30.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
11. Vanessa Bell, n. pag.
12. Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* pp. 67-68.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
14. *Sir Leslie Stephen's Mausoleum Book*, p. 75.
15. Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* p. 71.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.
17. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, p. 35.

CHAPTER 3

1. Jean O. Love, *Virginia Woolf: Sources of Madness and Art* (Berkeley: University of California

- Press, 1977), p. 253.
2. Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* p. 95.
 3. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, p. 45.
 4. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, p. 8.
 5. Stella Duckworth, *Diary, 1896*, an unpublished manuscript in the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, New York Public Library (Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).
 6. Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* p. 105.
 7. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, pp. 3-4.
 8. *Sir Leslie Stephen's Mausoleum Book*, pp. 102-103.
 9. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, pp. 54-57.
 10. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, pp. 7-8.
 11. *Sir Leslie Stephen's Mausoleum Book*, p. 104.
 12. Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* p. 123.
 13. Lill A. Schwartz, "Adolescent Psychiatry," *Handbook of Psychiatry*, ed. Philip Solomon and Vernon A. Patch (Los Altos, CA: Lange Medical Publications, 1969), p. 403.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 404.

CHAPTER 4

1. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, pp. 58-86.
2. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, pp.41-42.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.
6. Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* p. 167.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
8. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 121.
9. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, p. 108.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 119n.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
12. *Ibid.*, Editor's summary, p. 129.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
14. Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* p. 183.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
16. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 5, p. 308.
17. Hobart Amory Hare, *A Textbook of Practical Therapeutics*, 19th ed. (Philadelphia and New York: Lea and Febiger Publishers, 1925), pp. 640-642.
18. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, p. 145.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
20. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, pp. 157-161 and 213-216.
21. Adrian Stephen, *The 'Dreadnaught' Hoax*, with an intro. by Quentin Bell (London: Chatto and Windus/The Hogarth Press, 1983).

CHAPTER 5

1. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, p. 422.
2. Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* p. 193n.
3. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, pp. 209-210.

CHAPTER 6

1. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, p. 466.
2. Spater and Parsons, pp. 76 and 81.
3. Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911 to 1918* (New York and

London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963), p. 52.

4. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, p. 488.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 488-489.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 491.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 492.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 496-497.
9. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, pp. 6-7.

CHAPTER 7

1. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, pp. 12-13.
2. Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again*, p. 87.
3. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 8.
4. Frances Spalding, *Vanessa Bell* (New Haven and New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1983), p. 130.
5. Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again*, p. 149.
6. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, pp. 18-19.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
15. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 13.
16. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 34.
17. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 15.
18. Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again*, p. 157.
19. Spater and Parsons, p. 68.
20. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 43.
21. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, p. 19.
22. Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again*, p. 176.

CHAPTER 8

1. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 45.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
3. Spater and Parsons, p. 81.
4. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, p. 32n.
5. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 9n.
6. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, p. 32.
7. Spater and Parsons, p. 81.
8. Cf. letter of 1 May 1912, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, p. 496, and Leonard Woolf, *The Wise Virgins*, p. 231.
9. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 61.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 26.
12. Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again*, pp. 172-173,
13. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 63.

CHAPTER 9

1. Angelica Garnett, *Deceived with Kindness: A Bloomsbury Childhood* (London: Chatto and Windus/The Hogarth Press, 1984), p. 114.

2. Spater and Parsons, pp. 90 and 94.
3. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 42.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.
5. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, p. 250.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 298.
8. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 411.
9. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 30.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

CHAPTER 10

1. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 270.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 299.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 314-315.
7. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, p. 128.
8. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3, pp. 40-41.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
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A Note on the Author



Douglas W. Orr was born in Lincoln, Nebraska in 1905, attending the University of Nebraska (1923-1926) until transferring to Swarthmore College, where he graduated in 1928. He continued his studies at the University of Wisconsin, the University of Chicago, and Northwestern University Medical School, where he received his M.S., M.B., and M.D. degree by 1935. In 1936, he was a Barnett Fellow in England, where he wrote a treatise entitled *Health Insurance with Medical Care: The British Experience* (with Jean Orr, 1938). He subsequently trained at the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis, serving four years as a staff resident at the Menninger Clinic before active duty in the U.S. Navy from 1942 to 1946, thereafter establishing himself as the director of the Seattle Psychoanalytic Institute, and finally moving to La Jolla, California, in 1965. He was a Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, with 50 years of service (1940-1990); he was also a Charter Member of the San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego chapters of the Psychoanalytic Society and Institute. His books also include *Professional Counseling on Human Behavior: Its Principles and Practices* (1965) and *Life Cycle Counseling: Guidelines for Helping People* (with Nancy Orr Adams and David B. Harris, 1987). He died in 1990.