



The Letters of Virginia Woolf

VOLUME TWO 1912-1922

Originally published in England as *The Question of Things Happening*

*EDITED BY NIGEL NICOLSON
AND JOANNE TRAUTMANN*

The Letters of Virginia Woolf

Volume II: 1912-1922

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and Joanne Trautmann



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A B C D E F G H I J

“There’s the whole question, which interested me . . . of the things one doesn’t say; what effect does that have? and how far do our feelings take their colour from the dive underground? I mean, what is the reality of any feeling? . . . And then there’s the question of things happening, normally, all the time.”

Virginia Woolf to Janet Case
19 *November* 1919

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Plates 1, 4c, 6b, 6c, 7a, 7b, 8a, 8b and 8c were loaned by Professor and Mrs Quentin Bell; 2a, 5a and 6a, by Barbara Bagenal; 3 and 5b, by the Editor; 4b, by Angelica Garnett; 2b, by the Greater London Council; 7c, by the National Portrait Gallery, London; page 153, by Sussex University.

Editorial Note

THERE is no need to repeat from the Note attached to Volume I of these Letters every detail of our editorial method. It follows traditional lines. We have enquired widely for Virginia Woolf's letters in public collections in Britain and the United States, and persuaded her surviving correspondents or their descendants to search their desks and attics. The total haul now numbers over 4,000, and we hope that the publication of the first volumes will bring more to light. We have transcribed the letters either from the originals or facsimiles of them, adding dates and addresses where they were missing, and explaining obscure allusions. About twenty-five letters and postcards have been omitted from this volume, because they were notes of social engagements of no importance.

The editing of Volume II has been easier than that of Volume I, for two reasons. First, as the letters survive in increasing numbers and crowd more closely together, one provides clues to another, in date and subject-matter. Secondly, in 1915, and from October 1917 until her death, Virginia Woolf kept a diary, which fills in the chronology of her life and expands some incidents mentioned in the letters. By permission of Quentin Bell and Dr Lola L. Szladits, curator of the Berg Collection in New York Public Library, which owns the original, we have been able to examine it, but we have not quoted anything not already published by Leonard Woolf in his abbreviated version, *A Writer's Diary* (1953). The full diary is being edited for publication by Olivier (Mrs Quentin) Bell.

It has not been necessary or possible to explain and amplify everything which Virginia wrote to her friends. We do not wish to produce an edition of her letters in which a few lines of her text struggle, page after page, to keep afloat on a sea of footnotes. While that might be editorially impressive, it would destroy her fluency. We have confined our annotation to references which made us pause with the questions 'Who?', 'Where?', 'What?', on the assumption that the reader will do the same, and our answers have been given as concisely as possible. Even so, there are a few gaps. "I ran into Mrs Flower in the London Library. We merely spat at each other" (13 November 1918). Flower? There are several Mrs Flowers whom Virginia could conceivably have known, but which one was her target on that occasion? So with a sense of editorial incompetence, one surrenders: *unidentified*. There are other examples scattered through this volume. We are consoled, but not wholly, by the reflection that few readers will greatly care about Flower, and by the certainty that Virginia herself would have thought it foolish to subject her letters to feats of editorial archaeology.

Among those whom we wish particularly to thank are, foremost, Quentin and Olivier Bell. Professor Bell and his sister Angelica Garnett are the owners of the copyright in all the letters, and they have given us much of their time and help. But Olivier Bell has been the recipient of most of our enquiries. In preparing the material for her husband's biography of Virginia Woolf, she was the first to examine in detail Virginia's massive correspondence, and to place it in chronological order, often with only a 'Tuesday' to guide her. We have retraced her scholarly work, with the enormous advantage that she had done it first, and that we had other letters of which she did not know. In dating them we have rarely disagreed, and her unrivalled knowledge of Bloomsbury has filled many gaps in our own.

As before, this volume is published both in Great Britain and the United States. We wish to thank the Hogarth Press in London and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in New York for their encouragement; and the printers, T. & A. Constable of Edinburgh, for their skill and care.

For their generosity in allowing Dr Joanne Trautmann to spend part of her academic year working on this volume, we are grateful to the Department of Humanities, the Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine, Hershey, Pennsylvania.

The following have also given us much help: George A. Spter; B. J. Kirkpatrick, author of *A Bibliography of Virginia Woolf*; Dr Lola L. Szladits, of the Berg Collection, New York; the librarians of Sussex University, and of the London Library; Paul Levy, of the Strachey Trust; Michael Holroyd; Benedict, Juliet and Adam Nicolson; Patrick and Mrs Heron; Gordon S. Haight; Dr Wendy Baron; Daphne Sanger; Richard Shone; Raymond Mortimer; Mrs Margaret Scott, of Wellington, New Zealand; Sybille Bedford; the staff of the National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery. Our other main benefactors, the owners of the original letters, are acknowledged at the foot of each.

Several secretaries (who should more correctly be designated sub-editors, so great has been their contribution) have typed the letters and prepared them for publication. We wish particularly to thank Pamela Kilbane, Jane Carr and Lyn J. Dunbar, in England; and in the United States, Gretchen Hess Gage, Valerie Henderson and Gwendolyn W. Pierce.

NIGEL NICOLSON
JOANNE TRAUTMANN

Introduction

BETWEEN 1912 and 1922 Virginia Woolf married, published her first three novels, twice went mad, and co-founded the Hogarth Press. The same years contained the First World War. It was a massive experience for someone so mentally frail. But the impression left by her letters is that she was stronger at the end of this decade than at the beginning, stronger in creative power, in social energy, in audacity. If this is true, it was due primarily to the happiness of her marriage.

When two people of independent minds marry, they must be able to rely upon each other's tolerance, affection and support. Each must encourage, without jealousy, the full development of the other's gifts, each allow the other privacy, different interests, different friends. But they must share an intellectual and moral base. One of them cannot be philistine if the other is constantly breasting new ideas. They cannot disagree wildly on what is right and wrong. Above all, their love must grow as passion fades—and Virginia never experienced much passion—particularly if they have no children. And if they face, as Virginia and Leonard faced, the ultimate calamity that she might at any moment go raving mad and turn upon him with vitriolic abuse, then he must draw upon all the reserves their marriage has accumulated, and expend them freely, knowing that they will be renewed by his very effort of sustaining both of them through her long ordeal.

All this Leonard Woolf did for Virginia. But for him she might not have lived until she was 40. Feeling the profoundest form of gratitude, thinking guiltily that she was ruining his life, she responded with a love that matched his own. "I assure you, I couldn't have married anyone else", she told Jacques Raverat in 1922. And to Leonard she wrote:

"Precious Mongoose. . . . I lie and think of my precious beast, who does make me more happy every day and instant of my life than I thought it possible to be. There's no doubt I'm terribly in love with you. I keep thinking what you're doing, and have to stop—it makes me want to kiss you so." (17 April 1916)

Their love was not at first sexless. For two or three years they shared a bed, and for several more a bedroom, and it was only on medical advice that they decided not to have children. It is not difficult to picture Virginia as a mother, particularly, one imagines, of a girl. She was jealous of Vanessa's fecundity, and freely admitted it. Her childlessness added to her sense of deprivation. It was another penalty imposed upon her. But there were com-

pensations: greater freedom of movement, more time to work, and the delight she could take in the children of other people, coming to see herself as a natural aunt and god-mother, fascinated by the clarity of children's minds, and by childhood as a facet of human experience which no adult can recover or properly describe.

Virginia did not ruin Leonard's life. He achieved all that he was capable of achieving, and it was much. There were periods when he must sacrifice his time to care for her, and the strains she underwent added to his own. Yet it would be difficult to identify a single instance when he was prevented by her illnesses from writing this article, that book, sitting on this committee, editing that journal. She made a brave show of sharing his interests, and throughout her life continued to accompany him to some of his political meetings. Never did she ridicule his preoccupation with problems of peace and social justice, although she did not hesitate to lampoon them in others. When Leonard stood for Parliament in 1922, he partly shared her hope that he would not be elected, for by nature he was still a civil servant with an exceptionally fertile and independent mind.

She looked to him for the big decisions of their lives. It was he who managed their finances, guided her through her traumas, conceived the idea of the Hogarth Press. Except in the choice of where they were to live (for Virginia had a nose for houses), she deferred to him in practical matters. There is no record that they ever had a serious quarrel, except when she was insane. They never experienced jealousy of another person or of a talent unshared. She deeply respected his judgement on what meant most to her, her writing; and he, lacking the gift of soaring imagination and recognising that she possessed it, shielded her, watched her fluctuating health, nurtured her genius, and with instinctive understanding left her alone in a room of her own, while he remained always available in the common room between them.

One quality they shared with all Bloomsbury was dedication. This may seem difficult to reconcile with the wild parties in Gordon Square and Virginia's coruscating letters, but a serious intent always qualified their fun. Frivolity was not to be scorned, but it was an accompaniment to work, as wit was to conversation. There must be charitableness in their attitude to people, but not too much. No quarter should be given to women because they were women. "Purposely, perhaps," Virginia wrote in *Night and Day*, "Mary [Datchet] did not agree with Ralph; she loved to feel her mind in conflict with his, and to be certain that he spared her female judgment no ounce of his male muscularity." Standards were high; admiration grudging. Virginia compared Bloomsbury at this period to "the lion's house at the Zoo. One goes from cage to cage. All the animals are dangerous, rather suspicious of each other, and full of fascination and mystery" (Letter 1160). There must be imagination, originality, variety. It was more important to illuminate an argument than state it. What they required from their friends were periodic

demonstrations of the best of which they were capable. It was a competitive society, with a streak of malice that could turn icy. They encouraged their children to adopt the manner, in order to sharpen their wits, and puncture their vanity which could balloon dangerously. Bloomsbury was a pressure-cooker which needed the safety-valve of constant mutual criticism.

Simplicity was not an obvious trait of Bloomsbury. But Virginia and Leonard were simple in that they did not require in their own lives the extravagance which they relished in talk and behaviour. Few of her letters deal with money or the want of it, though by the standards of their class they were poor. They spent a few days of their honeymoon in a Somersetshire inn, where their bed was menaced by low beams which reverberated to the sound of every passing waggon, every guffaw from the bar below, and thought it wonderful. At one moment they toyed with the idea of spending part of the year in a hovel in Cornwall. Asheham and Hogarth were elegant houses, but the rooms were simply furnished, and the earth-closets at Asheham, as later at Monk's House, were hellish cess-pits of which Virginia made no complaint. The food was plain, and there was seldom wine. Milk was one of the few foods that Virginia considered essential for good health. She could cook (even took cooking-lessons), but preferred not to. There must be servants. On this she and Leonard were agreed. It was the only way to buy time. But much of it was wasted in interviewing or reassuring the very maids who were engaged to save it. Lottie and Nelly, and Vanessa's servants, Trissie and Blanche, to mention only the most permanent, trip through these pages as regularly as Lytton Strachey or Roger Fry. Although Virginia's wavering relationship with them, sometimes amused, sometimes exasperated, may be of more interest to social than literary historians, it is important for an understanding of this side of her character. She was competent; she was solicitous; she was patient. She applied herself without resentment to the occupations of the majority of middle-class women of her generation. It is surprising that the backstairs trafficking and gossiping, which form a staple of her letters to Vanessa, reappear so seldom in her novels.

Virginia was mad, self-dangerously mad, for about three months in 1913, and attempted suicide by swallowing 100 grains of veronal when Leonard was temporarily absent from the house. Sixteen months later she had another attack, even more serious. These bouts of lunacy are represented in this volume only by huge gaps. She emerged from the tunnels weakened but sane. Her subsequent off-hand references to them give no idea of the agony she endured in passing through them. In September 1922 she wrote to Janet Case about "my remarkable nervous system, which, as everybody tells me, can't be beaten for extreme eccentricity, but works all right in the long run". With scarcely greater self-concern she wrote a few weeks later to Jacques Raverat: "I'm glad you are fat; for then you are warm and mellow and generous and creative. I find that unless I weigh 9½ stones I hear voices and see visions and can neither write nor sleep." She was aware of the danger

that every new headache, every dose of flu (and she had many), besides symptoms of pneumonia, tuberculosis and heart-disease, might be signals of re-approaching madness, and none of the doctors could tell her whether the signals were long-distance or short. But she was un-frightened, almost as if she sometimes looked forward to re-entering that dream-world which she describes so vividly in *Night and Day*:

Being a frequent visitor to that world, she could find her way there unhesitatingly. If she had tried to analyse her impressions, she would have said that there dwelt the realities of the appearances which figure in our world; so direct, powerful, and unimpeded were her sensations there, compared with those called forth in actual life. There dwelt the things one might have felt, had there been cause; the perfect happiness of which here we taste the fragment; the beauty seen here in flying glimpses only.

It has come to be accepted that the moments of greatest danger were when Virginia had just finished a difficult book. But the dates fit too loosely to establish a direct connection, except with her last, *Between the Acts*. Having completed *The Waves*, she was exhausted, but there was no manic reaction in the sense of a complete change in her personality: nor with *The Years*. If *The Voyage Out* produced the crisis of 1913, why was there a gap of more than a year between writing those dangerous final chapters and her attempted suicide? Was not *Night and Day* a 'difficult' book, if only for its length; and even more, *Jacob's Room*? Yet in 1919 and 1921 Virginia, though sometimes ill for other reasons, was never in higher spirits. The truth is that she and Leonard lived under continual threat, and anything might precipitate the crisis. Her manic-depression (I use the term loosely) could strike with terrifying suddenness. When she recovered, her letters soon regained their impetus; when she was ailing, they slumped, noticeably near the beginning of the present volume. There is one which I consider malicious beyond the point of sanity—and perhaps for that very reason the word 'malicious' is inappropriate. It was written to Lytton Strachey on 26 February 1915.¹ A few days later Virginia "entered a state of garrulous mania, speaking ever more wildly, incoherently and incessantly, until she lapsed into gibberish and sank into a coma" (Quentin Bell, II, p. 25).

One cannot overlook the First War as an incident in Virginia's life, although she did her best to overlook it herself. It had no effect whatever upon her mental state, except to confirm her suspicions of a male-dominated society. She was married to a man who would probably not have resisted conscription had he been declared fit enough, but thought the war "senseless and useless", and devoted much of his political energy to devising means for

1. Not published in Leonard's edition of the Woolf-Strachey correspondence (1956).

preventing another. Her brother-in-law Clive Bell was moved so passionately by the horror of it that his pamphlet against the continuance of the war was deemed a public menace, and destroyed by order of the Lord Mayor of London. Four of Virginia's relations, including one of Leonard's brothers, were killed. Friends were wounded; others, like Bertrand Russell, imprisoned for their pacifism, or ostracised. Virginia herself slept night after night in the cellar of Hogarth House, sheltering from the zeppelin raids. Yet so little did all this mean to her that her letters contain almost no reflections on it. Personal inconveniences like food-rationing are recorded, and she roused herself sufficiently to appeal to Lord Salisbury on behalf of Duncan Grant, one of the many conscientious objectors among her friends. But of the great battles in France (the very sound of the bombardment sometimes penetrated to Asheham), of America's entry into the war, of the revolution in Russia, there is no mention in her letters, although there is a little more in her diaries. Once she wrote of Gallipoli, but only to illustrate the ignorance of her nurse, who thought it was in France. Of the possibility of defeat, of the hope of victory, she says hardly a word. It might seem from these letters that the most important event of the war was the Omega Workshops; its finest product, semolina.

One can understand her attitude. She assumed among her correspondents a common level of concern, and did not bother to mention it. But it was more than that. She thought the war an inevitable outcome of male chauvinism, against which she had made her own futile protest by the Dreadnought hoax of 1910. She was incapable of patriotic reverence; contemptuous of it. If men were bent on fighting (even Rupert Brooke, who wrote that "Manliness in man is the one hope of the world"; even Maynard Keynes, who on occasions could express contempt for conscientious objectors), well let them fight, but it was worse than foolish: it was degrading, like the behaviour of "some curious tribe in Central Africa". She was far from insensitive to what was happening, but it made her angry. She would have nothing to do with "this preposterous masculine fiction". She would wait until they stopped, and then resume her normal life without a word of reproach or congratulation to those like Ralph Partridge and Nick Bagenal who had risked their lives in helping to win the war for her, not a single backward glance at something she regarded as absurd and obscene. On Armistice Day she felt "immense melancholy", finding it impossible to write the last chapter of *Night and Day* with "all this shindy" going on around her, and then she goes on to tell Vanessa about her tea with Nelly Cecil. She had washed her hands of the whole business. *Eminent Victorians* had said all that needed to be said about the way men behave.

It was typical of Virginia. Hard as she tried out of loyalty to Leonard she could not take politics seriously, until she came to write *Three Guineas*. "All phantasies and moonshine, only mud-coloured moonshine", she called the efforts of men to improve the world:

"She was convinced that society is man-made, that the chief occupations of men are the shedding of blood, the making of money, the giving of orders, and the wearing of uniforms, and that none of these occupations is admirable."¹

Some public men and women she admired: Leonard himself; Margaret Llewelyn Davies for her work for women's emancipation; Asquith, Grey, momentarily. Lloyd George, Churchill, never. She was a Socialist, partly because Leonard was too, more profoundly because she believed that the privileges of her class were a social outrage. "Why the poor don't take knives and chase us out of our houses, I can't think", she wrote to Nelly Cecil from Manchester in 1913. But she hated cities like Manchester, and would not take a saw to the branch on which Nelly sat so comfortably, making only symbolic gestures for her Socialism, like handing potatoes to railwaymen on strike, or organising lectures at her house for the Women's Co-operative Guild of Richmond. It is a familiar dilemma: sympathy for the lot of the poor; tolerance for the lot of the rich. Particularly if one's own lot happens to lie between.

Virginia, I protest, was not a snob. She was an *élitist*. The distinction has never been properly made in discussing her attitude. A snob is a person who attaches exaggerated importance to the titular great, to birth and accent, to acquired or inherited wealth. An *élitist* believes that some people are born natural aristocrats, of mind and disposition, and that the world is a better place because of them. Virginia herself was one of these. She happened to have the advantage of birth too, as the child of cultured upper-middle class parents, but what mattered to her was that people should be 'distinguished' in character, whatever their backgrounds. That does not make her a snob. How could she be, living with Leonard? He would not even allow her to contribute a miniature manuscript to the Queen's Dolls House; and she, of her own volition, refused all decorations throughout her life. Of course she was class-conscious. She felt herself to be different in degree and kind from "the London poor, half drunk and very sentimental or completely stolid with their hideous voices and clothes and bad teeth" (987). But, equally, she disliked members of the upper classes who had no other merit except their birth, usually avoided their company, and despised their self-approbation. "I don't think them worth a damn", she wrote. And elsewhere: "They laugh at the things one cares about." They were "amateurish", unserious, even the Souls, the group of young aristocrats with intellectual interests which flourished before the First War. She would go occasionally to their parties:

"I've been meeting your friends, the Bibesco's. . . . I said all the most impossible things in a very loud voice; abused Lady Glenconner, and

1. E. M. Forster, Rede Lecture, Cambridge 1942.

then attacked Rupert Brooke: but at my age and with my habits, how conform to the way of the world? Hair pins dropped steadily into my soup plate: I gave them a lick, and put them in again." (To Molly MacCarthy. 4 December 1919.)

Unless one made some such gesture of defiance, one would be corrupted. Clive Bell she forgave for his socialising, because it amused her. But when Lytton Strachey allowed himself to be lionised, and even more when he was seen to enjoy it, she despaired.

When Katherine Mansfield told Middleton Murry that *Night and Day* "reeks of intellectual snobbery", she was nearer the mark. Here is one young man (Rodney) talking in the novel to another (Henry) about the delights of county society. Henry remarks that he had no wish to mix in it. "Oh but you should," replies Rodney. "They make one very comfortable, and the women are ravishing." Virginia goes on: "'The women', Henry thought to himself with disgust. . . . He could not help liking Rodney . . . [but] such words in another's mouth would have condemned the speaker irreparably." Why? Did Virginia believe that young men (or at any rate the young men with whom she would care to associate) never talked about girls when they were alone together? It is fastidiousness carried to intolerable lengths, the streak of puritanism which made her think Katherine Mansfield's sexual unscrupulousness fascinating but abhorrent, and at first reject *Ulysses* as "merely the scratching of pimples on the body of the bootboy at Claridges" (1277). But her attitude was not consistent. In her letters she could make scatological jokes of shocking nastiness, and flay the characters of her friends. Clive Bell called her "one of the best-bred women of her age". Sometimes she could be: sometimes.

Was she by nature unkind? In a memorial article about Virginia, Vita Sackville-West drew attention to the suitability of her married name: "Tenuousness and purity were in her baptismal name, and a hint of the fang in the other." When the fang showed, it could be merciless. About Will Arnold-Forster she wrote: "His little mongrel cur's body; his face appears powdered and painted like a very refined old suburban harlots; and his ridiculous little voice." About Sydney Waterlow: "My God! What a sight he looked bathing! like Neptune, if Neptune was a eunuch—without any hairs, and sky pink—fresh, virginal, soft." About Middleton Murry: "A posturing Byronic little man; pale; penetrating; with bad teeth; histrionic; an egoist; not, I think, very honest; but a good journalist, and works like a horse, and writes the poetry a very old hack might write." And those are not the worst examples in this volume. These fiendish opinions were not always confided to intimates. The first was written to Vanessa and the third to Janet Case; but the second (on Waterlow) she wrote to Carrington. Virginia often added the caveat "This mustn't be repeated", but of course it always was. It was the same in conversation. Virginia came to be

known among her friends (Quentin Bell thinks unfairly) as a security risk.

In her defence Leonard said to William Plomer after her death: "How can anybody with high critical standards fail to censure what seems trashy, trite, false or pretentious?" But her censoriousness went further than that. She enjoyed retailing harmful gossip, and in writing to one person, she would exaggerate the mental or physical deformities of another to whom she might be writing flatteringly by the same post. Sydney Waterlow was particularly vulnerable to this treatment, and few of Virginia's friends were totally immune. "Why", she jokingly asked Margaret Llewelyn Davies, "why is it so pleasant to damn one's friends?" She excused herself by telling Waterlow that it was 'her method', Bloomsbury's instinctive hyperbole. She did not mean the cutting things she wrote and said. Her opinion of people could fluctuate wildly, guided as much by the mood of the moment or an irresistible phrase as by her considered judgement. Ottoline Morrell is "like the Spanish Armada in full sail" in one letter, and "a foundered cab-horse" in the next. Indeed, her view of Ottoline is the best example of 'the method'. Virginia could not withhold admiration for her magnificence and courage, for her ability to remain afloat in the storms she generated at Garsington and in Bedford Square. Ottoline was an obvious target for Virginia's ridicule—flamboyant, rich, witch-like, a hunter of lions without the knack of taming them. But she had "an invincible spirit", "fundamental integrity", "an element of the superb", and these tributes come nearer to Virginia's true opinion of this remarkable woman than the mocking fantasies with which she amused herself at Ottoline's expense.

Let me place the 'Virginia' in her character alongside the 'Wolf'. She dropped only one close friend, Madge Vaughan, and only because Madge's husband was hostile towards Bloomsbury. She continued to correspond quite regularly with people like Violet Dickinson and Ka Arnold-Forster long after their ways had diverged. She never failed to answer a letter, and answer it in a manner that would give most pleasure, particularly if a friend were ill or in distress. She offered the love-lorn like Saxon Sydney-Turner the best of advice and consolation. Her bread-and-butter letters were so generous and charming that they risked a repetition of the invitation, just for the sake of receiving another. She was delightful to her new young acquaintances of the 1917 Club—Barbara Hiles, Carrington, David Garnett, Nick Bagenal, Gerald Brenan. In practical matters, too, she stood up valiantly for her friends. There was her intervention with the Cecils on behalf of Duncan Grant, which could have cost her Nelly's friendship. She supported the fund for Lytton Strachey to make him financially independent of journalism; and took the lead in another, for T. S. Eliot, young, American and unknown, when he was wasting his genius in Lloyd's Bank.

The most striking example of her concern for others—but this is about Vanessa—is the letter which she wrote to her cousin Dorothea Stephen on

28 October 1921. Dorothea had expressed disapproval of Vanessa's way of life, and asked to meet Virginia. Replying, Virginia discarded her pen for a flame-thrower: "I entirely sympathise with Vanessa's views and conduct. . . . If after this you like to come, by all means do, and I will risk not only my own morals but my cook's." Vanessa is the central figure of this volume, apart from Virginia herself: even more than Leonard. She was more than a sister. She was a mother too. There are scattered phrases in Virginia's letters to her which would fascinate a psychologist: "Why did you bring me into the world?" (1169); and elsewhere (1000) she describes herself as Vanessa's "first-born". Virginia's intimacy with her nephews and niece was not only a compensation for her own childlessness. She was one of them. She shared Vanessa with them. To Virginia Vanessa was a goddess, pagan but "with a natural piety"; a madonna capable of bawdiness; sometimes mysteriously withdrawn, but vigorous, splendid, iconoclastic. She could be Diana of the Ephesians: she could be Moll Flanders. Mute though she is in these pages, her personality is reflected by Virginia's letters as the sun is by a shield. She was a painter, and Virginia learned to understand painting through her eyes. She lived among the Sussex Downs, and shared their grandeur and serenity. But Virginia's version of her sister, as Angelica Garnett wrote so well,

tended to soar into the Olympian regions, where she subconsciously felt that Nessa belonged. Like a highly coloured transparency held over the original design, sometimes it corresponded, sometimes not. . . . Vanessa's strength lay in her closeness to reality, to the everyday world. By comparison with Virginia she was calm, like a pool in which the coloured leaves slowly change their pattern. She accepted, rather than protested; was passive, rather than avid. She did not care deeply about abstract ideas, and was led by her sensibilities rather than her intellect. . . . Even if she said little, there emanated from her an enormous power, a pungency like the smell of crushed sage.¹

Between 1912 and 1922 the record of the Woolfs' achievement is deeply impressive. Nearly three of those years were stolen from them by Virginia's illnesses and slow convalescence, and four were years of war. Leonard remade his life with nothing but the capital of his intelligence. He was an ex-colonial civil servant who had resigned in mid-career (for no other reason than his love for Virginia), without money, job, prospects, or friends in high places. Ten years later he was the acknowledged Labour expert on imperial and international affairs, on Co-operation and several branches of economics; he had published four political books and two novels, besides many pam-

1. Angelica Garnett in *Recollections of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Joan Russel Noble. 1972.

phlets, translations and articles; he had edited, or helped to edit, three reviews; he had founded the Hogarth Press; he stood for Parliament.

Virginia's achievement was no less remarkable. Her bouts of manic-depression were interspersed by recurrent illnesses which presaged another. For months on end she lay in bed apprehensive and incapable of work. Her normal day was interrupted by domestic chores and crises, by unwelcome visitors, by the demands of the Hogarth Press. Yet she found time to revise one major novel, *The Voyage Out*, and write two more, *Night and Day* and *Jacob's Room*. For several years she wrote an almost weekly review for *The Times Literary Supplement*, unsigned and therefore unacknowledged except by very few, as well as many articles for other journals, all of a quality only attainable by a writer of great original gifts who is determined to let nothing pass, even anonymously, with which she was not satisfied. On top of all this, she led, when health allowed her, a scintillating social life, and wrote (from 1917 onwards) a regular diary and several personal letters a day. Yet she rarely complained of the pressure on her time, was seldom too exhausted by the day's work to face an evening's party. "I was aware", said Elizabeth Bowen,¹ "of an undertow often of sadness, of melancholy, of great fear. But the main impression was of a creature of laughter and movement." She was not indefatigable: but her resilience was astounding.

The most unexpected and fruitful of their joint-enterprises was the founding of the Hogarth Press. It was a bold decision. There was no necessity to load on their overburdened lives this additional encumbrance. If Virginia needed physical and mental relaxation, she could walk, or skate, or ride, and she did all three. While Leonard was a natural organiser, he was not a natural mechanic, as the crude early products of the Press testify. If the constant trembling of his hands decided the Army Medical Board that he was quite unfit to manage a rifle, still less was he capable of sorting tiny strips of lead and arranging them to form words on the printer's rule. Virginia, and later Barbara Hiles and Ralph Partridge, must do this work for him, while he 'machined'. The work was exhausting and distracted them from other things, although it was recuperative in the sense that it was absorbing and constructive, and Virginia enjoyed it. The whole venture was at first precariously unsound. They had no capital. Their office was their house: their printer's bench the dining-room table. They had no experience of producing or selling books, at first no salesmen except themselves, and the books they intended to publish were in any case almost unsaleable.

Yet it succeeded. It succeeded to such an extent that the story of the Hogarth Press is still one of the legends of publishing. The explanation lies in Leonard's determination, and in their choice of books. Their list proclaims their flair: 1917, *Two Stories*, by Leonard and Virginia; 1918, *Prelude*, by

1. In the BBC television film about Virginia Woolf, *A Night's Darkness, A Day's Sail*.