TO THE READERS:

From all accounts, the Woolf Centennial Conference in Morgantown, West Virginia was entirely worth of the occasion. Perhaps some of the fortunate participants would be good enough to prepare a summary for VWM's next issue. This Fall '82 issue will be edited by Ellen Hawkes and, as her address will be changing, please submit any material for possible publication to VWM's regular mailing address on or before September 15. Remember articles should be typed, double-spaced and no longer than 800 words.

VWM is happy to announce that Professor Peter Stansky of Stanford's Dept. of History has joined our Editorial Board. Best known in Bloomsbury circles for the exemplary Journey to the Frontier, written with William Abrahams in 1966, he has recently published on George Orwell and on William Morris. He plans to edit a future VWM issue devoted particularly to historical matters, though he is also interested in the art of the period.

VWM has received from Eileen Traub a copy of a review she did of Simon Watney's English Post-Impressionism (Studio Vista / Eastview Editions, Inc.). The "intelligent, cohesive and illuminating text" and the many illustrations of paintings that have not been widely reproduced make the book worth the steep price ($60). She has offered to review Isabelle Anscombe's Omega and after for an upcoming VWM.

We hear from the University of Tennessee Press that Grace Radin's Virginia Woolf's "The Years": Evolution of a Novel is now published and from Louise De Salvo that "Melymbrosia is, at long last, being printed!" Good news for all Woolf readers, though several readers have written to register their ambivalence about the number of books emerging on Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury, suggesting that the best way to observe the Centenary might be to "turn back to the novels themselves." (This is a quote from an article by Keith Brown on Mrs. Dalloway which he published in the 29 Jan. '82 Cambridge Review, "for sentimental reasons, because I thought she would be pleased"). William Cackle, a faithful reader of Virginia Woolf since "the mid-Twenties when I was not yet twenty," rushes out to buy each new book but worries that by doing so he is joining a cult.

This concern was expressed also in a widely read article by Helen Dudar in the February '82 issue of The Saturday Review, entitled "The Virginia Woolf Cult." Aside from characterizing the VWM as a "fanzine" and misquoting this editor (wry is not my flavor), she wonders at the excesses of our attention and allegiance. Carolyn Heilbrun pointed out to her that the passion for Woolf is no greater than the passion for James Joyce . . . ."

"If you admire Auden, that's good taste," Professor Heilbrun notes sardonically. [And I am not convinced her flavor is sardonic!] "If you admire Sylvia Plath, it's a cult. Women are always in a defensive position. One has to be awfully careful to call something a cult." (p. 33 of the above cited article)

Are there other responses from our wide and various readership to this issue, or is it a non-issue? What kind of publishing is still needed on Virginia Woolf during the next 100 years? VWM would be glad to hear from you and then to give a report.

We also plan to begin publishing a cumulative index to our past issues (now 181), as a supplement to our usual six page Fall and Spring issues. If anyone would like to take on the task of preparing this index, please get in touch. The VWM will continue to need monetary donations from as many readers as possible, to cover these extra pages and the ever-rising costs of publishing even such a modest "fanzine" as this one. We don't want to have to go to charging a regular subscription, except for libraries and for back issues, but it is ever harder to get institutional support during these hard times. Your checks to the VWM Foundation Account are tax-deductible and should be sent to our regular mailing address.

Best wishes to everyone for a pleasant summer. I will be leaving before our publication date (and would like to give special thanks to Karen Petersen and the Sonoma Common Readers for seeing this issue to bed) to speak on Orlando for Lucio Ruotolo's Stanford in Britain program at Cliveden. After the seminar, we will all go on a field trip to Knole and Sissinghurst with Nigel Nicolson as guide. What ideal teaching conditions!

J.J. Wilson
Sonoma State University

GODREVY LIGHTHOUSE REVISITED

Recent closeup snapshots by Karen Teague of her Voyage Out To The Godrevy Lighthouse from St. Ives suggested that the lantern room atop the tower is disproportionately large for its present occupant lighting apparatus. I wrote to Trinity House Lighthouse Service to ask if the present lens were the original lighting apparatus for the tower. Sue McDermott, for the Public Relations Officer of Trinity House informed me that, while the lighthouse was built in 1859, the present lens was not installed until 1934 at which time the keepers
were withdrawn and the station changed to automatic operation. The lens is of the Second Order in size and is fixed in that it does not rotate beams but shows a generally diffused light that flashes on every ten seconds for one second duration. The lens is color-sectored so that it shows a white or red light depending on the direction from which it is viewed. From Talland House it appears today as described by Jane Lilienfeld in A Trip To St. Ives appearing in the Spring 1977 issue of VWM: "The lighthouse existed only as an eye. A red eye, small but strong away in the mist." She continues with respect to James: "Years later he remembers to have seen 'a yellow eye. I had seen what James and Virginia Stephen had seen.'"

From 1859-1934 the tower was fitted with the original First Order in size lens which revolved beams with regular luminosity and occurrence every ten seconds for one second duration across the line of sight of the Winter White flash. As seen from Talland House, due to atmospheric conditions, the white light would have appeared to Virginia Stephen as "a yellow eye . . . the eye opening and shutting" preceded and followed by a beam's wheeling across the night sky.

Joseph Kessel
Las Vegas, Nevada

*Karen Teague's closeup photograph has been rendered for VWM in this handsome pen and ink drawing by Tony Lofting.

HISTORIES OF A HOUSE

The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn, written in 1906 while Virginia and Vanessa Stephen leased Blo' Norton Hall in Norfolk, has a parallel in a scholarly essay on the moated manor house by another of its tenants, Prince Frederick Duleep Singh’s "An Account of Blo' Norton Hall, Otherwise the Manor House of Brome Hall in Blo' Norton," published in 1914.1 The story and essay contain a number of echoes. Singh notes, for example, the plan of the house "in the shape of a letter E with the central portion missing." Woolf has "the dignified little house built like the letter E with the middle notch smoothed out of it." More important similarities arise from the use of documents written by an early woman inhabitant of Blo' Norton Hall, or Woolf's Martyn Hall. Singh draws many of his details from the will of Elizabeth Brampton (d. 1600), which he extracts at the essay's end. Woolf concludes her story with the diary of Joan Martyn, which feeds the imagination of the historian narrator Rosamond Merdew, who finds the diary among the owner's papers at Martyn Hall. Singh's reflections as an historian on Blo' Norton Hall's classically unpretentious English manor house style might have been thought by Merdew, who says essentially the same about Martyn Hall. (Singh adds genealogies of the owning family who have inherited Blo' Norton Hall since approximately 1280; extracts several owners' wills, including Brampton's; lists the Hall's portraits, and prints photographs of the house's exterior, interior, garden, and moat.)

The two authors may have known each other's work. Singh leased the Hall from sometime after 1904 until his death in 1926. If he was the principal tenant by 1906, he may have sub-leased to the Stephen sisters for the month of August. Or, Virginia may have heard about "Prince Freddie" and his research on Norfolk buildings during her visits to the parson or on rambles about the village that she notes in a letter to Violet Dickinson and in her diary for 1906.2

Prince Frederick was a son of the Indian maharajah deposed by the British government in 1849. Born in England in 1868 and educated at Cambridge, Singh was an enthusiastic Anglophile, collector, historian, and preserver of houses and churches from Victorian restorers. He dedicated Blo' Norton Hall to Charles I, placed in it his collection of Stuart relics (the martyred king's nightshirts, nightcaps, a ringlet of hair, a piece of the execution block) and portraits. Information for his essay was gathered over several years from local sources and from several generations of Blo' Norton heirs.3

Similarities of detail in Singh's essay and Woolf's story suggest that the young writer did considerable fact-digging for her historical fiction composed so lightheartedly, as she wrote Dickinson, while "I tramp the country for miles with a map, leap ditches, scale walls and desecrate churches, making out beautiful brilliant stories every step of the way."

Catherine F. Smith
Bucknell University

1 Woolf's story was recently titled, edited, and published with an introduction by Susan M. Squier and Louise A. DeSalvo in Twentieth Century Literature, 25 (Fall/Winter 1979), numbers 3/4, 237-269.


VIRGINIA WOOLF AND LING SU HUA: LITERARY AND ARTISTIC CORRESPONDENCES

Volume VI of Virginia Woolf's letters reveals that one of her many correspondents was a Chinese writer and artist, Ling Su Hua. A friend of Julian Bell's when he was in China, Su Hua first wrote to Woolf in 1938, expressing both her depression about the war and her desire to write. Also faced with the impending chaos and destruction of war, Woolf encouraged Su Hua to find consolation in work, and specifically urged her "to write your autobiography, and . . . I will gladly read it and give it any correction it needs." She also sent several books to Su Hua in July of 1938, and again urged her to continue with her work, commenting "write exactly as you think—that is the only way" (259), and later emphasizing the importance of details: "Give as many natural details of the life, of the house, of the furniture as you like. And always do it as you would were you writing for the Chinese" (290). She hoped that Su Hua would be able to maintain a Chinese flavor in her writing, yet make it understandable for the English, so that the autobiography could be published in England after the war.

Woolf received several chapters of Su Hua's autobiography, which was eventually published in 1953 by Hogarth Press as Ancient Melodies. It is not surprising that Woolf found the fragments interesting. First, she was responsive to the portrayal of a different life, indeed a different civilization (328). And, undoubtedly, she recognized Su Hua's artistic vision, as well as experiences similar to her own in Su Hua's descriptions of her position as a woman in a male-dominated, patriarchial society, and of her growth as an artist. These factors may explain why Woolf's letters to Su Hua are particularly intimate, even though the two women had never met.2

Evident in the autobiography is a painter's vision.3 Su Hua's descriptions are most striking in nature scenes. For example, all the senses are involved through her use of sensory imagery when she describes playing in the garden where there are "old trees with empty stomachs in their trunks" and "shining green and purple fruits, like the eyes of fairies" and where the hollows of rocks make her feel as if she were "inside a vast sea, seeing and catching all the queer creatures." There is also unusual color imagery in a description of the city landscape shaped by palaces: "the yellow roofs appeared to be made of gold, the green roofs were as beautiful as jade, and those of blue became azure. The long
red-orange wall of the Forbidden City was like a ribbon binding the beautiful buildings together” (81). Moreover, Su Hua emphasizes how the Chinese love flowers, particularly in springtime when each flower or plant has a symbolic meaning which is also associated with Chinese history or literature or social customs. Finally, social customs are described with unusual detail, and the Chinese emphasis on decorative objects is especially well portrayed in her descriptions of the red-satin wedding dress and jewelled wedding crown of her new sister-in-law, and the elaborate wall and table decorations in the wedding reception hall (130).

In addition to these vivid descriptions of Chinese scenery and civilization, Virginia Woolf probably recognized the importance of Su Hua’s portrayal of the position of women in Chinese family and social life. She presents a detailed picture of the daily life of her father’s six wives and their many children. As the fourth female child of her mother, and the tenth daughter of a large family, Su Hua was not given any special attention during her early years. Keenly aware of her mother’s disappointment in having only daughters, and of the extreme importance placed on male children in Chinese culture, Su Hua dreamed of achieving great accomplishments which she hoped would console her family for not having any sons. Moreover, she writes: “I often felt unhappy when I considered that I was only a girl. I always hesitated to talk or laugh because I was very sensitive about the fact that I was not wanted in my family” (201). Undoubtedly, she would have received any special attention from her father if not for her artistic talent.

The autobiography describes Su Hua’s first impulse to draw with charcoal on a garden wall, and how these pictures attracted the attention of her father’s friend who urged her father to educate her. Since artists were revered by the Chinese, the art teacher she studied under wanted her to observe the woman Court artist “to make her see the life of an artist . . . her manner, her speech, her taste in art, and all her surroundings as well as what she does in painting” (86). Added to this influence would be the advice of her father: “Never do any picture which you do not like to do. Paint everything for your own sake. You should not try to please anyone, even though he may be your father” (87). Later, at the urging of her painting tutor, her father agreed to give her reading lessons which emphasized developing listening skills through ear training. During these lessons, she would hear the chanting of Chinese classics and would learn short poems by memory. Still later, her artistic education was furthered by music training through her Foster-Mother who taught her to play the seven-stringed harp and to understand that “music was the most beautiful way of expressing emotions. Therefore . . . music was very important for everyone” (202). As a result of this training, she became sensitive to the visual images and emotions embodied in music.

The autobiography seems to end abruptly with Su Hua about to decide her future: whether she would become a teacher, because she believed that education would help keep the social reform China needed to survive as a civilization in the twentieth century; or whether she would continue to develop her artistic talent and express her vision to others through painting and through words. The autobiography does not reveal Su Hua’s future; however, it does reveal that although she was from a different culture, Su Hua shared with Virginia Woolf not only a brief literary correspondence, but also a common bond—the desire to change the perceptions of others through their artistic vision and through the medium of their art forms.

Selma Meyerowitz
Stanford University

2 Ibid., p. 347. Woolf writes: “I am just going to write to her (Vannessa). . . . And I wish you lived near and could come too.”
3 Woolf refers to Su Hua’s work as an artist, “asking in one of the letters whether she has sent any paintings to Vanessa (328), and thanking her in another letter for sending a red and black poster which she liked (347).

**REVIEW: THE DIARY OF VIRGINIA WOOLF VOLUME THREE, 1925-30**

ED. ANNE OLIVIER BELL (HARCOURT BRACE JOVANOVICH, 1980)

Acknowledging “Virginia’s tendency to use her diary as a vent for ill humour.” Olivier Bell does well to emphasize how this third volume “is on the whole the record of a wretched time: the record of a woman happy in her marriage, happy in her friendships, but above all happy in her work…” (p.ix).

It may surprise those inclined to view the Woolfs’ marriage with suspicion to hear Virginia describe her husband as a source of continual pleasure and stimulation. Hurrying home to have fifteen minutes with him before lunch, she is amazed to find herself, after eighteen years of marriage, “all of a quiver.” Even the attraction of Vita — Virginia has just spent the night at Long Barn — does not diminish the excitement of renewing communications. “I daresay,” she speculates, comparing her own marriage with others, “few women are happier” (p. 310).

The pleasure she describes on such occasions is by no means exclusively intellectual. It involves sharing precisely those customary, daily rituals her literary adversary has recently stigmatized: “Arnold Bennett says that the horror of marriage lies in its ‘dailiness’” (p. 105). Recollections of lounging with Leonard after dinner, sitting together on a bus to Richmond, combing Grizzle (their mongrel dog), “making an ice” survive in her mind because they exist in what she terms to be “the core of my life” which is this complete comfort with Leonard… The intense success of our life is, I think, that our treasure is hid away; or rather in such common things that nothing can touch it” (p. 30).

The uncommon Vita Sackville-West, more than Leonard, emerges during these years to threaten Virginia’s independence. The issue, it would appear, lies deeper than sexuality. What Virginia had termed “a legacy of dependence” in writing of Leslie Stephen (Moments of Being, “A Sketch of the Past,” p. 114) still affects and restricts almost all of her more intimate relationships. If To The Lighthouse freed her from an obsessive parental dependence, the appeal of Vita tempers her once more to subordinate both artistic and personal impulses. Aware of her own defensive fears about life, she describes Vita as lavishing upon her “the maternal protection which, for some reason, is what I have always most wished from everyone” (p. 52). Sometimes an immense ship in full sail on the horizon, sometimes a general “chasing at the heels of his army” (Letters, III Feb. 17, 1926), always full and abundant as Virginia is not, Vita’s image promises order and direction. Her motherly presence, reducing Virginia to child-like contentedness, subsumes the haunting vision of a fin which will in time become the basis of her most experimental novel, The Waves. As she puts it in this same letter: “I often think of you instead of my novel.”

Walking past Knole with Vita, Virginia feels compelled “to look away from the vast masterless house…” (p. 174). In one respect Orlando reestablishes her friend’s sovereignty at the center of Virginia’s art if not as master of Knole. But such centrality is the last thing Virginia needs. Vita’s clear and unchanging form — “like a lamppost, straight, glowing” (p. 204) — situates and fixes Virginia in space and time. “I feel a lack of stimulus, of marked days, now Vita is gone” (p. 37). Vanessa often offers a similar sense of defining reality. “She is a necessity to me — as I am not to her. I run to her as the wallaby runs to the old kangaroo. She is also very cheerful, solid happy... And how masterfully she controls her dozen lives” (pp. 186-7).

Like Mrs. Ramsay’s presiding influence on Lily Briscoe, Vita’s strong presence interposes an old way of doing and of being. The fault of course is not Vita’s. Virginia seems aware of the need to move on her own behalf without the assurance of a defining center, be it mother or sister, friend or husband.

The alternative emerges painfully in these pages as she withstands the need of something definitive to fall back upon. Once she can tolerate such loss of centrality — the experience of an existential emptiness at the heart of life recurs throughout these diary entries — she grows to prefer the very ambience of inflection:
“there is — what I most love — change ahead” (p. 260). Far more important than symptoms of madness, Virginia’s repeated thoughts on “depression” represent a decisive stage in the evolution of her artistic vision. Despondence comes to signify in her mind the healthy consequence of being on her own, free to do nothing as well as something.

It is so strange to me that I cannot get it right — the depression, I mean, which does not come from something definite, but from nothing. “Where there is nothing” the phrase came back to me, as I sat at the table in the drawing room. Of course I was interested, & discovered that, for the first time for many years, I had been idle without being ill (p. 111).

Tempted always “to avoid these glooms,” she acknowledges how they are linked mysteriously to her most creative moments of being. One can follow in this volume how Virginia, struggling to disengage herself from conventional ties and derivative impulses, forces herself down into that well of emptiness and solitude. The record of this effort precedes and illuminates the well known passage Leonard first placed in A Writer’s Diary.

It is this that is frightening & exciting in the midst of my profound gloom, depression, boredom, whatever it is: One sees a fin passing far out (p. 113).

Having begun The Waves Virginia reveals how much she owes to Leonard’s openness. Where Lytton Strachey’s egotism “checks and inhibits” — “Had I married Lytton I would never have written anything” — with Leonard: “Anything is possible” (p. 273). While forced to play and perhaps at times overlay the protective role of nurse maid, he clearly valued and encouraged Virginia’s experimental ventures.

Lucio P. Ruotolo
Stanford University

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT BOARDS
THE EUPHROSYNE

As both Louise De Salvo and Esther Klindienst Joplin have pointed out, Woolf’s later draft of The Voyage Out became a book about books, a book about education and the ways fiction shapes life.” The work evolved into an example of the “female” Bildungsroman—a novel of youth and education in the tradition of Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister, Wordsworth’s Prelude, Byron’s Don Juan, Dickens’ Great Expectations, and Samuel Butler’s Way of All Flesh. The genre usually “follows a young man [sic] in his progress from boyhood to the threshold of a poised maturity.” With the exception of George Eliot’s Mill on the Floss, however, Woolf had few nineteenth-century models of the Bildungsroman depicting the “all-around development or self-culture” of a female protagonist.

On the island of Santa Marina, Rachel Vinrace embarks on a quest for self-discovery. Her autodidactic task is alternately abetted and hindered by the combined tutelage of Helen Ambrose, Terence Hewet, and St. John Hirst. Paradoxically, Rachel is convinced that the “great tradition” of Western thought will introduce her to unimagined Cabalistic mysteries. If she learns to read Greek and to master Gibbon, she will be led back through the ages to an understanding of the “very first page of the book of the world.” She firmly believes that “all knowledge would be hers, and the book of the world turned back to the very first page. Such was her excitement at the possibilities of knowledge now opening before her that she ceased to read.”

It is ironic that Rachel, in the middle of a South American jungle, is determined to swallow the Victorian canon of classical knowledge at one gulp—undigested and unassimilated, without prior analysis or mental examination. Like Shakespeare’s Miranda set in a “new world” of classical education, she reacts to Gibbon’s Decline and Fall as a wonderful example of Western scholarship. At this point, she fails to question the patriarchal tradition represented by her sententious text. Pleading for entrance into that exclusively male bastion, the sacrosanct “cathedral of learning,” she is unaware that the Oxbridge door to education leads to a claustrophobic tunnel of narrowly-defined values. Unwittingly, Rachel seeks admission to a life-denying cave of fossilized knowledge—bigoted, myopic, self-enclosed and self-referential.

As Rachel sets out to rectify the damages of her haphazard “female” training, she determines to learn the Greek alphabet and to penetrate the ponderous tomes of Gibbon. Her enthusiastic program of self-instruction raises the more fundamental question articulated by Helen Ambrose: “Can a woman be educated on a par with men?” What are the consequences of a separate but unequal education, based on home instruction and nighted ignorance? Helen declares in a letter:

If they [women] were properly educated I don’t see why they shouldn’t be much the same as men—as satisfactory I mean: though, of course, very different. The question is, how should one educate them? The present method seems to me abominable. This girl, though twenty-four, had never heard that men desired women. . . . Her ignorance upon other matters as important . . was complete . . I have taken it upon myself to enlighten her, and now, though still a good deal prejudiced and liable to exaggerate, she is more or less a reasonable human being. Keeping them ignorant, of course, defeats its own object. (VO 94-95)

If Richard Dalloway commissions Rachel to read Edmund Burke for political instruction, Virginia Woolf would certainly counsel her to turn in another direction—to the writings of Burke’s opponent, that feminist revolutionary who “had been in revolt all her life—against tyranny, against law, against convention.” From her intellectual foremother, Mary Wollstonecraft, Rachel might imibe that “love of humanity” which inspired “those two eloquent and daring books—the Reply to Burke and the Vindication of the Rights of Woman, which are so true that . . . their originality has become our commonplace.”

It is perhaps more than coincidental that both Helen Ambrose and St. John Hirst meditate on the education of women in terms that echo Mary Wollstonecraft’s feminist treatise on the rights of woman. Compare, for instance, Helen’s letter with Wollstonecraft’s query: “If then women are not a swarm of ephemeral triflers, why should they be kept in ignorance under the specious name of innocence?” The eighteenth-century feminist bemoans the “neglected education” of her fellow-creatures as a “grand source of misery.” “One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on the subject by men.” Her primary target in this volume is not Burke but Rousseau who, along with Lytton Strachey, seems to have provided a model for the gaunt intellectual of Woolf’s novel, St. John Hirst. Wollstonecraft bitterly complains that Rousseau, while taking arrogant pride in his virtues of reason and intellect, betrays a blind spot in his advice on the education of women. By attributing a “sex to mind,” she proposes a tenet inconsistent with his own “rationalist” philosophy. “But what a weak barrier is truth when it stands in the way of an hypothesis?” In a misogynist vein, St. John Hirst raises the same question proposed by Mary Wollstonecraft: “It’s awfully difficult to tell about women . . . how much, I mean, is due to lack of training, and how much is native incapacity” (VO 153). His depiction of Rachel’s “absurdly” protected life reduces the young woman to tears.

But what kind of education is appropriate for a twentieth-century woman? Certainly not the kind of learning represented by Miss Allan, the schoolmire diligently preparing a Primer of English Literature. Fondly stroking her father’s gold watch, she reverences the “great tradition” of masculine knowledge and tries to compress the “best that has been thought and known in the world”—by men—into digestible capsules of salient information, suitable for assimilation by children and ladies eager to become acquainted with the “masters” of English literature from Beowulf to Browning.

Women’s own literary activities seem equally trivial in the hands of someone like Susan Warrington, who dutifully records daily events in a diary whose calligraphy resembles the “square ugly hand of a mature child” (VO 103). Miss Warrington’s penmanship reflects her superficial and naive attitude toward life: her autobiographical concerns include lawn tennis and damp sheets in the hotel. Soon to be rescued from a barren middle age by Arthur Venning, Susan may sleep, bovine and contented,
uttering “peaceful sighs and hesitations” that resemble the noises of “a cow standing up to its knees all night in the long grass” (VO 104). Her ruminations are decidedly bourgeois, her perspective limited and provincial.

Education, Mrs. Hughling Elliot would assure us, is not what women want at all. “Unmarried women—earning their livings—it’s the hardest life of all” (VO 114). “What women want,” according to the childless matron (Sigmund Freud, take note), is the “crown” of feminine existence—marriage, childbirth, and child-rearing. Men are blessed with meaningful work. Women have only their memories and their regrets.

As if in response to Susan Warrington and Mrs. Hughling Elliot, Mary Wollstonecraft might thus comment on the “cautious prudence of a little soul”: “If all the faculties of a woman’s mind are only to be cultivated as they respect her dependence on man; if, when a husband be obtained, she have arrived at her goal, and meanly proud rests satisfied with such a paltry crown, let her grovel contentedly, scarcely raised by her employments above the animal kingdom.” In implicit answer to Mrs. Elliot, Wollstonecraft declares that “a proper education; or, to speak with more precision, a well stored mind, would enable a woman to support a single life with dignity.”

Is it sheer coincidence that Woolf echoes Wollstonecraft’s animal imagery, her allusion to marriage as the “paltry crown” of female life, and her commentary on the single state? Did Woolf consciously set out to investigate in The Voyage Out the contemporary question of “female education” under the auspices of Wollstonecraft’s earlier Vindication? Were she to comment on the self-tutelage shared by Virginia Woolf and Rachel Vinrace, Wollstonecraft might have remarked:

I do not believe that a private education can work the wonders which some sanguine writers have attributed to it. Men and women must be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in. . . . It may then fairly be inferred, that, till society be differently constituted, much cannot be expected from education.

Prof. S.A. Henke
State University of New York
at Binghamton

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6 Ibid., p. 31.
7 Ibid., p. 80.
8 Ibid., p. 66.
9 Ibid., p. 67.
10 Ibid., p. 52.

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LESLIE STEPHEN AND VIRGINIA WOOLF’S SUICIDE

Following Noel Annan, Katherine Hill’s recent, persuasive article, “Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen: History and Literary Revolution” (PMLA, 96[1981], 351-62), concludes that it was not just in literary matters but in the model of “ardent agnosticism” and “rational rebelliousness” (p. 360) that Stephen influenced his daughters. Following Hill, I turn would suggest that Stephen may even have provided a rationale for Virginia Woolf’s suicide. For if Stephen’s literary pronouncements prepared Woolf for a rich life in letters, buried deep in his Science of Ethics—published in 1882, the year of Virginia’s birth—was sanction, too, for Woolf’s way of death.

Against the mainstream of late Victorian thought, Stephen had clearly argued the morality of suicide:

If, now, we suppose that a man, knowing that life meant for him nothing but agony, and that moreover his life could not serve others, and was only giving useless pain to his attendants, and perhaps involved the sacrifice of health to his wife and children, should commit suicide, what ought we to think of him? He would, no doubt, be breaking the accepted moral code; but why should he not break it? . . . May we not say that he is acting on a superior moral principle, and that because he is clearly diminishing the sum of human misery? It is impossible to settle the case in concrete instances, because there is no fixed eternal test. The conduct may spring either from cowardice or from a loftier motive than the ordinary, and the merit of the action is therefore not determinable; but, assuming the loftier motive, I can see no ground for disagreeing with the action which flows from it. The Science of Ethics (London: Smith, Elder, 1882), pp. 391-2.

All three of Woolf’s suicide notes show Woolf motivated by Stephen’s “superior moral principle.” Above all she felt that she was diminishing the pain of her “attendants,” Leonard’s of course, beyond all others. Most moving, and most like Stephen, is the note to Leonard dated 27 March, 1941 by Quentin Bell and 18 March by Nicolson and Trautmann:

Dearst,

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 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.

By committing suicide, Woolf may, as Susan Kenney has argued (UTO, Summer, 1975), have been ridding herself of both patriarchs and protectors, but the voice of Leslie Stephen resounds even in her last words. In ethics as well as aesthetics, Leslie Stephen proves to have been his daughter’s father.

Barbara T. Gates
University of Delaware
Dear VWM:

Internal alterations will be made to King's College Library this summer and autumn, in order to improve facilities for readers of the Research Collections. As a result we shall have temporarily to close the Library to scholars wishing to consult mediaeval or modern manuscripts or certain classes of printed books. We regret very much any inconvenience that this may cause. The closure will begin on 1st July 1982, and it is hoped that we shall be able to reopen on 6th December 1982.

This closure will be in addition to our annual closure during the undergraduate examination period, which will run this year from 3rd May to 11th June.

Readers wishing to consult these Collections outside the closed periods are, of course, always welcome to do so, and should write, as usual, giving at least one week's notice of their intended visit.

We should be very grateful if you would bring these arrangements to the notice of your readers.

Yours faithfully,

Michael Halls
Modern Archivist
P.J. Croft Librarian
King's College Library
Cambridge