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VIRGINIA WOOLF: THE EXTENDED FORMATIVE YEARS
AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON HER WORK

A Thesis
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By

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The Thesis studies the effects which Bloomsbury had on the life and work of Virginia Woolf. Bloomsbury is an address in London where Virginia Woolf moved after the death of her father. She lived there with her two brothers, Thoby and Adrian, and her sister. It was at Bloomsbury at the age of twenty-two, where Virginia Woolf met Thoby's friends, and where she developed her most lasting friendships. The study looks at the evidence of how deep these relationships went in helping her overcome the sorrow of an abused childhood.

In order to measure the effects of Bloomsbury on her life, Virginia Woolf's Diaries and Letters were closely read, especially the particular references she made to Bloomsbury, the individual friends, her opinions on these, and the references to her mother, father, and siblings. Further, the Letters of special significance spanned the years during which she wrote Orlando and To The Lighthouse.

Other materials were also included in this study. Two biographical works, one which centered on Virginia Woolf as a child, and the other, written by her nephew, Quentin Bell were among the kinds of works which further painted the picture of Woolf. Bell's life of Woolf is imbued with his memory, and thus his sense of his famous aunt, and DeSalvo's work helps complete this
picture by examining the motivating forces which shaped the whole person. Joined with these works were first hand recollections from close friends and acquaintances who knew Virginia Woolf, especially her friends at Bloomsbury.

The two novels, To The Lighthouse, and Orlando, were also read in concert with the Letters and Diaries to reshape the time and place with Bloomsbury in mind, and to arrive at an intellectual and spiritual picture of Virginia Woolf through her work.

Finally, certain books and essays written about Woolf by scholars, as well as literary friends were chosen to enhance the overall portrait of the writer.

What was arrived at through this mode of study was a deepened sense and understanding for the person behind the creative talent. I gained a strong sense of Woolf as she related to the world, and to those she loved and cherished. The constant in all of this was the impact which Bloomsbury had in the formation of the artist's ability to examine her life, and to ply her craft.

The early years at Bloomsbury served as almost a second adolescence for Virginia Woolf. Free from the constraints of a Victorian household, and from adult supervision, Woolf was able to create new friendships with other young people, and to begin
to forge a life of her own making. The years at Bloomsbury
invited a much needed, though altogether painful examination of
the abuse she had experienced as a small child.

Bloomsbury and the continuing friendships eased the pain of
self analysis which Woolf engaged in first, while she lived
there, and later as she wrote. It was because she knew she
could rely on those friends for support that enabled her to make
sense of the effects her earlier life had on her.

To The Lighthouse is a mature work by Woolf in the form
of a dialogue she was never able to have with her mother.
The novel gives the world the beauty of a poetical portrait
painted in loving words to a mother, and says "I forgive" to a
father. Orlando is the novel she wrote immediately after which
serves to look at the social injustices of her country toward
women. The book symbolizes the freedom to feel love for
another.

Bloomsbury gave Virginia Woolf back a sense of her own
worth as a human being, and in doing so set the stage for the
many years of creative work, and thus the joy she would bring us
all. Bloomsbury gave her a value of self through the solace,
advice and love of friends.
I.

Virginia Woolf's early years in Kensington have recently been scrutinized because of a history of being abused as a small child and then later as a young teenager by her half-brothers George and Gerald Duckworth. This information is not new; references are made to it in a biography by Quentin Bell of the abuse visited upon both Virginia and Vanessa, her sister. (1) More recently, however Louise DeSalvo's investigation documents further evidence of the abuse, and details the severe emotional effects the abuse had on the health of the six year old Virginia; later in her teens immediately after the death of her mother; and in 1904, at the time of her father's illness. (2)

This study of Virginia Woolf does not chronicle the many and regular instances of the nightmare which Woolf lived through, nor does it focus mainly on the effects of that experience. The work of Ms DeSalvo is extensive in addressing that issue. This study centers on a more positive time and experience in a late and protracted adolescence which permeated Woolf's existence at Bloomsbury which acted as a balm over a sad and sequestered life experienced in Kensington. The time and place are told in retrospect from Woolf's diaries, by her biographers and through the creative genius of her works.
That Bloomsbury did occur so soon after the years of mental and physical anguish which had imprisoned the young Virginia Stephen was a gift for the body and spirit. Leon Edel describes this unusual instance for all of the Bloomsbury group (3). It was a time free of intellectual constraint for all of the young people who lived or visited there. Most important it was the home of one's choosing for Virginia and Vanessa and their brothers, as well as a place to meet for the young men and women who were their friends. Significantly Bloomsbury so described acted to soothe Virginia psychologically.

The balm that it created had its consequent effect in freeing Virginia to write her most enduring works. To the Lighthouse and Orlando are key works, the former considered Woolf's greatest achievement, and Orlando, written shortly after, appears to have been when she was most unfettered by the tortures of psychological disturbances. They are mature works, but with an insight into the very soul and mind of the young, which only someone in touch with that particular psyche (or one who never lost the initial sense of it) could deliver to the written page.
Virginia Stephen was born into an upper class British family whose patriarch was a respected historian of his day. The era which bred her was Victorian with all that is oppressive and patriarchal in that society. Her mother was frequently distracted and overworked in the daily ministration to a large, diverse family of young people. The family included Virginia's brother Thoby and her sister, Vanessa, as well as older half-brothers and sisters from Julia Stephen's former marriage to Herbert Duckworth.

The atmosphere was one full of restrictions regarding proper behavior of the girls in the family, while the young men and boys were allowed free reign. Virginia felt unprotected and neglected by a busy and preoccupied mother. It is important to understand the strict, fearful and unloving homelife that Virginia experienced in order to fully appreciate the transition which she would experience as liberation, and the impact it had on her creative flow. (4)

The atmosphere of terror was, in part created by the banishment of Laura, Virginia's half-sister. Laura was reported to have been difficult and unyielding to her step-father, Leslie.
As a consequence she was first kept prisoner in a far room in the house, and later sent to an asylum. To Virginia and Vanessa, the message was clear that if one did not bend to father's will, one could conceivably lose father's love, and even be removed from home.

A much loved sister, Stella Duckworth was frequently the object of her cousin Jack Stephen's physical attractions. She was often visited and physically threatened by this nephew of Leslie's, and the children, particularly Virginia and Vanessa were expected to assist in distracting "Jack" from his unhealthy pursuit of Stella. Coupled with these abnormal developments was the sad fact of Virginia's abuse at the hands of the Duckworth half-brothers. The sense of unprotectedness was central to Virginia and Vanessa Stephen and was a daily fact of life. The fault could be easily laid at the feet of their mother, Julia Stephen, although a member of the upper class, did much of the nursing, tending and running of a constantly growing household. As her older children from her former marriage grew, she began again with an entirely new family.

The Duckworth sons may have felt pushed aside by the new marriage and new family, and as a result took out their frustration while asserting their rights in a Victorian role by the abuse of their sister Virginia. (5)
DeSalvo draws a sharper picture but it is one most are familiar with, of a stern Victorian patriarch who has rule and total dominion over his family, servants and society. The laws of England protect his fortune to his sons, and in doing so also by omission, set the value to his wife and daughters. The Duckworth sons were treated with the same overwhelming respect to their wishes as was Leslie Stephen. Julia Stephen's life of running a household included the impossible task of ministering to Leslie through his depressions, fits of anxiety and frequent outbursts of feeling neglected. She therefore had little time to devote to one small girl's real fears for her own wellfare.

The recurring theme in Virginia Woolf's Diaries and in her literature was freedom of the spirit and of the mind. In seeking the significance of Bloomsbury to her overall development, we have to first look at this very unpleasant and restrictive life style from which sprang the free spirit. We have to judge the overall effects of the young and healthy environment which came, almost as a gift, full blown into a young woman's life at the age of twenty-two. Because it was the accidental fate of Bloomsbury which came at the end of the unhappy childhood and chronological adolescence which profoundly effected her literature. (7)
ENDNOTES


4 DeSalvo

5 DeSalvo

6 Quentin Bell page 360

7 Quentin Bell, page 364. "To the Lighthouse was made from the passions and tragedies of her youth".
Early Childhood

I.

Virginia Woolf was acutely aware of the importance of early childhood, and its influence on the psychological well being of the individual. What she wrote into her works was that sense of the young's psyche which indicated a conclusive understanding of its importance. In The Voyage Out, Rachel is "stuck" in childhood, a commentary on Virginia Woolf's early years, which Woolf made herself, and DeSalvo notes for its significance. (1)

Writing for the family newspaper, The Hyde Park Gate, Woolf learned a lesson which helped her in developing as a writer. According to DeSalvo, she "...learned that fiction can present the truth and yet at the same time protect the writer because it can act as a screen behind which the writer can hide, should she need to...". (2)

In January 1915, Woolf remembers how it was at Hyde Park Gate, and the comfort in keeping old routines: "...we used to set aside Sunday morning for cleaning the silver table. Here I find myself keeping Sunday morning for odd jobs...". (3) That Woolf was in touch with these early years throughout her life is evidence of a mind which, while it grows, can retain the memories of youth, and keep them fresh.
Much of the memory however, is tainted with the past she endured, but had not enjoyed. In May of 1926 she recounts "disagreeable" memories as she drives past Hyde Park Gate. Significantly too, her mood changes as the bus moves on to a more agreeable part of town, and she experiences a "...curious transition...from tyranny to freedom." (4) On another day she is more explicit in remembering the "...horror of family life..." associated with George Duckworth and her father. She writes of their special hold on her as a "...threat to one's liberty", and equates the emotion as singular to these two relationships. We can experience this with her repeatedly through her works, and it is not a difficult stretch to imagine the children she depicts as Woolf herself in the early years.

Early childhood is frequently associated with a lack of freedom, a recurrent theme in the diaries. Freedom and the possession of it are recounted. Her comments on freedom invariably associate themselves with Hyde Park Gate and the early years. She calls freedom "...the ideal state of the soul..."(5) and writes of throwing off the chains by leaving Hyde Park Gate.

Yet, as in all of life, not all of Hyde Park Gate is a bad memory. Her remarks on another day are pleasant reminiscences of her father and how he thinks of her as he visited London's
libraries. She muses that he thinks of her because, of all the children she displayed the greatest interest in books, history, and his work.

That Virginia Woolf should keep alive the memories of her past, both good and bad, demonstrates an important facet of the writer's mind. This facility of remembering, considering the morbid history she endured, was possible through the healthy existence she embarked on at Bloomsbury.
ENDNOTES

1 DeSalvo, page 168
2 Ibid, page 138
4 Diary, III, 1925-1930 page 194
5 Ibid
Bloomsbury

II.

In 1904 after the death of their father, Virginia and Vanessa move to Bloomsbury. Quentin Bell notes that the difference between Bloomsbury and Kensington is the free and young behavior of the two sisters at the new address. (1) The move was further noted by Bell to be "a social as well as a geographical departure." (2) Their life now was one of "a young and unchaperoned household." (3) Initiated by the older, and more aggressive Vanessa, she hoped to create an atmosphere of freedom for herself and Virginia.

Immediately with their establishment at Gordon Square, they caused sufficient furor among older friends of their family, because as Bell notes, "They were failing to cultivate the social graces, [and] their days were given to the desk and the easel." (4) In order to understand the effect this move had on Virginia Woolf, one must see that it had its effect on all of the group. Leon Edel points out "...what was different about these young men...and women was that they simply talked about things which were not then supposed to be mentioned." (5) He goes on to note: "They were free, for the first time of all responsibilities to the older generation...". (6)
It is important to note that the young women, Vanessa and Virginia had lived, just a short time before, in an atmosphere of complete submission to their father, their half-brothers, and were accustomed to rounds of parties and teas on the arm of Gerald and George Duckworth. To move from the oppression of having one's days filled with others expectations to days of free conversation with one's peers allowed Virginia to think in terms of her desk as it created the opportunity for Vanessa to pursue her painting.

Among the group there was a "...cohesive power [which] had moral rather than intellectual origins...it was mutual affection which provided the solid nucleus around which Bloomsbury grew." (7) This solidifying of relationships was all the more so as a result of Thoby's death. Thoby, the much loved brother of Virginia and Vanessa, was also the good friend to Clive Bell, Leonard Woolf, and Lytton Strachey, all of whom attended Cambridge with him. Thoby is remembered throughout Virginia Woolf's life in her diaries. He was the important link between the past and Bloomsbury. In December 1929 Woolf reminisces with Clive Bell about Thoby, thinking of the "...anguish, as I was after Thoby died...I think of death...as the end of an excursion I went on when he died." (8)
His death joined the group more tightly as only a shared grief can. Quentin Bell points out that the close association came from "affection" at first, and "...was not based upon a similarity of ideas and outlook." (9) There would be time, marked by years of growing friendship, which would allow them to share in one another's ideas and outlooks. In January 1919 Woolf writes, "How many friends have I got? Theres Lytton, Desmond, Saxon; they belong to the Cambridge stage of life; very intellectual, cut free from Hyde Park Gate, connected with Thoby." (10)

Two factors figure in Virginia Woolf's development in the atmosphere at Bloomsbury. The first was that she would renew her examination of what happened to her in the past, and the second was that she would develop new and healthy relationships which would proceed through life with her. The two factors hinge and frequently overlap throughout her life.

At Bloomsbury, she Vanessa and the others formed a Memoirs Club. Their meetings were constructed to have each member contribute ideas and works in progress. It was to the Memoir Club that Virginia revealed what happened to Vanessa and herself at Kensington. (11)
The importance of this development in Woolf's life can not be
sufficiently underscored. Until this time Virginia Woolf had
never confided her past abuse to a member of the opposite sex.
It shows a bond of trust was formed with her new friends
enabling her as a young woman to grow and mature, and thus also
to grow in her creative effort.

What follows are Virginia Woolf's frequent references to the
friends as individuals and as a solidifying group in which she
would find solace throughout her years. The Diaries, by
themselves, paint the picture of Bloomsbury's significance.
ENDNOTES

1 Bell, Biography, page xxii
2 Ibid
3 Ibid
4 Ibid
5 Edel, page 45
6 Edel, page 95
7 Diary, Vol I, Introduction – Bell, page xvii
8 Diary, Vol I, page 260
9 Bell, Biography, page xxvii
10 Diary, Vol I, page 234
11 De Salvo, page 72
The Diaries make frequent mention of Bloomsbury by name, and the individual friends who belonged to it. Beginning in Volume I in 1915, Virginia Woolf recounts the day's happenings, the trivia of life as she muses over her past, and considers her future. If there were any doubt of the permenant and ongoing influence the years in Bloomsbury had, one need only refer to the five volumes of Virginia Woolf's diaries.

In January of 1915 Woolf writes of a visit by Saxon Turner, followed by one with her brother-in-law, Clive Bell. Both men are friends from the years at Bloomsbury. With Clive, they "...talked chiefly about the hypnotism exerted by Bloomsbury over the younger generation...[and the] dominion that 'Bloomsbury' exercises over the sane and the insane." (1) She concludes her remarks with "Happily, I'm 'Bloomsbury' myself & thus immune." (2) Her immunity is to the effect that criticism from outsiders would have on her. Bloomsbury acts a buffer.

Three years later in an entry on October 28th, she relates an unpleasant reaction by the group because of a caustic remark she made of Clive's girlfriend, and announces that she will "...keep clear of that set in the future."(3) Yet in the Spring of 1919, less than 6 months later, she is found dining with the very same people, and suggesting that "...one of the drawbacks of
Bloomsbury is that it increases my susceptibility to these shades...". (4) by which she refers to people who do not like the Bloomsbury group. Virginia Woolf found solace in belonging to and being a part of something; in her case, it was the group of friends with whom she began lasting friendships, and would enhance as they grew, some, in stature in the world of art, others, like Maynard Keynes, politically in econonics, and still others, such as Lytton Strachey as an important biographer.

In the same entry, December 1924, when Woolf sums up the year as she does every year in the diaries, she mentions Strachey and that she will write to him as she plans to dedicate the Common Reader to him (which she did). (5) In that same entry she notes, "All our Bloomsbury relationships flourish, grow in lustiness. Suppose our set to survive another 20 years, I tremble to think." (6)

That the group exercised an enormous influence over Virginia Woolf all her life, there is no doubt. To what extent, and in what ways they effected her judgement, as she effected theirs is clear from reading the diaries. The important fact is they retained an influence over one another throughout the years.
Woolf used the Bloomsbury group as a sounding board of her emotions and attitudes. She used them as a ruler, measuring the value of others' values, thoughts and impressions. In a visit to dinner she meets some clergy, some titled people, and muses that they lack depth, and, compared with Bloomsbury, they pale before them. She is very explicit: "I thought of Bloomsbury. But then in Bloomsbury you would come up against something hard - a Maynard, or a Lytton, or even Clive."(7) Whether she is judging too harshly is not the point, rather, it is the importance that Clive, and the others have in how she sees the world. And, that world offered some degree of credibility to the group, as she notes in an entry on September 15, 1923 in an encounter with a young man she meets, and who comments on "...getting to know Bloomsbury. They're different human beings from any I thought possible."(8)

Bloomsbury gave Woolf a sense of belonging to something, and through her occasional references, it kept others out. Part of belonging frequently includes an exclusion of something or someone else. This belonging is repeatedly demonstrated to hold for all the group. Vanessa initiates the "Old Bloomsbury" to meet on Sundays in 1927, so many years after the formal meetings of the Memoir Club. The idea comforts Virginia.
In February of 1928, Virginia Woolf is feeling depressed, and Clive visits "...Bloomsbury today revives." (9) she mentions. That same year she is upset when Roger Fry doesn't get paid as well for his literary work as an outsider, and states, "I am torchy for the reputation of Bloomsbury...". (10) Lytton Strachey, she records, is not sufficiently pleased with praise for his work "...unless we Bloomsbury, are praised too." (11)

The Diaries record the significance which Bloomsbury carried for Virginia Woolf throughout her life. They disclose the way she felt when she was censored by the members of the group, and the loyalty which she experienced when her friends were treated less than fair. They further note the musings of a healthy mind in its normal and everyday discourse. Bloomsbury's influence on this mind is evident from the constant mention of one or another of the friends.

It is important to consider how this influence manifested itself day to day throughout Woolf's creative life. No one can separate themselves into discrete packages of feeling and thinking such that the one never touches the other. This fact was probably truer for Virginia Woolf because of her highly developed artistry. Bloomsbury acted upon her frequently and with
strong effect. The friends gave her a protected haven in which she could emotionally and intellectually reside. They inspired, criticized, rewarded and reinforced her impressions of personal significance. They helped to create an environment which enhanced personal worth for the genius that lived within it. Without Bloomsbury Virginia Woolf would have lived and created; her genius and the poetry forged from that genius would be heard despite the furies which haunted her. However she would have suffered immeasurably more from the torment of her childhood past, to the extent that it would have effected the sum total of her achievement.
1 Diary, Vol I, page 105
2 Diary, Vol I, page 106
3 Diary, Vol I, page 209
4 Diary, Vol I, page 262
5 Diary, Vol I, page 326
6 Ibid
7 Diary, Vol II, page 123
8 Diary, Vol II, page 264
9 Diary, Vol III, page 174
10 Diary Vol III, page 178
11 Diary Vol III, page 233
To The Lighthouse - the story

To The Lighthouse was written when Virginia Woolf was 45 years old. It is, on one level, the story of the Ramsay family, as seen through their experiences and impressions as they reside at their summer home. It is also close to a biographical rendering of Leslie and Julia Stephen, Virginia Woolf's parents.

The characters of Cam and James, two of the Ramsay children, are depicted first as young children, and later as adolescents. A guest of the Ramsays, Lily Briscoe, is also highlighted as a significant character. The characters of Cam and Lily are the voice of Virginia Woolf, and as such are Woolf's investigation into the very soul of her being. In these characters Woolf captures the fears of childhood, the intellectual and spiritual growth of the child as she reaches toward adulthood, and stages of growth in the young adult as she matures through Lily.

The novel is less about things happening, as it is about the way in which people think and feel. It is a novel with a deceptively simple story line, of two separate times in which the principal characters meet at this summer home. But it is of time passing, healing some wounds, leaving others in its wake, as loved ones die, and people change. A simple passage remarks on
the fall of the waves on the shore, and reminds Mrs Ramsay that her days "...had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow..."1

Through the symbol of the Lighthouse which opens the story, the family and their friends move toward whatever end fate will devise for them. James, the child wants to go to the Lighthouse, and his mother, Mrs Ramsay has promised that he may go. However, Mr Ramsay determines that the day will not be good, and thus there is an end to the consideration, and the discussion.

The rage and helplessness which James experiences is a touchstone of all blighted childhood dreams. His father pronounces how things will be, and it is quickly determined that his word carries resolution. This episode opens the reader to the character and standing of the family. It offers the picture of Mrs Ramsay, more intuitively perceptive than her husband, more in tune with the world. Through this one character we see the portrait of Woolf's own mother as she is remembered by a daughter close to the age of her mother when she died. It is a type of communication between Woolf and her mother, and is important because it fills in the missing pieces for Woolf which were cut short when Julia Stephen died.
Through the character of Lily Briscoe, a dialogue flows to Mrs Ramsay, reaching out to her for understanding. She wonders at Mrs Ramsay's feelings about life, her own place in it, whether she has sacrificed too much perhaps to everyone else's needs, and not for herself. One can extend those thoughts to Woolf, as she looks back on a mother who did precisely that, gave to her family and to her community, with little enough time for herself.

Virginia Woolf as Lily projects some honest feelings onto Mrs Ramsay, and what she (as Julia) might have thought about Woolf's choice to pursue art in writing. Woolf also conducts an internal dialogue as Lily, about the worth of her efforts. As Lily questions, so does Woolf. Lily becomes defensive about her art while Mrs Ramsay is alive, one of the positions Woolf might have taken about writing, and only when Mrs Ramsay is no longer there, is Lily able to assert the worth of her painting.2

Madeline Moore refers to this dialogue as "...the continuing dialectic between the life and the novel...between a remembered loss, and an experienced loss."3 In the dialogue Woolf developed the relationship with her mother as it might have been through the complexities of maturation so that she could experience her mother at all the ages since her early teens.
This unremitting examination of human relationships, to 
stare them in the face, was what Virginia Woolf did so effective-
ly, and it was Bloomsbury's influence which contributed to the 
effort. The sense of freedom which came with being in charge of 
one's destiny is central to the relationship between Woolf at 
Bloomsbury and the writing of To The Lighthouse. One must be at 
home and comfortable with the examining process in order to 
glimpse the kind of accuracy which Woolf does in her design of 
Lily and Mrs Ramsay.

Although the character portrayals can be examined discretely 
as we have done thus far here, they should be seen as interwoven 
with the relationships fostered at Bloomsbury, and equally with 
the climate which allowed for such in-depth, and intimate 
exploration of the characters. The undogmatic life style of 
Bloomsbury, and their code against sentimentality described by 
Alex Zwedling, set the tone for such an approach to character-
ization in To The Lighthouse.

The group, according to Zwedling advocated an honesty in 
their criticism which, while free of hostility, would also be 
free of placating sweetness. It left a door open for Woolf to 
reexamine her feelings about her parents through the voices of 
Lily and Cam. The entire passage between the spirit of Mrs
Ramsay and Lily is the gulf of life spanned, the vehicle is the novel which "...illumined the darkness of the past." 5

To conjure the spirit of her mother took enormous psychic energy. It is evident from the flow of the narrative how almost unearthly the events all seem to be. Some might liken the following example to a dream, and to read any scene one does have a sense of the events floating above and around them.

"...she [Lily] seemed to be sitting beside Mrs. Ramsay on the beach.
"...And Lily, painting steadily, felt as if a door had opened, and one went in and stood gazing silently about in a high cathedral-like place, very dark, very solemn...Mrs. Ramsay sat silent. She was glad, Lily thought, to rest in silence, uncommunicative; to rest in the extreme obscurity of human relationships. Who knows what we are, what we feel? ...Aren't things spoilt then,...by saying them?" 5

It is the poetic genius of Woolf which explains the creation of the ephemeral in this novel. And, this transitory element is part of Woolf's interior make-up.

Lily is successful in relating to Mrs Ramsay and Cam is not successful in her efforts to relate to Mr Ramsay. Lily as a mature voice, can and does come away with a feeling of having completed something. Cam is an adolescent voice, and by her nature is still undefined and unfinished. Cam seen as the young Virginia Woolf is an attempt to communicate with her father.
As such it suggests an ongoing dialogue. I believe it is an unsuccessful attempt to resolve the conflicts between Woolf and her father at that particular point in her experience.

In the story, Cam is angry at her father for forcing them to a voyage to the lighthouse. As the boat draws nearer to the lighthouse, Cam reflects on her feelings about Mr Ramsay. First she thinks affectionately on his beautiful hands, and then angrily upon "...that crass blindness and tyranny of his which had poisoned her childhood and raised bitter storms, so that even now she woke...trembling with rage...remembered some command of his;...his dominance: his 'Submit to me'." 6

In an entry on November, 1928, Virginia Woolf writes on her father's birthday, that he would be 96 years old, and considers what it would be like if he had lived beyond 1904. It could be Cam's voice "...His life would have ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books; inconceivable." 7 The inconceivable which physically ended for Virginia Woolf when she left Kensington, and which was quelled at Bloomsbury was still very much alive in her thoughts as she went to write To The Lighthouse. Woolf goes on to note that she used to think of her parents "unhealthily", but now through writing To The Lighthouse,
she feels she has "laid them in my mind".

Woolf, in a letter to Vita Sackville-West, muses on the portrayal of the novel, thinking it perhaps "too psychological; [with] too many personal relationships..." for Vita's taste, but adds that she thinks that is the only way to "...reach[ed] those particular emotions..."8 The self analysis which Virginia Woolf performed was resolute in its effort, and finally successful in producing the voices of herself at the different stages of her life as she spoke with her parents.

And it was self analysis after all because in speaking with them, she was also identifying first, with Julia, and then with her father, to determine, as we all do as we mature, what qualities we have of each parent.

To Vita she wrote: "I don't know if I'm like Mrs Ramsay: as my mother died when I was 13, probably it is a child's view of her: but I have some sentimental delight in thinking you like her...She has haunted me: but then so did that old wretch my father:...I was more like him than her, I think; and therefore more critical:..."9

Woolf here displays a mature ability to realistically deal with what her parents meant to her as a child and as an adult.
It is important to note that Virginia Woolf did not draw on historical information to write a biography of her parents. Contrarily, she was steadfast in not reading any of her parents correspondance to one another because she feared it would cloud her artistic vision of the spirit of these two, most important people.10

The undertaking to represent the spirit of one's parents to oneself and the world requires a certain degree of sanity as it may also require some maturity. Artists can and often reach beyond their years of experience to create portraits of characters with mature abilities and insights. But young writers can not consciously attempt a novel which sets out to paint a picture of their parents. Woolf shows in her diary entries and letters at this time a remarkable understanding and gentleness toward her parents which usually comes from seeing them grow old. As a writer she was able to extend to those unexperienced years, and seeing them frail, forgive them their errors.

Virginia Woolf was able to write about her parents in the way that she did because she was mature, but also because she was sane. Both the sanity and the maturity came as as direct result of the atmosphere of self examination which began at Bloomsbury and by the friends that sustained it.
ENDNOTES


3 Ibid


5 *To The Lighthouse*, page 256.

6 Ibid

7 *To The Lighthouse*, page 253.


10 Ibid

Orlando

Orlando follows on the serious work, To The Lighthouse. Woolf's need to satirize her political statement, and to declare her affection for her protagonist are cojoined in the work. But what is equally operative is the person and the writer, Virginia Woolf. Zwerdling links Virginia and Bloomsbury with Orlando, saying the critics at the time claimed the book had been written for the small "coterie" of Bloomsbury friends, and as such was greatly limited. Zwerdling takes issue with the association of the book to Bloomsbury by reiterating the point of Woolf's tendency of departure from tensions of writing the serious work.

The connection with Bloomsbury is actually related to the work in a far more meaningful manner than a book written to a group of friends. In 1924 Virginia and Leonard Woolf moved back to Bloomsbury, and there she wrote both To The Lighthouse and Orlando.1 Bloomsbury was the place of refuge for Virginia and close to Leonard's work, and they therefore decided to return to it, taking a place in Tavistock Square. Virginia Woolf resumes her interest in Vita at this time, as the Letters show.

Vita Sackville-West was thirty years old, from a well documented lineage in England, and possessed all the freedom of spirit which Virginia desired. Through Vita, Virginia would
live a vicariously rich experience, and taste sensuality for the first time. Vita was wealthy, had position, and had children. This latter point was even more important, I believe, because Virginia could now embrace motherhood through the intimate eyes of her love. Vita was young, and passed the infectious mood of youth to her lover. They traveled together, Vita accompanied Virginia to lectures, she became an important part of her life.

Throughout, and in tandem with this relationship was the her unswerving friendship with her husband, Leonard. Vita knew Virginia through the good times, and as an important romantic interlude, helped Virginia define her full nature. Together Vita and Leonard gave Virginia Woolf a many dimensional environment in which she creatively soared.
In the aftermath of *To The Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf wrote *Orlando*. Swiftly, on the heels of the deeper, darker novel came this seemingly frivolous fairy tale of knights, kings, Russian maidens, and Dukedoms in Turkish lands. The novel was written as a fantasy, but coupled with it was a separate fantasy which bore psychological significance, and in view of Woolf's history, and her relationship with Vita Sackville-West, disproved the label attributed to *Orlando* as a lighthearted fiction.

The story of Orlando is the story of a young man growing up in Elizabethan England. As he matures, he encounters many historically important people, including the Virgin Queen. Orlando is bright, gifted, easy to love, and adventurous. He is also in possession, as a man, of his father's land and servants. The conflict for Orlando is the dual nature of his interests. While he loves to joust, using the head of a Moor on a string to whack at with his sword, he covets time alone to ponder nature. Orlando finally expresses this contemplative side in a poem, which he carries with him through the years, counted in centuries, and not the normal length of human life.

It becomes clear early on that *Orlando* is not just a work of fiction, but a symbolic exclamation of Virginia Woolf's views.
In creating a life which spanned centuries, Woolf could express some strong convictions about the history of women in society. Orlando's important difference from that of other mortals is that he transforms into a woman. Woolf's life of Orlando is not lighthearted. It uses that tone as a ploy to make very important political statements which framed her life, and which she thoroughly espoused.

The creation of Orlando should be seen in conjunction with her relationship with Vita, because Vita was the model for the character. It was Virginia Woolf's love for Vita which lent a poetic eloquence to the work, and which transformed Woolf's life, for a time, making it a more youthful, life giving experience. Vita represents the balance that Woolf wanted to achieve in life. She had style, flair, and walked most comfortably much as Orlando does; whatever befalls him, he can sustain. So it was of Vita as Virginia Woolf saw her.

Vita is central to the Volume of letters (Volume III 1923 to 1928) which Virginia Woolf wrote in that time span. "I am writing at great speed."4, Virginia comments of her progress with Orlando. And, Orlando became her most successful work to that date, more so than any she had previously written.
Much has been written about the novel, *Orlando*, about the particular scene, especially, of the old woman caught beneath the ice, unable to speak. Her muteness is a symbolic muzzle put on women in their effort to participate in the arts. Still more is written about the love song that is *Orlando*. The political statement is as equal to the need for interpretation as the relationship with Vita, and to them both is the contribution which Bloomsbury made. This chapter will discuss all three aspects as they intertwined in Woolf's life, and the novel.

One of the most magical scenes, fraught with symbolism is the one in which Orlando is transformed from Man to Woman. Orlando leaves England, and becomes an Ambassador in Turkey. He has been honored by his government, elevated to Duke of his realm. That night Orlando takes a peasant woman as lover, and in post passion sleep, becomes a woman. The ritual of transformation is heralded by the three, most limiting aspects assigned to womanhood. Woolf gives them satirical names, Our Lady of Purity, Chastity, Modesty, and as they dance around the sleeping Orlando, they chant the credo which has wrought its negative effect on women's progress to be equal in the world of accomplishment.
Under the guise of purity, Woolf says, society has kept women from the greater world of intellectual and creative work. The argument for keeping women out of that world has been to suggest that the seamier side of life, full of beggars and thieves and murderers is not the place for women, and would compromise their purity of mind by being exposed to it. Woolf suggests that the woman who wishes to aspire must necessarily wish to forgo the brand of purity represented in Orlando. Likewise the other sisters, Chastity and Modesty, serve to ambush women's creative desire, by hiding the truth of their real purpose. The questions asked in Orlando, is it better to be female, male or androgynous, and how does one escape identification through a physical nature, are answered by Orlando: in effect one must be able to aspire to all things, and thereby define one's nature through what one achieves.5

Orlando as a woman becomes for Woolf the spirit that is Vita, and vicariously Virginia herself. In her diary Woolf comments on the inequality of gender as a guideline for expected behavior. She says that in men aggressiveness for business purposes is "forgiven", while in [young] "...women it is trounced". Significantly to Orlando, she goes on to say, "It's these reflections I want to enmesh, in writing...."6
Madeline Moore makes the connection between Virginia Woolf's need to make a very strong point, and to couch it in hilarity. For instance England's primogeniture (the bulk of an estate goes to the first or any son or male heir over a daughter), and Vita's loss of her father's estate to an uncle is translated into the suit against Orlando to claim all her lands immediately upon her becoming a woman. The degree of absurdity in Orlando's case serves to make the larger, more serious point which was then the law in England; the very law which prohibited Vita from having a birthright because she was female.

Important to note also is the fact that Orlando is a female subject of Great Britain, and not some arbitrarily chosen country. By this choice Virginia Woolf could emphasize her case against the established order which ruled against women in Great Britian. Orlando then, became one of Woolf's manifestos for social change for women.

It was not fortuitous that Virginia appeared with Vita to speak at Girton College for Women as Orlando was being published. At the delivery of that speech, Woolf was free of the constraints of her society to address a portion of it on the very subject of limitation within the law for women. Woolf's position on polemical writing is that it destroys the poetry if it not controlled. With Orlando Woolf controlled the voice of polemical
diatribe through satire. Jane Marcus describes the effect Orlando creates: "...Woolf engaged in serious play with the history and ideology of her culture...and the way in which literature shapes our expectations of life as individuals, couples, families and generations. Orlando "...challenge[s] the fundamental myths of patriarchal society. Orlando is "...melodramatic, operatic and flamboyantly visual."9, Marcus says, and the work is often mistaken for farce.

Woolf's use of satire in Orlando does borders on the operatic, but it would be wrong to think that she did not take her subject seriously. Long after Orlando has experienced the limitations of her new sex, she marries. Immediately after the ceremony the new husband leaves to sail his ships across the seas, and Orlando goes back to her home. Nothing seems to happen for many pages, and, as Woolf notes that is because Orlando is pondering, thinking and deciding her future actions. Woolf uses this inaction to juxtapose what might be occurring in a "male writer's" novel. The suggestion is that Orlando would not be free to simply think because she was a woman. Instead, she would be acted upon, and the scene Woolf paints bears a close resemblance to D.H. Lawrence's Lady Chatterly's Lover:
"But Orlando was a woman....And when we are writing the life of a woman, we may, it is agreed, waive our demand for action, and substitute love instead. Love, the poet has said, is woman's whole existence....Surely, since she is a woman, and a beautiful woman, and a woman in the prime of life, she will soon give over this pretense of writing and thinking and begin to think, at least of a gamekeeper....And then she will write him a little note (as long as she writes little notes nobody objects to a woman writing either) and make an assignation for Sunday dusk:...and the gamekeeper will whistle under the window—all of which is,...the very stuff of life and the only possible subject for fiction."10

In this one passage is a statement of fact for Woolf, and the limits she believed society placed on the female. The passage is at the end of the book, and as such is a crescendo in Woolf's musical movement, leaving little doubt of the passion of her beliefs. Orlando, then is as much a political statement as it is a love letter.

It is significant that Woolf would write her most probing, personal account of her parents and herself, and in that same heightened and creative moment, declare her love and her political beliefs to the whole world. The significance in time was at the onset of the love relationship which freed Woolf spiritually. In place, it was Bloomsbury which freed her psychologically and intellectually. Vita was the inspiration to move into the troubled waters of her childhood through Cam in To The Lighthouse, and Bloomsbury was the healing experience, the
one which taught her to examine unflinchingly, and to come to terms with her life. *Orlando* was the love letter she felt free to write at Bloomsbury where the unorthodox was the preferred and accepted means to uncover the lies which Victoriana helped keep covert.
ENDNOTES


2 Letters, Vol III, xxi

3 Ibid

4 Letters, Vol III, page 430


6 Madeline Moore, The Short Season Between Two Silences, page 98-99

7 Madeline Moore, page 102

8 Moore, page 102

9 Jane Marcus, Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), page 19

Conclusion

This thesis began as an investigation into the effects of the much heralded Bloomsbury group on its illustrious member, and an important contributor to the world of literature, Virginia Woolf. It has done this through her Diaries, volumes of Letters, two of her works, and within the context of the group she counted as her friends, those who were Bloomsbury.

The Diaries show the close attachment through the constant reference to individual friends, and the identity of the group as it influenced her thinking. They counted for emotional support when she felt depressed, as she notes in her diary on a day when Clive Bell comes to visit, and she is thus revived. They counted for the individual opinions of her work, as she dedicated work to at least one of the members, (Lytton Strachey). And they were her family fused with her sister, and the memory of her beloved brother Thoby whom they all loved, and in whom they all shared grief in losing.

After reading the last of the five volumes of Diaries, a pattern seems clear. The further away the event, the greater clarity Woolf seemed to have of it, and the impact it had on her life. This is certainly true of all of us, but in Virginia Woolf
it was a concerted effort to analyze and gain perspective of her life. The diaries hint at it, and alone would not constitute the greatest proof. What does show this tendency to analyze is a combination of the literature and the history of Virginia Woolf in her early years.

First was the truth of her childhood, and the abuse which caused her ultimate despair. Recent biographies document the childhood, and characterize what her feeling must have been. That she felt jailed and suffocated in her father's house, we have as proof her diary entries referring to Kensington. The biography written by her nephew suggests the demands made on Woolf by her half-brother, and strongly suggest this demand may have been made by her father as well. Whether the demand met with actual acquiescence in this latter case, is not the point. It is enough for the child and young adolescent to have felt it for the damage to be done.

The means to analyze for Woolf was at first through sharing the reality of Kensington with her Bloomsbury friends, and to write of it for the group's evenings set aside to perform for one another. It was the beginning of a healthy process which Woolf would go through repeatedly, and for the rest of her life. This analysis would emerge in her writings as well. Her past
would not be resolved until she wrote To The Lighthouse.

The Diaries make clear her allegiances after she left Bloomsbury, and the volumes of Letters show the influence which Bloomsbury made on the young Virginia Stephen. Her early letters show a lively spirit who feels confident in expressing herself through writing, and broadly hint at the great writer in a developmental stage. The letters are full of the beauty of her poetical skill.

In a letter dated in the year 1907, she writes reluctantly to the young man who threatens to take her sister Vanessa from her by marriage. Later that same year, on the eve of the wedding, she writes to Clive Bell again. This time she concedes him his victory of winning Vanessa with an inspired description of her sister through her name:

"So then let us turn—and where? First, I think, to Vanessa; and I am almost inclined to let her name stand alone upon the page. It contains all the beauty of the sky, and the melancholy of the sea, and laughter of the Dolphins in its circumference, first in the mystic Van, spread like a mirror of grey glass to Heaven. Next in the swishing tail of its successive esses, and finally in the grave pause and the suspension of the ultimate A breathing peace like the respiration of Earth itself."1

This ability to shape verbal rainbows is a harbinger of the power she would invoke later in her novels, and especially as she described Mrs Ramsay in To The Lighthouse.
Virginia Woolf's past continued to haunt her throughout her life. The need to exorcise the ghosts of the unpleasant and restricted childhood, and the pain of her mother's death are nowhere more poignantly depicted than in her novel, *To The Lighthouse*. Through the novel she was able to come to terms with the love/hate she felt for her father, and to touch on the relationship she might have had with her mother, had Julia lived.

It would not be surprising to find Vanessa commenting on the novel as "You have given a portrait of mother which is more like her to me than anything I could ever have conceived."2 What is revealing however, is the power of Woolf's psychological and literary talents merging to produce the essence of her mother for Duncan Grant who never met her. In the same letter Vanessa relates Duncan's response: "...for Duncan who didn't know them says too that for the first time he understands mother."3

The letter in response to Vanessa's simply states "...I suppose she (Julia) cut a great figure on one's mind when it was just awake, and had not any experience of life."4 It is the novel itself which delineates Julia Stephen's impact on Woolf.

All of the letters have a free sounding element to them while the Diaries tend to a more formal tone. This is not to say
that the Diaries are contrived. The Diaries are a mixture of notes to herself, lists of things to do, remembrances of events and how she felt about the people she met. They also chronicle feelings about Bloomsbury friends, and memories of her parents. In the Diaries, Virginia Woolf muses on her memories, figuring out by subtracting the years, how old her father would be on a certain date, or how long ago that Bloomsbury began.

To The Lighthouse was a literary reexamination of her life at several stages, child, adolescent, young adult, and mature woman. Orlando was Virginia Woolf's celebration of life, her affirmation of love unlike any other she had experienced. The Diaries and Letters show that she moved back to Bloomsbury at the time she began these two novels, and that she renewed her friendship with Vita at the same time.

Bloomsbury gave Woolf the comfort in proximity to her cherished memories of young adulthood, and her relationship with Vita tapped the resources of her passion for the first time. Throughout Bloomsbury is never very far away either in spirit or place for Virginia Woolf. Leon Edel has given a characterization of the history of that time. He portrays the overlapping qualities of the friendships, with everyone defining themselves as individuals, and seems to say that the real growing up for all
of them started with Bloomsbury. Thoby's friends, the young men from Cambridge, would give Virginia and Vanessa a picture of the world they inhabited, and the sisters, because they felt free to do so, would learn from it, mold it to their own, and form a lifestyle unique to the society they previously knew. The life and the style were Bloomsbury, a name which some wanted to claim partnership in, and others wanted to disclaim for any significance it might have brought to the world.

What Bloomsbury did for Virginia Woolf was to provide her with an oasis after the years at Kensington. Its liberating environment enabled her to start a process of self psychological examination, which found began with the Memoirs Club, and which found its way into her literature. It also saved her for a time from successfully obliterating herself.

It has been my intention to view Virginia Woolf from the powerful experiences of her youth to gain a deeper understanding of her. Among the most memorable accounts of her are two taken from a collection by Jane Russell Noble. The first is a very old Duncan Grant, one of the last survivors of the group who recalls her shortly after she moved to Bloomsbury:
"I do not think that her new existence had 'become alive' to Virginia's imagination in those first years. She gave the impression of being so intensely receptive to any experience new to her, and so intensely interested in facts that she had not come across before, that time was necessary to give it a meaning as a whole. It took the years to complete her vision of it."5

The second account is of Stephen Spender which serves to give shape to the picture I have watched emerge of Virginia Woolf and how she experienced Bloomsbury:

"It is much more important to say that her second world was an inner world in which her family and friends played roles in her imagination: in which they existed,...as a group, revering one another, believing in the talents of each and all, exchanging ideas, gossip and confidences. Each member was a part of a shared consciousness. There was interaction ...which gave the group the character of a work of art of relations achieved and of values intensely imagined. Communication between them was ideal, together with the wit, the story-telling...only very thin walls dividing the rooms where they met from tragedy. If there was tragedy they could talk about it."6

Virginia Woolf formed lasting values through this unique group of family and friends who helped her stave off the tragedy for awhile.
ENDNOTES


2 Letters, Vol III, Appendix, page 572

3 Ibid

4 Letters, Vol III, page 383

5 Jane Russell Nobel Recollections of Virginia Woolf, (Peter Owen, 1972), page 20

6 Recollections, page 183-84
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