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VIRGINIA WOOLF

Moments of Being

EDITED
WITH AN INTRODUCTION
AND NOTES
by JEANNE SCHULKIND

SECOND EDITION

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Preface to the Second Edition

The British Library has recently acquired a seventy-seven page typescript by Virginia Woolf which came to light in 1980. Written in 1940, this hitherto unknown material provides the missing link between the typescript and the manuscript which were brought together as "A Sketch of the Past", the most substantial and significant of the autobiographical writings in *Moments of Being* (see Editor's Note, p. 61). It represents, moreover, a sufficiently valuable contribution to warrant a new edition.

The British Library typescript contains twenty-seven pages of entirely new material (pp. 107-25 below) in which Virginia Woolf describes her father, Leslie Stephen, and the ambivalence of her relationship to him which her recent reading of Freud had caused her to reassess. Her mature, analytic account illuminates one of the most important influences on her development both as an individual and as a writer, and provides a valuable corrective to the earlier version which, because it is partial, is also misleading.

The typescript, a reworked and more polished version of the manuscript transcribed on pages 107-37 in the first edition, gives this new version greater stylistic coherence than the earlier one. Furthermore, a number of passages of particular interest, such as Virginia Woolf's reflections on her methods of writing and on the nature of consciousness, are expanded and clarified.

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This book was made possible by the consent and co-operation of the University of Sussex Library, the British Library, and the owners of the copyright in Virginia Woolf's writings, Quentin Bell and Angelica Garnett. Professor Bell and his wife, Olivier, were characteristically generous in giving aid whenever it was needed; they also provided me with much indispensable information and often saved me from error, for which I am most grateful. The courtesy of the staffs of both libraries mentioned above has also been greatly appreciated.

I would like to thank the publishers of Virginia Woolf's writings for permission to quote from them in my Introduction, and Mrs Lola Szladits for making possible the presentation of a complete text of "Old Bloomsbury" by giving permission to use material from the Berg Collection.

Editor's Note

This collection of autobiographical writings by Virginia Woolf brings together unpublished material selected from the Woolf archives at the British Library and the University of Sussex Library. The latter archive, known as the 'Monks House Papers', belonged to Leonard Woolf. When he persuaded Quentin Bell to write the authorized biography of Virginia Woolf he placed the papers at the disposal of Professor Bell who quoted brief passages from them in the biography. After the death of Leonard Woolf the papers passed, through the generosity of the executrix of the estate, Mrs Trekkie Parsons, to The University of Sussex.

The decision to publish material which would have been extensively revised by Virginia Woolf and most of which—unlike the essays published posthumously by Leonard Woolf—was never intended for publication, was not taken without the most careful consideration. The undeniable interest and value of these memoirs, however, left those involved in the decision with no doubts. Publication which would make readily available to a wide audience material that so richly illuminates the vision and sensibility of a writer whose contribution to the history of English literature was so profoundly individual could not but be worthwhile. These memoirs have a unique place in the documentation of her life and art.

It was Virginia Woolf's practice to write out one or more rough drafts of a work and then to type out complete revisions, sometimes as many as eight or nine. The material in this collection is in various stages of revision but with the exception of the first memoir the scripts bear signs of 'work in progress', notwithstanding that the last three selections were in fact read by Virginia Woolf to the audiences for whom they were intended. Corrections, additions, deletions, sometimes hastily made and incomplete, are scattered throughout the work and in some cases whole passages are revised within the text. No attempt has been made in this edition to present a record of these textual revisions and variations. To have done so would have greatly impaired the enjoyment of most readers. For anyone seriously interested in studying this aspect of Virginia Woolf's memoirs, the material is available at the University of Sussex Library and the British Library. However, the desire to present a

readable text has at no point been allowed to take precedence over what must be the commitment of primary importance, that of following faithfully Virginia Woolf's last intentions regarding the material as far as they are known or can be reasonably surmised, or to state the reason for not doing so and to indicate doubt where it exists. It is hoped that the 'editorial machinery' will not be unpleasantly obtrusive to the general reader—and Editor's Notes to the individual texts have been provided to minimize this danger—but that it is in evidence has at least the advantage of keeping before the reader the fact that these texts were not prepared for publication by Virginia Woolf, and hence they should not be judged by the same criteria as would be applied to texts published during her lifetime.

Because the selections that follow are in different stages of revision it has occasionally been necessary to adapt editorial practice to deal with specific problems. When this has been done, mention has been made in the appropriate preface. With that exception, the following editorial principles have been applied to the texts uniformly.

Deletions made by Virginia Woolf have not been included unless they are necessary for the sense of the passage and no substitute has been provided. In such cases the deleted words have been enclosed in square brackets. Partial deletions, which are not uncommon, have been silently completed. In those few cases where Virginia Woolf added a word or a phrase but failed to make the deletion necessary to accommodate the addition, the oversight has been silently corrected. For example, in "Old Bloomsbury", the first version of one passage reads: "True, we still had Thursday evenings as before. But they were always strained and ended generally in dismal failure." Virginia Woolf then added 'often' before 'ended' but failed to delete 'generally': Where an addition has made it necessary to alter the grammatical form of a word, the change has been listed in the Appendix. Deletions which are of interest have been noted.

Just as some of Virginia Woolf's deletions were incomplete, so were some of her additions and corrections. When it was impossible to incorporate them into the text without serious disruption to the thought they have been omitted and noted. In those instances where a word or phrase was added by Virginia Woolf in such a way as to make it clear that it was merely being considered as an alternative, the later version has been used except where the first is clearly preferable. In very few instances indeed is any point of significance involved; however, alternative readings have been noted if they are

of interest or if there is doubt as to the choice Virginia Woolf would have made.

In early drafts, Virginia Woolf's practice regarding punctuation, spelling and capitalization was highly erratic and she often used abbreviations which never appeared in her published work. On occasion, obvious oversights coupled with typing mistakes and incomplete or hastily made corrections have resulted in a profusion of errors; at others, the careful attention to these matters which characterizes her published works is evident. It was Virginia Woolf's practice to submit her work to her husband, Leonard, for revision of these details and he, in publishing her posthumous works, did not hesitate, as he writes in the editorial preface to *The Death of the Moth*,* 'to punctuate' the essays and correct 'obvious verbal mistakes'. Although the liberties that Leonard Woolf would have been justified in taking could not be similarly justified by anyone else, his practice has at least served as a general guideline for the kinds of corrections which have been made in the present text; for it is equally clear that in the case of these memoirs—unlike that of the Diary or the Letters—Virginia Woolf would most certainly have made the spelling, punctuation and capitalization conform to standard usage, except where a nuance was involved, had she decided to publish them.

Hence punctuation has been altered to conform to Virginia Woolf's own practice in her published works. Hyphens, italics, question marks, full stops, double quotes for dialogue, apostrophes for possessives and contractions have been added where appropriate; 'and' has been substituted for the ampersand; abbreviations and numbers have been written out where it was her practice to do so. Apart from these uncontroversial examples, punctuation has been altered only to avoid ambiguity, to correct obvious oversights, or to conform to a pattern established in a sentence or passage which was momentarily overlooked. No attempt has been made to make Virginia Woolf's idiosyncratic and highly expressive punctuation conform in other respects to conventional usage. When, for example, an exclamation point occurs in the middle of a sentence, it is retained if it is appropriate to the sense of the passage. All typing errors have been corrected. Spelling and capitalization have been regularized to conform to common usage unless a nuance is involved.

The sense or the grammar of a sentence has occasionally necessitated the addition of a word which has been enclosed in brackets.

* The Hogarth Press; London, 1942.

However, more than one word in brackets without a note indicates words deleted by Virginia Woolf as explained above. All doubtful readings and illegible words have been noted except in those few cases where a legible and acceptable alternative is available.

The individual prefaces contain a brief description of the subject matter of the memoir in order to avoid cumbersome annotations of the text; the date and circumstances of writing; and a description of the typescript or manuscript on which the edited text is based as well as any unusual problems.

For the sake of brevity, the initials 'VW' and 'LW', for Virginia and Leonard Woolf respectively, have been used in the footnotes. The manuscripts and typescripts (ms and ts) are referred to by their Library reference numbers, for example, 'MH/A.5a', except that after the initial mention, the 'MH' (Monks House) has been omitted because all the papers come from that collection. The two-volume biography by Quentin Bell* is referred to simply as 'QB' followed by the appropriate volume and page numbers. The Letters, edited by Nigel Nicolson, assisted by Joanne Trautmann, are referred to as '*Letters*', followed by the appropriate volume number. No attempt has been made to be exhaustive in the identification of persons mentioned in the memoirs. In those cases where the individual was of minor or passing significance to Virginia Woolf, or significant because of being representative of a type, as the context makes clear, identification has not generally been made. Quentin Bell's biography is available for those interested in such details; also the six volumes of *Letters*, as mentioned above, and the five-volume *Diary of Virginia Woolf*, edited by Olivier Bell, assisted by Andrew McNeillie. The period in general and 'Bloomsbury' in particular are amply documented.

Introduction

This collection of autobiographical writings, although diverse, nevertheless reveals the remarkable unity of Virginia Woolf's art, thought and sensibility. The beliefs and values that underlie her work are shown in these pages to be an outgrowth of the sensibility which marked her responses to the world, from the very beginning, with a distinctive quality. The need to express this vision was perhaps the chief impetus behind the experiments with structures, techniques and style which place Virginia Woolf's novels among the most highly innovative and personal contributions in the history of the genre. These memoirs also reveal the unusual degree to which Virginia Woolf wove the facts of her life—the people, the incidents, the emotions—into the fabric of her fiction, thus testifying to the firm artistic control she exercised over that material in creating works, having the coherence and inner necessity which distinguish the highest artistic achievement.

The first selection, "Reminiscences", begun in 1907, eight years before the publication of Virginia Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*,¹⁹¹⁵ belongs to the period of her apprenticeship. At that time, she regularly assigned herself literary exercises which often took the form of short descriptive essays to be shown only to a few intimates and as much, one suspects, for their reactions and judgements as for their amusement. "Reminiscences" was intended as a 'life' of her sister Vanessa, but it is in fact a memoir of the childhood and adolescence they shared. The second item of the collection, "A Sketch of the Past", was written at the end of her career and was clearly intended to provide relief from particularly taxing literary commitments and from the deepening gloom of the second world war. The two selections are juxtaposed here because they concern the same period of Virginia Woolf's life, that is, the early years before the move to Bloomsbury.

The three pieces that follow were papers delivered between 1920 and 1936 to the Memoir Club, a group of close friends of long standing who gathered at intervals to read memoirs in which they were committed to complete candour. The intimate character of the Memoir Club is evident in the tone that pervades the three papers and contrasts sharply with that of the other selections, different as

they are from one another. The order in which the papers were written coincides with the chronological order of the events described; the first paper takes up where the preceding selection, "A Sketch of the Past", ends. The first two papers, "22 Hyde Park Gate" and "Old Bloomsbury", were written in the early 1920s when Virginia Woolf was on the threshold of artistic maturity and about to create for the novel new forms and techniques so admirably adapted to the expression of her highly personal vision. The last selection of the present volume, "Am I a Snob?", was written in the late 1930s and is, if a state of mind can be pinned down to a period, concerned chiefly with events of that decade.

The diversity of purpose which characterizes these memoirs—written for different audiences and occasions and spanning a career that lasted almost four decades—might well have resulted in an absence of coherence, a random heaping together of fragments of a life. Yet the fragments do arrange themselves into a meaningful order; a pattern emerges which expresses Virginia Woolf's view of the self generally, and herself in particular, in ways that a conventional autobiography could not have done.

That self was an elusive will o' the wisp, always just ahead on the horizon, flickering and insubstantial, yet enduring. She believed the individual identity to be always in flux, every moment changing its shape in response to the forces surrounding it: forces which were invisible emerge, others sink silently below the surface, and the past, on which the identity of the present moment rests, is never static, never fixed like a fly in amber, but as subject to alteration as the consciousness that recalls it. As she writes in "A Sketch of the Past", when she thinks she may have discovered a possible form for the memoirs: "That is, to make them include the present—at least enough of the present to serve as 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."*

Thus, in "A Sketch of the Past", this belief in the ceaseless transformation of personality is formally expressed in the juxtaposition of the present self and the past self. Virginia Woolf's present self is conveyed in the fragments of her daily life that preface each entry and in the reflective, mature consciousness which is continually

* p. 75.

searching and probing the past for meanings that could not have been evident to the self who had the experience. The collection taken as a whole, composed as it is of material written at such widely different stages in her life and in her development as a writer, also dramatizes this point of view by filtering the past through a succession of present selves. Even the last selection, "Am I a Snob?", which deals more with contemporary events than any of the other selections, leads back to Hyde Park Gate, albeit through a side entrance. In short, the collection emphasizes the active interpenetration of past and present that continually results in fresh arrangements of that elusive identity which is 'the subject of these memoirs'.

In the first selection, for example, Julia Stephen, Virginia's mother, is an enigmatic, revered, perhaps slightly resented, certainly distant figure who, though dead some dozen years, remains for the daughter a powerful, almost obsessive presence, but is not after all very credible. When Virginia Woolf writes again of Julia in "A Sketch of the Past", long after the cathartic experience of writing *To the Lighthouse*, she does so with perception and understanding gained partly, no doubt, through abandoning the unwitting subterfuge of reverence and honestly confronting her feelings towards her mother in all their ambivalence and complexity. As a result, both Julia Stephen and Virginia Woolf are much more fully realized; the slightly implausible, superficial identities created in the first memoir now reveal nuances and depths of meaning which were barely suggested in the earlier sketch. A similar increase in honesty and perception can be seen in the two portraits of Leslie Stephen. In the first sketch, Virginia Woolf's harsh but muted resentment of her father after Stella's death is at least partly responsible for the distorted and incomplete view of him and of their relationship. One would not easily sense the intensity of her feeling for him, so skilfully is it concealed. This emerges only in the later memoir written after her reading of Freud had led her to a greater understanding and acceptance of her feelings towards her father. Here shading is added to the spare lines of the sketch, creating around Leslie Stephen a psychological space in which he achieves a convincing existence. In frankly acknowledging the vehemence of her anger against him she is free to acknowledge the depth of her love and affection for him.

If life then is 'a bowl which one fills and fills and fills', each new experience added to the existing ones displaces them ever so slightly