
Part I
Textual Encounters

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1

The Lives of Houses

Woolf and Biography

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Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) was born and bred in a culture of biography and commemoration. The late nineteenth century in Britain witnessed an explosion of printed life narratives, short or full-length, accompanied by an interest in preserving any objects or locations associated with cultural heroes. In her lifetime, it became widely acknowledged that the truth about someone's life should include personal details and private moments rather than polite generalizations, and that many kinds of lives were worth noting, not just those of eminent public figures. These realizations about the value of ordinary experience inspired Woolf as a novelist, to be sure. Yet it is also worth noting how much of what Woolf wrote consisted of non-fiction life writing or commentary on documented lives of the past. Woolf was the daughter and friend of biographers, and many of her writings, including novels, touch on life narrative, with a strong attraction to the revealing intimate detail. Striving to express physical experience, Woolf also evoked objects and places that shape lives. I shall pursue Woolf's life as a biographical writer who was at the same time a haunter of houses, her own and those that seemed alive with biographical meaning.

Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen (1832–1904), was the founding editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, which ran to 63 volumes by 1900. Much of Woolf's writing can be regarded as biographical. In addition to a biography of her friend the art critic Roger Fry (1940), she produced satiric fictions, *Orlando* (1928) and *Flush* (1933), and a novel, *Jacob's Room* (1922), that in various ways dramatize the effort to recreate a life in words from fragmentary documents, objects, houses, and environment. Both father and daughter have had a profound influence on the understanding of English-language biography. Although it is often assumed that the exposure of intimate details

was a twentieth-century trend, Stephen's writings on biography anticipate a search for "familiar atmosphere" (Stephen 1956: 20) and the flawed truth of character. Extending her father's vision of biography, Woolf's biographical imagination inhabited physical space, yet always with a sense of memory and loss rather than satisfied physical possession.

Woolf's earliest publications in the new century reaped the benefit of her education at home in her father's library. Her essays often reveal strong responses to the personality of writers, not only forebears such as Laurence Sterne or Jane Austen but also the newly rediscovered diarists and correspondents such as Dorothy Osborne and John Evelyn. In essays and reviews, she declared principles for "new biography" similar to those written by her close friend (and briefly fiancé) Lytton Strachey and by Harold Nicolson (husband of Vita Sackville-West, Woolf's lover). The modernist idea of a new biography was more explicitly small-scale and idiosyncratic than Stephen and the Victorians would have it. Strachey and others debunked the pieties or public relations of family-sponsored commemorations. Crucially, women, people of all classes and walks of life, and everyday experience were coming into focus as well. Woolf's version of fresh, vital biography for the new age resembles her father's principles for good biography, with the crucial difference that the subject might be obscure or female. Biography should be neither weighted down with fact nor idealized, but honed to essential moments of being. It should concede, as Stephen also recognized, the elusiveness of memory and the unknowability of others.

As if anticipating the current intensity of interest in her own life and career, Woolf generated a trove of material to enrich biographies about her. Except in periods of enforced rest during treatment for mental illness, she wrote daily, and she leaves behind almost 4,000 letters and 30 volumes of diaries, pages that seem to keep alive an accessible woman behind the public "Mrs. Woolf," author of some 400 signed or anonymous essays. A few early studies carefully examined her fiction for innovative form and style, but for decades in the mid-twentieth century appreciation of Woolf was hampered in Britain by her characterization as a neurotic, upper-class elitist. The ground-breaking two-volume biography by her nephew Quentin Bell (1972) called attention to the rich material of Woolf's archives without dispelling this reputation. Yet Bell's biography accompanied and aided a surge in feminist criticism of Woolf's writings, and she emerged in new roles. Considerable attention centered on the novels themselves not only as examples of modernist experimentation comparable to James Joyce but also as challenges to the linear logic and power of masculine discourse, in feminine writing or *écriture féminine* (Caughie 1991; DuPlessis 1985).

Beyond the textual and theoretical studies, however, there were many that focused biographically on evidence from Woolf's life. In the 1980s readers began to find inspiration in the life of Woolf as a great woman writer who was a lesbian. Interpretations developed from her love affair with Sackville-West, the model for Orlando. Woolf's life was further reconsidered in light of her characterization of Mrs. Dalloway and her beloved Sally Seton, or of Lily Briscoe and her beloved Mrs. Ramsay. As scholars became more familiar with the fragments of autobiography and her diaries and letters,

they highlighted Woolf's trauma of being molested as a child and young woman by her half-brother, George Duckworth; Louise DeSalvo attributed Woolf's eating disorder and mental illness to this abuse (DeSalvo 1989, cited in Lee 1996: 124). Posthumous diagnosis is always dubious, yet most now agree that Woolf suffered from manic depression, with at times hallucinations. Before she began her successful writing career, she had phases of medical treatment and attempted suicide twice. The worst episodes, apparently, were triggered by the deaths of her parents and her marriage, though publication of a novel was always a perilous time. Studies have linked Woolf's experience to medical treatment at that period, as characterized by the suffering of Septimus Smith, the traumatized veteran in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925).

Biographical approaches help us to situate an author in relation to cultural history. Instead of the psychological and sexual concerns, many studies have drawn on evidence that associates Woolf with her era. By the 1980s, some regarded her as a political pioneer, focusing on the feminist classics *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1937) and on her involvement in campaigns for women's suffrage and education for working people, as well as the fact that she and Leonard Woolf attended conferences and held meetings of the Labour Party (Light 2008: 239). Others redirected attention to Woolf as a writer about the city (Squier 1985) and the real world (Zwerdling 1986). Feminist literary historians have recognized Woolf as a feminist critic and reader responding to Victorian and earlier writers (Booth 1992; Ellis 2007; Fernald 2006) and as a public intellectual (Cuddy-Kean 2003). Re-examinations have imbedded Woolf in her social position, notably Hermione Lee's *Virginia Woolf*, which begins with chapters entitled "Biography" and "Houses" (1996: 3–49). Alison Light's *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants* (2008) takes a sharp look at the conditions of everyday life for the Stephens, the Bells, the Woolfs, and associates in houses maintained by the labor of women. Rather than retell Woolf's life story, I will focus on Woolf's immersion in biography, particularly as a writer highly sensitive to physical experience and the domestic lives of houses.

A woman of Woolf's class and generation would have heard many messages to aspire to be the Angel in the House. Woolf responds to domestic space as a trap for what she called a woman of genius. But houses also hold the power of elegy to evoke memories of the dead. Houses represent families and heritage, comforts and pleasures, as well as gendered perils. Domestic space can invite yearning, as in images of an anonymous woman gazing out of a window, or disgust, shame, or horror. Her mother, a contender for the title of Angel in spite of her frequent absences from the house, died early, perhaps intensifying Woolf's attachments to childhood homes. I will visit a series of (auto)biographical houses in Woolf's life and works, although I will necessarily pass over some residences. An urban writer, Woolf also wrote evocatively of landscape. Almost every year, she and members of her family spent the summer months in a house in the country. At different stages, Woolf was prescribed rests in other people's houses or nursing homes. Some houses associated with Woolf have become landmarks, and their influence on her well-known writings is indelible. Significantly, three houses that were important in Woolf's life are now museums owned by the National Trust:

her final home, Monk's House; Charleston, her sister Vanessa Bell's home nearby in Sussex; and Knole, the vast edifice of Sackville-West's ancestors. Woolf's novels *Night and Day* (1919), *Jacob's Room*, *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *The Waves* (1938), and *Between the Acts* (1941) as well as the burlesques of biography *Orlando* and *Flush* all feature houses, whether in city or country, that bring family history and artifacts back to life. Posthumous intimacies in eloquent spaces pervade Woolf's writings in every genre. Chronology and topography as well as theme, the warp, woof, and dye of biography, reveal Woolf's attachment to the literary spirit of houses.

The London Houses

Woolf's childhood home at 22 Hyde Park Gate blended two families and traditions closely associated with London: the artistic circles in her mother's background and the Evangelical reformers in her father's. The home united the widowed Julia Prinsep Jackson Duckworth, her two sons Gerald and George, and her daughter Stella with Leslie Stephen, widower and father of a disabled daughter, Laura. Julia and Leslie had four children between 1879 and 1883: Vanessa, Thoby, Virginia, and Adrian. It was the sort of populous, hierarchical household vividly portrayed in *The Waves* and the companion essays of *The Pargiters* (1977). In five floors without electricity, some 18 people went about their designated occupations. The rooms, which included one bathroom and three water closets, were clearly divided as to the access and suitable behavior of masters and servants – a cook and six or seven maids; boys, who were sent to expensive schools and university, and girls, who were educated at home and took over household management in the mother's place; parents and children (Light 2008: 32–33). The household was characteristic of the upper middle class, although the family had some titled connections through Julia's aunt and cousins. Neighbors and relatives of respectable reformers, writers, and artists, they were also allied with lawyers, publishers, civil servants, and others who were admitted to fashionable society. The household at 22 Hyde Park Gate nevertheless diverges somewhat from the usual portrait of a family in late Victorian South Kensington, as Leslie Stephen's work as an editor and writer included hours in his study, whereas Julia Stephen was often out or away, nursing ill relatives or visiting and nursing the poor. The tea table in the front drawing room was a scene for the social rite of daughters serving tea (evoked in *Night and Day*). Vanessa and Virginia could retreat to a glassed-in side room off the back drawing room to paint and read. The former night nursery at the top of the house became Virginia's bedroom and study when she was 15 (Lee 1996: 42–43).

For years this house displayed one plaque; now it sports three blue circles attached to the white house front bearing short lines of white text. The names appear in the largest type; inscriptions are capitalized and punctuated thus:

SIR / LESLIE / STEPHEN / 1832–1904 / Scholar / and writer / lived here

Vanessa / Stephen / Vanessa Bell / 1879–1961 / Artist / Born and lived here / until 1904

Virginia / Stephen / Virginia Woolf / 1882–1941 / Novelist and Critic / Born and lived here until 1904

Many houses in London bear such blue plaques, as part of an official scheme of commemoration established in 1868 (Mole 2014). A plaque makes a house resemble a biography with a name on the cover. Although a reader walking by is not allowed to walk into the currently occupied building, the short text of the plaque allows an informed observer to open up the well-documented story. The plaques on 22 Hyde Park Gate with their shared end date of 1904 point to the fact that Stephen's death in 1904 precipitated the departure of his daughters. What these plaques do not relate, of course, are the lives of the other children or the traumatic deaths that occurred here and that molded Woolf's life.

On May 5, 1895, Julia Stephen died; Virginia was 13. The eldest daughter, Stella Duckworth, took over the household responsibilities until, against her father's jealous wishes, in 1897 she married Jack Hills and died not long after, perhaps of appendicitis and complications of pregnancy. Vanessa and Virginia came to be dominated by half-brother George Duckworth, who marched them off to social-climbing dinners and parties and, more disturbingly, fondled Virginia in her bed at night. This house, then, seemed to keep daughters in a mortifying trance. Yet in this house began the careers of two leading lights of English modernism, sister co-authors of *Hyde Park Gate News* who flourished in different ways as artist and novelist in the twentieth century. By day, Victorian Hyde Park Gate gave Virginia free tutorials with a former Oxford don. She read avidly in the library at the top of the house, including Lockhart's biography of the novelist Walter Scott and *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography* by her grandfather Sir James Stephen (Gordon 2005).

When Leslie Stephen died in 1904, Vanessa, Thoby, and Adrian abandoned Hyde Park Gate and moved to 46 Gordon Square in Bloomsbury, a shabby-genteel backwater. Virginia, who had been in medically supervised exile, belatedly moved in with her brothers and sister. This second London house, where the siblings lived till 1907, now has a blue plaque for the economist John Maynard Keynes, their Bloomsbury friend. Living in Gordon Square meant abandoning the red velvet and brown and gold, overstuffed darkness for open, electric-lit, white-walled rooms, where family treasures and portraits could be displayed afresh (Lee 1996: 200–201). As Vanessa wrote in a 1905 letter, it could be a relief to manage "a household all much of the same age," an unorthodox arrangement at that era (Lee 1996: 203). Here, the sisters indeed began their careers. Virginia began to publish reviews and to write fiction, working on what became *The Voyage Out* (1915). As a young reviewer, Woolf reflected on the fascination with writers' houses and on contemporary pilgrimages. "Haworth, November 1904," her first piece accepted for publication (published in 1905 by the *Guardian*), tours the Brontë shrine and questions such biographical pursuits:

I do not know whether pilgrimages to the shrines of famous men ought not to be condemned as sentimental journeys. It is better to read Carlyle in your own study chair than to visit the sound-proof room and pore over the manuscripts at Chelsea. (1986: 5)

Sentimental journeys, in the more positive sense of explorations of feeling, are the substance of many of Woolf's essays and diaries; she offers a precedent for a house-centered approach to literary lives, yet is a little embarrassed by the inspection of personal things.

This early essay's reference to Carlyle is telling. In 1895, the year Julia Stephen died, Leslie had chaired the committee to found the museum in the house where his friends Thomas and Jane Carlyle had lived – part of a trend toward such commemoration. By 1905 Woolf had visited the Carlyle museum at least twice: on January 29, 1897, with Stephen himself, and again in 1898 with Vanessa and their cousin Hester Ritchie, granddaughter of the novelist William Makepeace Thackeray (Bradshaw 2003: 25). Woolf's diary in 1897 notes "C's sound proof room, with double walls – His writing table, and his pens, and scraps of the manuscripts – Pictures of him and her everywhere" (Gordon 1985: 75). Woolf's first publication in the prestigious *Times Literary Supplement* (also in 1905) was "Literary Geography"; instead of narrating a visit to a literary home, it reviewed two studies of every place a writer had visited, lived, and written about: *The Thackeray Country* by Lewis Melville and *The Dickens Country* by F. G. Kitton. Woolf's essay states:

We are either pilgrims from sentiment, who find something stimulating to the imagination in the fact that Thackeray rang this very door bell or that Dickens shaved behind that identical window, or we are scientific [...] and visit the country where the great novelist lived in order to see to what extent he was influenced by his surroundings. (1986: 32)

Whether motivated as a fan or a scholar, the collector of literary habitats seems a bit misguided: "A writer's country is a territory within his own brain"; "phantom cities" should not be turned "into tangible brick and mortar," nor should great writers be posthumously confined to "earthly houses."

Yet Woolf knew the shaping influences of homes. The famous Thursday evenings and Friday Club of the Bloomsbury Group began in the earthly house of Gordon Square in 1905. Drawn to Thoby Stephen, fellow members of the Apostles at Cambridge University converged on the London household (Lee 1996: 216). Debates, readings, and discussions of plays, art, and contemporary issues gave the house the aura of a cultural center. After a tour of Greece with Virginia, Vanessa, and Violet Dickinson (Woolf's emotional guardian), the talented and beloved Thoby died of typhoid in this house on November 20, 1906. World War I brought the death of many more young men and Woolf blended this grief in *Jacob's Room*, an experimental elegy for the missing beautiful youths; as the title suggests, Jacob is evoked by the spaces and things he lived among. Vanessa and Virginia remained close friends with Thoby's Cambridge associates, including Leonard Woolf, Lytton Strachey, and Clive Bell. When Vanessa married Clive in 1907, the remaining unmarried siblings, Virginia and Adrian, set up house at 29 Fitzroy Square, another of the elegant terraced squares in Bloomsbury. This house now boasts two plaques that illustrate the contiguity of famous writers who in fact were never present at the same time. A dark bronze rectangle was erected by the St. Pancras Borough Council in 1951: "George Bernard Shaw lived in this house

from 1887 to 1898. 'From the coffers of his genius he enriched the world.' " Prompted by Vanessa's son Quentin's biography and a surge of feminist criticism, the Greater London Council added a blue plaque in 1974: "Virginia / Stephen / (Virginia Woolf) / 1882–1941 / Novelist and Critic / lived here / 1907–1911."

Even more than Gordon Square, the Fitzroy Square phase was experienced as a transformation, as if for the first time in human history respectable men and women could talk openly about sex, including homosexuality. For a young, unmarried woman to live with her brother and to entertain various unmarried male friends was unheard of. It was a further move away from the vertical regulation of South Kensington, toward a more horizontal and fluid interaction among peers. Woolf recollected both that "Everything was on trial" and opening up, and that she felt suppressed by the homosexual coterie (Lee 1996: 203, 209, 239). It was not a happy ménage, as she and Adrian were usually at odds. Life in Fitzroy Square was only relatively level; it still required a hierarchy of paid service. The sister was necessarily the mistress of the household, and thus began Woolf's history of difficulty with servants: Sophie Farrell, who had come from Hyde Park Gate, and Nellie Boxall.

When Woolf declared of modernism in "Character in Fiction" (1924): "on or about December 1910, human character changed" (Woolf 1988: 421), she anticipated the TV serials *Upstairs, Downstairs* and *Downton Abbey* in the matter of servants and houses. And this declaration refers to the era of Fitzroy Square. In "Character in Fiction," Woolf marked the social upheaval since 1910 in "the character of one's cook," perhaps thinking of her own contest of wills with Nellie Boxall (Light 2008: 168–171): the Victorian cook was a monster in the "lower depths"; the Georgian is on free terms with the residents of upper floors. Perhaps reminded of revisiting Carlyle "country" as she had done again in 1909, Woolf cites the example of the Carlyle marriage:

the horrible domestic tradition which made it seemly for a woman of genius to spend her time chasing beetles, scouring saucepans, instead of writing books. All human relations have shifted – those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. (1988: 422)

In 1911 Adrian and Virginia moved to 38 Brunswick Square, where they rented rooms to Maynard Keynes and Duncan Grant, who were lovers. By December, Leonard Woolf had become another tenant (Lee 1996: 300). After a difficult courtship, Virginia decided to accept Leonard's offer and they married in 1912. In September 1913, she attempted suicide, and she was mentally ill for much of 1915. By 1917 the Woolfs were settled in Hogarth House in the suburban Richmond, chosen as a stable place for her health. Her breakdown, whatever its causes, had seemed tied to the publication of *The Voyage Out*. Living in Richmond, she published her first novel of the streets and neighborhoods of London, *Night and Day*, which features a heroine raised in Carlyle's neighborhood in Chelsea. Katharine Hilbery, said to be modeled on Vanessa, inhabits a biographical workshop. She is helping her mother to write the (unwritable) life of the

great Victorian poet, Mrs. Hilbery's father. Katharine also keeps a private museum of her grandfather's desk, pen, spectacles, slippers, and portrait. The plot of Woolf's novel, like social arrangements in Bloomsbury, tries to imagine alternatives to the symmetrical heterosexual pairing of classic comedy.

Today, houses in Chelsea boast plaques commemorating writers who were more or less known to the Stephen family. Hogarth House in Richmond now has a blue plaque: "In this house / LEONARD and / VIRGINIA WOOLF / lived / 1915–1924 / and founded the / Hogarth Press / 1917." Here, the childless partners Leonard and Virginia taught themselves hand printing, at first as an occupation to keep her calm and then as a serious and often successful enterprise. The Hogarth Press was influential in modernist literature and was the basis of several transformative relationships with writers whom they published – T. S. Eliot, Katherine Mansfield, and Vita Sackville-West, among others (Wilson 1987: 100–101). At first, Virginia set all the type and Leonard printed – slow, antiquated labor – before they hired a series of assistants, who, like the house servants, might complain of the cramped dark basement and unrealistic expectations. When the Woolfs acquired a larger press, it had to be placed on the ground floor in case the old house could not bear the weight. Vanessa Bell designed the book jackets in the Omega Workshop style immortalized in the museums at Charleston and Monk's House in Sussex. The press freed Woolf to publish independently of her half-brother Gerald Duckworth's publishing house. Husband and wife, working side by side in their publishing house, also produced a steady stream of reviews and articles for newspapers and journals, essential sources of income. Like her father, Woolf worked from home, but now both spouses collaborated.

Finding her way to a new voice with her own press, Woolf felt confined in the Richmond retreat and craved a return to street haunting in London (Wilson 1987: 104). In 1924, at Virginia's insistence, the Woolfs and the press moved to 52 Tavistock Square in Bloomsbury, where their friends still lived. The press expanded on the ground floor and they lived on upper floors, with the offices of solicitors on two floors in between. *Mrs. Dalloway* emerged from her writing not only about London streets, shops, and parks, but also about country houses. In the period of Tavistock Square, among many essays and reviews, Woolf returned to the themes of the Carlyles' house. Having experienced her love affair with Sackville-West, and having developed the argument about "women and fiction" and gender and culture that became *A Room of One's Own*, she was ready to issue a more open challenge to the subordination not only of servants but also of wives. Reviewing two novels by Geraldine Jewsbury in "Geraldine and Jane" (1929), she was "discreet" for her publisher (Lee 1996: 409), yet also voiced women's passions and career frustration. The review would fit well in her beloved Lytton's iconoclastic *Eminent Victorians* (1918). And, once more, it suggests the secrecy of family homes and the biographical battlegrounds they become. The novelist and influential editor Jewsbury at first venerated Thomas Carlyle and then fell in love with his wife (N. Clarke 1990: 14), who deserved a soundproof room – or a professorship – of her own. The wife's frustrated lover writes letters about the longing for a future in which Geraldine

and Jane could fulfill their ambitions apart from men, in a vision that anticipates *A Room of One's Own*.

In the thriving Tavistock Square era, “Mrs. Woolf” was a famous bestseller and likely to be regarded as part of the establishment. Nationally, the Great War, the General Strike, and the Depression had confirmed the change that Woolf had dated in 1910: the hierarchy of the Victorian house no longer held. At the Carlyle’s House museum, interest in the servants and the wife had begun before the turn of the century, but Woolf confirms, after another visit there in 1931, that the biographical house indicts the Victorian domestic tradition. Woolf’s “Great Men’s Houses,” one of “Six Essays on London Life” in the British *Good Housekeeping* published between December 1931 and December 1932, registers the transition from the Victorian to the modern “social order” and seems to prepare for *The Pargiters* (McVicker 2003: 143–144), which in turn laid the groundwork of both *Three Guineas* and *The Years*. It is as if she displaces her own memoir of growing up as a daughter in Hyde Park Gate (or, like Katharine, in Chelsea) into a preserved, three-dimensional biography, and the physical facts of daily life become allegorical.

One hour spent in 5 Cheyne Row will tell us more [...] than we can learn from all the biographies. Go down into the kitchen. There, in two seconds, one is made acquainted with a fact that escaped the attention of [Carlyle’s biographer] Froude [...] – they had no water laid on. Every drop that the Carlyles used [...] had to be pumped by hand [...] And here [...] is the cracked yellow tin bath, [...] which had to be filled with the cans of hot water that the maid first pumped and then boiled and then carried up three flights of stairs from the basement.

The high old house without water, without electric light, without gas fires, [...] was served by one unfortunate maid. All through the mid-Victorian age the house was necessarily a battlefield [...] The stairs [...] seem worn by the feet of harassed women carrying tin cans. (Woolf 1975: 32–33)

In a note in *Three Guineas* Woolf describes the labor of various maids as chaperones of Victorian ladies, and imagines that the maids brood on their resentment of the patriarchal system “in the darkness of the beetle-haunted basement [...] It is much to be regretted that no lives of maids, from which a more fully documented account could be constructed, are to be found in the *Dictionary of National Biography*” (ch. 2, n. 36). In a sense, Leslie Stephen helped to preserve “The Maid’s Room” (comparable to *Jacob’s Room*) by leading the effort to establish the memorial museum. The 1930s saw the collapse of many great estates of Woolf’s childhood, and the increase of National Trust museums in houses small and large.

London, happily, is becoming full of great men’s houses, bought for the nation and preserved entire with the chairs they sat on and the cups they drank from, their umbrellas [...] And it is no frivolous curiosity that sends us to Dickens’s house and Johnson’s house and Carlyle’s house and Keats’s house. We know them from their houses – it would seem to be a fact that writers stamp themselves upon their possessions more indelibly

than other people [...] They seem always to possess [...] a faculty for housing themselves appropriately, for making the table, the chair, the curtain, the carpet into their own image. (Woolf 1975: 31)

Woolf repeats terms of property and possession that suggest writers can control the effects of their surroundings. In her own life, she had created an enduring space, Monk's House, but in Sussex rather than London. In 1939, during the Blitz, bombs destroyed houses near 52 Tavistock, prompting the Woolfs to rent 32 Mecklenburg Square in Bloomsbury, which in turn was destroyed in 1940. London was never full of great women's houses, and hers was not preserved. The rest of Woolf's abbreviated life was set in Sussex.

The Country Houses

For years during her childhood, the Stephen household with its servants decamped for a rented summer home on the southwest coast, Talland House in St. Ives, Cornwall (now a Grade II listed building). The characters of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* reflect Leslie Stephen's background as a former university don and intellectual, and Julia Stephen's visiting of the poor and ill. The fictional setting has moved to the Hebrides, but the seascape and the perspectives of the children and guests, mother, father, and servants, emerge from Woolf's memories. The H-like structure of the novel is linked by "Time Passes," which seems to personify the house as a mourner. The family is absent for 10 years because of World War I and the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay and characters resembling Stella and Thoby. It is the servants who bring the place back to life. Soon after publishing *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf wrote a fantasia inspired by the history of another kind of country house, one of the "great houses" of ancient ruling families. *Orlando* is a parody of biography, its protagonist an immortal poet modeled on Woolf's living lover, Vita Sackville-West, whose family owned Knole, with its 365 rooms and its anecdotes of Queen Elizabeth I. Orlando is a boy when he encounters Shakespeare, and he sojourns in town and country through the centuries, taking on the camouflage of each literary age. Orlando transforms into a woman and discovers the constraints of domesticity in the Victorian period before experiencing the freedom of androgynous union in the present. In all the critical attention to *Orlando*, it is seldom noted that its house is as endangered as the Ramsays'. The 1920s were a kind of fire sale of country estates as the teams of servants they required found education and work, and as taxes and falling agricultural revenues forced titled families to give up the opulent displays of inequality. Woolf honors the effect of English country houses on literature, and roots Orlando's inspiration in the iconic oak tree at her family's estate, but she also shows that a daughter cannot inherit such a property and should celebrate the emergence of multifarious identities in the present.

Sussex was Woolf's refuge, an inspiration for balanced life on a smaller scale than the great estates. The appeal of the country village near the coast was in keeping

with pastoral or georgic literature evoking rural harmony, though the Woolfs and their friends avoided idealizing the provinces. Asheham was the second of the houses Vanessa and Virginia rented near Lewes, in Sussex, and it was the first country house that the Woolfs shared, from 1912 to 1919; Woolf wrote “A Haunted House” about its ghosts (Lee 1996: 311–313). And it was no idyll but a nightmare for the servants, worse, perhaps, than the Carlyles’ house.

In 1919 the owner needed to reclaim Asheham, and Leonard and Virginia bought Monk’s House, not far from Vanessa’s uproarious Charleston. In an illustrated collection for the National Trust, *Writers at Home*, contributors Quentin Bell and John Lehmann (Leonard Woolf’s assistant at Hogarth Press) express their different attachments to Charleston and Monk’s House, charmed places that are now museums (Bell 1985; Lehmann 1985). Like the current visitor’s pamphlet at Monk’s House, essays in *Writers at Home* heighten the charm (or literary heroism) through drawbacks: the deep chill indoors (breaking ice in the wash basin; E. M. Forster burning his trousers as he tried to warm up at a heater); small rooms (only one guest per weekend in the early days); and simple food. The memoir by the first major biographer of Woolf centers on so-called “Little Bloomsbury by the Sea” – though Woolf’s nephew warns that it was not by the sea and that “Bloomsbury” is a perilous concept (Bell 1985: 169). Bell recounts Woolf’s description of the long, low house, never actually inhabited by monks; it united a pair of workmen’s cottages, without electricity, running water, or central heating, with a fine large garden and views. Leonard felt that both their homes, Monk’s House and Hogarth House in Richmond, were agreeably haunted by former inhabitants and a depth of civilization (Hill-Miller 2001: 249–250). Virginia was especially pleased with the primitive family portrait that came with the house. As Bell put it, “Virginia had always been moved by the idea of a house’s previous owners remaining to ‘haunt’ it lovingly” (Hill-Miller 2001: 245). Lehmann, who had been an employee staying in the house (though not a servant), recalls Monk’s House as it was when Leonard and Virginia were alive, claiming alternately that the house is still intact and that it is irrevocably changed. When Lehmann had visited Leonard alone after Virginia’s death, it was as he remembered it, save “the absence of Virginia herself” (Lehmann 1985: 167). Now, in anticipation of writing the essay for the National Trust album, he visits the Monk’s House museum much as Woolf had visited the Carlyles’ museum. It is a display of irrevocable loss. Leonard’s house plants are gone, though Lehmann pays tribute to the Woolfs’ two favorite elms in the garden, nicknamed Leonard and Virginia. But Woolf’s colorfully covered collection of books have gone to “some ardent collector on the other side of the Atlantic” (Lehmann 1985: 159). More recently, the two elms have fallen, and the bookshelves have been refilled with books by the Woolfs “presented by the late Quentin Bell” and others (National Trust 1998: 6). But there are preserved traces of the inhabitants. At the further end of the garden is “the hut” or “writing lodge” that she used in warm weather (Hill-Miller 2001; Lehmann 1985). The compact building is now enclosed in sealed windows, displaying an empty chair at the desk with a fictitious manuscript. The ashes of both Virginia and Leonard are buried in the garden, and each has a plaque and a bust. Woolf’s remains belong at Monk’s House,

though she was not born there and died in the nearby river. Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner, where so many of the English writers are remembered, is the sort of national honor and canon that Woolf rejected. And, traditionally, suicides are not buried in churches.

The Woolfs had found a cottage for weekends on a scale more typical for the nuclear families of the later twentieth century. Even before World War II confined them to the country, they had begun to connect, as employers, with village life in Rodmell, much as the Stephens had at St. Ives (Lee 1996; Light 2008), with somewhat lessening class difference. Woolf's unfinished final novel, *Between the Acts*, written in view of the garden and low Sussex downs, evokes the historical layering of Sussex, with motor cars near the Roman road. The imagined ancestral country house in that novel had been incestuous and adulterous – worse by melodramatic degrees than Hyde Park Gate. But it also claimed its deep connection to the antecedents of civilization, with its library recalling ancient myths, its legend of the lady drowned in the pool, its seductive greenhouse, its decaying church. Privacy, the home, has become communal reverie and chant on the occasion of a village pageant that should prevent the destruction of England. The house is more of a stage set than any place where Woolf had actually lived, but it is set in her homeland, in rural England. In the end the country house seems to unite with the open air landscape and a new play begins.

Woolf's writing is preoccupied with biography, which is to say, with a curious blend of description of decor and lifestyle as well as elegy. Her writings and her life may be brought into focus through these double lenses, the material and immaterial, or "granite and rainbow," as she terms the "truth" and "personality" to be captured by biography (Woolf 1958). While much that we refer to when we use the words "Virginia Woolf" lives in the brain and cannot be confined to earthly houses, the textual Woolf shows us fresh ways to respond to tangible bricks and mortar.

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