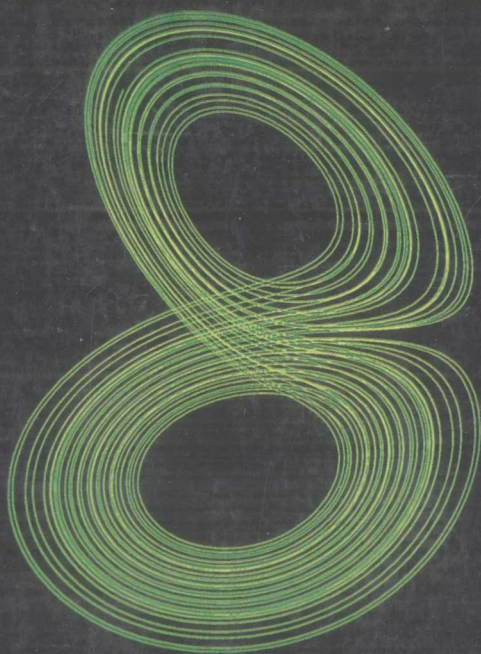


F I F T H E D I T I O N

William Smart



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EIGHT MODERN ESSAYISTS

Fifth Edition

WILLIAM SMART

Sweet Briar College

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To Sarah & Jessie

Preface

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY CHANGES in the twenty-five years since *Eight Modern Essayists* was first published. Some writers in that first edition seem old-fashioned now: Max Beerbohm, James Thurber, Edmund Wilson. Even some of the more “up-to-date” writers who replaced them over the years—D. H. Lawrence and Norman Mailer, for example—no longer seem quite as fresh. In 1965, half the authors in this latest edition had yet to publish their first book. And, should there be other editions in the future, there will certainly be other changes. (Maybe some future edition will include a writer who used this anthology in college!)

The major goal of these collections has always been to present writers whose voices are strong and original and therefore will appeal to intelligent readers—not “easy” writers or “popular” writers, but *good* writers worth studying in depth. Three writers who have remained throughout all five editions best exemplify those elusive qualities: Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, and E. B. White. However different they may be as writers—as thinkers and stylists—they nevertheless appeal nearly equally to all readers.

The idea behind *Eight Modern Essayists* has always been that concentrating on a few good writers helps one learn to write. The point is not to learn rhetorical devices or stylistic stratagems that have been “successful” for other writers but, rather, to learn that good writing is not solely a matter of grammatical correctness.

This Fifth Edition presents two new American writers who meet the standards I have always used in selecting essayists for inclusion: writers whom teachers will like to teach, and students will enjoy reading. Paul Fussell and Carol Bly will, I believe, live up to the expectations of anyone who has used a previous edition. They are intelligent writers with distinctive voices, and they merit our concentrated attention.

Despite the need to keep *Eight Modern Essayists* fresh—for students as well as for teachers—I’ve always been saddened by the losses that occurred from one edition to the next. No matter how much one liked the *new* essayists, there was no way not to miss E. M. Forster’s “My Wood,” for instance, or D. H. Lawrence’s “Adolf,” or James Baldwin’s “Notes of a Native Son.” With this Fifth Edition I’ve finally figured out how to eat my cake and have it too—by creating an appendix at the end of the book containing one essay by each of the writers who has been replaced over the years. A breach of principle—indeed!—but one I feel confident will win the approval of anyone who has ever used *Eight Modern Essayists*.

W. S.

教斯优秀的写作, 首在知道如何界定优秀的写作, 而唯一办法
就是去阅读前辈顶尖作家的作品。对这一问题, 十七世纪
剧作家 Ben Jonson 有一段名言表述:

A Note to Students

入门者和初学者适于去研究其他
作家而且是最优秀作品, 因她在试图去
理解别人之前而非作为别人。我们一
心去读这些才去得到她去理解自己
的写作。

GOOD WRITING BEGINS with knowing what good writing is, and the only way to do that is by reading the best writers who have preceded you. There is a classic statement on the subject by the seventeenth-century playwright Ben Jonson:

It is fit for the beginner and learner to study others and the best. For the mind and memory are more sharply exercised in comprehending another man's things than our own; and such as accustom themselves and are familiar with the best authors shall ever and anon find somewhat of them in themselves.

You learn several things when you read a number of pieces by the same author: first, that he or she has a point of view which is fairly consistent; second, that most good writers have a personal style of writing—that is to say, they have distinct “voices.” It won't be long before you'll be able to tell George Orwell from Virginia Woolf or E. B. White from Joan Didion just by reading a couple of sentences. By then you will have learned that no single way of writing is better than all others. Different writers write different ways.

This collection of essays should encourage you to be bold, to try to write as well as the writers you are reading. Very likely, you won't be able to do it, but just trying hard will make you a better writer. The key word, of course, is hard. Good writing is hard work. It doesn't come easily, even for the best—indeed, especially for the best. You must be intelligent and perceptive and honest—and care deeply about things—but that is not enough. I sometimes tell students that if the writers in this collection were students in the course, they would probably be spending the most time on their papers, not the least.

好的写作是
苦差事。这集
文章, 甚至对
于最好的作家
也作如此——
而事实上, 尤其
对于最好的
作家来说。

The best writers are often the slowest, most careful writers. Because good writing often reads quickly doesn't mean it was written quickly. Keep in mind that the time you spend writing is never wasted time; you just don't realize when you're making progress. It's so slow sometimes. But good teachers will always give you a chance to write well if you are sincere about wanting to do it.

This is a book of essays for people who would like to learn to write well. Read it carefully, and even after the course is over, keep it . . . and read these writers again and again. And write. That is the only way to learn to write well.

Contents

VIRGINIA WOOLF 1

- The Death of the Moth* 5
- ✓ *Shakespeare's Sister* 7
- Professions for Women* 9
- Ellen Terry* 15
- A Sketch of the Past* 20

GEORGE ORWELL 33

- A Hanging* 37
- Shooting an Elephant* 41
- Marrakech* 48
- Politics and the English Language* 54
- Why I Write* 67

E. B. WHITE 75

- Once More to the Lake* 80
- Death of a Pig* 86
- The Ring of Time* 94
- On a Florida Key* 98
- The Essayist* 104

LEWIS THOMAS 107

- Death in the Open* 111
- On Natural Death* 113
- On Cloning a Human Being* 116
- The Tucson Zoo* 119
- The Iks* 122
- How I Began Writing Essays* 125

PAUL FUSSELL 129

- The Boy Scout Handbook* 133
- Appearance Counts* 138
- My War* 160

CAROL BLY 179

- Getting Tired* 182
Great Snows 186
Quietly Thinking Over Things at Christmas 190
Our Class System 196
Growing Up Expressive 201

JOAN DIDION 209

- Goodbye to All That* 213
On Going Home 222
On Morality 224
At the Dam 229
On Keeping a Notebook 231
Why I Write 238

ALICE WALKER 245

- The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?* 249
Brothers and Sisters 256
Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self 260
In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens 268

A SAMPLER OF ESSAYS**FROM PREVIOUS EDITIONS 279**

- MAX BEERBOHM *A Relic* 280
 E. M. FORSTER *My Wood* 286
 D. H. LAWRENCE *Adolf* 290
 JAMES THURBER *The Dog That Bit People* 298
 EDMUND WILSON *The Old Stone House* 303
 JAMES BALDWIN *Notes of a Native Son* 317
 NORMAN MAILER *Miami Beach* 338
 EDWARD HOAGLAND *The Courage of Turtles* 343

VIRGINIA WOOLF



HBJ Photo

typhoid

PERHAPS NO ENGLISH WRITER ever grew up as surrounded by books, writers, and the affluence that makes culture possible as Virginia Woolf. At the time of her birth (in London in 1882) her father, Leslie Stephen, was already distinguished as a philosopher, critic, and editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*. His first wife had been Thackeray's youngest daughter; his second, Virginia's mother, was descended from French nobility. Meredith, Hardy, and Henry James were his close friends, as was James Russell Lowell, who accepted the invitation to be Virginia's godfather by sending along some verses that expressed the wish that "the child would be/ A sample of heredity." Later that same year Leslie Stephen was named editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and it was in the presence of that enormous undertaking that Virginia was educated. Instead of being sent to school, she was simply turned loose in her father's library, and the breadth of the knowledge she gained therein reveals itself in nearly all her essays.

Books, though, were not the whole of her education, and for the rest one must look to St. Ives in Cornwall, where the Stephen family went for its summer holidays. There, close by the sea, Virginia and the other Stephen children, Thoby, Vanessa, and Adrian—along with the children from their mother's first marriage—spent many happy days picnicking, boating, and playing games. In *To the Lighthouse* (1927) Virginia Woolf describes their summers in Cornwall with great fidelity.

When Sir Leslie died in 1904, the four Stephen children gave up the house at Hyde Park Gate and moved to 46 Gordon Square, Bloomsbury. Soon Thoby's friends, Lytton Strachey and Clive Bell, started coming around to carry on the discussions they had begun at Cambridge under the name of the "Midnight Society." And thus began what has since been known as the "Bloomsbury Group," by no means a formal organization, but merely a gathering of friends who believed (as their Cambridge mentor, G. E. Moore, had declared in his *Principia Ethica*) that the appreciation of beauty and the need for personal relationships were man's supreme endeavors.

After Thoby died of typhoid in Greece in 1906 and Vanessa married Clive Bell a year later, Virginia and Adrian moved to Fitzroy Square, a short distance away, and the Thursday night meetings followed

them. New friends began coming—among them the art critic Roger Fry, the economist John Maynard Keynes, and E. M. Forster—until, by the late nineteen-twenties, the group was so famous that the word Bloomsbury had become synonymous with highbrow. Nor was it always used as a compliment; D. H. Lawrence called them “Bloomsberries,” gilded youth, beetles that stung like scorpions.

In 1912 Virginia Stephen married Leonard Woolf, a socialist and political writer who had been one of Thoby's friends at Cambridge, and three years later she published her first novel, *The Voyage Out*. Then, in 1917, with no other intention than that of printing a few short works by themselves and their friends, purely for the fun of it, the Woolfs bought a hand printing press and set it up in the dining room of their house in Richmond. The first book they produced contained two stories, one by Virginia and the other by Leonard; a little later they published *Prelude* by Katherine Mansfield and *Poems 1919* by T. S. Eliot. What had started out as a lark suddenly became a successful business, and over the years that followed The Hogarth Press became famous as a publisher of new writers. Undoubtedly, the Woolfs made their greatest mistake as editors when they refused to publish Joyce's *Ulysses*.

In 1919 they bought the cottage Monks House in the village of Rodmell, near the River Ouse, in Sussex, and there they spent their weekends and holidays for the next twenty-two years. In March 1941, in a state of depression brought on both by the war and the fear that she might lose her mind and be a burden on her husband, Virginia Woolf committed suicide by drowning herself in the Ouse. Later, her husband revealed that she had suffered several nervous breakdowns earlier in her life, going back as far as her mother's death in 1895.

Along with Joyce and Proust, Virginia Woolf is one of the great innovators of the modern novel, directing the reader's attention away from a sequence of outward actions and toward the complex inner lives of her characters. In her most successful novels—*Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *The Waves* (1931), and *Between the Acts* (published posthumously in 1941)—almost nothing happens on the surface of her characters' lives. Instead, the action all takes place in their heads, in their responses both to each other and to the objects they are surrounded by. Time, also, changes: the chronological time of outward actions—in which morning is separated from night by a sequence of events or “actions”—is replaced by the *real* time of an alert consciousness; morning to night becomes a sequence of impressions, intuitions, memories, anticipa-

毫无疑问，伍尔夫夫妇在从事编辑工作期间所犯下最大错误莫过于拒绝出版乔伊斯的《尤利西斯》。

tions. In short, the conflicts between the characters all take place within their sensibilities and, because of that, the novels make large demands on the reader's perceptions.

However difficult her novels may sometimes be, as an essayist Virginia Woolf is always perfectly lucid. Seldom does she abandon her father's advice "to write in the fewest possible words, as clearly as possible, exactly what one meant." Moreover, she obviously benefited from the more than two hundred book reviews she wrote for the *Times Literary Supplement* from 1905 until a few years before her death. And yet she was never a formal, systematic critic, but rather a common reader, personal and subjective, who read "for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others." And one notices that the books she loved the best and wrote the most engagingly about were not especially the classics, but all those memoirs, letters, biographies, and autobiographies of the obscure, all those "rubbish-heaps," as she put it, of "vanished moments and forgotten lives told in faltering and feeble accents. . . ." For Virginia Woolf was a novelist even when she was writing essays, and it made little difference to her if her characters came from real life or the pages of a book. All she wanted was to illuminate those lives, make them stand before us in all their vitality and confusion. Nothing else really mattered to her. "If one wishes to better the world," she once wrote, "one must, paradoxically enough, withdraw and spend more and more time fashioning one's sentences to perfection in solitude."

THE DEATH OF THE MOTH

MOTHS THAT FLY by day are not properly to be called moths; they do not excite that pleasant sense of dark autumn nights and ivy-blossom which the commonest yellow-underwing asleep in the shadow of the curtain never fails to rouse in us. They are hybrid creatures, neither gay like butterflies nor sombre like their own species. Nevertheless the present specimen, with his narrow hay-coloured wings, fringed with a tassel of the same colour, seemed to be content with life. It was a pleasant morning, mid-September, mild, benignant, yet with a keener breath than that of the summer months. The plough was already scoring the field opposite the window, and where the share had been, the earth was pressed flat and gleamed with moisture. Such vigour came rolling in from the fields and the down beyond that it was difficult to keep the eyes strictly turned upon the book. The rooks too were keeping one of their annual festivities; soaring round the tree tops until it looked as if a vast net with thousands of black knots in it had been cast up into the air; which, after a few moments, sank slowly down upon the trees until every twig seemed to have a knot at the end of it. Then, suddenly, the net would be thrown into the air again in a wider circle this time, with the utmost clamour and vociferation, as though to be thrown into the air and settle slowly down upon the tree tops were a tremendously exciting experience.

The same energy which inspired the rooks, the ploughmen, the horses, and even, it seemed, the lean bare-backed downs, sent the moth fluttering from side to side of his square of the window-pane. One could not help watching him. One was, indeed, conscious of a queer feeling of pity for him. The possibilities of pleasure seemed that morning so enormous and so various that to have only a moth's part in life, and a day moth's at that, appeared a hard fate, and his zest in enjoying his meagre opportunities to the full, pathetic. He flew vigorously to one corner of his compartment, and, after waiting there a second, flew across to the other. What remained for him but to fly to a third corner and then to a fourth? That was all he could do, in

spite of the size of the downs, the width of the sky, the far-off smoke of houses, and the romantic voice, now and then, of a steamer out at sea. What he could do he did. Watching him, it seemed as if a fibre, very thin but pure, of the enormous energy of the world had been thrust into his frail and diminutive body. As often as he crossed the pane, I could fancy that a thread of vital light became visible. He was little or nothing but life.

Yet, because he was so small, and so simple a form of the energy that was rolling in at the open window and driving its way through so many narrow and intricate corridors in my own brain and in those of other human beings, there was something marvelous as well as pathetic about him. It was as if someone had taken a tiny bead of pure life and decking it as lightly as possible with down and feathers, had set it dancing and zigzagging to show us the true nature of life. Thus displayed one could not get over the strangeness of it. One is apt to forget all about life, seeing it humped and bossed and garnished and cumbered so that it has to move with the greatest circumspection and dignity. Again, the thought of all that life might have been had he been born in any other shape caused one to view his simple activities with a kind of pity.

After a time, tired by his dancing apparently, he settled on the window ledge in the sun, and, the queer spectacle being at an end, I forgot about him. Then, looking up, my eye was caught by him. He was trying to resume his dancing, but seemed either so stiff or so awkward that he could only flutter to the bottom of the window-pane; and when he tried to fly across it he failed. Being intent on other matters I watched these futile attempts for a time without thinking, unconsciously waiting for him to resume his flight, as one waits for a machine, that has stopped momentarily, to start again without considering the reason of its failure. After perhaps a seventh attempt he slipped from the wooden ledge and fell, fluttering his wings, onto his back on the window sill. The helplessness of his attitude roused me. It flashed upon me he was in difficulties; he could no longer raise himself; his legs struggled vainly. But, as I stretched out a pencil, meaning to help him to right himself, it came over me that the failure and awkwardness were the approach of death. I laid the pencil down again.

The legs agitated themselves once more. I looked as if for the enemy

against which he struggled. I looked out of doors. What had happened there? Presumably it was midday, and work in the fields had stopped. Stillness and quiet had replaced the previous animation. The birds had taken themselves off to feed in the brooks. The horses stood still. Yet the power was there all the same, massed outside indifferent, impersonal, not attending to anything in particular. Somehow it was opposed to the little hay-coloured moth. It was useless to try to do anything. One could only watch the extraordinary efforts made by those tiny legs against an oncoming doom which could, had it chosen, have submerged an entire city, not merely a city, but masses of human beings; nothing, I knew, had any chance against death. Nevertheless after a pause of exhaustion the legs fluttered again. It was superb this last protest, and so frantic that he succeeded at last in righting himself. One's sympathies, of course, were all on the side of life. Also, when there was nobody to care or to know, this gigantic effort on the part of an insignificant little moth, against a power of such magnitude, to retain what no one else valued or desired to keep, moved one strangely. Again, somehow, one saw life a pure bead. I lifted the pencil again, useless though I knew it to be. But even as I did so, the unmistakable tokens of death showed themselves. The body relaxed, and instantly grew stiff. The struggle was over. The insignificant little creature now knew death. As I looked at the dead moth, this minute wayside triumph of so great a force over so mean an antagonist filled me with wonder. Just as life had been strange a few minutes before, so death was now as strange. The moth having righted himself now lay most decently and uncomplainingly composed. O yes, he seemed to say, death is stronger than I am.

[1942]

SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare. Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what

would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say. Shakespeare himself went, very probably—his mother was an heiress—to the grammar school, where he may have learnt Latin—Ovid, Virgil and Horace—and the elements of grammar and logic. He was, it is well known, a wild boy who poached rabbits, perhaps shot a deer, and had, rather sooner than he should have done, to marry a woman in the neighbourhood, who bore him a child rather quicker than was right. That escapade sent him to seek his fortune in London. He had, it seemed, a taste for the theatre; he began by holding horses at the stage door. Very soon he got work in the theatre, became a successful actor, and lived at the hub of the universe, meeting everybody, knowing everybody, practising his art on the boards, exercising his wits in the streets, and even getting access to the palace of the queen. Meanwhile his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She picked up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps, and read a few pages. But then her parents came in and told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers. They would have spoken sharply but kindly, for they were substantial people who knew the conditions of life for a woman and loved their daughter—indeed, more likely than not she was the apple of her father's eye. Perhaps she scribbled some pages up in an apple loft on the sly, but was careful to hide them or set fire to them. Soon, however, before she was out of her teens, she was to be betrothed to the son of a neighbouring wool-stapler. She cried out that marriage was hateful to her, and for that she was severely beaten by her father. Then he ceased to scold her. He begged her instead not to hurt him, not to shame him in this matter of her marriage. He would give her a chain of beads or a fine petticoat, he said; and there were tears in his eyes. How could she disobey him? How could she break his heart? The force of her own gift alone drove her to it. She made up a small parcel of her belongings, let herself down by a rope one summer's night and took the road to London. She was not seventeen. The birds that sang in the hedge were not more musical than she was. She had the quickest fancy, a gift like her brother's, for the tune of words. Like him, she had a taste for the

theatre. She stood at the stage door; she wanted to act, she said. Men laughed in her face. The manager—a fat, loose-lipped man—guffawed. He bellowed something about poodles dancing and women acting—no woman, he said, could possibly be an actress. He hinted—you can imagine what. She could get no training in her craft. Could she even seek her dinner in a tavern or roam the streets at midnight? Yet her genius was for fiction and lusted to feed abundantly upon the lives of men and women and the study of their ways. At last—for she was very young, oddly like Shakespeare the poet in her face, with the same grey eyes and rounded brows—at last Nick Greene the actor-manager took pity on her; she found herself with child by that gentleman and so—who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body?—killed herself one winter's night and lies buried at some cross-roads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle.

That, more or less, is how the story would run, I think, if a woman in Shakespeare's day had had Shakespeare's genius.

[1929]

PROFESSIONS FOR WOMEN*

WHEN YOUR SECRETARY invited me to come here, she told me that your Society is concerned with the employment of women and she suggested that I might tell you something about my own professional experiences. It is true I am a woman; it is true I am employed; but what professional experiences have I had? It is difficult to say. My profession is literature; and in that profession there are fewer experiences for women than in any other, with the exception of the stage—fewer, I mean, that are peculiar to women. For the road was cut many years ago—by Fanny Burney, by Aphra Behn, by Harriet Martineau, by Jane Austen, by George Eliot—many famous women, and many more unknown and forgotten, have been before me, making the path

*A paper read to The Women's Service League.