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Invisible presences: Virginia Woolf and biography

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"INVISIBLE PRESENCES:" VIRGINIA WOOLF AND BIOGRAPHY

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THESIS

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Consider what immense forces society brings to play upon each of us ... well, if we cannot analyse these invisible presences, we know very little of the subject of the memoir; and ... how futile life-writing becomes.

--Virginia Woolf (1985a:80)

ABSTRACT

The principal concerns of this thesis are the connections that Virginia Woolf made between writing, revelation, women and biography, set in the historical and literary contexts of her life in England from the late nineteenth century to her death in 1941. Her vision of biographical form, language and the biographical self is assessed within the environment established by her father, her Victorian childhood and education, Bloomsbury attitudes and a spirituality shaped by her Anglican heritage and her experience of gender. My contention is that her novelist's sense of the relationship between fact and fiction, her critical analysis of the significance of language and gender, her perception of unique dimensions in the lives of women and her exploration of her own spirituality were a revolutionary combination that suggested fundamental changes in biographical form and expectation.

Facets of her concerns, strategies and spirituality are examined chiefly through an analysis of Moments of Being, a posthumously published autobiographical collection. Written between 1907 and 1940 the essays span Woolf's professional career and reveal the development of her ideas and style. Moments of Being is considered in relation to her essays, "The New Biography" and "The Art of Biography," her fictional biography Orlando, and Roger Fry, the only conventional biography she wrote.

A central observation in this thesis is that Woolf and her father shared a moral imperative derived from their heritage. His assertion that theological language failed to account for the rational and scientific aspects of life in the world is paralleled in her perception of the failure of patriarchal language to account for the lives of women. Both saw these inadequacies of thought and language as damaging to the human spirit. Without her father's vocabulary, which had been shaped by his Christian childhood and agnostic explorations, Woolf sought words to describe the shock of revelation in her "moments of being" and to depict the reality that sustained them. Her quest led her to link writing and being and to blur boundaries between self and others, biography and autobiography, fact and fiction, past and present. Prevailing views on aesthetics and literature contributed to her perception of biography.

This thesis considers Woolf's revolutionary view of biographical form and theory to have been rooted in the reforming sensibility she shared with her father, her novelist's vision of life freed from the oppressions of gender and the perception of reality, yielded through moments of being, that was the core of her spirituality.

"INVISIBLE PRESENCES:" VIRGINIA WOOLF AND BIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

Born in 1882 and raised in the England of Queen Victoria, Virginia Stephen Woolf was a child of the nineteenth century. Taught by her father for the most part, she carved out a professional life that paralleled his in her respect for literary tradition, her skepticism, and her focus on biography. Father and daughter wrote essays on biography, biographical literary criticism and biographies. While much separates the times of their lives, two factors overshadow all else: gender and war. Leslie Stephen, born in 1832, was the son of Evangelical Anglicans. A product of Eton and Cambridge, he followed the course charted for males of his class until, confronted by the achievements of nineteenth century science, he became Britain's most articulate agnostic. He was a moral and rational observer of intellectual collapse from within the systems of power. The bulk of Virginia Woolf's writing falls after the first World War, after the certainties that her father had seen threatened had shattered absolutely. Privileged by class but deprived by gender, Virginia Woolf spoke from the margins of power in a world where monarchies were falling and profound, previously unthinkable concepts were finding expression. Raised in a literary world that was predominantly male, she wrote as a woman from a perspective and with a syntax that were new. At the heart of her work were revelatory experiences that supported a concept of self freed from hierarchies and the imperatives of achievement. She imagined a self enmeshed in the web of its own past and present experiences, sustained and determined by forces in its community, and sensitive to a reality which could be revealed in moments of vision or being.

The focus of this paper will be on Woolf's Moments of Being, a posthumously published collection of autobiographical essays written at various stages during her life. It is not my intention to describe the entirety of Woolf's biographical theory. Such an attempt would be folly since she is not systematic and defies analysis that would have her seem to be. My concern is with her vision of biography and the elements in her work that made an impact on biographical practice. While Moments of Being is only a small volume in the large legacy of Woolf's work, it establishes revelation as a central reality in her understanding of the self, illustrates her awareness of the attitudes and patterns inherent in English literary practice, and promotes the strategies of her political purpose as a woman writing within the English tradition.

In the first chapter, "Angels and Discourse," Woolf's predicament is outlined and an approach to her writing is suggested. Caught between the confident demands of Victorian belief in an imperialist ethos and the frustrations of a woman writing in England during the early decades of this century, Woolf turned to her own experience and elevated a subjective description of life in her world of writing and family to contend with the images of "great men" at the core of the canon of conventional biography. In this chapter I suggest approaching Woolf's writing from a perspective that can encompass her response to Victorian biography as well as her personal, feminist, and spiritual concerns.[1] Moments of Being can then be examined as a profound comment, with religious dimensions, on the function and purpose of life-writing.

Since Woolf's biographical practice was rooted in the nineteenth century and nourished by her father's efforts, Leslie Stephen is considered in Chapter 2 with a view to understanding the world view that sustained and required his form of biography. In his own efforts to break away from notions of a biographical self constructed within a theological framework, he described a self nurtured by a moral world responsive to personal accomplishment. Woolf's concept of "moments of being," moments which reveal a pattern behind the confusion and meaninglessness of the world, broke apart her father's biographical categories and encouraged description of the uniqueness of the self's experience rather than the significance of its measurable achievements. My consideration of his achievements in their own context departs from most Woolf scholarship, which tends to regard him as an aging and oppressive threat to her genius. His roots in Evangelical England, the magnitude of his reaction against them, and the hold they continued to have through his moral and rational attitude to experience in this world, contributed to the shaping of his daughter's intellect and her determination to pursue her own vision. Her dedication to truth paralleled his own.

However, another consequence of Leslie Stephen's legacy was that Woolf lacked a means of describing her religious experience. Not only had Stephen denied such experience, he had also rejected the Christian vocabulary traditionally used to relate it. Chapter 3 begins by comparing Woolf's biographical perspective to her father's and then notes shifts in attitudes from his day to hers that reinforced her inherited moral sense and connected it to the act of writing as a woman.

In Chapter 4 Moments of Being is explored to isolate some of her fundamental concerns and trace their development, to illustrate the complex rhetorical strategies that expressed her belief in the formative power of the act of writing, and finally to relate her concept of self and her notion of revelation to their manifestation in/as writing.

In the final chapter Woolf's two essays on biography and two of her biographies, Orlando and Roger Fry, are discussed briefly in a conclusion that notes the development of her concept of biography and the relationship of that development to events in her life. Her particular blend of fact and fiction expressed connections she made between life and life-writing.

Woolf's concept of biography undercut the power of the nineteenth century's heroic biographies. By examining her attitudes to self, revelation, and writing, and relating them to certain changes in religious and cultural attitudes, I hope to place her in line with the traditions of Evangelical practice in England: not only did she inherit a sense of moral mission, she carried it into a new arena. As the Clapham Sect had made the slave fully human, so Woolf directed her attention to the realities of women and the power of the literary figure of woman, and wrote her own experience of both women and woman into being.

Virginia Woolf and religion may seem oxymoronic. Her prose was lyrically spiritual but to involve her in the more explicit category of religious thought is rarely done in criticism of her work.[2] As her father's daughter and a child of her time she could maintain that "certainly and emphatically there is no God" (1985a:72). However, though agnosticism had warded off concerns that were explicitly Christian, Woolf's world was framed by religious discourse. She was a descendant of the influential and evangelical Clapham Sect; her father was the nineteenth century's most examined and eloquent agnostic; her aunt was an influential Quaker mystic. As a central figure in the Bloomsbury Group she participated in deliberations on the nature of Being, Self, the Good, Art, and other categories crucial to religious exploration at that time. At the centre of her work is a religiosity which rests on her awareness of revelation. Considered a mystic by some literary critics,[3] a category too explicit for use here, she was certainly preoccupied with spiritual truth. Her concern with ultimate reality, with the pattern behind the events and the silences of life, infuses her writing; it reflects the voices of her evangelical Clapham ancestors and the situation of

women writing in the traditions of England in the first four decades of this century.

CHAPTER ONE

ANGELS IN DISCOURSE

To Virginia Woolf angels were creatures of an earlier style of being, creatures whose viability had become problematic. Although she easily wrapped their images in her prose, she felt uncomfortable dwelling in spaces they inhabited. During the early days of her professional career, when writing book reviews, a phantom would slip behind her:

> The shadow of [illegible] wings fell on my page; I heard the rustling of her skirts in the room (196[illegible]203).

It was the Angel in the House--named for the heroine of a famous Coventry Patmore poem--whose sympathy, charm, unselfishness, purity, and willingness to sacrifice herself for innumerable causes were characteristics of the ideal Victorian woman. Whether wife, daughter, or sister this angel rendered an enabling service to the heroic men who shaped the world of technique and words, and "she never had a mind or a wish of her own." The effect of this phantom on unbiased critical judgment was devastating to Woolf and so she killed her. "She died hard. Her fictitious nature was of great assistance to her" (203).

A second sort of angel appears in A Room of One's Own, an essay Woolf wrote on the problems of the woman writer. Looking for Milton and Thackeray manuscripts, Woolf found herself at the door of "that famous library" in Oxbridge:

> I must have opened it, for instantly there issued, like a guardian angel barring the way with a flutter of black gown instead of white wings, a deprecating, silvery, kindly gentleman, who regretted in a low voice as he waved me back that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction (9).

This corporeal and deferential angel served to protect and preserve the places and privileges of male enterprise; his robes of defense warded off incursions of the female critical mind. Woolf could not kill this angel but she did develop strategies to outwit him. Marginalized throughout life by exclusion from the institutions culturally defined to sustain talent like hers, she found alternative routes and developed attitudes of suspicion. Denied a university education, she mastered British literary history in her father's library and in the drawing rooms of Bloomsbury. A distrust of academic thought and theory coloured her essays and cast its shade over her other work. The institutions of publishing might have proved

equally impenetrable but she avoided them, if not the anxiety of the reviews they spawned, by issuing her works through the Hogarth Press which she owned jointly with her husband.[4]

Another variety of angel she neither killed nor evaded but, somewhat intimidated, held in respect as emblematic of her encounter with English literary traditions. On the 10th of September, 1918, after reading Paradise Lost, she wrote in her diary:

> The substance of Milton is all made of wonderful, beautiful and masterly descriptions of angels' bodies, battles, flights, dwelling places. He deals in horror and immensity and squalor and sublimity but never in the passions of the human heart. Has any great poem ever let in so little light upon one's own joys and sorrows? I get no help in judging life.... But how smooth, strong and elaborate it all is! What poetry! The inexpressible fineness of the style, in which shade after shade is perceptible, would alone keep one gazing into it, long after the surface business in progress has been despatched.... Though there is nothing like Lady Macbeth's terror or Hamlet's cry, no pity or sympathy or intuition, the figures are majestic; in them is summed up much of what men thought of our place in the universe, of our duty to God, our religion (1985b:15-16).

Though a great deal of Woolf's energy was spent locating words and sentences to describe the experience of women and unearthing a genealogy of women writers, she did not deny the significance and appeal of that tradition from which she had been excluded. In many respects her work is a dialogue with the male legacy, a debate in which she is customarily intrepid.[5] The sublimity of the angels in Paradise Lost signified the lure of English tradition and its profound power: "Whatever Milton is to the male imagination, to the female imagination Milton and the inhibiting Father--the Patriarch of patriarchs--are one" (Gilbert 1979:192).[6] Woolf's project was to claim her own heritage, to recognize everything, and discard nothing, that might have shaped it. In her response to Milton she acknowledged the complexity and ambiguities she faced.

For Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, denial of heavenly choirs would have been a principled decision based on rational self-examination--thus had he navigated the crisis of faith in England in the 1860s. He was an articulate nineteenth century agnostic whose rejection of Christian dogma had shaped Woolf's belief structures; her rejection of angels reflects his utilitarian views. For her, however, there were other pressures. She required vocabulary to name a spiritual experience that his agnosticism had denied, a reality that his gender did not know. A fourth angel, which appeared in a letter written toward the end of her life, suggests the tenor of her sensibility:

> I've just been walking on the marsh: a winter sunset; and I was thinking, what do Kingfishers do in winter, when lo and behold, one shot out under my feet, skimmed the river, and caused me about as much pleasure as an angel ... no ... I don't care for angels (Rose 1985:86).

This angel very nearly insinuates itself into a gentle "moment of being." The encounter is a small example of a kind of experience central to Virginia Woolf's concept of self, of being-in-the-world; it is an instant in time when she can see what she calls "reality,"

> a thing I see before me: something abstract; but residing in the downs or sky; beside which nothing matters; in which I shall rest and continue to exist, Reality I call it. And I fancy sometimes this is the most necessary thing to me: that which I seek (1985b:132).

Woolf did not care for angels, creatures of a fading discourse, denizens of a hierarchy which she, like her father, did not accept. However, if she would subvert the "reality" that bred them, she needed to do so in terms that gave her leverage. To challenge assumptions effectively and to stretch definitions she needed to make sense, yet break conventional logic, from within the literary traditions that dominated English culture and sustained angels on clouds of unconscious assumption. Her methods resemble those of Jacques Derrida who recognized that 'reason leaves us only the recourse to strategems and strategies' and recommended "adventures of a certain wandering, without telos or finality, without domination or mastery" (Jardine:130). Woolf's English underpinnings held her firmly in a tradition less self-aware and linguistically self-conscious than Derrida's French heritage and his deconstructionist project,[7] but she presages his concerns, and her attitude to the confining logic of transparent writing was not unlike his.[8] In her essays on biography, biographies, and autobiographical writing she stalked the boundary between the definitional grid of Western thought and the unconscious--because unnamed--experience of the woman who writes. Reluctant to ignore the tradition which denied her existence as a woman but unable to ignore the reality which confirmed it, she sought accommodation, a way of being-in-the-world.

A replacement for unwanted angels lay in her "moments of being," or "moments of vision," a concept capable of intimating notions of mysticism and the religiosity of individuals in communion, and modernist[9] in its ability to challenge the conventions of life-writing. Like angels, her "moments" were sometimes elusive and peripheral, at other times they were shocks which would yield "a revelation of some order," tokens of "some real thing behind appearances" (1976:84). Like angels they ministered to tradition when they revealed the meaning that lies behind the surface of the present. The fate of these servants of the divine hung upon the rhetoric of their appearance. Virginia Woolf, with her pen, was both preserver and destroyer.

Writing as a Woman

To begin a discussion of Woolf's concepts of self, belief structures, and biographical theory with angels is to imitate her method, to place in the foreground a disconcerting image which both conceals and reveals, which suggests integral and relevant matters that are, nonetheless, confounding. The issues before us resist theory and analysis; the shadow of wings may fall across the page, the flutter of a black gown may bar the door. Virginia Woolf was not a systematic thinker. Her genius lay rather in the creation of concepts reminiscent of familiar unities; like Truth and History, but suggestive of another order of meaning. James Joyce, a contemporary of Woolf's, maintained:

> Women write books and paint pictures and compose and perform music. And there are some who have attained eminence in the field of scientific research.... But you have never heard of a woman who was the author of a complete philosophic system, and I don't think you ever will (Gilbert 1987:223).

Like Woolf, Joyce stood at the twentieth century edge of the world of angels but he had been nourished by the verities of that world. Its philosophic systems and hierarchies inscribed a reality which in turn empowered his prose; as a male he participated in the modernist experiment from within the world that was undergoing changes. However, once that reality, forged through Renaissance humanism and Enlightenment philosophy, had been challenged by nineteenth century scientific and political thought, women like Virginia Woolf were forced to recognize that they did not share in its power. As words and concepts became available to them to describe their experience and powerlessness, they could not pretend to support a paradigm of unreality. Even though Woolf was steeped in the traditions and privileges of England, as a woman she was excluded from their centre: the evidence lay before her in the work of the Brontes, George Eliot, Mary Wollstonecraft, the Pankhursts, and many others.[10] Phyllis Rose's reflection on Woolf answers James Joyce's observation and suggests that complete philosophic systems need not be accorded privileged status.

> I see in her novels not meditations on philosophical themes but personal treatments of vital and immediate problems of identity (1978:xiii).

Woolf belonged to a different class of writers than Joyce. She had different conceptual tools with which to order her world. As a woman, as the child of unbelievers, as a writer in England in the first half of the twentieth century, she had access to specific and

limited conceptual options. Her tools were defined by her situation, parents' attitudes, lack of formal schooling, intense emotional nature, the cluster of family deaths, and so forth. Victorian prose remained the model of power for her represented, indelibly, through the attitudes and writing of her father. When her work is set beside that of James Joyce, or T. S. Eliot, a disparity is immediately apparent. Primarily because of their education and gender, both Joyce and Eliot participated in the model of meaningingfulness that predominated and shaped human existence in their time.

Through writing, the principal activity in her life, Woolf found rapture and ecstacy. She equated writing with being. Events, ideas and the adventures of life became real to her through her novels and essays, her biographies, memoirs, diaries and letters. The degree to which English literature, history and biography sustained her writing and shaped her interpretation of life is measured in her commitment to criticism and publishing and through her insistence on women's voice in literature. Of the revelation of a "moment" she wrote:

> I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me....Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what (1976:84).

The activity of writing was life saving.

> Why is life so tragic: so like a little strip of pavement over an abyss. I look down; I feel giddy; I wonder how I am ever to walk to the end. But why do I feel this: Now that I say it, I don't feel it (1985b:36).

Woolf moved her concept of the personal consequences of writing, her emphasis on women's experience of reality and her awareness of the implications of exclusion, into and against the dominant writing practices. By doing so she subverted and changed those practices, including their religious aspects.[11] A literary tradition whose patterns had ignored women, or seen them as domestic or erotic angels, could not remain coherent after the angels had been routed. Perhaps Virginia Woolf's ideas are not a complete philosophic system because such systems can only exist, by definition, within the dominant model of thought; any marginal position is incomplete when assessed from the centres of power. However, by bringing subjective knowledge of herself as woman into life-story, a category traditionally reserved for men created in the image of God, and saints of both sexes, both men and God change. For the biographers of men of moral stature, like her father, the concept of biography changes.

In her fiction, biographies and essays, Virginia Woolf strove to articulate the unthinkable, to bring alternative experience into being. Angels were thinkable; reality, that "most necessary thing", paradoxically, required attention and new words. In her fiction Woolf was a European modernist, a member of that group of artists and writers in the first half of the twentieth century who tore apart the fabric of nineteenth century verities like Truth, Self, time, memory, History, Religion--who manipulated the thinkable in new ways. While Picasso and James Joyce were major innovators, Bloomsbury Group members Lytton Strachey, Maynard Keynes, Roger Fry and E. M. Forster made significant contributions as well. However, unlike her colleagues, who were participants in the dominant ideology and could be as equally and easily impressed by the thoughts of Cambridge philosopher George Moore as by the creatures in Paradise Lost, Woolf had angels in house and library whose shadowy gowns had effectively obscured the category to which she belonged as a writing woman.[12]

The dominant version of Victorian thought was transparent. It appeared to make perfect sense. However, lurking at its boundaries were

> widespread activities that escape analysis ... that do not acquire 'meaningfulness' in its terms, that are therefore in the strictest sense unthinkable (Reiss:11).

Perceived as a conceptual tool suited to ordering the universe and its machines, to naming and manipulating objects, prose was assumed to be colourless, to have no substantive effect of its own. The dark, romantic, feminine and poetic side of Victorian writing, which prefigured the unthinkable unconscious that Freud would discover as the century closed, was, by its own images, an obscured discourse.[13] Virginia Woolf brought her experience in all its aspects, including its dark and feminine Victorian side, forward into the light of conscious and deliberate writing. Alice Jardine describes the way in which the concept of woman can initiate a fundamental transformation in the nature of literature. She describes a force emerging from within the literature of the West. A previously unthinkable force, it envelops woman as well as women and men who write:[14]

> In the search for new kinds of legitimation, in the absence of Truth, in anxiety over the decline of paternal authority, and in the midst of spiraling diagnoses of Paranoia, the End of Man and History, "woman" has been set in motion both rhetorically and ideologically (36).

Until the 60s, even the 70s, Woolf scholarship reflected her accepted status as a minor literary figure. Since then academic focus on her work and her reputation have grown at an

astonishing rate. The critical categories and fluid perspective necessary to discern her achievement awaited a postwar climate distrustful of legitimacy in "the master (European) narratives--philosophy, history and religion" (24).

Woolf claimed "two very genuine experiences," two adventures of her professional life.

> The first--killing the Angel in the House--I think I solved. She died. But the second, telling the truth about my own experience as a body, I do not think I solved. I doubt that any woman has solved it yet. The obstacles against her are still immensely powerful--and yet they are very difficult to define. Outwardly, what is simpler than to write books? Outwardly, what obstacles are there for a woman rather than a man? Inwardly, I think, the case is very different; she still has many ghosts to fight, many prejudices to overcome (1965:206).

There was no space for the truth of her body among the ghosts and prejudices of "humanist" ways of thinking. Jardine describes the process of locating and imagining this space and its qualities of "woman" in contemporary French thought:

> The question of woman and language is not one of fashion; it involves rather a profound rethinking of both the male and female speaking subjects' relationship to the real, the imaginary and symbolic, as well as of the status of metadiscourse itself.... The status of women is determined not only at social and political levels, but by the very logical processes of thought through which meaning is produced (44).

Jardine insists that the question of woman and language is not merely an external and linguistic matter of studying what women do and say and of allowing that to be described and squeezed into words. Rather, she maintains, it is a matter of internal signification.

> The "human subject," "reality," "identity," and "meaning" are not natural givens that can be enumerated and analyzed, but are rather logics produced through language as it constructs and deconstructs representation (44).

Change must occur in the act of thinking itself, and it has done so in France in a movement of concern from "identity" to "difference," "from wholeness to that which is incomplete, from representation to modes of presentation," from "metadiscourse to fiction" (36). These categorical mutations leave gaps or holes in our patterns of knowledge, tears in discourse, that Umberto Eco has identified as definitional of "modernity" as an artistic system (124). These concerns, this movement away from the rigid and inapplicable confines of Victorian conventions, were at the heart of Virginia Woolf's struggle though her work fell several decades before the process was recognized as culturally central. The movement of concern from the work of her father to her own is that from metadiscourse to fiction, from describing the ways of Truth to imagining the versions of a truth.

"Occulted discourse" (Reiss:11), gaps in the text, "that which is beyond the Father, overflowing the dialectics of representation, unrepresentable, will be gendered as feminine"

(Jardine:138). Jardine's perception of the feminine accentuates the magnitude of Woolf's attempts to tell the truth about her own "experience as a body." French theorists like Luce Irigaray claim that the recovery of woman as a literary figure related to the actual experiences of women necessarily subverts the fundamental assumptions of Renaissance humanism. Jacques Derrida's words reflect the tenor of French thought:

> Because, indeed, if woman is truth, she at least knows that there is no truth, that truth has no place here and that no one has a place for truth. And she is woman precisely because she herself does not believe in truth itself, because she does not believe in what she is, in what she is believed to be, in what she thus is not (193).

Where in the rational and empirical systems of British thought can Derrida's insight be placed? Indeed, though Virginia Woolf might have recognized her task in his words, she would not have responded to his rhetoric. She shares, however, the French feminist focus on "the fact and experience of genderedness" (Bynum:8) and the European postmodernist need to dismantle the rigid structures that denied her experience.

The religious significance of gap/woman/truth is central to Woolf's spiritual orientation. The tragic life she envisioned as suspended "like a little strip of pavement over an abyss" (1985:36) has an echo in Michel Leiris, one of France's more inscrutable writers, for whom the function of writing is

> to fill a void or a least to situate, with respect to the most lucid part of ourselves, the place where gapes this incommensurable abyss (Jardine:115).

For Leiris this abyss is internal and it is female. For Woolf it is inextricably linked to life; the boundary between internal and external is not so clear. Both write to sustain themselves, to save themselves in the encounter. Woman is what is absent for Leiris, that which "forces him to write" (115). Under this pressure what can become of the Father, that "self-sufficient Idea that has given the Western world its contours" (80)?

Jardine describes a current rethinking of the margin between sacred and secular, a reconceptualization of "the archaic spaces ... hidden in the shade of the Big Dichotomies" (80). Woolf spent her life doing just that. With her heritage of the socially significant deeds of Clapham Evangelicals, her childhood in the intense emotional atmosphere of Hyde Park Gate, and her present secured in Bloomsbury's preoccupations with the meaning of art and relationships, she could not cut herself free from the interpenetration of the sacred and secular. At the age of 20 she wrote

> I read some history: it is suddenly all alive, branching forwards and backwards and connected with every kind of thing that seemed entirely remote before. I seem to feel Napoleon's influence on our quiet evening in

> the garden, for instance--I think I see for a moment how our minds are all threaded together--how any live mind today is of the very same stuff as Plato's and Euripedes! It is only a continuation and development of the same thing. It is this common mind that binds the whole world together, and all the world is mind. Then I read a poem, say, and the same thing is repeated. I feel as though I had grasped the central meaning of the world, and all these poets and historians and philosophers were only following out paths branching from that centre in which I stand (Hill:68-9).[15]

To grasp the central meaning of the world is a religious act. To see the writing of poets and historians as leading out from her centre is to subscribe to a subjectivity that erases the traditional objective authority of Western thought. A "self-sufficient Idea" is not absent but Woolf's idea reveals a chthonic component outside or marginal to the dominant thought structures that has become familiar in the feminist spirituality of the late twentieth century.[16] In Woolf's novel To The Lighthouse, the painter Lily Briscoe muses on Mrs. Ramsay, a fictional portrait of Woolf's mother. Heroes and great ideas seem remote; instead within little moments of revelation other moments may be found. Significance is labyrinthine rather than logical, diffuse rather than complicated in a Miltonian fashion. There is no philosophic system but rather personal, vital and immediate problems of identity.

> What is the meaning of life? That was all--a simple question.... The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one.... Mrs Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs Ramsay saying 'Life stand still here'; Mrs Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent)--this was of the nature of revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs Ramsay said. 'Mrs Ramsay! Mrs Ramsay!' she repeated. She owed this revelation to her (183).

Virginia Woolf: Patron Saint of Feminism

Of the angels with which this chapter opened, the Kingfisher suggests that for Woolf belief was a central concern, as it had been for the Clapham Sect, as it had been for her father. A further indication of the religious element in Woolf's writing is the profound response it elicits and the religiosity of that response. The following voices are those of American women who, with the exception of the poet May Sarton, are literary scholars/biographers. Like Woolf, they are writing women preoccupied with the religious or spiritual dimensions of life.

Phyllis Rose on reading in the 70s:

> The woman I read most and who meant the most to me was Virginia Woolf. I was not alone. Thousands of women turned to Virginia Woolf at the same time. She became a patron saint of feminism. She also moved into the ranks of "major authors" (9).

Louise De Salvo on visiting Knole, the setting for Orlando:

> We had just come through a small stretch of moor that smelled powerfully of damp and peat when we saw a road sign that read, simply, "Sevenoaks," the village in which Knole is located. When I saw that sign, I began weeping, inexplicably and uncontrollably, filled with a sense of myself newly born, capable of working and having fun, capable of enjoying my life's work. This was released somehow by that sign and the sense it inspired of the flesh-and-blood reality of Virginia Woolf who had passed, a long time ago, by that very spot to another friend, another woman (41-42).

Sara Ruddick:

> Woolf inspired me to find, not lose, myself. I am not sure how she conferred this gift of self-recovery--the sense that my life, in its daily ordinariness, not in its laboured cleverness, was worth attention. I may not understand, but I cannot doubt my memory. Time and again, students, writing with grateful astonishment of the ways Woolf enhances and deepens their lives, remind me of this mysterious gift of authenticity Woolf confers (142-43).

Sandra Gilbert, in a less committed statement, draws on liturgical language:

> Woolf consistently offers her heroines, and a few heroes, the amazing grace of fantastic new languages, tongues which sometimes redemptively, sometimes sardonically, incarnate extraordinary sense in ineffable shape, sound, syntax (1987:217).

Finally, May Sarton in a poem written in the early 1950s, Letter from Chicago, for Virginia Woolf:

> You are not, never to be again,
> Never, never to be dead,
> Never to be dead again in this city,
> Never to be mourned again,
> But to come back yearly,
> Hourly, with the spring, with the wind,
> Fresh as agony or resurrection;
> A plume of smoke dissolving,
> Remaking itself, never still,
> Never static, never lost:
> The place where time flows again.
>
> I speak to you and meet my own life.
> Is it to be poised as the lake beside the city,
> Aloof, but given time, but given the moment--
> Is it to be a celebration always?
>
> I send you love forward into the past (153-54).

This response to Woolf, however inspired, indicates the power of her prose to address matters that are inherently religious or sacred.[17] By stimulating responses that describe female experiences as life, Woolf created alternative expressions of spiritual attitudes to any

life. In biographical theory and practice her perception of the individual life broke open the traditions of the genre familiar to her through her father's work and teaching, without destroying them.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WORLDS OF LESLIE STEPHEN

> I am not one of those persons who are accessible to what are called historical associations: my heart would not beat more quickly on the Field of Marathon; and when I see a place where something has happened, the thing that always occurs to me is its strong resemblance to places where nothing has happened (Stephen 1956:210).

Leslie Stephen, Victorian Man of Letters, alpinist and agnostic, while not without humour, was a serious man. For him nature was neither that creature of the Romantics responding to and reflecting the passions of the race, nor the force, "red in tooth and claw," that Science threw at Tennyson. Nor did nature teach morality, though it might inspire humility (Turner:256). For Stephen nature was part of a world of science and reason, a world of men. He preferred Mont Blanc viewed across Lake Geneva "as the guardian of the dwelling place of people" to wilderness beyond the reach of civilization (Stephen 1956:211). Yet, though he denied acute sensibilities, his mind could encircle the natural world, the world of science, and tame it through philosophy, literature and biography: he could stand immune on the Field of Marathon because he knew its place in history and he could trace a literary thread from its remote past through Plutarch to Browning.

In this chapter we shall look at Leslie Stephen, the world that shaped him and the world he shaped. Through family and education Stephen met and was molded by major dynamics in 19th century Britain--evangelical Christianity, science and rationalism--and he emerged an articulate agnostic. By examining the pattern in his life, we can grasp a sense of his times and come to understand the Necessity[18] that impelled his vision of biography. It is the method of discovery he himself used.

Leslie Stephen understood literature to be "the utterance of a class which may represent, or fail to represent, the main national movement," as "affected more or less directly by all manner of religious, political, social and economic changes ... dependent upon the occurrence of individual genius for which we cannot even profess to account" (Stephen 1903:31). He might not have claimed genius for himself, in fact few have claimed it for him,[19] but his place in the annals of biography is unique. His contribution to the genre reflected the work of his century's acclaimed biographers, like Thomas Carlyle and James

Froude, and helped establish biographical conventions which have remained effective. Few biographers have taken the individual and the world on equal terms. Stephen, a prolific writer, was as concerned with the nature of thought and the world in which it was manifest, as he was with the actions of individuals at the centre of things. His works range from a treatise on ethics, through philosophical and literary histories, to biographies which appeared as essays, as monographs, as literature and life studies, and as precise shapes within the Dictionary of National Biography. Necessity dictated the forms he chose, forced their preoccupations and indeed forged their religious underpinnings.

Childhood and Traces of Clapham

Leslie Stephen was born in 1832, the year of the first Reform Bill, into an interconnected group of families that Noel Annan has called Britain's "Intellectual Aristocracy" (1955). Names like Wedgwood, Darwin, Wilberforce, Macaulay and Trevelyan thread across and down the family trees; all of Leslie Stephen's grandparents are there, the Venns and the Stephens. Emerging in the early nineteenth century, largely urban and middle class, the intellectual aristocracy held bourgeois values of morality and dedication which they carried with them into the schools and universities, the civil service, law and publishing. The Evangelical Revival had affected the entire group but particularly those families that were members and descendants of the coalition called the Clapham Sect.[20] Philanthropy drew them together, first over the abolition of slavery, and evangelicalism bonded the generations. Reacting against "a serious decline in church life" within the Church of England, they did not withdraw from Anglicanism but rather drew an ascetic and moral version of it around themselves (Hennell:12). The original members chose to live near one another around Clapham Common in the south of London, late in the eighteenth century, and from that centre spread their tentacles of social reform through England. They turned their energies on "the poor, the illiterate and the distressed part of the community," building hospitals, promoting and financing schools; "they made the social, as well as the spiritual, welfare of the lower classes their concern" (199). Among their projects in 1796 was the establishment of "The Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor." Their intention was not to improve the status of the poor but to improve the experience of such status as was held. In the static world of the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries, Clapham paternalism was all that was possible. Still, their attitude was remarkable.

> It is because the Clapham Sect lived and acted as citizens of heaven that they overcame so many of the petty distinctions that divide men on earth: it is for this reason that we are eternally their debtors (211).

The Clapham Sect deserves our attention because its sentiments remained a force long after its moral fervour subsided. Many of its progeny turned away from evangelical Christianity. Leslie Stephen became an agnostic, his brother Fitzjames adopted "an austere stoical doctrine," Samuel Wilberforce became an Anglican bishop, Robert and Henry Wilberforce turned to Roman Catholicism (Cockshutt 1974:71): when only traces remained of the original enthusiasm, they seemed to seek a faith with edges. Clapham faith had been Christocentric, concerned with personal salvation, but with no strong doctrinal codes, no determining authorities, it had about it an Anglican tolerance, a latitudinarianism.[21] It was feasible to slip away from the church but inconceivable to divest the soul of a commitment to life incised in heart and mind through habits of belief and of conscience. More than one scholar has noticed a line of descent clearly marked from Clapham to Bloomsbury:[22] "a continuing sense, running through several quite different sets of doctrinal attitudes, of the deep seriousness of life, of the overriding strength of evil, of the deep cosmic and personal significance of our struggles against it" (75). From the abolitionists, through Victorians like Leslie Stephen and Florence Nightingale, and on to the Bloomsbury generation of Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster, a sense of duty, of dedication, of conscience and of purpose infused both action and literature.

The evangelicalism of Clapham was an attitude to life. Enthusiastic in the early generations, it became subdued as its inheritors gained influence and spread through British institutions. Gertrude Himmelfarb has characterized the generations' movement from belief to unbelief:

> the first generation [was] represented by Wesleyan fundamentalism, when religion looked upon learning and culture as godless; the second by the Clapham sect ... which succeeded in making piety socially and culturally respectable; and the third by men like Macaulay and James Stephen (Leslie's father), who discarded the traditional Evangelical apparatus of conscience-probing, sin-confessing, "illuminations," and conversions. Leslie Stephen himself would have favored such an interpretation. His own spiritual journey, starting from the quiet, unostentatious, lax conformism of school, ended in the quiet, reasonable, good-natured agnosticism of his maturity (204).

Himmelfarb rejects the continuity inherent in this scheme because she feels a great divide separated Leslie Stephen from his father: Sir James Stephen was "deeply pious;" Leslie "could not appreciate or credit the very fact of belief" (205). She goes on to diminish a tendency in the Victorians of Leslie's generation to invest life, particularly religion and politics, with "gamesmanship" that was an end in itself, an end without meaning (207). However, she has not allowed Darwin and the clash of religion and science a sufficient role in her equation. She has ignored what Leslie recognized as the immorality of belief in God: in a world bounded by natural law Conscience demanded that the Truth be sought. It was a greater sin to remain blinded by dead doctrine than it was to deny the faith of the fathers. Sir James Stephen could afford to pray in private. For his generation there was a familiar momentum in affairs. As the senior civil servant responsible for colonial affairs, one whose exacting stewardship fell in line with Clapham ideals, he became known as Mr. Over-Secretary Stephen. As for his family, there too he followed evangelical guidelines, sacrificing much for their education and well-being. Life would not seen so clear for his youngest son upon reaching maturity. Gertrude Himmelfarb is not wrong in characterizing Leslie Stephen's spiritual journey as quiet, unostentatious, reasonable and good-natured, but she is unfair in assuming the absence of a determined will to believe, the absence of a piety equivalent to that of Sir James.

Leslie Stephen's childhood was picture-book Victorian, somewhat lyrical and pastel, an odyssey that might have inspired the novelist George MacDonald.

> The Stephen children led happy gentle lives. Christianity flowed about them and they bathed in it. There were no fervid prayer meetings, no witch-hunting for sins.... The children believed that Jesus lived because their parents talked to Him each day.... But they learned more than a religion of emotion. The Catechism, simple theology and family prayers stamped their imaginations with the graver and more terrible images of the Christian faith. Not that such a fate awaited them. They were children and Jesus loved them (Annan 1952:13).

Family life for the Stephen children was austere but loving. Sir James was reclusive so that theirs was not a hectic social existence, but it was a healthy life with an abundance of books, and an emphasis on duty and the effort necessary to perform it.

> To outsiders the household must have been pervaded by an air of gravity, if not of austerity. But we did not feel it, for it became the law of our natures, not a law imposed by external sanctions. We certainly had a full allowance of sermons and Church services; but we never, I think, felt them to be forced upon us. They were a part, and not an unwelcome part, of the order of nature (Stephen 1895:62).

Sir James was a temperate man, and sensitive, one for whom emotional display was uncommon and evident religious feelings likely to be categorized as spiritual indelicacy. In the larger societal realms of religious experience he exhibited tolerance, aware "that Clapham was not the world, and that the conditions of salvation could hardly include residence on the sacred common" (56). His interests encompassed St. Francis and Loyola, Wilberforce and Luther but he stopped short of the rationalists and the Oxford Movement. — Those movements struck at the very roots of his beliefs.[23]

Had Leslie Stephen been able to go through life with the impress of his parents' religiosity undisturbed, perhaps he could have carried it unperturbed. However, even before he encountered the challenges of science and rationalism at Cambridge, he had first to come to terms with his own health. His frailty as a child forced decisions regarding his schooling significant enough to determine where the family would live. An anecdote, often recounted, concerns a bout of "brain-fever" induced by his adoration of and subsequent emotional response to poetry. He was eight years old. The doctor's recommendation of the fresh air of Brighton and a cessation of poetry was calculated to cage and temper his sensitivity (Maitland:27). The family moved to Brighton; later they would move to Windsor so that Leslie and his older brother could attend Eton and avoid the horrors of life as school boarders. Leslie's health continued to be a cause of concern but, with several interruptions, he managed to prepare himself for Cambridge. Two years into his stay his mother noted steady improvement in his health; at 19 he could now walk as far as his father at 60. Four years later he could walk thirty-four miles without difficulty (43). By the time he left Trinity Hall, his health had improved incredibly, he had gained respect as a rowing coach and had had an impact on intervarsity athletics. He later became a notable alpinist in a period of fervid mountaineering, writing on the subject and scaling several European peaks, and a redoubtable walker whose Sunday Tramps with friends and colleagues chalked up 252 walks averaging 20 miles (Annan:89). These athletic activities are not so much natural as they are determined and enthusiastic: they illustrate a conscientious attitude toward good health, a duty owed to the body, and an exhilaration in achievement.[24]

Cambridge and Conversion

Christianity was under attack in the mid-nineteenth century. Sir Charles Lyell's Principles of Geology (1830) effectively diminished the likelihood of divine intervention through cataclysm and was only one of a series of assaults from science.[25] German Biblical criticism, notably David Strauss's Life of Jesus (1835) published in English in 1846, undermined the authenticity of biblical texts. In 1859 Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species served as the epicentre of this storm on tradition whose waves extended from the past well into the future, a tempest that left Christianity untenable for Leslie Stephen. An undergraduate at Cambridge from 1850 to 1854, he remained on as Goodbehere fellow[26] and tutor and was ordained in 1855. In 1859 he took priest's orders. What seemed reasonable and inevitable in 1859, a mere step on the ladder of his adult life, became a significant misstep in 3 years. In the summer of 1862 Stephen found himself unable to conduct chapel services and resigned his tutorship. Christianity no longer made sense. Stephen was forced to reconsider the human condition.

The Stephens' choice of Cambridge over Oxford had been deliberate and in keeping with Clapham preferences. Opposing dynamics fueled debates at Oxford and Cambridge in the nineteenth century. Gertrude Himmelfarb insists that

> more than any other single factor--more than childhood, marriage or profession--school seems to constitute the decisive, formative, influence in [Englishmen's] lives, an influence that acquires the character of a permanent emotional, social, even metaphysical condition (203).

She sketches two school profiles: those with a Rugby-Oxford temperament "went through agonies of doubt and emerged to find their familiar world shattered;" their Eton-Cambridge contemporaries "experienced nothing more disturbing than the sensation of having awakened" (204). While she continues to underestimate the rigour and will inherent in the Cambridge option, she has discerned a major divide. Oxford enclosed the Tractarians and Newman, and nursed them through a surge of religious examination into Roman Catholicism or a renewed and ritualized Anglicanism. Cambridge was a centre of science, rationalism, and decorum. Stephen described the "prevailing tone" as "quiet good sense" (Maitland:18) and maintained in a letter to James Russell Lowell that

> [the] odium theologicum, though it exists at Oxford, has almost perished out of Cambridge. One of our fellows wrote a book the other day to prove, under a very thin veil, that Christianity was a degenerate kind of Gnosticism. Nobody took any notice of it, and if he does not insult people's feelings, nobody will (159).

Leslie Stephen's discipline at Cambridge was mathematics" and from it he learned that "one's conscience may be a dangerous guide unless it condescends to be enlightened by patient and impartial inquiry" (Annan:140). As an undergraduate he had read Mill's System of Logic, a profound influence on students during the 1850s (141). Much of his writing hints at ideas he found there: formal logic and the truth or falsity of propositions, scientific law and the uniformity of Nature (142). By 1860 his reading had included Comte, Kant, Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley and Hume (43). His concern with the methods by which truth could be discovered, particularly religious truth, was life-long and surfaced in the philosophical preoccupations of his English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, in his Science of Ethics, in many of his essays and as the foundation of his biographical forays. His was a positivist view: rational exploration of the laws of nature would continue to uncover basic truths whose application would promote a better world. The social reforms urged by Clapham conscience do not seem remote. Indeed Leslie Stephen's attitudes to living in the world exuded the same heavenly fervour. The difference was that he inhabited territory denied to God.

Stephen described his conversion several times and we must take him at his word he was nothing if not honest and reflective.

> My own experience is, I imagine, a very common one. When I ceased to accept the teaching of my youth, it was not so much a process of giving up beliefs as of discovering that I had never really believed. The contrast between the genuine convictions that guide and govern our conduct, and the professions which we were taught to repeat in church, when once realized, was too glaring. One belonged to the world of realities and the other to the world of dreams. The orthodox formulae represent, no doubt, a sentiment, an attempt to symbolize emotions which might be beautiful, or to indicate vague impressions about the tendency of things in general; but to put them side by side with real beliefs about facts was to reveal their flimsiness (Maitland:133).

> Many admirable people have spoken of the agony caused by the abandonment of their old creed. Truth has forced them to admit that the very pillars upon which their whole superstructure of faith rested were unsound. The shock has caused them exquisite pain, and even if they have gained a fresh basis for a theory of life, they still look back fondly at their previous state of untroubled belief. I have no such story to tell. In truth, I did not feel that the solid ground was giving way beneath my feet, but rather that I was being relieved of a cumbersome burden. I was not discovering that my creed was false but that I had never really believed it (145).

> I now believe in nothing, to put it shortly; but I do not the less believe in morality &c. &c. I mean to live and die like a gentleman if possible (145).

The Necessity of Morals

Leslie Stephen, frail child of Evangelicals, emerged from his sojourn at Cambridge freed from the strictures of ill-health and Christian dogma. He would spend his adult life testing his new realities of body and mind, scaling mountains and exploring philosophies and lives. Like Cardinal Newman his reading had led him into a position on belief, one he could claim to have been natural to him, and one that was not easily accepted by the reading public. Newman's Roman Catholicism and Stephen's agnosticism were journeys in opposite directions along the same path, journeys both elaborately recounted.[28] However, while those who moved in the direction of Rome or up into the loftier reaches of Anglicanism found their landscape richly mapped by generations of earlier travellers, unbelievers like Stephen were faced with unmarked terrain. They acknowledged the difficulty of enhancing their option, of infusing science and rationalism with hints of ardour, and the option they envisaged was singular: Victorian morality, a science of living, an ethics of belief. James Turner has described the progression from belief to morality. Unlike Himmelfarb's belief to unbelief sequence, Turner's image grants the commitment of unbelievers. Exemplary behaviour, central to Calvinism and to Cromwell, was of general concern to early modern Europe, both Protestant and Catholic: a focus on morality "allowed escape from both the divisive welter of doctrinal disputes and the uncertainties spawned by the new philosophies" (32). As new laws of science pulled more spheres of life within the utilitarian frameworks of reason, it made sense to describe God in terms that enabled His pre-eminence to be plainly grasped. For a long time the strategy worked: "the known unbelievers of Europe and America before the French Revolution numbered fewer than a dozen or two ... disbelief in God remained scarcely more plausible than disbelief in gravity" (44). An image of a divided God, although it emerged before 1790, was not widely acknowledged until the nineteenth century.

> Although His spiritual governance remained immediate and personal, and except in broad principles unpredictable, He managed the visible world through impersonal natural laws (77).

This God circumscribed science only to find science had explained Him away. Darwin and Huxley, in that brief period of Leslie Stephen's clerical life, showed that the world could be explained without God. "Even His primal creative function--His role as First Cause dissipated into mist. Most scientists, qua scientists, simply stopped talking about such metaphysical questions" (180). Turner's argument is that the theologians had trapped themselves. By insisting that knowledge of God's existence could be described by men, they

had obscured the difference between natural and supernatural knowledge. Without that demarcation, in a rational and scientific world, what choice did a conscience-stricken Clapham descendant have? To set aside the ecclesiastical system of 1862 required a conscience not unlike those of the Evangelical Anglicans who, at the time of an earlier decline, turned toward Clapham's "sacred common." That Stephen felt no pain at leaving is surely an indication that he still inhabited the land of his fathers. The Clapham Sect had turned from an attack upon "pluralism, absenteeism and clerical ignorance" (Hennell:11) to a more personal and dedicated creed with vigorous social concerns; Stephen turned from a diaphanous personal creed and hollow ritual toward a social morality within which the individual could find meaning. The actions are different but in both cases the need to take them arises from examined conscience.

When Leslie Stephen left Cambridge for London in 1865, and life as a "man of letters,"[29] he carried morality not only as an agnostic's Necessity, but also as a rhetorical necessity. At the highest level men of letters "were to be the preachers, prophets and teachers to the reading public, and their task was to save society from the social sins, the political catastrophes and the moral degradation that industrial life and values carried in their wake" (191). In a moral age he was a purveyor of advice. No matter how much distance he might put between himself and traditional Christianity, moralism for him was beyond skepticism: it "clung like a barnacle, more tenacious than God" (Turner:223). Deprived of Christian rhetoric his morality seems at times a little raw and can weigh heavily on a late twentieth century examination of his writing. Noel Annan, assessing Stephen in relationship to the thought of his age, weighed his Science of Ethics and found Stephen wanting as a moral philosopher; it was "the failing of an amateur who has blundered into a profession which demands rigorous training" (1952:215). Gertrude Himmelfarb's assessment of Stephen's work is similar and, linking him to Virginia Woolf's portrait of Mr. Ramsay in To The Lighthouse, she claims that he "starved himself as an intellectual, thinking it would make him a better man" (218). Both Annan and Himmelfarb, authorities on Victorian Britain, agree that Stephen's strength was not as a moral philosopher but they do not infer from that weakness that therefore his other works are flawed. When critics of the twentieth century look back, they have a tendency to compress the broad implications of Stephen's moralism into a kind of coded repression.[30] Janis Paul pondering Virginia Woolf's Victorian background describes a family atmosphere "that

celebrated externality and factuality, subjected the needs of the individual to the needs of society, denied thoughts and feelings" (9). She can say that "Sir Leslie was in fact quite interested in literature, but his own Victorian childhood had somewhat brutally rechanneled his native love of language" (17). She does not say that the celebrated externality was the outward movement of a Clapham soul, and her use of "subjection", "denied" and "brutally" are not merely misleading, they are wrong. It would seem that the further the critic gets from the pivotal issues that Leslie Stephen faced, the easier it is to misinterpret or diminish his experience. While moralism is less overt in the biographies than in the philosophical works and essays, it is nonetheless fundamental to his vision; our task is to understand its significance and see through it to his concepts of being in the world.

Biographical Writing: The World that Leslie Stephen Shaped

According to Frederic Maitland, Leslie Stephen was

> a man who thought of poetry while he read philosophy, of philosophy while he read poetry, and of stubborn fact--especially of the lives of concrete men and women--while he read everything (407).

He was a biographer who took the individual and the world on equal terms, albeit usually a thinking and writing individual in a world of books and ideas. His concern was with the interaction of the two and when he strayed far, became too abstract or too psychological, he faltered. His Science of Ethics impressed no one, yet his History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, which links philosophies and the lives of philosophers, is still highly regarded. He seldom drew too close to the subjects of his biographies and when he did, the result was both tender and curious. He did acknowledge the "supreme importance of the individual (1903:19)," but he meant as actor in an era not as a primary subject. He was master of the middle ground because it served his moral purposes: the interaction between life and society, echoing along the streets of Clapham, both explicated and enhanced his agnosticism.

Stephen wrote two full length biographies, The Life of Henry Fawcett (1885) and one of his own brother, The Life of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen (1895). Five shorter literary biographies, written for John Morley's English Men of Letters series, comprise works on Samuel Johnson (1878), Alexander Pope (1880), Jonathan Swift (1882), George Eliot (1902) and Thomas Hobbes (1904). Without question his most influential work was the Dictionary of National Biography; he not only gave it shape as the original editor, from 1882 to 1890,

but he also wrote 378 of the entries himself. And in a final category are his innumerable biographical essays, many of which were review pieces, that dotted the journals of his day.

In the full length biographies of Henry Fawcett and his brother Fitzjames, Leslie Stephen fulfilled the expectations of nineteenth century biography. Ira Nadel characterizes a Plutarchian model which, along with Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson (1791), dominated both biographical style and content for much of the century. Common features were an ethical and moral focus, concentration on illuminating incidents, selective description and a concern with evaluation rather than extended narrative. To reliance on scholarship and authority (17), A.O.J. Cockshutt adds a universal trust in documents, particularly letters, and a preoccupation with heroism, influenced by Thomas Carlyle's ideas and biographies. Cockshutt further interprets the style:

> [The biographies] all have some sense of a man struggling to achieve something, and of some other forces, separate from his will, at work to help or hinder him. The nineteenth century biographer, whether Christian or not, inherited and seldom questioned an assumption that these forces could not be summed up simply in physical law and social pressure. There is, almost always, a further idea present, sometimes overtly expressed, sometimes vaguely adumbrated, of spiritual formation by forces beyond man's control, and indeed beyond his full understanding. Each man is felt to have a meaning, an objective meaning to which all interpretation is only a weak approximation.... The biographer himself reads the evidence of life as if it were a novel, and God were the novelist.... [The] finished biography is more accurately compared to literary criticism; it is a report upon an obscure but momentous work of art (1974:21).

Stephen's biographies suggest a mythical world, perfected lives. Written ten years apart, they vary somewhat in their creation but both approach five hundred pages and encompass vast amounts of detail in a style that is formal and, for the most part, disinterested. Fitzjames was a journalist and a judge who spent time in India and shared many of Leslie's interests in literary and philosophical matters; Fawcett was a parliamentarian: two lives full of documented activity. The biographies make turgid reading now but were well received upon printing; Fawcett went through five editions in three years, Fitzjames two in the year of publication. Despite extensive detail on Fitzjames' activities in India or on Fawcett's creation of parcel post, Stephen's intention was to develop character:

> [we] have to learn the art of forgetting--of suppressing all the multitudinous details which threaten to overburden the human memory. Our aim should be to present the human soul, not all its irrelevant trappings (1956b:140-1).

One feels he misfired, particularly in the Fawcett biography; didacticism lies embedded in the width of the spine.

Stephen does, however, make some revealing remarks on his perception of documents, particularly letters. Life for him had "a most natural and obvious unity" and biography, as a work of art, should aim at "revelation, and, as much as possible, self-revelation, of a character" (143). He valued particularly "autobiography contained in letters" (138) and was convinced that we would be surprised by "the amount of passion and feeling with which they are throbbing" (139). Certainly, the early life of Fitzjames includes much material that is autobiographical; it also falls within the Stephen tradition of writing one another's lives.[31] The shared edenic childhood establishes Fitzjames' character and a closeness between author and subject that resonates throughout the book.

In the life of Fawcett there is an incident that also points toward Stephen's concern with the human soul. With only a few exceptions, nineteenth century biographies are about men "who did what they intended to do, men who either were not tempted by stray impulses, or who were successful in rigidly suppressing them" (Cockshutt 1974:18). There is an absence of impulse, of high moments.[32] Henry Fawcett's life would be like that, in fact for the most part it is, except for the extraordinary moment of his blinding. Stephen writes a moving and lyrical chapter describing the accident and its aftermath, which requires only rapt attention to delete the more obvious moralisms. Like Fitzjames' childhood it attaches an aura to the subject that clings for the remainder of the book.

> On September 17, 1858, Fawcett went out shooting with his father upon Harnham Hill. Harnham Hill commands a view of the rich valley where the Avon glides between the great bluffs of the chalk downs and beneath the unrivalled spire of Salisbury. It is one of the loveliest views, as Fawcett used to say, in the south of England. He now saw it for the last time. The party was crossing a turnip field and put up some partridges, which flew across a fence into the land where Mr. Fawcett had not the right of shooting. In order to prevent this from happening again, Fawcett advanced some thirty yards in front of his party. Shortly afterwards another covey rose and flew towards him. His father was suffering from incipient cataract of one eye. He therefore could not see his son distinctly, and had for the moment forgotten their relative change of position. He thus fired.... (42).

Stephen moves quickly through the moment and then explores its personal ramification for thirty pages. By fixing this tragedy in the second chapter, Stephen establishes a rare and seminal moment which then pulls into itself the rest of the life: the moment of blinding becomes a lifetime of blindness. After describing family reactions and Fawcett's own stoicism, Stephen quotes in full a particularly effective letter whose 'chin up' and 'manly' advice got the patient back on his feet. Fawcett is allowed moments of depression and then reawakens to the joy of living as he tries out a series of sports. Racing, cricket and racket-

playing are no longer possible but he continues his vigorous walking, and skating on the Fens where "[on] the wide open spaces he would skate quite alone" (62). And he fished: through anecdotal fish stories Stephen draws in local characters, neighbouring gentry, and finally sends Fawcett beyond home on advocacy missions for various philanthropic institutions. Though everything Fawcett does thereafter is conditioned and magnified by his blindness, Stephen mentions it again only a few times. It would be misleading to claim sublimity for the chapter, but the incident does support Stephen's insistence on the soul of the subject at the heart of a biography. Without that chapter the biography would meet standard Victorian criteria with a less engaging objectivity.

Most nineteenth century biographies were written of subjects well-known to the biographer; through a disinterested and formal style emotion was suppressed which then tended to suffuse the works with a radiant, sometimes sentimental, tone (Cockshutt 1974:14). For the most part Stephen avoids the pitfall. His style is forthright, his information sound, and his admiration clear. Still, he reveals more personal feeling in these works than in his other writing except for The Mausoleum Book, a reminiscence written for his children upon the death of his second wife.

The English Men of Letters series provided Stephen with an opportunity to chart issues in society through vital exemplars, to explore the middle ground. The series was conceived by John Morley, editor of the Fortnightly Review, to make available to the public short, inexpensive biographies that included critical opinion and historical relevance.[33] By bringing life and works together Morley "sought to correct the distortions that resulted from moralizing" and in the combination to provide a "spiritual guide and centre for the reader" (Nadel:38). Positivist in his views, he felt that a series of representative men reflecting the "social element in every part of conduct" would mirror the unities of life underlying change and evolution. The approach was innovative: a review in the Athenaeum lamented the drift "into an age of literary middlemen" (41) who would encourage readers to value quick information over the slow pleasures of reading.

Stephen's George Eliot, in 1902, was the first volume to appear in a second series and it is a good example of his mature style. His primary concern was to develop Eliot's character in such a way that it could support and explain the concepts he found developed in her works. His approach was chronological; he dwelt on maturation and achievement as she advanced toward her zenith, then delineated her weaknesses and her decline. In her

writing years he tended to move away from her figure and into her books and her ideas. Since he was in basic agreement with her views, and had followed a similar religious trajectory, he moved sympathetically through her early years acknowledging the frustrations and limitations of country life but sensing in it the roots of her strength. Ironically, given his own propensities, he judged her weakness to be a tendency toward elaborate and lifeless philosophical abstractions, and he criticized the authorial distance these ideas created in her later works.

Aside from the intentional moral didacticism inherent in the series itself, in this biography some of Stephen's more annoying Victorian moral assumptions intrude.[34] His abiding horror of misplaced femininity tended to emerge in this work attached to George Eliot's perceived literary weakness. As a woman, according to Stephen, she was incapable of truly depicting men:

> Men drawn by women, even by the ablest, are never quite of the masculine gender (74).
>
> George Eliot, I have suggested, was a woman; a woman, too, of rather delicate health, exhausted by hard work; and, moreover, a woman who in spite of her philosophy, was eminently respectable, and brought up in a quiet middle-class atmosphere ... and though by dint of conscientious reading George Eliot knew a great deal about the ruffian geniuses of the Renaissance, she could not throw herself into any real sympathy with them (135-6).
>
> Mr. Felix Holt would have been quite in his place at Toynbee Hall; but is much too cold-blooded for the time when revolution and confiscation were really in the air. Perhaps this indicates the want of masculine fibre in George Eliot and the deficient sympathy with rough popular passions which makes us feel that he represents the afterthought of the judicious sociologist and not the man of flesh and blood who was the product of the actual conditions (155).

In general, however, Stephen's work in the series is of high quality and demonstrates his commitment to the human creature in the world of its own devising. The interlacing of life and art, a commonplace now, required a reconsideration of the purpose of art and the nature of the artistic act.

In the year that Virginia was born, 1882, Stephen began to edit the Dictionary of National Biography, whose 63 volumes then, as now, are "an indispensable guide to persons who would otherwise feel that they were hewing their way through a hopelessly intricate jungle" (1973:11).[35] Stephen had a genius for organizing people, ideas and history. The skills that facilitated his English Thought in the Eighteenth Century served him as editor of

the dictionary: a sense of the structure of time and of the individuals who held it in place. He honed the processes of condensation that had marked the English Men of Letters series:

> A dictionary ought, in the first place, to supply you with a sufficient indication of all that has been written upon the subject; it should state briefly the result of the last researches; explain what appears to be the present opinion among the most qualified experts, and what are the points which seem still to be open; and, above all, should give a full reference to all the best and most original sources of information (19).

These were the primary conditions and he held to them, nagging contributors through the years of his editorship, from 1882-90, until he wore himself out and was forced to retire. His insistence on accuracy established a standard and instituted a corrective function in the dictionary (Nadel:49). The decisions that he made for inclusion, whether of individuals or of content, shaped understanding of British society and of its development. He was aware of this effect and went to considerable effort to be complete. Regarding inclusion, he looked to previous dictionaries for inspiration, and then considered who might have been left out (1973a:17): he did not intend to prejudice his dictionary but neither did he deliberately set about revising earlier prejudices. His rules on content were stringent, intended to standardize the dictionary and make it more readable.

> A smart journalist knows how to beat out a single remark into a column of epigrams and illustrations. The dictionary-maker should aim at the reverse process: he should coax the column of smoke back into the original vase.... (1956b:130).

In a letter to Charles Eliot Norton, Stephen summed up his intentions for his own dictionary entry on Carlyle: "a highly condensed life, throwing the domestic storms into the background, and insisting on Carlyle's hard struggle for life and independence...." (Maitland:388).

Stephen passed on to his daughter an appreciation for biography and the sense it conveys of living tradition. She kept his dictionary by her as a professional writer's tool However, she easily saw its flaws. It reflected the assumptions and presumptions of its day, the dominant values of the society it portrayed. National figures were those who served the state, by definition, not those who merely amassed wealth, seldom members of the working classes or women. It distinguished between insiders and outsiders.[36]

Leslie Stephen was a biographer of objective time, a Victorian man of letters establishing images of the individual in history. He did not question the implications of his method; his concern lay with breaking through the confining boundaries of ecclesiastical time

and configuring an alternative. He never abandoned the problems created by religion, in allegiance or disaffection: they surfaced in his essays, in his work on the eighteenth century and on ethics, and were a feature of the lives he considered. But the core of his achievement was his ability to place his biographees in the world. When he interpreted lives, he stayed within descriptive parameters moving neither toward metaphysics nor toward psychology. He could not have foreseen the directions his own preoccupations would take when grasped by his daughter's talent. Unable to get inside his subjects--that skill awaited twentieth century psychology--he situated them in the world, explained their relationship to it and measured the grounds of their achievement. He envisioned the struggle of life and the will to achieve as intense encounters and transferred that sentiment to his readers in subdued and decorous prose. Such faults as he had grew from the moral pressures of his age which, deleterious to his thought in some respects, sustained his rationalism. His preoccupation with ethics, though it may detract from a postmodern[37] reading of his work, would have been nearly invisible at the time.

Afterimage

Edmund Gosse encountered Leslie Stephen one day in 1893 when he happened upon the unveiling of a statute of Henry Fawcett in a park at the back of Lambeth Palace. His recollection reminds us of the distance between that time and our own. Practiced though Gosse may have been at "illuminations," his perceptions have a validity ours cannot have.

> It was a brilliant summer day, blazing, without a cloud. Leslie Stephen had not, I believe, intended to speak, but the Archbishop asked him to do so.... [W]hen L.S. rose to speak, he stood up silhouetted against the burning blue sky, with a tremendous light upon him. It was exactly like a Holbein--the magnificent head, with its strong red hair and beard, painted against the porcelain blue sky. I never in all my knowledge of him saw Leslie Stephen to such physical advantage. He was full of emotion, occasionally shaken by it, but he rose above it; and he seemed like a prophet raised half-way up to heaven, high above the people. The scene will always remain with me as one of the most picturesque that I was ever present at (Maitland:422-23).

Stephen had abandoned Christianity but some of its light still filtered into the place he inhabited.

CHAPTER THREE

BELIEFS AND BIOGRAPHY

> This may help to justify my daring remark that the dictionary is an amusing work.... The reader, as I have intimated, must supply something for himself; he has to take up the dry specimens in this great herbarium, and to expand them partly by the help of his imagination til they take something of the form and colouring of life.... No man is a reading enthusiast until he is sensible of the pleasure of turning over some miscellaneous collection, and lying like a trout in a stream snapping up, with the added charm of unsuspectedness, any queer little morsel of oddity or pathos that may drift by him.
>
> --Leslie Stephen (1973:29-30)

> This influence, by which I mean the consciousness of other groups impinging upon ourselves; public opinion; what other people say and think; all those magnets which attract us this way to be like that, or repel us the other and make us different from that; has never been analysed in any of those Lives which I so much enjoy reading, or very superficially.... Consider what immense forces society brings to play upon each of us ... well, if we cannot analyse these invisible presences, we know very little of the subject of the memoir; and again how futile life-writing becomes. I see myself as a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream.
>
> --Virginia Woolf (1985a:80)

Two Biographers

More than a curious conceit, the piscine metaphor shared by father and daughter points toward essential differences in their perspectives, differences rooted in generation and gender. In the first epigraph, from an essay on national biography, Leslie Stephen describes the delight available to a reader of collective biography like his own Dictionary of National Biography. In making his observation he stands apart from the dictionary he has created and addresses a reader equally distinct and separate; he describes a compilation of short discrete biographies that could be sampled to acquire a variety of sensations. In his world lives can be compiled and sorted alphabetically, whether on library shelves or in dictionaries, because the boundary markers of existence--genealogies, dates, rituals--and the criteria for achievement and notability have been agreed upon. Supplied with the dictionary's biographical blueprint, the reader is capable of creating images that "take something of the

form and colouring of life." While metaphoric trout are more often victims of some angler's delight than aggressors, that this literate fish can "snap" should not surprise: he swims with confidence in the streams of empire where mastery is tacit, order endemic, and the unexpected explicable.

Virginia Woolf's thoughts in the second epigraph, from her autobiographical "A Sketch of the Past," follow a description of the influence of others during childhood, notably that of her mother upon herself. Her search for analyses of those "invisible presences" essential to life-writing but seldom found in it, presences that can shift lives from the courses charted so clearly in her father's dictionary, belongs to the twentieth century. In her metaphor she is not a familiar species feasting leisurely in a stream. Rather, unnamed, she swims the current with others, unaware of her own shape, uncertain of the presence and intentions of others. She has assumed a portion of the imagining that Stephen had left to his reader.

As a biographer Woolf struggled to describe a new and subtler form of community, a revised and resonating form for the self. Although she shared with her father a devotion to biography and history, and an appreciation of literature and the role of the critic, her world was separated from his by the divide of the 1890s, the fin de siecle,[34] and by the First World War after which the greater part of her professional life occurred. The transition across those decades clove his century from hers. Biography moved "from knowing the externals of a life to attempting to know the self in the process of living" (McNett:4). Life in nineteenth-century biography had often been imagined as a public self stationed in a rational world. Twentieth century biographical scrutiny turned to the private self and began to explore relationships forged "between a continually evolving individual consciousness and a continually changing external world" (5). Although Virginia Woolf was influenced by the nineteenth century, having absorbed its precepts under her father's tutelage, her mature writing was exemplary of twentieth century modernist thought.

Both father and daughter envisaged one world in their biographical criticism and practice. His was stable, positivist, and called forth an objective authorial voice which favoured biographical accounts. Except for The Mausoleum Book, a memoir he wrote for his children, Stephen preferred to account for the lives of others, particularly literary and national figures. Autobiography as such held little appeal for his sensibility though he felt biography benefitted from the inclusion of autobiographical letters. The unity of Woolf's

world lay in the pattern she sensed behind the randomness of life. The conjunction of randomness and pattern creates an ambivalence in her biographical images and her perceptions of the shape of life, rooted in her own experience, favour autobiography. In her fiction, essays, and biographies she manipulated the world of her senses, her society and her antecedents. Her undertaking inverted biographical assumptions. Her mixed biographical/autobiographical style and her rejection of the heroic ripped out the boundary markers of biographical existence. She blurred the contours of the heroic world with suggestions of reality drawn from personal vision, female experience and the lives of the obscure.

Inherited Moral Imperatives

When Virginia Woolf was born in 1882, her father was fifty years old. She recognized the chasm that separated them: "There should have been a generation between us to cushion the contact" (1985a:147). That there was not, that Stephen himself was a revolutionary reformer in his own age, magnifies and intensifies the contrast between them. Stephen was not just a repressed Victorian unbeliever whose last decade burdened his talented daughter. Both father and daughter struggled with questions of life, meaning, and belief. He inhabited a world where morality, Christian or agnostic, was dominant, where Truth was a moral rather than a pragmatic value. Empiricism and conscience were absolute, self-confidence rampant, and the Empire testified to the innate superiority of the northern races. The foundations of Woolf's world marked the demolition of her father's. In the 1890s Marx and Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Ibsen were new to Britain and emblematic of the nature of the changes in literary and political thought. New analyses of social formation and a close, disturbing look at the individual called Victorian certainties to question. The impact of Freud would soon be felt (Cockshutt 1964:181-183). Moreover, at the end of the nineteenth century significant economic adjustments were altering the literary world. The aristocracy and gentry had begun to fall into the middle class as a 20-year depression in cereal farming undermined the financial roots of their patronage, and that growing middle class was more materialistic and less philanthropic than the wealthier Victorians had been. Moral mastery was losing its appeal. Earlier, newly specialized interests had fragmented the reading public; now an emerging semi-literate working class was seeking totally different literary diversions (Heyck:198-9). The towering men of letters were shrinking into charming

and quaint belles-lettrists. The declining influence of men of letters may have opened the field for women; certainly Woolf saw herself as a moral guide not unlike her father. The sinews that had held Leslie Stephen to Clapham ideals stretched to include his daughter in Bloomsbury:

> For it is an age clearly when we are not fast anchored where we are; things are moving round us; we are moving ourselves. Is it not the critics duty to tell us, or to guess at least, where we are going (Woolf 1981a:11)?

Leslie Stephen's moral sense, stronger after his rejection of Christianity, had owed much to the assurance gained during his childhood. "The Stephen children led happy gentle lives. Christianity flowed about them and they bathed in it" (Annan 1952:13). His daughter had parallel beginnings: "The childhood summers at St. Ives were marked in memory as the irrecoverable paradise" (Gordon:12). She was "a much-praised child" (15), and "at the same time as [her] wit was encouraged, she was bathed in protective love" (16). Rooted firmly through these idyllic childhoods in the seedbeds of Britain's intellectual aristocracy, father and daughter inherited the sense of commitment indicative of Clapham faith. Neither denied an essential meaning in life; they felt a duty to society to articulate their beliefs. Leslie's biographical and ethical preoccupations pivoted on the Necessity that determined his agnosticism, the crisis of faith of the 1860s. Virginia's preoccupations, also biographical and ethical, pivoted on events more personally devastating. Three deaths scarred her adolescence and early adulthood. Her mother died in 1895 when Virginia was thirteen. Two years later Stella, a half-sister who had taken upon herself her mother's responsibilities, died. These deaths effectively tore the centre from the family and left an ailing father and four brothers with only Virginia and her sister Vanessa, older by two years, for emotional sustenance. Then in 1906, after Stephen had died and his four children had moved to Bloomsbury, Thoby, the eldest of the brothers and a vital force in the quartet, died suddenly and unexpectedly.

Leslie Stephen had faced a crisis of faith which emerged as concepts in the larger world, the world of men and universities and churches, confronted contradictions inherent in the creations of science, technology and God. Virginia Woolf experienced another world, one where death and women (as keepers of the home fires or as creative individuals) were central, a world where the community of literary antecedents,[39] "invisible presences," or the friends and colleagues of Bloomsbury, was formative. Duty and commitment were as strong for her as they had been for Stephen but were differently formed and differently expressed.

And because she forced her voice, steeped in the traditions of English literature, into the arena of critical thought, the act of writing itself became morally problematic for her.

She wrote as a woman in a medium reserved for men:

> The garrulous sex, against common repute, is not the female but the male; in all the libraries of the world the man is to be heard talking to himself and for the most part about himself (1979a:41-42).[40]

Interrupting this male conversation required more than a strong voice. Woolf was perfectly aware of the fundamental nature of the changes she wished to effect. Her agenda echoed earlier Clapham-inspired commitments; her gender claims demanded no less than had the abolitionist inversion of economic structures and her father's inversion of religious structures

> Both in life and in art the values of a woman are not the values of a man. Thus when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values--to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important (1981b:81).

She makes clear that hers is more than simply a literary or a social program. She claims the act of writing itself to be constitutive of her being.

> I thought, driving through Richmond last night, something very profound about the synthesis of my being: how only writing composes it: how nothing makes a whole unless I am writing (1985b:202).

Had she been a poet, her profession would seem less astounding than it does coming from an essayist, novelist, diarist and biographer. Her claim is that for her a woman writing is life-forming. The totality of her vision and the minutiae of its manifestation are essential components, technical and theoretical, in her autobiographical Moments of Being and in her fictional biography Orlando.

Between the Generations: Literature, Aestheticism and Religion

Two nineteenth century developments affected Leslie Stephen minimally but contributed significantly to the authority of Woolf's voice. The first was the development of a connection between literature, women and religion which accompanied the growth of the study of English literature and the second was the emergence of aestheticism at the end of the century. This latter influence combined with ideas in the twentieth century, notably the philosophy of G. E. Moore, to formulate Bloomsbury aesthetics.

When Virginia was 11 years old, Leslie wrote to his wife that Thoby, the favoured son who was to die at 26,

> has just the kind of good sound brains that tell at Cambridge. Someday he may be Lord Chancellor, but I don't want him to be an author. That is a thing for ladies and Ginia will do well in that line (Hill:142).

Buried in the attitude Stephen manifests is an attitude to womens' education and to the role of women and English literature that had great bearing on Woolf's professional career. Whether for financial reasons or because of educational principles, the Stephens did not send Virginia or her sister to school.

> Think how I was brought up! No school; mooning about alone with my father's books; never any chance to pick up all that goes on in schools...and being walked off my legs round the Serpentine with my father (Hill:137-8).

During those walks around the Serpentine in Hyde Park Leslie and his daughter would talk about what she had read. While she did study the classics and attend some classes at King's College, London, the bulk of her education was pulled down from her father's library shelves.[41] She absorbed his attitudes at a very early age:

> I am sometimes pleased to think that I read English literature when I was young. I like to think of myself tapping at my father's study door, saying very loud and clear, 'Can I have another volume, father? I've finished this one.' Then he would be very pleased and say 'Gracious child, how you gobble' ... and get up and take down, it may have been the 6th or 7th volume of Gibbon's complete works or Spedding's Bacon or Cowper's Letters. 'But my dear, if it's worth reading, it's worth reading twice' he would say. I have a great devotion for him--what a disinterested man, how high-minded, how tender to me, and fierce and intolerable (Hill:132).

This regimen gave her direct access to a Victorian mind and provided a firm elaborated platform from which to launch her own ideas, a classical rhetoric to fashion into her inimitable style. It also instilled in her a resentment and suspicion of the institutions of men.

Stephen's suggestion that literature was more suitable for Ginia than her brother reflected an attitude that had emerged in the 19th century. As the reading public expanded, more and more women wrote, and the teaching of English literature as a subject moved into the universities. "If one were asked to provide a single explanation for the growth of English studies in the later nineteenth century, one could do worse than reply: 'the failure of religion'" (Eagleton:22). Charles Kingsley, in his capacity as Professor of English in the 1880s articulated the literature/women/religion conception when he said that literature could "initiate" woman into "the thoughts and feelings of her countrymen in every age ... that

knowing the hearts of many, she may in after life be able to comfort the hearts of all" (Baldick:69). One suspects he had in mind yet another task for the Angel in the House:

> It is thus that God intended woman to look instinctively at the world. Would to God that she would teach us men to look at it thus likewise. Would to God that she would in these days claim and fulfil to the uttermost her vocation as the priestess of charity (69).

Woolf's version of the interaction between women, literature and religion mirrors Kingsley's while subverting it. In Three Guineas she compares the profession of the priesthood to that of literature:

> In three or four centuries, it appears, the prophet or prophetess whose message was voluntary and untaught became extinct; and their places were taken by the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons, who were invariably men ... paid men.... Thus the profession of religion seems to have been originally what the profession of literature is now. It was originally open to anyone who had received the gift of prophecy. No training was needed; the professional requirements were simple in the extreme--a voice and a market place, a pen and paper (141).

She then instances Emily Bronte who, "though not worthy to be a priest in the Church of England, is the spiritual descendant of some ancient prophetess" (141).

Women were considered suited to the study of English literature which was, after all, the conveyor of the meaning of British civilization in the vernacular, the common materna linga.[42] The Victorian attitude of Julia and Leslie Stephen toward women's education--despite the fact that Stephen's niece was the Vice-Principal of Cambridge's Newnham College when Thoby was at Trinity (Rosenbaum:142)--not only fed the connection between women's intuition and their role in the propagation of literature, it also prepared Virginia for the fin de siecle "quasi-religious dedication to art" that Bloomsbury

> inherited and continued.... They thought of art as the search for and communication of a form of truth, given dignity through its power to mould experience; temporarily to order and organize it into a balanced and aesthetic whole (Bree 1973:27).

S. P. Rosenbaum notes that Bloomsbury aestheticism was a complex inheritance With roots in Romanticism, it drew heavily on G. E. Moore's ethics as well as on traditional figures such as Plato and Kant, on fin de siecle [redacted] like Pater and Swinburne, and on French culture (29). The legacy can be expanded to include Morris and Ruskin (32). However dense the nature of Bloomsbury attitudes to art, there was no parallel in Leslie Stephen's life. He would, however, have understood the quest for truth. The new attitudes to art and literature dealt directly with religion and blended easily with Woolf's agnostic birthright and the Clapham imperative. Clive Bell's words on art as a spiritual necessity

describe the Bloomsbury approach.[43] He damns the entanglement of religion in dogma and then describes art as a religion:

> It is an expression of and a means to states of mind as holy as any that men are capable of experiencing; and it is towards art that modern minds turn, not only for the most perfect expression of transcendent emotion, but for an inspiration by which to live (Johnstone:36).

These attitudes to religion and art were developmentally continuous with nineteenth century attitudes. Fin de siecle developments, which introduced aestheticism into the British moral equation, grew out of a dissatisfaction with dogmatic Victorian smugness. When he rails against religion, Roger Fry does not sound unlike Leslie Stephen:

> If religions made no claim but what art does--of being a possible interpretation without any notion of objective validity all would be well--that's what the artist does--but religions all pretend to do what science tries to do--namely discover the one universally valid construction and hence comes all the trouble ... religions are so deeply dyed with wish-fulfillment that more than anything else they have stood in the way of the disinterested study (science) and vision (art) of the universe (36).

Leslie Stephen promoted disinterested study but he had no inclination toward a "vision of the universe." His heart skipped no beats on the Field of Marathon. The aesthetic sensibility, the emotional susceptibility to the meaning of a moment, separate father and daughter. Virginia Woolf's concerns were more personal than her father's. For her ecstacy could reside in the remembered noise of the blind drawing "its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out" (1985a:65).

However, if the attitudes toward religion and art grew from nineteenth century attitudes and bridged the generations, the First World War caused a radical break. Except for "Reminiscences," all of Moments of Being was written after the war, as were Orlando and Roger Fry. The world of the Victorians was gone and it was difficult to see how a refined moral sense could help the world or the individual. Given Woolf's inherited predilection for duty--the Clapham imperative, her perception of the role of women in the creation of literature and the legacy of aestheticism, it is tempting to apply Nathan Scott's description of the modernist effort to her though, significantly, she is excluded from his remarks.

> The implicit assumption was that the inherited systems of reference had broken down, that, in order for the spectacle of the new reality to be mastered, the artist had to take on "the whole job of culture"--raiding dead tradition for the still viable remnant of meaning ... to give a shape and a significance to a world which itself offered very little assistance.... Knowing themselves to be disinherited of an effective metaphysical machinery for the ordering of experience, they proceeded to improvise into existence new systems of meaning and faith (255-256).

Woolf's concern with new "meaning and faith" linked her to other modernists. But she did not raid dead tradition, nor improvise systems. Certainly she could experience moments of "non-being," an existential state that called for renewal, but tradition for her could not, by definition, be dead. Nor did her metaphysics, based upon her ecstatic "moments of being," consist of "machinery for the ordering of experience." She differs from other modernists in the canon--Joyce, Eliot and Pound are indelible--by gender. For her the collapse of the old order allowed the emergence of her own experience. She did not need to "give a shape and significance to the world;" rather, she needed words to describe shape and significance that were obvious to her in the lives of those--particularly the women--around her.

Virginia Woolf's preoccupation with gender pulled her outside the main thrust of dominant and male discourse and connects her to the current "postmodernist operation" occurring at the frontier between "what can and cannot be represented" (Owens:59). For postmodernists representation can be a problematic concept because it objectifies: in naming it acquires the power of imposed order. The postmodern intention, according to Craig Owens, is not to transcend representation but

> to expose that system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting or invalidating others. Among those prohibited from Western representation, whose representations are denied all legitimacy, are women. Excluded from representation by its very structure, they return within it as a figure for--a representation of--the unrepresentable (Nature, Truth, the Sublime, etc.). This prohibition of representation bears primarily on woman as subject, and rarely as the object of representation, for there is certainly no shortage of images of women (59).

One of these images of women, the Angel in the House, had profoundly affected Woolf's mother Julia who had taken up nursing as a vocation during the hiatus between her marriages. Exhaustion from caring for others and managing her household of ten killed her. Even though Woolf directed intense energies to killing this angel of destruction, she understood it had been shaped by powerful images of woman as Truth and Sublimity. Remembering Julia's death, she wrote:

> Certainly there she was, in the very centre of that great Cathedral space that was childhood; there she was from the very first.... I suspect the word "central" gets closest to the general feeling I had of living so completely in her atmosphere that one never got far enough away from her to see her as a person (1985a:81-83).

Woolf felt that Julia not only created the atmosphere in which the family and others were nurtured, she also enabled other lives to take shape:

> All lives directly she crossed them seemed to form themselves into a pattern and while she stayed each move was of the utmost importance (1976:41).

The awesome dependence on women objectified Julia relentlessly. To tear the image of woman-as-angel Woolf needed to describe the invisible lives of individual women. The task was not simple.

> To begin with, there is the technical difficulty--so simple, apparently; in reality, so baffling--that the very form of the sentence does not fit her. It is a sentence made by men; it is too loose, too heavy, too pompous for a woman's use (1981b:81).

Woolf called for a new form of writing able to articulate the experience of women, for a grammatical discovery of women's reality. Her sentence lies at the core of her achievement. The fundamental revolution she had in mind was facilitated by

> a sentence which we might call the psychological sentence of the feminine gender. It is of a more elastic fibre than the old, capable of stretching to the extreme, of suspending the frailest particles, of enveloping the vaguest shapes (194).

Moments of Being charts the evolution of Woolf's sentence from its early adherence to the rhythms of her father's Victorian prose to its mature support for her view of the self. She moves from representing--and thereby objectifying--individuals in the first essays toward an art of suggestion that allows women, and men, to appear as subjects without the limitations imposed by "representation."

CHAPTER FOUR

MOMENTS OF BEING

The Text

Moments of Being is a posthumously published collection of essays written at intervals during Woolf's life.[44] Arranged thematically, the text allows the reader to follow events in Woolf's life but it distorts her progress as a writer. Since my concern is with the development of Woolf's vision of life-writing, the essays will be considered in the order in which they were written.

The earliest of the autobiographical writings, "Reminiscences," was written in 1907-08 when Woolf was in her mid-20s. Her father had died in 1904, Thoby in 1906, and she would publish her first novel in 1915. Addressed to her nephew Julian Bell as a portrait of his mother Vanessa, "Reminiscences" falls within the Stephen family tradition of writing for and about each other. In style it is close to her father's work but the subject matter, derived from the conditions of her life, is radically different. "Hyde Park Gate" and "Old Bloomsbury," two contributions read to a gathering of Bloomsberries, the Memoir Club, were written while she was in her late thirties. The former is a delightful and devastating portrait of her unlikeable step-brother George, while the latter is a wandering recollection of Bloomsbury's early years. These three pieces mark Woolf's apprenticehip and show the development of her prose from its Stephenesque base to an adroit, perceptive and witty mature style.

The fourth piece, "Am I a Snob?" was a third memoir written for the Bloomsbury club when she was 54, five years before her death. Deceptively frivolous, it exemplifies her understanding of rhetorical strategies. It is at once a satirical view of conventional memoirs and a revision of biographical categories to include aspects of women's lives traditionally ignored.

The final piece seems the most deliberately profound.[45] Written during the two years before her death, while she was working on her biography of Roger Fry and living through the early years of the war, "A Sketch of the Past" contains statements of belief fundamental to her concept of the self. Her rhetorical manoeuvres are less obvious than in "Am I a Snob?" but are, nonetheless, potent. Of the essays, this is the least editorially certain;[46]

incomplete at her death, it has appeared in two editions with new material on her father and life at Hyde Park Gate, and additional revisions, in the second.

"Reminiscences:" The Emergence of a Personal Style and Vision

In "Reminiscences" Virginia Woolf's style and perception are closer to her father's than to the experimental, elliptical, and evanescent prose of her maturity. Fundamentally linear and chronological, the essay is structured in four sections which examine the three women who surrounded Woolf in her childhood: her mother Julia, Stella her step-sister, and Vanessa. The weight of the prose, compared to "A Sketch of the Past" which covers much the same subject matter, clearly presses down upon concepts such as memory and moments that are beginning to emerge and will dominate her later work. In this first work she describes Julia's reaction to the death of her first husband:

> She had lived with a man, stainless of his kind, exalted in a world of pure love and beauty. The effect of his death then was doubly tremendous, because it was a disillusionment as well as a tragic human loss.... And now that she had none to worship she worshipped memory, and looking on the world with clear eyes, was more scornful than was just of its tragedy and stupidity because she had lived in a dream and still cherished a dream. She flung aside her religion, and became, as I have heard, the most positive of disbelievers (1976:37).

Thirty years later she described the same sequence in "A Sketch of the Past:"

> Herbert was the perfect type of public school boy and English gentleman, my father said. She chose him; and how completely he satisfied her is proved by the collapse, the complete collapse into which she fell when he died. All her gaiety, all her sociability left her.... During those eight years spent, so far as she had time over from her children and house, 'doing good', nursing, visiting the poor, she lost her faith (1985:90).

Herbert's qualities have been scaled down. No longer stainless and exalted in a world of pure love and beauty, he is a schoolboy, albeit perfect, and he has vacated the ether to become English. Less dramatic in this version, Julia does not fling her religion aside. Rather, she loses it in the midst of a busy life more intimately described. The sentences are lighter, lyrical, and packed with personal pronouns.

These two passages hint at the changes that took place in Woolf's approach to character. Julia changes from a transparent and majestic emotional force in the earliest essay to a woman suffering, caring, at home in the world in the second. Stella too undergoes a radical change between early and late portraits. In the earlier work Woolf has allowed her a low level of human response: she was not clever (1976:48), could be described

as having "a consciousness like that of some tormented dumb animal" (50), and was "often bewildered" (54). In "A Sketch of the Past" Woolf still calls Stella's devotion to Julia "canine" (1985:96), but the portrait has become tenderly layered in versions--her own, Julia's, Jack's. No longer satisfied with merely observing and judging Stella, Woolf explores the complexities of the relationship between the widowed Julia and her only daughter and "imagines" Stella to be "sensitive; modest; uncomplaining; adoring her mother, thinking how she could help her..." (96). The words come tumbling out, the syntax spreads, and an image and sense of Stella emerges that is convincing as experience within a woman's world. Such is the direction of Woolf's prose in Moments of Being. She began by echoing the authority and transparency of Victorian characterization and moved toward less authorial and increasingly suggestive prose open to "invisible presences."

Embedded in a style and attitudes that echoed her father's nineteenth century prose, Woolf's trajectory is evident from the start of her writing career. In the chapter on Leslie Stephen, I followed his private life until his declaration of agnosticism and then focussed on his works; he treated his biographees the same way. Evidently, he understood the contours of an acceptable Victorian biography. Not only did Woolf blur the line that her father drew between public and private lives, she stressed the significance of personal and family relations. From Leslie Stephen little is learned of his family life; among his biographers personal details are either sanitized (Maitland) or ignored in favour of Stephen's ideas (Annan). Edmund Gosse favoured him outdoors, addressing the public, resplendent against a blue sky. His daughter brings him home. In her early style, upon Julia's death she described him like one who "reels staggering blindly about the world, and fills it with his woe" (1976:47). He did not scruple "to demand perpetual attention." "He was the tyrant of inconceivable selfishness, who had replaced the beauty and merriment of the dead with ugliness and gloom" (65). This interpretive attention to personal biographical details undermines the basic tenets of traditional biography: where is the great man, the hero who can be eulogized, lionized?[47] Boswell may have observed Johnson closely and narrated revealing anecdotes, but he did not bring him into the world of women and death, a world of sorrow and emotional intensity. In Moments of Being though Virginia Woolf seldom loses sight of the world of men and institutions, she writes from, and of, the hearth. Lyndall Gordon referring to Woolf's early "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" draws attention to the significance, on familial and national scales, of women in their own space:

> The centre of history is not the legal document or the muddled vicissitudes of the Wars of the Roses but the woman left alone in her citadel, who kept order as a matter of course, who kept anarchy, as far as she was able, at bay (88).

The hearth becomes the tea table in Moments of Being.

Equally significant and rooted in the same impulse to loosen the hold of nineteenth century biography is Woolf's blend of biography and autobiography. Moments of Being could be categorized simply as autobiography were it not for the role Woolf's autobiographical self plays in her other writing. She is never absent. Her presence filters like a vapour through her work. In essays, fiction, and biography if her actual voice is not heard, her memories are reworked in the characters.[48] Likewise in autobiography, she is a creature among other creatures; Moments of Being draws the stories of others into her recollection of herself. By blurring the edges of subjectivity, she subverts objectivity. Another boundary is diminished. In "Reminiscences" her stated purpose is to tell Julian Bell about Vanessa--his mother, her sister. While Vanessa opens and closes the essay, the powerful portraits that occupy the centre are of Julia and Stella. The voice, however, is always Virginia's. She can only tell us what she knows, not about Vanessa's infancy, nor about Julia's presence which has become invisible, inseparable from other memories.

The invisible presences of "Reminiscences" are the faint precursors of her web of unseen personalities. Those she knew who had died and the subtle presence of literary and historical figures mix with the remembered past and the present to create Woolf's awareness of community in her mature work. Not since the activities around Clapham Common, in the Stephen tradition, has community been as palpable as it is in Virginia Woolf's writing. Unlike Clapham individuals, however, she did not move out from a base in community life to work in the world of Evangelical mission. Instead she created a vision of community through her writing, of the living and dead, that verified and sustained her own experience, particularly as a woman excluded from the world of men, absent from their agendas which had, nonetheless, shaped her existence. The dissonance that she uncovered between the worlds of the genders is nowhere clearer than in her portrait of the unloved and oppressive brother George who dragged his unwilling sisters through the ballrooms of London society. She wondered why he insisted they go with him and concluded that it was useless to inquire:

> George's mind swam and steamed like a cauldron of rich Irish stew. He believed that aristocratic society was possessed of all the virtues and all the graces. He believed that his family had been entrusted to his care. He

> believed that it was his sacred duty--but when he reached that point his emotions overcame him; he began to sob ... seized Vanessa ... implored her in the name of her mother, of her grandmother, by all that was sacred in the female sex and the holy traditions of our family to accept Lady Arthur Russell's invitation to dinner (1976:172).

George's sense of sacred duty, destructive of the lives of his sisters and absurd in the theatre of institutions, ridicules any notion of community defined by coercive hierarchy. By the time she writes "A Sketch of the Past" Woolf has found a concept in "moments of being" that enables her to suggest an alternative to George's world.

"Reminiscences" includes early and incomplete descriptions of "moments." They appear as pivotal but are neither as central nor as spiritually significant as they will become in "A Sketch of the Past." Rather than breaks in the surface of the present that allow reality to flood in, they are signposts of meaning. The world is not as fluid and changing as it will become. Woolf also distinguishes between levels of response to meaning, a differentiation that will diminish later. An example of an early moment is the slight flicker of Jack and Stella's relationship. Jack's prenuptial visits had "an undeniable glow, a conviction of meaning lying at the base of them, which made them remarkable, and bore, like some dull heat, into [Stella's] mind" (57). A catalytic role is reserved for Julia who dispensed moments as she "crossed lives ... which seemed to form themselves into a pattern behind her" (41). There were also failed moments. Vanessa was robbed of the moment of adolescence by her mother's death (36). Of her father Woolf says that

> on a walk perhaps he would suddenly brush aside all conventional relationships, and show us for a minute an inspiriting vision of free life, bathed in an impersonal light.... But such exaltations doubtless depended for their endurance upon a closer relationship than age made possible. We were too young ... we would have ... given him all we had, and felt it little beside his need--but the moment passed (53).

These moments are the genesis of Woolf's sense of revelation. Though they lack the immanence of the "moments of being" in her final autobiographical writing and depend more on interpersonal relationships, they yield a sense of pattern that is the cornerstone of her "reality."[49] Supporting these moments of heightened awareness, of revelation, Woolf's sentences--"elastic ... capable of stretching to the extreme, of suspending the frailest particles, of enveloping the vaguest shapes (1981b:194)--will carry her concepts and beliefs into the heart of discourse.

"Am I a Snob?" Rhetorical Strategies

In "Am I a Snob?" Virginia Woolf does not address religious or spiritual matters directly. Rather, in this essay of 1936 read to the Memoir Club when she was 53 years old, she used an apparently frivolous topic to lay open the body of conventional life-story. When her operation on that body has ended and she has sutured it shut, the patient has become a different being. By illustrating absurdities in the logic of the genre, she weakens its authority and with her quarry thus disabled, she introduces women's lives--unthinkable material in biographical terms--and leaves the genre to recover if it can.

Woolf's preoccupations in this essay presage Elizabeth Bruss's claim that "no literary form is free from assumptions about the nature of the psyche, the extent of social and political possibility, even rudimentary metaphysics of its own" (23). For Woolf the assumptions made in memoirs, and biography, make woman impossible. Women, she says in another essay, "are left out, and history, in our opinion, lacks an eye" (1979b:36). Without a voice in literature women cannot be described as they are. Without having a legitimate being in words, woman as a literary figure will continue to function like an angel and will be oppressive to many women.[50] This essay, then, while not overtly metaphysical, lies at the hot core of Woolf's work. By writing the experiences of women into her memoir, Woolf challenges the authority of a tradition given to excluding that experience as obscure, invalid or inessential.

Referring to twentieth century biographies, Park Honan was able to say that we "admire and need" large complete biographies--he mentions Richard Ellman's Joyce-- because

> biographies bring order to the "height" of accumulated knowledge, celebrate "great" or unusual natures, counteract the insignificance of daily urban life, tell us of our "selves", and offer valid or convincing "moral" exempla (110).

Honan is an "insider", like Leslie Stephen, and of that sort Virginia Woolf said, "I respect them.... They do a great service, like Roman roads. But they avoid the forests and the will o' the wisps" (Hill:139). It is to counteract the marmoreal reality of "great men" in a world of Roman roads that Woolf writes women into being. By putting women into her texts as they existed in her life, Woolf did not write a memoir that Park Honan could admire. "Am I a Snob?" suggests ambivalence in all his ordering categories: the height of accumulated knowledge seems to exist amidst the insignificance of daily life; great or unusual natures are remote and questionable as moral exempla.

Gilbert and Gubar point out that unlike male literary history which functions like a socially constructed family, "female genealogy does not have an inexorable logic because the literary matrilineage had been erased, obscured, or fragmented" (1988:199). Whereas, they say, "it is impossible for Wordsworth to evade Milton's paternity" (199), and the anxiety and richness that such a relationship of influence establishes, there is no inexorable logic for the memoirs of women. By centering a memoir of her own life on the lives of three other women, Woolf blurs the line between memoir, biography and autobiography, shows erasure at work in their lives and by extension, in hers, and suggests a functioning world of women in action that cannot be held within the narrow confines of memoir-writing as it is understood.

Woolf opens "Am I a Snob?" by questioning the notion of memoir. Why has she been asked to deliver her past? She does not lead a "stirring and active" life, nor "brush up against the great" as do others in the club, Maynard Keynes for example. Nor has she been well educated. She lives in a world of marriage proposals and seduction by half-brothers. People like her "to whom nothing ever happens" are not supposed to be suitable memoir writers. Having thus rejected treating herself as object, Woolf faces the autobiographical truth that, adventureless though she may be, to herself she is a "subject of inexhaustible and fascinating anxiety." Indeed she is such a "vast subject" that only a tiny fragment can be considered, but a fragment as "trackless and tiger-haunted" as any corner of the explorer's world of adventure from which she is excluded (212). Memoir seems to require not a "great" author, merely one who writes, one who asks a tiny question. Her juxtaposition of great men and insignificant Virginia, vast subjects and tiny fragments, muddies the customs of memory-telling. Pivoting on the small question of her snobbery, Woolf is able to direct her gaze on both an inner realm of personal reflection and the outer world of hierarchies. Although these are, perhaps, the territories of all memoirs, seldom is the subject matter as marginal to travel on Roman roads as are the lives of Woolf's three women.

Woolf's question "Am I a Snob?" demands that she articulate her relationship to hierarchy. She answers by recalling relationships with three Ladies. The first encounter is with the Marchioness of Bath and her daughters, accessoried aristocrats who "don't care a snap what anyone thinks. Here is human nature in its uncropped, unpruned, natural state." These women feed dogs from the dinner table and can't spell. Their simplicity escapes the

boundaries of conventional behaviour, writing and moralizing, and Woolf enjoys it with "an ecstasy ... of pleasure, terror, laughter and amazement" (215). The Marchioness cannot write but she can be written about: someone had sent Woolf a letter on her behalf. On paper decorated with a coronet, the letter rests conspicuously on the top of Woolf's stack of correspondence. A delicious quality surrounds this woman and her daughters who inhabit the most refined class stratum yet appear bereft of the gestures and skills of a literate society.

A second encounter is with Margot Asquith, Lady Oxford, wife of a former Prime Minister. Born untitled, Lady Oxford must pay some attention to the formalities of writing. Woolf includes examples of their mutual correspondence.[51] "Letters," Leslie Stephen had maintained, "are the one essential to a thoroughly satisfactory life" (1956b:139). The first letter is an invitation with flexible dates--the 12th or 13th, 17th or 18th--that refuses to divulge its purpose (Woolf 1976:216)! A second letter reveals Lady Oxford's wish that Woolf, who had once praised her as a writer, would "when I die ... write a short notice in the Times to say that you admired my writing" (217). She felt her voice had been silenced by the press and that Woolf could restore it. Intrigued by this woman who appears to understand the significance of writing, Woolf looks forward to a private lunch. She arrives to discover Lady Oxford caught up in a large gathering and oblivious of her original request. Yet, whatever may have happened to the short notice in the Times, Lady Oxford lives on in "Am I a Snob?" and thus has achieved a measure of her purpose. After the luncheon, though not enjoying the ecstacy prompted by Lady Bath's behaviour, Woolf admits that

> the next thing I remember is that I found myself pacing along the Farringdon Road talking aloud to myself and seeing the butchers' shops and the trays of penny toys through an air that seemed made of gold dust and champagne (218).

If Lady Bath does not give a fig for words and gestures and yet sets them in motion, Lady Oxford seems to care but has been throttled, one assumes, by the institutional demands upon her husband. Woolf's role is more complicated in the second encounter. She cannot merely observe in delight and record her reactions but must consider the effects of public opinion and institutions upon women. Woolf is drawn like a moth to Lady Oxford's flame, but there is to be no immersion in the world of the Times. The world of unrecorded social relationships has priority.

The third encounter is more complex again, the least rarified and the most personal. The past intrudes. Rather than coronets on stationery that she can hold in her hand in the actual present of the memoir, Woolf recalls a "flyaway missive" received twelve years ago (218). From the untitled Sibyl Colefax, the letter invited her to meet the author Paul Valery. Woolf can meet authors easily: this invitation is so unappealing that it recalls the agonies of buying underclothing, her "suspenders complex." Eventually, Sibyl's persistence draws Woolf to meet Arnold Bennett. As it happens the party occurs the night after Bennett has attacked Woolf's Orlando in a review in the Evening Standard. Woolf, however, has less trouble exposed as a writer than she does as a purchaser of suspenders, and she and Bennett are able to enjoy each other's company while hating each other's books. Hierarchy has disappeared as the tenor of the Evening Standard replaces that of the Times. Among equals, without fear of exposure, and having shed their vestments as writers, they are free to talk. Woolf's words imply that written discourse, even when intensely personal, can be set aside during the social adventures of living; that what is real is not necessarily what has been written; that the wordless encounter in the changing room of a clothing store is an adventure.

The relationship between Sibyl and Virginia develops, each fascinated by the foreigness of the other's world. Virginia writes books; Sibyl hosts literary parties. There is no ecstacy here: Sibyl cancels invitations when better engagements come along, and Virginia finds most party conversations tedious. They continue in this desultory fashion until Sibyl loses her husband and with him her place in society. Without his house, she has no place to summon authors. Curious, Woolf sends her husband Leonard to Sibyl's door with some flowers from her garden; she receives a long letter in reply:

> It read sincerely; it read as if she were telling the truth; and I was a little flattered that she should tell it so openly, even so gushingly, to me (224).

But it was only one of many similar letters. While her world disintegrated, Sibyl continued to articulate a version of her self. Patricia Meyer Spacks maintains that letters can call "attention to discrepancies between personal impulse and social restriction. Society has always allowed in personal letters at least some of the verbal latitude it deplores in gossip"

(164). Was the real Sibyl behind the mask of her effusive letter? Woolf's reaction to Sibyl's behaviour calls into question the authenticity of letters:

> When I heard later that she had written letters very like the one she sent me to people whom she scarcely knew at all, I was not so well pleased. When I heard that she had dined out every night since his death ... I was baffled (225).

Eventually, an invitation which seems precise and intimate draws Woolf to a disorganized and disorienting encounter with Sibyl in the house. Everything is for sale. The hierarchical relationships have broken down as the servants, once trusted, are despised and without knowledge. The story winds down. Woolf recalls making "an effort to talk more intimately." Sibyl smiles and recollects her parties.

> That's what I've wanted--that people I like should meet the people I like. That's what I tried to do--" (229).

Woolf encourages her to talk but, having begun a new adventure, Sibyl is distracted and cannot converse. A car arrives to take her to "a tiresome engagement in Mount Street." The old house, fading evidence of Sibyl's social value, is left behind. Just as Lady Bath is barred from traditional written discourse by a lack of skills, and Lady Oxford was ignored by the institutions of publishing from political necessity, Lady Colefax--she did, after all, have a title of sorts--seems about to be erased as a hostess. However despite the exclusion of these women from the pages, corridors and properties of power, they neither cease to exist nor relinquish their influence, such as it is. Lady Bath seems neither to notice nor care that she has been confined to certain categories of social interaction. Lady Oxford is only momentarily distressed. Lady Colefax continues to function. It is left to Woolf to mourn: "I wanted to say something to show that I minded leaving Argyll House for the last time. But Sibyl seemed to have forgotten all about it. She looked animated" (230).

Virginia Woolf has put these three women into writing, put their letters into writing, but in the end they live through encounter and talk. It is Woolf who lives through the act of writing, Woolf who notes in "A Sketch of the Past" that in writing she seemed "to be discovering what belonged to what" (1985a:72), who felt "that by writing [she was] doing what is far more necessary than anything else" (73). At the end of the story the reader understands some kind of pattern in the lives of the three women and Woolf, like many

memoir writers, has written an order into her own. It is appropriate to recall Alice Jardine's remarks:

> The question of woman and language is not one of fashion; it involves rather a profound rethinking of both the male and female speaking subjects' relationship to the real, the imaginary and the symbolic (44).

In "Am I a Snob?" Woolf deals with questions of woman and language. She may have brought herself into being through writing, but she has presented us with an order in the lives of women which is constructed upon the temporality of conversation. She encourages us to rethink the relationship of women and words.

Is Woolf a snob? Of course. She is ecstatic with Lady Bath, endlessly fascinated by the lives of others. She has, however, subverted, or inverted, the hierarchy. Coronets, symbols of elevated social and political status, accompany wordlessness and dogs who eat at the dinner table. The absence of coronets in the lives of a politician's wife and the widow of a man of property force these women to consider the power of words. While Woolf acknowledges a marginal authority in the memoir form, she has travelled away from its world of Roman roads to a sphere where significance dwells in gossip.

If "Am I a Snob?" seems frivolous at first, in the end there is a lingering sadness for the three women and their ambivalent relationship to writing. Patricia Meyer Spacks' attention to gossip is illuminating. She notes that

> the eighteenth-century attack on gossip suggests the superiority of the verbal mode epitomized by those who can read Latin and consider public matters; it hints the inadequacy of female understanding as well as female talk; it declares the reprehensible nature of concern with human detail if such concern issues in speech; it preaches a doctrine of repression in the service of communal welfare, in the interests of that "society" generally assumed to define value (156).

Leslie Stephen admired the order and logic of 18th century thought; he might have appreciated this attack. In his biography of Henry Fawcett he included minute and tedious detail on the creation of parcel post in Britain but gossip, suggestive undocumented information, was unthinkable. Neither does gossip find a place in Park Honan's biographical theory. Woolf's world, in contrast to theirs, is not one of "stirring and active lives" brushing up "against the great;" rather, it is a world of understanding and encounter and mainly a world of women who are not "insiders," women who gossip, women who survive. For Spacks "gossip as a phenomenon raises questions about boundaries, authority, distance, the nature of knowledge; it demands answers quite at odds with what we assume as our culture's dominant values" (12). These are questions that underlie "Am I a Snob?" Through her

encounters with Ladies Bath, Oxford and Colefax, Woolf questions the boundaries between herself, these women, and the institutions, like publishing, that they share with men. She suggests that the authority of writing is paradoxical in the lives of women, subverted by issues of gender. Distance, whether social or authorial, has a different meaning for women than it does for men. The nature of knowledge is raised again and again. Lady Oxford wants to be known as a writer. Woolf wants to know how Sibyl feels after her husband's death. What do we know about Virginia Woolf after reading "Am I a Snob?"

Gossip "emphasizes what people hold in common, dwells on frailties, seeks the hidden rather than the manifest," while "heroism thrives on specialness and on public manifestation (101)." Woolf, intent on locating another kind of life story with a different set of values, deliberately turned her back on heroism at the start of the essay. By strategically including the stories of the three Ladies in her own memoir, she makes gossip a "unifying explanatory structure for a sequence of events. Gossiping speakers exchange and interpret information in order--for good reasons or bad--to enlarge their grasp of someone else's experience and thus, ideally, better to understand their own" (96). Woolf exists in and through the talk which she makes real through her writing.

Events that might have found their way into traditional Victorian discourse disappear with the bones fed to Lady Bath's dogs. Woolf delights in hierarchy when it is remote, removed from her world. Matters are not so easily depicted in the world she shares with her peers: she encounters Arnold Bennett, the critic who damned her work, and enjoys his company; she watches Sibyl Colefax abandon the house that lent power to her voice and feels compelled to speak for her. Such unity as exists comes through her own act of writing into being "the hidden rather than the manifest." Spacks makes the implications of Woolf's manoeuvre clear:

> The pleasure of biography can involve not only delight in finding out, but delight in the process of finding out, a process bearing striking resemblance to that of gossip (100).

The religious implications of "Am I a Snob?" can be stressed by remembering that Woolf is telling women's stories and addressing problems that arise from that act.

> Without stories [woman] is alienated from those deeper experiences of self and world that have been called spiritual or religious. She is closed in silence. The expression of women's spiritual quest is integrally related to the telling of women's stories.... Women live in a world where ... the stories celebrated in culture are told by men.... Since women have not told their own stories, they have not actively shaped their experiences of self and world nor named the great powers from their own perspectives (Christ and Spretnak:327).

In this essay Woolf is concerned with the profound implications of breaking women's silence. Her dissection of the politics of writing and her description of a discourse of women founded on the temporality of gossip are fundamental operations in what Christ has called women's naming of the great powers from their own experience.

"A Sketch of the Past:" Some Biographical and Rhetorical Consequences of Virginia Woolf's Concept of the Self

> There they were, on the verge of the drawing room, these great men: while, round the tea table, George and Gerald and Jack talked of the Post Office, the publishing office, and the Law Courts. And I, sitting by the table, was quite unable to make any connection. There were so many different worlds: but they were distant from me. I could not make them cohere (1985a:158-9).

> Did those deaths [of Julia and Stella] give us an experience that even if it was numbing, mutilating, yet meant that the Gods (as I used to phrase it) were taking us seriously.... I would see (after Thoby's death) two great grindstones (as I walked round Gordon Square) and myself between them ... nobody could say 'they' had fobbed me off with a weak little feeble dip of the precious matter. So I came to think of life as something of extreme reality. And this of course increased my sense of my own importance (137).

> I enjoy almost everything. Yet I have some restless searcher in me. Why is there not a discovery in life? Something one can lay hands on and say 'This is it'? My depression is a harassed feeling. I'm looking: but that's not it--that's not it. What is it? And shall I die before I find it? Then (as I was walking through Russell Square last night) I see the mountains in the sky: the great clouds; and the moon which is risen over Persia; and I have a great and astonishing sense of something there, which is 'it'. It is not exactly beauty that I mean. It is that the thing is in itself enough: satisfactory; achieved (1985b:90).

Together these three epigraphs create an image of circles of power around Virginia Woolf. She sits in "a little sensitive centre of acute life" (137), formed with Vanessa for protection, amidst the men in her world who enunciate a disturbing and confusing discourse of power. Beyond them grind the stones of the Gods. And beyond the stones lies the sufficiency of the thing itself. Though the image suggests a three-storied universe akin to the sphere of angels, Woolf's universe has been brought into being through her writing. She sits at the centre and controls it with her pen.

Of the three epigraphs, two from "A Sketch of the Past" and a third from her diary, the first is a smaller scaled reflection of the larger circles of power. Her brothers sit with

her around the tea table which she described earlier as

> that sacred spot in our house. It was the centre, the heart of the family. It was the centre to which the sons returned from their work in the evening; to the hearth whose fire was tended by the mother, pouring out tea (1985a:118).

The brothers in their turn are held in place by talk of the institutions they represent, and at the edge of her vision there are images of great men like Meredith and Henry James, remembered from her childhood. When Moments of Being is read chronologically, this is the final image of Woolf, written just four months before her suicide by drowning. To the end of her life she could dismiss neither the gender barrier nor the abyss between the generations. The second and third epigraphs reflect themes at the heart of "A Sketch of the Past": death and moments of being. The "numbing, mutilating" experience of "extreme reality" represented by the deaths of her mother, half-sister, and brother is juxtaposed here against her essential optimism and confidence that "the thing is in itself enough."

In "A Sketch of the Past" Virginia Woolf stretches her woman's sentence to shape a fluid sense of self which, though contained by these circles of power, responds to the rhythms of vision and memory. With the same mature reflection that she used to insert serious purpose into the humour of "Am I a Snob?", she now writes a memoir without questioning the legitimacy of her story or of the genre. She assumes a responsibility to write herself into being. In her diary, in 1933, she had written

> I thought, driving through Richmond last night, something very profound about the synthesis of my being: how only writing composes it: how nothing makes a whole unless I am writing (1985b:202).

Now in "A Sketch" she adds

> I feel that by writing I am doing what is far more necessary than anything else (1985a:72).

Writing composes her being, and she writes of what she discovers, or comes to understand, through the revelation of her moments. Any of these moments

> is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words (72).

Her intuitive experience of moments of being seems "given" (72). Having shaped her life since childhood, this intuitive sense "proves that one's life is not confined to one's body and what one says and does" but is lived in relation to "some real thing behind appearances," "background conceptions" which, she laments, are "left out in almost all biographies and autobiographies" (73).

"Why is it so difficult to give an account of the person to whom things happen (69)?" The "immensely complicated" self to whom things happen and the philosophies that sustain and infuse it are the conceptual bases of her rhetorical strategies in "A Sketch of the Past." In her own "philosophy" she declares

> that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we--I mean all human beings--are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself (72).

It is the pattern behind the cotton wool--her term for life's moments of non-being--that is the thing itself. Not only can she bring that reality into being through writing, she herself becomes real when writing it. She is the words, and her memoir is the thing itself. To "give an account of the person to whom things happen" she binds her philosophy to experiences of life with the threads of her moments of being.

The moments often arrive as shocks, "sudden and violent" in childhood, but welcomed as age brings a "greater power through reason to provide an explanation" (72). Their power is not limited to the present. She insists that the quality of a remembered moment can be more real than the present: "I can reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there" (67). Two revelatory moments, startling in their simplicity and stark against a ground of non-being--"the arch of glass burning at the end of Paddington Station" and the poem she read in Kensington Gardens (93)--typify the nature and significance of moments of being throughout the essay. At the time of her mother's death Woolf noticed that she felt "nothing whatever."

> The tragedy of her death was not that it made one, now and then and very intensely, unhappy. It was that it made her unreal; and us solemn, and self-conscious (95).

For the three or four days before the funeral the atmosphere was "so melodramatic, histrionic and unreal that any hallucination was possible;" they were days of "astonishing intensity" which were followed by "muffled dullness" after the funeral (93). Later in the essay she insists that "one of the aspects of death that is left out when people talk ... of the message or teaching of sorrow" is its "unbecoming side; its legacy of bitterness, bad temper; ill adjustment; and what is to me the worst of all--boredom" (143). The two moments alone remain clear from that time. Her prose is concise yet wraps space, colour and intense feeling in its passage. The sensuousness of the moments, particularly in the station, the

sense of sudden comprehension and the awareness of the pattern behind the cotton wool, are hallmarked.

Virginia was taken to Paddington Station to meet Thoby who was arriving home following the death of their mother.

> It was sunset, and the great glass dome at the end of the station was blazing with light. It was glowing yellow and red and the iron girders made a pattern across it. I walked along the platform gazing with rapture at this magnificent blaze of colour, and the train slowly steamed into the station. It impressed and exalted me. It was so vast and so fiery red. The contrast of that blaze of magnificent light with the shrouded and curtained rooms at Hyde Park Gate was so intense. Also it was partly that my mother's death unveiled and intensified; made me suddenly develop perceptions, as if a burning glass had been laid over what was shaded and dormant. Of course this quickening was spasmodic. But it was surprising--as if something were becoming visible without any effort. To take another instance--I remember going into Kensington Gardens about that time. It was a hot spring evening, and we lay down--Nessa and I--in the long grass behind the Flower Walk. I had taken The Golden Treasury with me. I opened it and began to read some poem (which it was I forget). It was as if it became altogether intelligible; I had a feeling of transparency in words when they cease to be words and become so intensified that one seems to experience them; to foretell them as if they developed what one is already feeling. I was so astonished that I tried to explain the feeling. "One seems to understand what it's about", I said awkwardly. I suppose Nessa has forgotten; no one could have understood from what I said the queer feeling I had in the hot grass, that poetry was coming true. Nor does that give the feeling. It matches what I have sometimes felt when I write. The pen gets on the scent (93).

Moments of being are often isolated as sudden shocks; she refers to "scene making" as her "natural way of marking the past." More deliberate than her intuitions, scene making similarly influences construction of her prose.

> A scene always comes to the top; arranged; representative. This confirms me in my instinctive notion--it is irrational; it will not stand argument--that we are sealed vessels afloat upon what it is convenient to call reality; at some moments, without a reason, without an effort, the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality; that is a scene--for they would not survive entire so many ruinous years unless they were made of something permanent; that is a proof of their "reality". Is this liability of mine to scene receiving the origin of my writing impulse? (142).

Scene making seems to be a gentler and more accessible form of her revelatory moments of being. Both gain passage to that reality that "is in itself enough," and both are inextricably bound to the act of writing. In "A Sketch of the Past" moments and scenes both allow and promote a muddying of time, an overlapping of incidents, and an abundance of portraiture. The inherent containment of these units permits Woolf as narrator to move with ease from descriptions of them to commentary on her role as biographer or to lyrical exposition of her philosophy.

The moments were, Woolf says, scaffolding in the background, "the invisible and silent part of my life as a child. But in the foreground there were of course people" (73), and those she watched with a "sense of spectacle" (155), "notetaking for some future revision." Woolf's conception of "being," created through the act of writing her revelations, resists forms of characterization typical of Victorian autobiography and biography. Authority no longer resides in genre conventions sustaining the transparency of the written "other" (whether that "other" be one's self or another's self); it rests in the act of writing. The result is that in her memoir Woolf does not lay her life from birth to the present along a scale of appropriate categories. Rather, she responds to her revelations and the images in memory that they bring forward, controlling them with her pen. Comparisons with her father's technique reveals the difference. In his biography of his friend Henry Fawcett, Leslie Stephen does not voice any particular commitment as author to the act of writing; the biography follows a conventional pattern from birth, through achievements, to death. Stephen is concerned with the image of Fawcett and his place in the world, and Fawcett is made to mirror great men as best he can. Stephen's self-portrayal in the Mausoleum Book is similarly structured as is his biography of his brother. Without a sense of alternatives there can be only one version of truth, which can be depicted, more or less.[52] Woolf's involvement in the portrait of her brother Thoby in "A Sketch of the Past" illustrates what happens when her methods are employed. She introduces him in one section, digresses in the following section with memories about childhood by the sea in St. Ives, and in a third articulates her problem:

> Why do I shirk the task, not so very hard to a professional ... like myself, of wafting this boy from the boat to my bed sitting room at Hyde Park Gate? It is because I want to go on thinking about St. Ives. I have the excuse that I could, if I went on thinking, recall many other pictures; bring him in again and again. And it is not only an excuse; for always round him, like the dew that collects in beads on a rough coat, there hangs the country; butterflies; birds; muddy roads; muddy boots; horses (136).

Woolf needs an excuse because to bring him home to London from the idyllic summers in St Ives is to bring him closer to his death, to kill him. She acknowledges that the foreboding she feels in the present did not exist at the time remembered: "we had no kind of foreboding."

> That is one of the falsifications--that knell I always find myself hearing and transmitting--that one cannot guard against, save by noting it. Then I never saw him as I see him now, with all his promise ended. Then I thought only of the moment (140).

Woolf is involved and implicated in her text. Her memoirs are a compilation of autobiographical and biographical reflections which she can manipulate but which, in turn, force her response to their necessities. There are alternative truths, different versions of reality, but they are never simple exchanges.

Woolf's perception of moments and scenes also affects the larger narrative shape of "A Sketch of the Past."[53] The essay falls into thirteen sections, introduced by dates and separated by two to four weeks except in one case where nearly a year passes. This longer time lapse falls between sections six and seven, effectively dividing the essay into two halves of approximately forty pages each. The first half covers childhood in St. Ives and Julia's death; the second includes Stella's death, a substantial portrait of Leslie, and material on Thoby, Jack and life at Hyde Park Gate.

In a brief introductory paragraph to the first half Woolf acknowledges there are many methods for writing memoirs, but she has neither the time nor the inclination to analyze them all. If she does not write soon, Nessa has warned, it will be too late. With that she launches into the first memory of a memoir that her reference to apparent haste and mood has just given the appearance of inherent and not generic order. She begins the next section with a date and the declaration that she thinks she has discovered a possible form for her "notes" which is

> to make them include the present--at least enough of the present to serve as a platform to stand upon. It would be interesting to make the two people, I now, I then, come out in contrast. And further, this past is much affected by the present moment. What I write today I should not write in a year's time. But I cannot work this out; it had better be left to chance.... I have no energy at the moment to make an orderly and expressed work of art: where one thing follows another and all are swept into a whole (75).

She claims impatience with an orderly unfolding of events; she is exhausted with writing the life of Roger Fry which has become just that. This immersion in her memoirs is intended as a pleasure, a relief, and not a straining toward commandeered form.

In all but two sections she begins with her "platform" of the present and, once alerted to it, the reader cannot fail to notice the material it includes. In the first half of "A Sketch" she mentions the drudgery of the Fry biography in four of the six sections: "the word filing and fitting that my life of Roger means" (98) contrasts with her present style. In the second half mention of the Fry work is desultory, replaced by allusions to the war--the bombings and the threat to book writing. Narrative momentum is forward in time but the recurrence of the present in each section creates cycles of return within the essay. Aside

from linking her own past and present, by continually referring to the oppression of present realities--whether the formal restrictions of the Fry biography or the noise and destruction of machines of war--Woolf sets her memoirs apart as reflections of an alternative reality.

The bond between the past and present is never far from the surface of the essay. Memory is paramount in a world responsive to moments and scenes. The mere juxtaposition of chronological events has no inherent meaning. There are, however, conditions that limit the interaction between past and present. It is possible for the present to destroy the past though that past is what makes the present real.

> The past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. Then one sees through the surface to the depths. In those moments I find one of my great satisfactions, not that I am thinking of the past; but that it is then that I am living most fully in the present. For the present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the present when it presses so close that you can feel nothing else.... But to feel the present sliding over the depths of the past, peace is necessary. The present must be smooth, habitual. For this reason--that it destroys the fullness of life--any break--like that of house moving--causes me extreme distress; it breaks; it shallows; it turns the depth into hard thin splinters.... I write this partly in order to recover my sense of the present by getting the past to shadow this broken surface. Let me then, like a child advancing into a cold river, descend again into the stream (98).

This passage is central to her view of past and present. It also points to events beyond the actual text of "A Sketch." A reader aware of the circumstances of Woolf's death may read the last line with foreboding: "Let me then, like a child advancing into a cold river, descend again into the stream." Such a reading would be consistent with Woolf's view of being linked to a patterned reality behind the cotton wool of non-being. It would mirror Woolf's own response to memories of her brother Thoby, her sense of the falsification of memories by our knowledge in the present. The passage introduces the final section of the first half of "A Sketch of the Past" in which Woolf feels threatened by the breakup of her world as she writes. In the parallel final section of the second half, an angry section, she lashes out against the world of men which she cannot make cohere. Four months later she advanced--in fact--into the March cold of the River Ouse to her death by drowning. The ineffable sadness of her drowning, its mystery, visits Woolf scholars as a reflection of Woolf's own experiences with death. Part of the pattern revealed by her death lies in realization that "submergence was her image for the hidden act of imaginative daring," that "the dead had always claimed Virginia more completely than anyone living and that, in a sense, she was always preparing to join them" (Gordon:280-281). In his autobiography Leonard Woolf

makes a similar observation:

> Death, I think, was always near the surface of Virginia's mind, the contemplation of death. It was part of the deep imbalance of her mind. She was "half in love with easeful death". I can understand this, but only intellectually; emotionally it is completely alien to me (73).[54]

Past and present function simultaneously, through memory. The past brought forward can be as real as the present; the present shadowed by the past is life at its fullest. If Woolf's "platform" of the present enables her to establish a rhythmic return in the essay, the goal she moves toward, again and again, is death. Nine of the thirteen sections end either in images of actual death or explorations of conditions created by the deaths. In the first half the death of Julia "occurs" three times: she dies as the centre of family life, Virginia is made to kiss her moments after her death, and Jack appears at Hyde Park Gate the night before her death. In the second half the fact of her death contributes to the blow of Stella's death and Thoby's maturity is explained in part by both deaths. Each of these section endings is followed by a return to the present. The linearity within the story retreats before the emotional involvement of the pattern of recurrence and the tension between now and then.

Woolf's perceptions of "the person to whom things happen" further undermines the certainty of conventional biographical or memoir form. Concern with the reality of character is strong in "A Sketch of the Past," indeed throughout Moments of Being. In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," a paper on characterization in the novel, Woolf deplores the Edwardian tendency to look at the trappings of life, the factories and the houses, but "never at life, never at human nature" (1966a:330). She wanted novelists to discard detail that described the fabric of society in favour of explorations of the "reality" of character. "But, I ask myself, what is reality? And who are the judges of reality? A character may be real to Mr. Bennett and quite unreal to me" (325). Throughout Moments of Being Woolf's sense of character develops in conjunction with a concern about the nature and source of her knowledge about people. In "Am I a Snob?" her fascination with the three Ladies and her awareness of their essential mysteriousness surrounds her questions about the use and significance of writing. In "A Sketch of the Past" she relates the issue of her knowledge of others to strictures on memory and the significance of the written self.

Woolf's probing into the origins of her understanding of others blurs distinctions between autobiographical and biographical knowledge. In her treatment of her parents,

Julia and Leslie, she considers her emotional ties to them, questions the completeness of her understanding and the reality of her portraits, and notes, once more, the contribution of the act of writing to the creation of self. In writing To The Lighthouse she claims to have rid herself of an obsession with them.

> I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed with my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her (1985a:81).

> Just as I rubbed out a good deal of the force of my mother's memory by writing about her in To the Lighthouse, so I rubbed out much of his memory there too. Yet he too obsessed me for years. Until I wrote it out, I would find my lips moving; I would be arguing with him; raging against him; saying to myself all that I never said to him (108).

The act of writing which brings Woolf into being and makes revelation a reality also erases the obsessive qualities of her memories of others. Her profoundly suggestive analysis of writing and memory avoids categorical statements by adhering to the paradoxes of her own experience.

Although both powerful presences, Julia and Leslie Stephen functioned very differently in their daughter's life. Julia, dead when Virginia was thirteen, left no written record of herself.

> What reality can remain real of a person who died forty-four years ago at the age of forty-nine, without leaving a book, or a picture, or any piece of work--apart from three children who now survive and the memory of her that remains in their minds? There is the memory but there is nothing to check that memory by; nothing to bring it to ground with (85).

Julia remains unclear, an invisible presence; her death pervades Moments of Being. She was an atmosphere, the "whole thing," and "yet always in a room full of people," unreachable (83). Though Woolf maintains that childhood memories are easy to describe because of their completeness, Julia is seen only in glimpses. She appears on the balcony in St. Ives in a white dressing gown (66); her square-tipped fingers are recalled (81). Leslie, on the other hand, left an extensive written record and lived until Virginia was twenty-two. Yet, despite his writing and the fact that Julia is an invisible presence, Woolf says that she "never saw him with anything like the clarity" with which she saw her mother (112). In his case, the absence of clarity is not because he is incomplete. On the contrary,

> it bores me to write of him, to try to describe him, partly because it is all so familiar; partly because it is a type.... There are no crannies or corners to catch my imagination.... It is all contained and complete and already summed up (109).

His type bored her. As a father he was tyrannical, and the sociable father she knew not at all. The Leslie Stephen she knew as a writer she suspected was "the man's Leslie Stephen," the muscular agnostic with "a healthy out of door, moor striding mind" (115). Part of Leslie Stephen is tedious, part is clouded by emotion, part is inaccessible and what remains may be written, but it is still only a part. Even with intimacy, emotional involvement and an extensive written record, the portrait falls short of reality; her Leslie Stephen is not "the person to whom things happen." He is clearly an invisible presence in her life, despite his overwhelming actuality, and she has succeeded in analyzing him as such. If she cannot find his biographical image, can anyone? His other biographers have largely ignored his personal life[55] which she shows to have been essential to his character. Her experience suggests that biography may necessarily be a form of autobiography, and be subject as such to transparent notions and tacit assumptions.

Woolf's mother and father dominate the memoir, and so the intermingling of memory, record, past and present are explored more elaborately with them, but the complications and implications of one's knowledge of another lie behind all of the portraits. When Woolf moved beyond an explicit blend of auto- and biographical to more strictly biographical writing, she retained her complex vision of the reality of being. Her fictional biographies, Orlando and Flush, where her commitment to her subject weighs significantly, are the most successful.[56] In Roger Fry, the biography she was writing as she began "A Sketch" and which was published before she finished, she came up against the conventions of traditional biography, "the word filing and fitting" (98). She found the process tedious, and the reader is likely to agree with her. She did not know Fry well enough to enjoy creating his biography as she had enjoyed molding a centuries-old, sex-changing image of Vita Sackville-West in Orlando, nor could she stretch her philosophies and her woman's sentence around him as she could her family. He belonged to the world of men, the world with which she closes "A Sketch of the Past." Her difficulty with the Fry biography emphasizes the interdependence of her life and work. Her perception of reality was founded on her gendered situation which allowed her tremendous imaginative freedom but not access to the world of male accomplishment.

In "A Sketch of the Past," where vision and memory contribute to a fluid sense of self and others, a world created by her pen in her search for the background philosophies of those to whom things happen, Woolf revolves at the end to attack

> the machine into which our rebellious bodies were inserted in 1900 [that] not only held us tight in its framework but bit into our rebellious bodies with innumerable sharp teeth (152).
>
> Everyone of our male relatives was shot into that machine at the age of ten and emerged at sixty a Head Master, an Admiral, a Cabinet Minister or the Warden of a College (153).

She and Vanessa realized their vulnerability after Stella's death and formed a "closed conspiracy," "a private nucleus" against father, brothers, Victorian conventions and tyrannies. Even Thoby, the adored brother, as a man, would necessarily have ignored "domestic trifles," would have felt that the sisters should accept their lot (143). The eclipse of her world, save for the safe haven at its centre, was especially hateful because of her enforced complicity. Acquiescence to Leslie's plaintive appeals for a walk following his habitual abuse of Vanessa over the Wednesday accounts or recoil at George's displeasure with her cheaply and eccentrically made dress of green furniture fabric, generated rage. That these men depended on women, that their emotional outbursts "were never indulged in before men" (145), added duplicity to the list of hated conditions.

Her fight was with the men in her family individually and with them as Victorians. She and Vanessa were living in 1910;[57] the men were living in 1860. "Father himself was a typical Victorian. George and Gerald were consenting and approving Victorians" (147), and their "patriarchal society of the Victorian Age was in full swing in our drawing room" (153).The tea table conversation, which it was Virginia's lot to practise, "was not argument, it was not gossip. It was a concoction, a confection; light; ceremonious" (149). Its inadequacy forced her rebellion, and though she established her own ground, acquired a room of her own, she remained an outsider, "split asunder," powerless against the "depth, swiftness, inevitability," of the patriarchal "belief" in "society" (153). In "A Sketch of the Past" she connects her "little sensitive centre of acute life" (137) to the reality she perceives behind the cotton wool of non-being. She articulates, lyrically and profoundly with her woman's sentence, the experience of her being and the necessity of writing it into life. She succeeds in shaping a new way of being in the world, but its very success demands that she continue to shape it. When Moments of Being is read as published, it closes with the whimsical sadness of Sibyl Colefax's predicament. When read chronologically, it ends with the final image of Woolf seated at the centre of imagined circles of men, those of real greatness and those who merely believe and oppress. Did her vision fail four months later?

Or did the effort of endlessly writing herself beyond the imprisoning circles, away from the extreme reality of the two great grindstones, seem less enticing, less necessary, than it had before the biography of Roger, before the war?[58]

CONCLUSION

DUST AND ASHES: THE TEMPTATION OF A UTOPIAN BIOGRAPHER

I have described Woolf's vision and moral commitment as it was sparked by a lifetime's dialogue with Leslie Stephen, by the Clapham inspired ethos of Bloomsbury, and by aesthetic attitudes in England. The responses of Leslie Stephen and Virginia Woolf, developed in a "highly disciplined moral and social setting," derived from the world of the Clapham Evangelicals where "the child was free to find God for himself" (Cockshutt 1974:67). Woolf was firmly within her family's traditions.[59] She brought the Evangelical preoccupation with social commitment, self-examination, and soul-searching through diary-writing, into the realms of modernist thought.

Bloomsbury aesthetics contributed to her sense of the privileged moment. Roger Fry's attitude to the spirituality of art, at once mystical and agnostic, indicated the temper of the artistic world around her:

> Every work of art which one enjoys with complete aesthetic apprehension becomes for the time being the spirit's universe. No conscious reference to anything outside the work of art is relevant (Johnstone:47).

This attitude drew support from George E. Moore's concept of "states of mind" which Maynard Keynes described as

> timeless, passionate states of contemplation and communion, largely unattached to 'before' and 'after'. Their value depended, in accordance with the principle of organic unity, on the state of affairs as a whole which could not be analyzed into parts (Beja:124).

In her comprehension of the shock of revelation Woolf echoed these concepts. However, her spirit's universe also required a sense of literary history and vital community. To these she added cogent mystical revelation in an idiom of woman's experience.

Virginia Woolf's contribution to biography is a complex amalgam of feminist attitudes, stylistic techniques, a novelist's imagination, and revelatory intuition. She invaded the world of men and books by writing about the different concerns and responses of women and then publishing her books herself. Recognizing significant connections between the language of texts and the language of experience, Woolf denied that a clear separation existed between them and claimed that by writing her experience she created her self. Mary Jacobus has described the impact of Woolf's understanding of selfhood on biography:

> Life is most fully present when the life of the writer and the writing of the life merge, breaking down the distinction between subject and object; between woman as writer or woman as written, woman as reader or woman as read. Orlando and her biographer, in other words, create each other by mutual substitution; the masquerade--Orlando's transvestite progress through the literary ages--is that of writing, where fictive and multiple selves are the only self, the only truth, the writer knows (22).

Woolf stressed the generative nature of the act of writing that Jacobus describes. In her diary she wrote that only writing composed her being, "how nothing makes a whole unless I am writing" (1985b:202). In "'Am I a Snob?," a confident and mature articulation of her concerns, Woolf made clear the complexity of the interaction of women and texts. "A Sketch of the Past," written near the end of her life, is a lyrical exposition of her moments of being and her beliefs, her biographical attitudes, and her sense of time and memory. She allows her anger to surface more clearly in this essay than in others from Moments of Being, or in her novels and biographies. Her anger is elusive, not in its focus--for she has been critical of society from her earliest writing--but in its timing: "A Sketch" follows notable novels and essays published in a voice of her own. Perhaps the uncertainty of the mid 1930s and the painful unravelling of the last years of her life forced a flirtation with traditions that she had rejected until then. Her only actual biography, Roger Fry, is the flawed result of the temptation to leave behind her own blend of granite facts and the rainbows of personality, of fact and fiction.

The movement in her attitude toward biography, from her early optimistic mood to the disequilibrium of her last years, appears in outline in two essays: "The New Biography" and "The Art of Biography." "The New Biography," written in 1927, and Orlando, written the following year, are Woolf's utopian statements on biography.[60] By that time she had formed an imaginative concept of biographical writing. Among her earlier concerns in "Reminiscences," "Hyde Park Gate," and "Old Bloomsbury," had been topics of objectivity and subjectivity, public and private selves, family and relationships, invisible presences, and the differences in the life patterns of women and men. By the time she wrote Orlando, Woolf's fluid and elastic sentences, eloquent and suggestive, had broken through Victorian restraints on character and biographical images. She had experimented with concepts of time, memory and narration. Lyndall Gordon's description of Woolf's project, as it appeared in two early novels, indicates the direction she was to take. In The Voyage Out (1915), according to Gordon, Woolf intended "to find in Rachel's random life a definitive shape and to follow, in her obscure case, what is fugitive in the mind" (98). In Jacob's Room (1922)

Woolf "devised a form of imaginative biography which refused deceptive fullness of definition. This [imaginative form], she hoped, would give to biography the formal restraints of a suggestive art" (168). To locate what is fugitive in the mind, to be suggestive, and to refuse deceptive fullness, these were the preoccupations of Woolf as a novelist-biographer.

In "The New Biography" Woolf advocated a movement from fact toward fiction in biography. Biographical facts "must be manipulated," without losing their integrity, to shed light or cast shadows on personality. She maintained that the solid "granite" truth of biographical fact, hard, dull and "supposedly virtuous" could not transmit the "rainbow" intangibility of personality. The truth of real life, of fact, and the truth of fiction were incompatible, and she preferred the latter since it alone could create a semblance of inner life. The fact-ridden, action-defined life in a fixed universe with a standard morality was no longer satisfactory. Woolf commended Harold Nicolson's Some People for its multiple perspectives. It "is not fiction because it has the substance, the reality of truth. It is not biography because it has the freedom, the artistry of fiction" (232). Like Moments of Being, Nicolson's book was a portrait of the author reflected in "the mirrors of [his] friends;" "not noble or impressive, or shown in a very heroic attitude, it is for these very reasons extremely like a real human being" (233).

Woolf felt that a method which could combine "dream and reality, that perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow" (235), had not yet been discovered. Her own attempt, immediately and still a popular success, was Orlando. In an irrepressible adventure of imagination she combined her knowledge of Vita Sackville-West, based on their close relationship, and detail gleaned from Vita's history of her family's home, Knole and the Sackvilles (1922). Orlando was, she wrote in the holograph copy,

> A Biography
> This is to tell a person's life from the
> year 1500 to 1928.
> Changing its sex,
> taking different aspects of the characters in
> different centuries. The theory being that
> character goes on underground
> before we are born; and leaves something afterwards
> also (Wilson:179).

The notion of character extending before and after our lives is sustained in the biography through the complexities of genealogy, English literary history, and architectural legacy. Orlando looked out over the house that was his ancestral estate:

> This vast, yet ordered building, which could house a thousand men and perhaps two thousand horses, was built, Orlando thought, by workmen whose

> names are unknown. Here have lived, for more centuries than I can count, the obscure generations of my own obscure family. Not one of these Richards, Johns, Anns, Elizabeths has left a token of himself behind him, yet all, working together with their spades, and their needles, their love-making and their child-bearing, have left this (Woolf 1928:66).

Orlando's thoughts were Woolf's concerns. House, history, ancestors, memory, all these things shape and create the subject of the biography.

The importance of Orlando has been recognized. Ruth Hoberman has declared that "traditional biography, single-voiced, portraying a completed, valorized past ... is subverted ... by a multiplicity of narrators, the eruption of the present into past, a challenge to hierarchy, and a biographical referent so problematic that her identity must be established by law suits" (147). J. J. Wilson discerned broader implications and called Orlando an anti-novel: "The basic nature of the anti-novel is utopian and the satire of literary conventions is closely related to a criticism of all conventions" (174). Ira Nadel has described Orlando as "quintessentially biography as revolution" (after Thomas Kuhn) and as "a metabiography" (140-1).

Woolf herself makes several comments that support these judgments and connect Orlando to her intuitive perceptions:

> It sprung upon me how I could revolutionize biography in a night! (1977:429).

> Orlando was the outcome of a perfectly definite, indeed overmastering, impulse (1985b:136).

> How extraordinarily unwilled by me but potent in its own rights, by the way, Orlando was! As if it shoved everything aside to come into existence (1985b:121).

The elements that cluster in Moments of Being, from the early images of women, family and home, to Woolf's articulation of the centrality of revelation, gather in Orlando in a merry assault on nineteenth century biography. Orlando is at once criticism, biography and history. Woolf wrote in her diary that it "has to be half laughing, half serious; with great splashes of exaggeration...the spirit to be satiric, the structure wild." The time she spent writing she called "a very happy, singularly happy autumn" (1985b:121). Woolf's sense of the biographical self, in Moments of Being and in Orlando, rested on her intuition of "moments." Conceptually and stylistically, "moments of being" enabled her to eliminate conventional biographical structures of self and of time present, past and passing. The technique of scene making allowed her imagination to elaborate and manipulate facts.

Virginia Woolf broke the hold of Victorian biography and established a freer, imaginatively profound version of the genre. She articulated a form of feminist spirituality rooted in Evangelical attitudes and practices. However, her attitude to biography did not coalesce around those achievements. In the last years of her life she moved awkwardly and in anger toward the biographical forms she had previously rejected.

Leslie Stephen, acknowledging that biographies can be vitiated by the absence of fecund sources, by the evaporation of "the history of mind and character," had claimed that even the thinnest biographies can still have a fascination.

> They stimulate the imagination to realize one of the hardest of all truths to accept--that the existence of a Hamlet now proves that there must have once been a William Shakespeare (1956b:134).

In the world of books and men, according to Stephen, the evidence of the one proves the existence of the other. Woolf replied, in a passage quoted earlier, that

> behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we--I mean all human beings--are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself (1985b:72).

Leslie Stephen was convinced that a separate and autonomous author exists before each act of creation; Woolf imagined a world of interrelated beings in a pattern revealed through vision. The pattern exists; no disengaged author(s) created it. There is no God. Stephen spoke from within the categories of Victorian belief. Agnostic though he might have been, for him patriarchal structures held. Woolf spoke of her experience from the margins of society, traditional Christian concepts closed to her, and held to her vision until the last troubled years of her life.

Virginia Woolf drowned herself in 1941. In the mid 1930s life for her had been difficult although the sustaining relationships with her husband and sister endured until her death. Lytton Strachey, with whom she had a long and close relationship, died in 1932; Roger Fry died in 1934; her nephew Julian was killed in the Spanish Civil War in 1937. Her relationship with Vita Sackville-West had cooled, and her health was a serious, if intermittent, problem. Moreover, her work had begun to be attacked by the critics. On this last matter, Quentin Bell has suggested that she sensed her reputation must decline, for she had achieved a degree of eminence that made her a natural target. Furthermore, a new generation of literary artists had emerged unconcerned with the revolution in literature

which she had seen as inevitable, and those who had been her allies were disappearing through death and attrition. Joyce, for example, published no major work after 1922. The new literary generation had a political agenda as war stalked Europe (Bell:185-6).

In Woolf's writing from 1938 to her death, there are four works that, connected, intimate her last attitudes to biography: Three Guineas (1938); "The Art of Biography" (1939); "A Sketch of the Past" (1939-40); and Roger Fry (1940).

In Three Guineas she does not address biographical issues directly but reveals her state of mind in an angry and separatist feminist statement. In this work she describes her Society of Outsiders, relates fascism to patriarchy, attacks educational and religious attitudes and institutions. Her calls for improvements such as the ordination of women, paid housework, and shared child rearing were dismissed by her critics as silly and self-indulgent (xvii). Her anger was articulate and aggressive, less muted than previously by the sophistication of her style. In contrast to Three Guineas, "A Sketch of the Past" allows some anger but turns attention toward life stories and beliefs. Why, at this stage in her life, was she explicit about beliefs she had been content to wrap suggestively in her woman's sentence in earlier works? Was it an attempt to move more surely within her Clapham heritage, to make conventional sense, to be remembered or inferred from her works as her father had inferred Shakespeare from Hamlet?

"The Art of Biography" and Roger Fry are evidence of a shift toward conventional biography. In the former she continued to call for freedom in the selection and interpretation of facts. The biographer, she says, "can give us the creative fact; the fertile fact, the fact that suggests and engenders" (228). The biographer's role is formative in a manner reminiscent of the novelist's:

> The biographer must go ahead of the rest of us, like the miner's canary, testing the atmosphere, detecting falsity, unreality, and the presence of obsolete conventions.... He must be prepared to admit contradictory versions of the same face. Biography will enlarge its scope by hanging up looking glasses at odd corners. And yet from all this diversity it will bring out, not a riot of confusion, but a richer unity (226).

These thoughts seem to recall her earlier attitudes. However, she now claims that the biographer is not an artist with access to revealed truth. At most the biographer plays the role of social critic. She limits the biographer's freedom: the biographer is a craftsman, not an artist. Yet it was as an artist that she had created Orlando as both "a riot of confusion" and "a richer unity." Woolf uses Lytton Strachey's work to prove her point, praising his

Queen Victoria as a masterful "selection and relation" of verified and authenticated facts (224). Strachey invented nothing. Elizabeth and Essex, on the other hand, was a failure. It was biography as art, flawed with the half-truths necessitated by the paucity of real facts. "The Queen thus moves in an ambiguous world, between fact and fiction, neither embodied nor disembodied." The world of fiction may be more whole, rare and intense than the world of biography, which is bound by facts, but the two don't mix (225). Although she admits that creative facts change as time passes and opinions change, that is a small freedom compared to those she permitted in the world of Orlando.

> The artist's imagination at its most intense fires out what is perishable in fact; he builds with what is durable; but the biographer must accept the perishable, build with it, imbed it in the very fabric of his work. Much will perish; little will live. And thus we come to the conclusion, that he is a craftsman, not an artist; and his work is not a work of art, but something betwixt and between (227).

In the world of Roger Fry, as she drew it, the fictitious became suspect. The joy of writing biography that she felt when working on Orlando, the sense of creating herself through writing that she felt in Moments of Being, seem to have perished with the facts woven into Roger Fry.

Roger Fry is "sober, careful, almost tedious" (McNett:152). There is no need to describe the work here beyond noting its adherence to the craftsmanship Woolf advocated in "The Art of Biography." It has moments of brillance and a recognizable Woolfian syntax and rhythm, but it is merely chronological and deals with standard categories familiar to the world of men and books, categories like childhood, university, travel, marriage and career. Neither an expert in art, Fry's field, nor experimental in creating his inner imaginative life--one recall's Leslie Stephen's remarks on George Eliot's portraiture of men--the work is strangely ponderous and lacks an essential core of meaning. Leonard Woolf, a supportive critic of his wife's work, was severely critical of the biography. According to Quentin Bell, Leonard called it "mere analysis, not history; she had seen it from a dull angle made even more dull by so many dead quotations" (II, 214).

Woolf, in addition to comments in "A Sketch of the Past," refers to the biography several times in her diary.

> [11 April 1937] Much of it is donkey work (275).

> [5 May 1938] I'm a little appalled at the prospect of the grind this book will be. I must somehow shorten and loosen; I can't (remember) stretch it to a long painstaking literal book: later I must generalize and let fly. But then, what about all the letters? How can one cut loose from facts, when there they are, contradicting my theories? (278).

> [7 July 1938] It's all too minute and tied down--documented. Is it to be done on this scale? Is he interesting to other people in that light? I think I will go on doggedly till I meet him myself--1909--and then attempt something more fictitious (285).
>
> [20 September 1938] Since I'm too stale to work--rather headachy--I may as well write a sketch roughly of the next chapter (I've been rather absorbed in P. H. [a novel], hence the headache. Note: fiction is far more a strain that biography--that's the excitement.) (289).
>
> [11 March 1939] A terrible grind to come: and innumerable doubts of myself as biographer: of the possibility of doing it at all: all the same I've carried through to the end; and may allow myself one moment's mild gratification. There are the facts more or less extracted. And I've no time to go into all the innumerable horrors. There may be a flick of life in it--or is it all dust and ashes? (296).

Woolf's reflections make it abundantly clear that Roger Fry was not an act of writing that made her whole nor one "far more necessary than anything else" (1985a:72). "The life of the writer and the writing of the life," to recall Jacobus' words, do not merge (22). Roger Fry seems to me to have been an honest mistake. She had refused to write a biography of Lytton Strachey and initially refused the Fry work. Whatever her motives--they will have included her devotion to Fry and the wishes of the women in his life, including her sister Vanessa--Roger Fry stands apart from her other efforts in biography as a foray into the enemy camp. It lacks the power of her critical voice and lacks power as conventional biography. She was, above all, an artist, not a craftsman.

As an artist Woolf introduced significant changes in biographical form. Her exclusion from the privileges of education and professional life, and her intense emotional experiences within her family forced a perspective quite unlike that produced by her father's Eton-Cambridge training and his athletic talent. She did not seek to narrate lives as chronological sequenced experiences blended with productive and valuable accomplishments, though such a program had enabled Stephen to move from a theologically justified view of life to an anthropologically directed one. Rather, she sought to blend times past, present, and future, to create scenes, and to make moments of revelation real by writing them. To suggest an intricate reality in life she developed an elusive and rhythmical sentence which she used to sustain a suggestive biographical form. She analyzed biographies, indeed English literature itself, for barriers raised to resist represention of women's actual experience as opposed to her experience as Angel in the House. If it was immoral to deny significance to the lives of women, the lives of the obscure, it was her responsibility as a

creative writer, Clapham-descended, to bring to life in biography the reality of women's experience.

What I have called the Clapham imperative was not a disinterested moral endeavour but an intensely social, political, and religious impulse to change the world for the better, to move humankind toward a fuller appreciation of the meaning or value or pattern of life. Woolf was the daughter of an agnostic. Words to clothe her ideas in traditional Christian thought were not available to her. Quentin Bell has said that "she tended to be, as she herself put it, 'mystical', but she entertained no comfortable beliefs" (136) and that Leonard Woolf "thought her an irrational christian" (122).

Kathryn Rabuzzi's description of current feminist theology includes characteristics applicable to Woolf's work:

> a high level of authorial engagement, generally in narrative form, often confessional which sets it apart from what some feminists refer to as a contrasting remoteness and abstractness in traditional, overwhelmingly masculine scholarship.... In contrast to some traditional nonfeminist theologians, who start with deity and move toward humanity, feminist theologians typically begin with humanity and ask such questions as, What does it mean to be human in female form? Or, what does the fact that I am a woman mean for me in terms of being alive at all? (22).

These are questions Virginia Woolf asked. She also wondered what it meant to be a woman writing in England in the first four decades of the twentieth century. Her answers, in keeping with the traditions she knew, where spiritual and formative. In her diary she wrote of her vision of the mountains in the sky, seen as she walked through Russell Square at night:

> Then ... I see the mountains in the sky: the great clouds; and the moon which is risen over Persia; I have a great and astonishing sense of something, which is 'it'. It is not exactly beauty that I mean. It is that the thing is in itself enough: satisfactory; achieved. A sense of my own strangeness, walking on the earth is there too: of the infinite oddity of the human position.... Who am I, what am I, and so on: these questions are always floating about in me: and then I bump against some exact fact--a letter, a person, and come to them again with a great sense of freshness (1985b:90).

Woolf could not make the different worlds she knew cohere (1985a:159), but she "came to think of life as something of extreme reality" (137). Leslie Stephen had said that the biographer must forget the welter of detail and aim "to present the human soul, not all its irrelevant trappings" (1956b:141). Though he had set God aside and moved some distance toward focussing on humanity first, he was as confident of the existence of the soul as he was of the existence of William Shakespeare. Virginia Woolf, not surprisingly, had an answer for her father:

> The truth is, one can't write directly about the soul. Looked at, it vanishes; but look at the ceiling, at Grizzle [a dog], at the cheaper beasts in the zoo which are exposed to walkers in Regents Park, and the soul slips in (1985a:89).

As an artist and a biographer Woolf refined her peripheral vision. Her moments of being were revelations of the meaning of life, moments when "one seems to understand what it's about" (93).

Both Leslie Stephen and Virginia Woolf were moralists who felt a duty to write. They were revolutionaries; his agnosticism and her understanding of gender were essentially subversive. Both saw in biography a genre that could merge their broad conceptualizations of the meaning of life in society with their understanding of the human condition. Both were concerned with "invisible presences," those "immense forces society brings to play upon each of us" (80). Father and daughter led truly parallel lives.

In this thesis I have described Leslie Stephen in terms of Clapham Anglican Evangelicalism, his Eton-Cambridge education, and the rational and scientific thought that led him to agnosticism. I have also considered his attitude to biography and his principle biographical works. For Woolf, Stephen was both a mentor and an example of the power of a Victorian discourse from which she was excluded. Sentences, language and genres in their conventions did not describe or explain life as she lived and observed it. Her project was to find the words and forms that would do so. She maintained that the project itself--which for my purposes has included the writing of her life as she experienced it, the writing of others' lives according to her perception and the writing of moments of being--brought her self into being, established what she called "reality." She said, "We are the words ... we are the thing itself" (1985b:72). Her feminist spirituality she understood to be as revolutionary and essential as her father had understood his agnosticism to be.

To understand Woolf's work I have placed her in contexts that include the Clapham Sect heritage and Hyde Park Gate experiences that she shared with her family, and the Bloomsbury Group setting that flourished before and after the First World War. Developments relating to the study of English literature, aestheticism, religion and women have also been described. Moments of Being, as a principal record of her ideas, has been examined and situated in relationship to her essays on biography and to Orlando and Roger Fry. In the early essays of Moments of Being, particularly "Reminiscences," her concern with subjective experience and privileged moments emerges--although she had yet to develop

the rhythm and syntax essential to these ideas in her later prose. In "Am I a Snob?" she establishes language, writing, rhetorical strategies and the temporality of conversation as profound components in her understanding of the lives of women. In "A Sketch of the Past" my concerns were chiefly with her elaboration of revelation through moments of being, her sense of past, present and memory, and the effects of these on her notions of being and biography.

Woolf's vision of the biographical self in "The New Biography," Orlando, and "Am I a Snob?" was indeed revolutionary and utopian. She imagined a biographical form capable of expressing inner experience, including the experience of gender, one that could describe the realities of life in community, whether present or historical. She created this form principally by blurring boundaries between fact and fiction, self and others, and past and present, a skill promoted by her own marginality. Her single attempt to write conventional biography, Roger Fry, seems to me to have been a temptation she succumbed to in the last difficult years of her life. Seen in the context of her anger in Three Guineas, her revised expectation for biography in "The Art of Biography" and her rage as "A Sketch of the Past" closes, Roger Fry makes the sort of sense that Virginia Woolf avoided at her visionary best.

Despite Leslie Stephen's agnosticism, which overturned much that was traditional, he easily maintained the order of things embedded in language. He could not be certain there was a God but for him the soul remained intact. Without his agnosticism and suspicious of the order of things embedded in language, Virginia Woolf developed a peripheral vision that allowed meaning to develop while she wrote of what she knew. Certainly there was no God and she could not describe the soul, but she could look at the dog or "the cheaper beasts in the zoo" (1985a:89) and the soul would slip in. When she saw "the moon which is risen over Persia," she had "an astonishing sense of something, which is 'it'" which allowed her to approach dogs, letters and the events of daily life with a "great sense of freshness" (1985b:90).

ENDNOTES

1. The following definitions are the ones I use in this thesis. "Religion is the organization of life around the depth dimensions of experience" (King:286). By spirituality I mean a particular kind of religion, with an emphasis on process rather than organization and structure, that is personally appropriated and understood. I have found Carol Ochs' Women and Spirituality (1983) particularly useful.

2. There are exceptions. Examples of religious considerations of Virginia Woolf, within the field of literary criticism, are Vijay Kupar, Virginia Woolf's Vision of Life and Her Search for Significant Form: A Study in the Shaping Vision (1979), Jane Marcus' essay "The Niece of a Nun" (1987b), and Madeline Moore, The Short Season Between Two Silences: The Mystical and the Political in the Novels of Virginia Woolf (1984). Generally Woolf criticism stresses modernist categories of self, time, history, memory.

3. Madeline Moore considers Woolf as a mystic, including in her assessment such factors as Woolf's anorexia nervosa. In the introduction to Moments of Being Jeanne Schulkind notes that "the idea of a privileged moment when a spiritually transcendent truth ... is perceived ... is a commonplace of religious experience and in particular of mystical traditions of thought" (20).

4. In a diary entry for 22 September 1925 Woolf refers to her debt to the Hogarth Press: "Haven't I just written to Herbert Fisher refusing to do a book for the Home University Series on Post-Victorian?--knowing that I can write a book, a better book; a book off my own bat, for the Press if I wish! To think of being battened down in the hold of those University Dons fairly makes my blood run cold. Yet I'm the only woman in England free to write what I like. The others must be thinking of series and editors" (1985b:86).

5. Humm, maintains that her continuing dialogue with her father is the source of her feminism. "It is in the very structure of her discourse that she engages in a feminist battle with her father and with her male friends" (124).

6. Gilbert and Gubar are more specific: "Milton, and Milton alone, leaves [Woolf] feeling puzzled, excluded, inferior, and even a little guilty. Like Greek or metaphysics, those other bastions of intellectual masculinity, Milton is for Woolf a sort of inordinately complex algebraic equation, an insoluble problem that she feels obliged--but unable--to solve..."(1979:191).

7. See Appendix B for a brief discussion of deconstruction.

8. The "transparency" of Victorian discourse is its strongest defense against the incursions of the unthinkable. "To appear to be nothing more than an instrument or a reflection, discourse must be firmly based on the already-known and (especially) the already-said: The formulations must be so entrenched that they come to seem inevitable and invisible" (Bruss:470).

9. See Appendix B for a brief discussion of modernism.

10. The extent and impact of feminism in England at the time Woolf wrote is described in terms relevant to her achievement in Gilbert and Gubar's No Man's Land (1988).

11. The revolutionary impact of introducing women's experience into literature has remained a keystone of feminist theory. The consequent restructuring of reality, according to Adrienne Rich, "will bring far more essential change to human society than the seizing of the means of production by workers" (Irvine:11).

12. Lest this be construed as a late reading of her work, it should be noted that in works not examined here Woolf stressed the matter of the exclusion of women. A Room of One's Own (1975) and Three Guineas (1986) are her most political statements.

13. The power and significance of the dark feminine in the nineteenth century is discussed in Nina Auerbach, Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth (1982).

14. "A man becomes a woman (devient femme) when he writes, or, if not, he does not 'write' (in the radical sense of ecriture) what he writes, or, at least, does not know what he's writing" (Jardine:58).

15. This quotation is from unpublished diary notes written while she lived at Hyde Park Gate.

16. An early example of the articulation, specifically, of the chthonic element in women's spirituality was Charlene Spretnak, The Politics of Woman's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement (1982).

17. By sacred I mean whatever is highly valued in the life of a person or group, or made central by repeated use in special contexts.

18. Stephen named Necessity in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton in 1902: "Well, I am not pious nor a Quaker; but I get on pretty well with my deity--Necessity; and I sympathise to a certain extent with [the] view that there is a certain comfort in making up one's mind to it. Only I reserve the right of occasionally damning things in general" (Maitland:480).

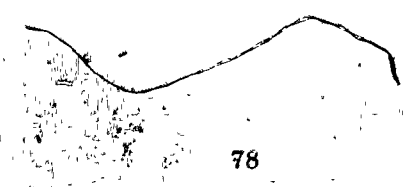
19. The title of an article by Denis Donoghue, "A First-Rate Second-Class Mind," reflects a widespread assessment of Leslie Stephen (New York Times Book Review, December 30,1984, p.8).

20. The attribution of the epithet 'Clapham Sect' is often accorded to Sidney Smith but Hennell notes it may have been Sir James Stephen, Leslie's father, who first used it in his Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography. The name is misleading since it suggests they were a dissenting sect when in fact they remained Anglicans and much of their effectiveness was derived from their ability to interact with other Anglicans (Hennell:169).

21. Cockshutt maintains that there was a father-Father problem. In a "highly-disciplined moral and social setting ... the child was free to find God for himself" (1974:67). The father was firm and present but the Father was ill-defined and distant.Henry Venn wrote of his father, the original Clapham rector that as "a theologian he was pre-eminently scriptural. He had thought and read carefully upon all the great and essential articles of our faith, and his attention was given to each in proportion to its practical importance. He had no system, not even a favourite writer; the liturgy, articles and homilies of the Church were never appealed to as authority and very sparingly as illustration of Christian truth, he never spoke of the doctrines as exhibited in the formalities of the Church, but he spoke of them in their just and native simplicity ... he regarded the Church as the mere creature of Scripture" (Hennell:261)

22. Scholars who notice the Clapham-Bloomsbury line include Annan, Rosenbaum, Himmelfarb, Rose, and Cockshutt.

23. Lady Stephen does not emerge from the literature as a well-defined character, indeed in a five hundred page biography of his brother, Leslie devotes a mere two and one-half pages to his mother. However, he tells us that she was loving and diligent, serene and devoted, and that she maintained the evangelical spiritual discipline of diary-writing without missing a day for over sixty years (1895:66).



24. Both Leslie Stephen and Virginia Woolf had significant health problems; both had similarly nervous constitutions. Stephen overcame his childhood difficulties and seems to have been fit until the deafness and irritability of his old age set in. Woolf's condition was more complicated. She was forced to stop working by frequent bouts of illness, was hospitalized several times for nervous or mental disorders, conditions which may have contributed to her suicide attempts including the last successful one. While criticism is appearing which considers her health, notably Jean O. Love's work, there is not sufficient evidence, nor agreement, to warrant taking serious account of Woolf's health problems here.

It may reflect the social destinies of father and daughter that he was encouraged to overcome his disability, and went on to significant physical accomplishment, while she found herself hospitalized with others deciding her life's course. It is noteworthy that her husband in consultation with several doctors and health care professionals determined that she should not bear children because of her mental health, a decision which was "a permanent source of grief to her" (Bell:2/8).

25. A measure of the real impact of science emerges in a list of new specialist societies: the Geological Society (1807), the Astronomical Society (1820), the Zoological Society (1826), the Meterological Society (1836), and the Chemical Society (1841) (Heyck:59). Aside from expressed interest in science, these groups represent a new fragmentation of knowledge; the generalist was about to disappear before the rising tide of professionalism.

26. Stephen's focus had not been a clerical career. Trinity Hall has 10 lay fellows, 2 presbyter fellows who were clerics in orders, and the Goodbehere fellow. Stephen was beaten out on a lay fellowship but got the Goodbehere, in 1854; he was to assist in chapel and take orders within one year. He saw the appointment as a stepping stone and was ordained in 1855. He later became one of the two presbyter fellows and junior tutor in 1856 at the age of 23 (Maitland:41-54).

Teaching careers were not yet possible within the universities. "The standard career pattern for Oxbridge dons led from undergraduate to fellow to orders to a parish living or the bar, and resignation of the fellowship" (Heyck:163). Clamour for better teaching and broader curricula, begun in 1830s and 40s, led to Royal Commissions on Oxford in 1852, Cambridge in 1852-3.

27. According to Sir William Hamilton who wrote a series of articles on university reform in the Edinburgh Review in the 1830s, the universities were supposed to give instruction in all major subjects but the collegiate system which dominated the universities had forced reduction to one--classics at Oxford and mathematics at Cambridge (Heyck:157-8).

28. Stephen addressed Newman's position directly in "Newman's Theory of Belief", An Agnostic's Apology and Other Essays, 1893.

29. For the Victorians 'men of letters' included "poets, novelists, journalists, biographers, historians, social critics, philosophers and political economists" bound to the general public by market relations. A significantly large literate reading public was available by 1800 to replace patronage (Heyck:24-25). The relationship was "essentially a connection of sympathy, in the sense of mutual understanding and confidence" (37) and it played a significant role for most of the century.

30. To be fair it is almost impossible not to rake Leslie Stephen over our liberal all-knowing coals. Noel Annan is as guilty of it as any but he does it with humour and perspective. He passes on a telling anecdote describing the aging Stephen: "With the merciless insight of children they seized on their father's failings; in particular his habit of dramatising the insignificant into the cosmic. Once as he passed their room stumbling upstairs to his study they heard him talking to himself: 'I wish I were dead ... I wish I were dead ... I wish my whiskers would grow.' Mr. Ramsay [Virginia's fictional portrait of her father], tyrannical and self-torturing, demanding that the family revolve around him is the fiction of fact" (1952:102). This is grist for Gertrude Himmelfarb's mill and she uses it mercilessly (218). I would submit that there is some harsh truth here but there is also a whimsy reminiscent of J.M. Barrie and Lewis Carroll.

31. There is both an autobiographical and a biographical tradition. Autobiography "begins with Leslie's grandfather's Memoirs of James Stephen Written by Himself for the Use of His Children, and continues through Leslie's Mausoleum Book to Virginia's 'Reminiscenses' written for her infant nephew Julian Bell, and her unfinished 'A Sketch of the Past', on down to Leslie's grand-daughter Angelica Garnett and her recent exorcistic Deceived With Kindness: A Bloomsbury Childhood" (Rosenbaum:56). Aside from Leslie's biography of his brother, the biographical tradition includes Sir George Stephen (Leslie's uncle), Life of the Late James Stephen; Vanessa Bell, Notes on Virginia's Childhood: a Memoir; Angelica Garnett, Recollections of Virginia Woolf; Quentin Bell, Virginia Woolf: a Biography. Related to this tradition are Sir James Stephen "The Clapham Sect" in his Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography, and images of her relatives that float through Virginia Woolf's fiction, most notably her father as Mr. Ramsay in To The Lighthouse and her brother Thoby, in Jacob's Room.

32. Critical moments are central to Virginia Woolf's technique. While this moment in the life of Fawcett is a rare instance in Stephen's work, it reflects an Evangelical sensitivity for illumination that Stephen shared with Woolf.

33. The series considered poets, politicians, historians, and novelists, among others, and had a significant effect on the "structure, evolution and quality of biographical writing" in England (Nadel:33) principally, perhaps, because of the calibre of contributors like Leslie Stephen, Edmund Gosse, Anthony Trollope, Henry James, and Thomas Huxley (35).

34. Lest it be assumed Stephen reserved charges of femininity for women, it should be remarked that manliness was a preeminent virtue for him. He is in fact associated with the creation of the term 'muscular Christianity'. Given the history of his health and physical activities, his preoccupation with manliness comes as no surprise. A wonderful example of his prejudices is in a letter to his wife's mother following an occasion when he had slandered her friend Coventry Patmore: "I do think Coventry Patmore effeminate. Every man ought to be feminine, i.e., to have quick and delicate feelings; but no man ought to be effeminate, i.e., to let his feelings get the better of his intellect and produce a cowardly view of life and the world. I dislike George Herbert because he seems to me always to be skulking behind the Thirty-Nine Articles instead of looking facts in the face, and Coventry Patmore has found a refuge which I dislike still more heartily" (Maitland:314). Woolf, as we have seen, found Patmore's sensibilities highly destructive insofar as he contributed to the Victorian stereotype of the "angel in the house."

35. Collective biographies and national biographies were in the air in the nineteenth century: Sweden, Holland, Austria and Germany did them too (Nadel:47).

36. Woolf hypothesized an alternative reality. She proposed a parallel compendium of the Lives of the Obscure "which is to tell the whole history of England in one obscure life after another" (1985b:85). And in Three Guineas she described a Society of Outsiders "that seeks to to achieve [freedom, equality and peace] by the means that a different sex, a different tradition, a different education, and the different values which result from those differences have placed within our reach" (130).

37. For a brief discussion of postmodernism see Appendix B.

38. Le fin de siecle was not so revolutionary in England as in France. Mary R. Anderson notes that in England "elements of Enlightenment rationalism and Romantic striving persisted through an ethos of religion, stability, and progress" and muted the desacralization characteristic of fin de siecle thought. "Ultimately religious losses at the core were masked by an astonishing range of religious concerns at the periphery." She draws particular attention to Evangelicalism's "potent mix of social concern and individual importance" (95). There were, nonetheless, important French connections which continued into Woolf's era when Roger Fry was instrumental in bringing Post-Impressionist art, with its modernist implications, to London.

39. A great deal of Woolf's energy as an essayist and biographer was spent building, or uncovering, a canon of women writers.

40. Patricia Meyer Spacks quotes George Steiner on the traditional gender/garrulousness connection: "In every known culture, men have accused women of being garrulous.... The chatting, ranting, gossiping female, the tattler, the scold ... is older than fairytales" (259).

41. Although Woolf's education was idiosyncratic, it was rigorous. Aside from extensive reading in English literature, history and biography, by the time she was thirty, Woolf had read in the original Pindar, Aeschylus, Euripedes, Virgil, Homer, Xenophon, Thucydides, Aristotle, Sophocles, and Plato. (Herman:260). Walter Herman has remarked upon the difference between her use of the classics and that of Pound, Eliot and Joyce. They were shoring up the remains of contemporary civilization with their utilization of Latin, whereas she felt that the present moment was actually connected to the remote past (266). Her education was marked by her enthusiasm and commitment, qualities perhaps common in the autodidact.

42. Tensions between the linguistic instruments of culture and the genders have been elaborated by Sandra Gilbert. She remarks that as Walter Ong's "recent account of the relationship between the materna lingua (or mother tongue) and the 'civilized' patriis sermi (or father speech) implies, European male writers have, since the high Middle Ages, been integrally involved in a struggle into and with the vernacular which has continually forced them to examine, usurp and transform the daily speech of women and children so as to make it a suitable instrument for (cultivated) male art" (1987:220).

43. Clive Bell and Roger Fry were Bloomsberries, one the husband and the other a lover of Vanessa Stephen Bell.

44. While none of the five pieces was prepared by Woolf for publication, the editors were confident that the material was valid. They claim to have noted places in the text that were uncertain or unclear. Woolf had done some revisions, and several pieces had been made public to family or Bloomsbury friends.

45. S. P. Rosenbaum (1987) claims that "'A Sketch of the Past' is being recognized in its fully recovered state as one of her most important pieces of writing" (60). His reference is to the 1985 edition.

46. The 1985 edition contains 17 pages of additional material much of which describes Leslie Stephen and enhances our view of the relationship Woolf had with him. There is also new material on life at Hyde Park Gate. Later revisions of the second half of the essay, "much reworked and improved," (1985a:62) replace those of the 1976 edition.

47. In "A Sketch of the Past" Woolf described Leslie Stephen as a lion to her monkey: "Suppose I, at fifteen, was a nervous, gibbering, little monkey, always splitting or cracking a nut and shying the shells about, and mopping and mowing, and leaping into dark corners and then swinging in rapture across the cage, he was the pacing, dangerous, morose lion; a lion who was sulky and angry and injured; and suddenly ferocious, and then very humble, and then majestic; and then lying dusty and fly pestered in a corner of the cage" (116). Woolf's image is a delightful retort to heroic biographies.

48. Examples of her presence in the novels, through her memories, are the portraits of her brother in Jacob's Room and of her parents in To the Lighthouse.

49. Rosenbaum draws attention to "that indefinable, evaluative term 'reality'" and notes that "the discrimination of reality was an essential moral activity for Bloomsbury in their lives and their works" (79).

50. In addition to using "women" and "woman" to refer to actual experiences, I have used "woman" to indicate the conceptual apparatus that surrounds the creature as a literary figure. Alice Jardine says there can be discourse about women, or discourse by, through, as woman. "The problem is that within this ever-increasing inflation of quotation marks around the word 'woman,' women as thinking, writing subjects are placed in the position of constantly wondering whether it is a question of women or woman, their written bodies or their written bodies. To refuse 'woman' or the 'feminine' as cultural and libidinal

constructions (as in 'men's femininity') is, ironically, to return to the metaphysical-anatomical--definitions of sexual identity" (37).

51. Patricia Meyer Spacks makes the point that fictional letters, which the writer presents as genuine private letters, solicit "the reader's discomfort, emphasizing his/her status as eavesdropper--but the claim's fictionality converts the guilt of eating stolen fruit into yet another fiction.... Like the gratification of seeing tragedy, which legitimizes our interest in other people's suffering by assuring us of its characters irreality, the delight of fictional letters includes that of guilt transformed into aesthetic satisfaction" (164). The sensations are further complicated in Woolf's memoir, since we cannot be sure where the line between fact and fiction has been drawn.

52. To say that Leslie Stephen recognized only one version of the truth is not to deny his contribution to biography. His emphasis on life-in-the-world, as opposed to life lived for some greater glory or toward some perfected model, suggested a major revision of the biographical perceptions of life. However, he did not question the humanist image of man and its roots in European discourse.

53. See Appendix A for a list of the sections and their page references in the 1985 and 1976 editions of Moments of Being.

54. Of the relationships in Virginia Woolf's life that with her husband Leonard was stable, stimulating, and a working partnership. Her suicide note, printed in two versions in his diary, is a testament of her love for him: "You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be..." (94). As a socialist and a Jew he had a perception of life that undoubtedly enhanced her understanding of marginality. The seriousness of their position during the war, such that they had provided themselves "coolly and prudently ...with means for committing suicide in order to avoid the tortures which almost certainly awaited them if the Germans ever got hold of them" (Leonard Woolf:15), inflated the image of death in her life.

55. Noel Annan published a new biography of Leslie Stephen in 1984, Leslie Stephen, the Godless Victorian, and while he adds much new material made available through Woolf scholarship and the publication of her letters and diaries, he continues to exempt himself from any profound consideration of Stephen's personal life by disclaiming the genre biography and focussing on Stephen's place within intellectual history.

56. Orlando is based on the life of Vita Sackville-West and is thus part fiction and part truth. Since Woolf had an affair with Vita the personal element is strong. Flush is a biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's dog; it is riddled with Woolfian wit and does much to deflate the commonplaces of biographical form.

57. 1910 was the year Roger Fry organized an exhibition of French Post-Impressionistic art in London. In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" Woolf maintained that human character changed at about that time (320).

58. Nigel Nicolson maintains that Virginia Woolf was not insane when she died but that "she feared madness.... Many people who take their own lives do not choose to die, but are impelled to it by their mental illness. Virginia Woolf chose to die. It was not an insane or impulsive act, but premeditated. She died courageously on her own terms" (Woolf 1980:xvii).

59. Caroline Stephen who was Leslie's sister, a Quaker and an author, had little direct influence on Woolf's attitude to biography. However, she did hold strong religious views which, like her brother's, departed from the Evangelical tradition. Woolf described her in a letter: "We talked for some 9 hours; and she poured forth all her spiritual experiences, and then descended and became a very wise and witty old lady. I never knew anyone with such a collection of stories--which all have some odd twist in them--natural or supernatural. All her life she has been listening to inner voices, and talking with spirits: and she is like a person who sees ghosts, or rather disembodied souls, instead of bodies. She now sits in her garden, surrounded with roses, in voluminous shawls and draperies, and accumulates and pours forth wisdom on all subjects. All the young Quakers go and see her, and she is a kind of modern prophetess" (1975a:229).

60. See Appendix C for a chronology of Woolf's works under consideration here.

APPENDIX A

DATED SECTIONS OF "A SKETCH OF THE PAST

No.	Date	Page: 1985 ed.	1976 ed.
1a.	18 April 1939	64	74
1b.	19 April	70	81
2.	2 May	75	86
3.	15 May	85	98
4.	28 May	91	106
5.	20 June	95	111
6.	19 July	98	114
7.	8 June 1940	100	116
8.	19 June	107	---
9.	late July	115	---
10.	18 August	124	125 (undated).
11.	22 September	126	127
12.	11 October	136	136 (12 October)
13.	15 November	143	143 (17 November)

APPENDIX B

MODERNISM, POSTMODERNISM, POSTSTRUCTURALISM, AND DECONSTRUCTION

This appendix describes the above terms as they are used in this thesis. What follows is not intended to define the terms but rather to give a sense of their evolution and the contexts in which they arose, and to relate them to Virginia Woolf.

Modernism designates particular attitudes to literature and art in England and France in the first half of the twentieth century commonly associated with

> "the long withdrawing roar" of "the Sea of Faith," and Darwinian visions of "Nature, red in tooth and claw," with the discontents fostered by an industrial civilization, with the enemies within the self that were defined by Freud, and ultimately with the no man's land of the Great War (Gilbert and Gubar 1988:21).

In the nineteenth century Leslie Stephen had recognized fractures in the prevailing systems of thought and felt obliged, on moral grounds, to speak freely on the impossibility of supporting an irrelevant deity. He did not go so far as to declare the inevitability of creating new systems; rather, he advocated a more objective and scientific attitude. A modernist shift from classical theology to anthropology (Taylor: 13) is previewed in Stephen's work, particularly in his use of biography and his interest in utilitarianism.

Virginia Woolf belonged to a group of artists and writers, born in the 1880s, that had a pivotal influence on literature in England and painting in France. These individuals are central to modernism: E. M. Forster (b. 1879); Paul Klee (b. 1879); Max Ernst (b.1881), Pablo Picasso (b. 1881); James Joyce (b. 1882); Georges Braque (b. 1882); Amedeo Modigiliani (b. 1884); Ezra Pound (b.1885); D. H. Lawrence (b.1885); T. S. Eliot (b. 1888). Generally, the continental painters effected attitudes slightly before the English writers. Picasso's Les Demoiselles d'Avignon was considered revolutionary in 1907; it reflected his meditations upon Cezanne and African sculpture, and foreshadowed cubism. D. H. Lawrence's first work appeared in 1911, Eliot's first poems were published by the Woolfs' Hogarth Press in 1917, and Joyce's Ulysses was published in 1922. These individuals set themselves the task of bringing forward new forms, or variations of traditional forms, to express the profundity of their beliefs and experiences. Woolf belonged to the Bloomsbury Group which began to meet in 1906 and concerned itself with modernist issues within the British context. The group included economist John Maynard Keynes, biographer Lytton Strachey, author and social activist Leonard Woolf, artist Vanessa Bell, art critic Clive Bell,

novelist E. M. Forster and artist and critic Roger Fry. Friendship, art, and the philosophies that defined them were central concerns.

In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" Woolf claims that "in or about December 1910 human character changed" (320).

> All human relations have shifted--those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature (321).

The pivotal event in her life in December 1910 was the first of two Post-Impressionist exhibitions that Roger Fry organized in London. The show was intended to reveal to English audiences the "innovative spirit in Paris" which Fry's aesthetic placed within the historical dynamic of Western art. He called Cezanne "'the tribal deity' of the modernists" (Edel:174-5).

Nathan Scott, Jr. describes "classical modernists," which can include both the English and the continental versions, as "those who risked some comprehensive judgment of 'the whole present'" (254).

> The implicit assumption was that inherited systems of reference had broken down, that, in order for the spectacle of the new reality to be mastered, the artist had to take on 'the whole job of culture'--raiding dead tradition for the still viable remnant of meaning, minting out of his own untrammeled inventiveness new world-hypotheses, and so ordering it all as somehow to give a shape and a significance to a world which itself offers very little assistance toward the attainment of a coherent vision of human existence (255).

For Leslie Stephen there had been a dissonance within the system, but no collapse. For the modernists, before the war, there was a feeling of fundamental change in systems and concepts though essential meaning held. Collapse came in the form and shadows of the Great War.

Analyses of modernism seldom include reference to the "woman problem" in accounts of the cultural dynamics of the period (Gilbert and Gubar 1988:21). Yet, as Theodore Roszak has said

> the woman problem was argued about, shouted about, agonized about, endlessly, endlessly. By the final decades of the [nineteenth] century, it permeated everything (21).

John Stuart Mill's The Subjection of Woman was published in 1869; the Pankhursts' Woman's Social and Political Union was organized in 1903. The American Women's Rights leaders Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony died in 1902 and 1906. Virginia Woolf began to write in the first decades of this century. With her mastery of English

literary history she understood the significance of marginality and wrote herself into the canon.

If modernism was an attempt to restore, or remint, an order in the world, postmodernism operates from the assumption that such an attempt, following World War II, is no longer tenable. Jardine calls postmodernism a genuinely new direction grounded in/through "contemporary French theory," which, she says, is a "generic term" used to designate writers coping with the "threatened collapse of the dialectic and its representations" (22). Those whose writing qualifies as postmodernist she describes as

> writing, self-consciously, from within the (intellectual, scientific, philosophical, literary) epistemological crisis specific to the postwar period. To put it simply, they are those writers, whom we call our "contemporaries", who, in John Barth's caustic formulation, do not try to pretend that the first half of the twentieth century did not happen (23).

Mark Taylor, in an echo of Barth's sentiment, claims postmodernism opened with a

> sense of irrevocable loss and incurable fault. This wound is inflicted by the overwhelming awareness of death--a death that "begins" with the death of God and "ends" with the death of ourselves (6).

David Tracy describes the postmodern situation as a crisis rooted in the history of the West. We face it now, he says, and "we" are

> those Westerners shaped by the seventeenth-century scientific revolution, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and the nineteenth-century industrial revolution and explosion of historical consciousness. We late-twentieth-century Westerners find ourselves in a century where human-made mass death has been practiced, where yet another technological revolution is occurring, where global catastrophe or even extinction could occur. We find ourselves unable to proceed as if all that had not happened, is not happening, or could not happen. We find ourselves historically distanced from the classics of our traditions. We find ourselves culturally distanced from those "others" we have chosen both to ignore and oppress. We find ourselves distanced even from ourselves, suspicious of all our former ways of understanding, interpreting and acting (8).

By the same logic that Virginia Woolf can be called a modernist and 1910 seen as an important date for her, we as postmodernists, can align our cultural sensibilities to 1968. Just as modernism viewed the world through the lens of nineteenth century insight, so the postmodern sensibility sees through a lens ground by the experiences and effects of the Second World War. Within the period since that war, "Mai 68" has become a symbol of change, like Fry's 1910 exhibition, like Picasso's Desmoiselles; Virginia Woolf's remarks on the shift in human relations in 1910 are echoed by the French looking back at the consequences of 1968. "Mai 68" situates thought in relation to student riots in Paris though much was happening elsewhere: Soviet tanks moved into Czechoslovakia; Martin Luther

King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated in the United States; Pierre Trudeau became Prime Minister of Canada with promises of a "just society"; fighting between Protestants and Catholics began in Northern Ireland; Black Power surfaced at the Mexico Olympics. Biafra and Vietnam dominated the news. French thought establishes a kind of guide to contemporary developments in cultural criticism, though similar impulses are at work beyond the hexagon of her borders.

Modernism and postmodernism generally connote Western culture in a broad sense; structuralism, poststructuralism and deconstruction all refer primarily to developments in French theories of language. Structuralism is a postwar theory, strongest in the 1960s, which reacted against the historical dimensions of dialectical thought and elaborated the synchronic capacities of language use as a closed system (Bree 1983:143). Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism (1957) is an example beyond French borders, and outside Structuralism, of the widespread impulse to find systematic methods for criticism. The search was for general laws. Language was regarded as a system of signs whose patterns of meaning could be projected onto other cultural activities.

> In the end structuralism does not only think everything through again, this time as language, it thinks everything through again as though language were its very subject matter (Eagleton 105).

Meaning, it seemed, was constructed, and shared, through language. The separated self, the autonomous individual, the hero of the Western world, became suspect as the font of meaning.

Poststructuralism marks a shift away from analysing language and its components in a closed system, to analysis of the use and practice of language. The relationship of elements inside language, divorced from use and context, seemed insufficient. After May 1968 closed systems made no sense; historical, social and political realities born of the plurality of systems became immediate factors in critical assessment. Discourse could indicate language both as system and as practice. It absorbs synchronic analyses of language and adds studies of use based on individual, cultural, historical, psychological or other practices (Tracy:53). The interrelationship of all uses of language becomes important.

Deconstruction functions within poststructuralism. It "challenges all claims to uncovering the full systemic character of any language by insisting upon the implications of the fact that no system can adequately account for its own ineradicably differential nature"

(56). Based upon definitions forged through an awareness of the differences that exist between all things, none of our systems can enclose all meaning.

Deconstruction works primarily upon binary oppositions, central to structuralism, which locate significant meaning in the logic of polarities like dark/light, high/low, Man/Woman. It claims that often, in order to set a functioning oppostion in place, certain sorts of information are discarded, suppressed, banished or distorted. Eagleton notes that out of the endless interplay of meanings "certain meanings are elevated by social ideologies to a privileged postion, or made the centres around which other meanings are forced to turn" (131). Examples he gives are God, the Self, Freedom, Order, and Man. These terms cannot be discarded, but they can be deconstructed, "shown to be products of a particular system of meaning, rather than what props it up from the outside" (132).

Certain data are allowed to thrive in conversation, other data are excluded by a variety of strategies. Eagleton, following Derrida, describes this deconstruction process by developing Man/Woman self/other oppositions:

> Woman is the opposite, the 'other' of man: she is non-man, defective man, assigned a chiefly negative value in relation to the male first principle. But equally man is what he is only by virtue of ceaselessly shutting out this other or opposition, defining himself in antithesis to it, and his whole identity is therefore caught up and put at risk in the very gesture by which he seeks to assert his unique, autonomous existence. Woman is not just an other in the sense of something beyond his ken, but an other intimately related to him as the image of what he is not, and therefore an essential reminder of what he is. Man therefore needs this other even as he spurns it, is constrained to give a positive identity to what he regards as no-thing. Not only is his own being parasitically dependent upon the woman, and upon the act of excluding and subordinating her, but one reason why such exclusion is necessary is because she may not be quite so other after all. Perhaps she stands as a sign of something in man which he needs to repress, expel beyond his own being, relegate to a securely alien region beyond his own definitive limits. Perhaps what is outside is also somehow inside, what is alien is also intimate (132-33).

In this thesis Leslie Stephen stands in the pre-dawn of modernism. He devoted himself to the Necessity of meaning embodied in his life, to describing life as it was impelled by the forces in and around, rather than above and beyond it. His concern was with Man.

His daughter began as his reflection and affirmed his achievement in her talent and response. But, she said, "We are living say in 1910, they were living in 1860s" (1985a:147). The woman question had arisen; new realities were evident. Woolf has long been recognized for her achievements in the art of the novel but it is with the postmodern ability to step back from style and message to observe the mechanics of discourse that the magnitude of her project becomes clear. Writing self-consciously as a woman she moved into discourse as

the excluded other, the dark and down side of polarities. She was the excluded chthonic other bringing significant meaning with her as she surfaced into text. Until theory developed the ability to discuss this effect of her effort, it was ignored despite the fact that she recognized it herself. Erich Auerbach ends his influential survey of European literature, Mimesis (1946), with a masterful account of Woolf's technique in To the Lighthouse. For him her use of multiple consciousnesses reflects the "widening of man's horizon, and the increase of his experiences, knowledge, ideas and possible forms of experiences..." (549). When he wrote, there was no theoretical possiblity of a separate experience and literature of women. Moments of Being is an account of Woolf's life as a woman, her progress as a writer, and her foreshadowing of postmodern concerns.

APPENDIX C

A CHRONOLOGICAL SELECTED LIST OF VIRGINIA WOOLF'S WORKS

1907-8	"Reminiscences" in Moments of Being
1915	The Voyage Out
1920-21	"22 Hyde Park Gate" in Moments of Being
1921-22	"Old Bloomsbury" in Moments of Being
1922	Jacob's Room
1924	"Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown"
1925	Mrs Dalloway
1927	"The New Biography"
1927	To the Lighthouse
1928	Orlando: A Biography
1929	A Room of One's Own
1933	Flush: A Biography
1936	"Am I a Snob" in Moments of Being
1938	Three Guineas
1939	"The Art of Biography"
1939-40	"A Sketch of the Past" in Moment os Being
1940	Roger Fry: A Biography

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