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| Woolf, (Adeline) Virginia (1882-1941) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| File: Woolf\_Portrait.jpg  Figure 1 Virginia Woolf photographed by Gisèle Freund in 1939.  Source: <http://kaykeys.net/passions/virginiawoolf/index.html>  Virginia Woolf was one of the foremost literary innovators of the early twentieth century. A novelist, essayist, short-story writer and literary critic, she was also instrumental in disseminating the work of other key modernist writers, through the Hogarth Press which she ran with her husband Leonard Woolf. Author of such major works as *Mrs Dalloway¸ To the Lighthouse* and *A Room of One’s Own*, she was a key figure in the Bloomsbury Group of writers, artists and intellectuals active in the early twentieth century. Although stigma attached to her bouts of mental illness, culminating in her suicide by drowning in March 1941, for many years overshadowed appreciations of her literary output, she is now recognised as one of the most important figures in the literature and culture of the period, whether in terms of the feminist politics of her work, or her ground-breaking experiments with narrative form and technique. |
| Virginia Woolf was one of the foremost literary innovators of the early twentieth century. A novelist, essayist, short-story writer, feminist polemicist and literary critic, she was also instrumental in disseminating the work of other key modernist writers, through the Hogarth Press which she ran with her husband Leonard Woolf. Author of such major works as *Mrs Dalloway¸ To the Lighthouse* and *A Room of One’s Own*, she was a key figure in the Bloomsbury Group of writers, artists and intellectuals active in the early twentieth century. Although stigma attached to her bouts of mental illness, culminating in her suicide by drowning in March 1941, for many years overshadowed appreciations of her literary output, she is now recognised as one of the most important figures in the literature and culture of the period, whether in terms of the feminist politics of her work, or her ground-breaking experiments with narrative form and technique.  File: Woolf\_Father.jpg  Figure 2 Woolf photographed with her father Sir Leslie Stephen in 1902.  Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Virginia_Woolf_with_her_father,_Sir_Leslie_Stephen.jpg>  Virginia Woolf was born Adeline Virginia Stephen to Sir Leslie Stephen, author and mountaineer, and Julia Prinsep Stephen. Her family were wealthy and well-connected: her father was the first editor of the dictionary of National Biography, and was related through his first marriage to the novelist William Makepeace Thackeray, so the Stephens’ social circle included some of the foremost literary and political figures of the day, including Henry James, Thomas Hardy and George Meredith. The young Virginia was encouraged to read widely, and began writing at an early age. With her sister Vanessa Bell, who was to become an important artist and interior designer, and brothers Thoby and Adrian, she produced the Hyde Park Gate News, named after the street where the family lived, from 1891 to 1895. This handwritten publication included serialisations of Woolf’s first sustained pieces of fiction, co-authored with Thoby when she was ten, entitled ‘A Cockney's Farming Experience’ and ‘The Experiences of a Pater-familias’. Although she had relatively little formal education, Woolf was tutored at home in a range of subjects, and also attended classes up to degree level at King’s College London between 1897 and 1902, in History, Greek, Latin and German.  Following their father’s death in 1904 (their mother having died in 1895), the Stephen siblings set up home in Bloomsbury, a then unfashionable part of London, and established a bohemian household hosting meetings of young intellectuals and artists (mainly friends of Thoby’s from his time at Cambridge University) who were to become known as the Bloomsbury Group. These included the art critic Clive Bell who married Vanessa in 1907, the economist John Maynard Keynes, the artist Duncan Grant who later became Vanessa’s lover and artistic collaborator, and the then civil servant LEONARD WOOLF, who lodged with Virginia and her brother Adrian from 1911. After a brief period of courtship, Virginia accepted Leonard’s marriage proposal in 1912 and they were married in August of that year.  File: Bloomsbury.jpg  Figure 3 Gordon Square in Bloomsbury, London, where Woolf and her siblings lived from 1904.  Source: <http://dovegreyreader.typepad.com/dovegreyreader_scribbles/2010/03/whistlestop-london.html>  Woolf began publishing her writing, mainly essays in literary criticism, in her early twenties. By the time of her marriage, she had also embarked on her first novel, a bildungsroman published as *The Voyage Out* in 1915. While relatively conventional in terms of narrative form, the subject matter of this novel – a young English girl emerging into adulthood during a trip to South America – already hinted at the gender politics which were to concern her all her life. Her next fictional publication was ‘The Mark on the Wall’, a short story of immense narrative innovation exploring interiority as rarely before in literary fiction. It was published with Leonard’s ‘Three Jews’ as *Two Stories* in 1917 – the first publication by the Hogarth Press, which she and Leonard had set up in their home in Richmond earlier that year. Though they initially struggled with the technical difficulties involved in hand printing, the Press soon became a respected enterprise, publishing works by such key figures as Katherine Mansfield, T. S. Eliot, and E. M. Forster. Hogarth were also the authorized publishers for the work of Sigmund Freud in its first English translations.  1919 saw the publication of two contrasting works by Woolf. Her short story *Kew Gardens* continued the intense exploration of interiority and deployment of densely poetic prose found in ‘The Mark on the Wall’, while her next novel, *Night and Day*, was in a similar broadly realist style to that of *The Voyage Out*. Its themes and concerns, however, in particular its depiction of the city and preoccupation with gender politics, are recognisably modernist. Her major break with traditional narrative in the novel form came with *Jacob’s Room* (1922). While drawing to a large extent on the short life of her brother Thoby, who had died of typhoid fever in 1906 after a trip the Stephen siblings made together to Greece, it challenged conventional conceptions of character and form through the conspicuous absence of the supposedly central figure. The novel is also an elegy for the millions of young men killed during World War One. The late teens and early 20s were also to be Woolf’s most productive in terms of published short fiction. The collection *Monday or Tuesday*, published in 1921 and illustrated with woodcuts by Vanessa, brought together eight pieces which together display some of her most radical literary innovations in perspective, genre and language. Woolf would go on to publish only a few more short stories in her lifetime, though Leonard included some previously unpublished ones in his collection *A Haunted House* (1944). However, she wrote dozens more short stories that remained unpublished until well after her death, the form clearly remaining one in which she could experiment with new techniques and narrative voices.  File: Bell\_Portrait.jpg  Figure 4 A portrait of Woolf by her sister, Vanessa Bell (1912)  Source: <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw08084/Virginia-Woolf-ne-Stephen>  Woolf’s most celebrated works date from the mid-1920s. *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) is a one-day novel using what Woolf called her ‘tunnelling’ technique to fill out the characters’ pasts through lengthy excursions into memory, while at the same time linking them through a fluid narrative often moving rapidly from one perspective to another. Though written several years after World War One, the novel is shot through with war trauma; like REBECCA WEST’s *The Return of the Soldier*, it depicts a shell-shocked war veteran as the co-protagonist to its eponymous central character, an upper-class socialite. Her next novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927) was Woolf’s most self-confessedly autobiographical novel in its depiction of the patriarch and matriarch Mr and Mrs Ramsay. Woolf stated in a diary entry that ‘writing the *Lighthouse* laid [mother and father] in my mind’. Her narrative innovation continued in this novel’s densely sensuous prose and its structure: the novel is made up of three sections, two single days separated by the much shorter ‘Time Passes’ in which many years go by.  After the psychological demands of writing *To the Lighthouse*, two contrasting projects followed. Theplayful pseudo-biography *Orlando* (1928) depicted the life and times of a sex-changing protagonist who lives for 400 years. Explicitly based on her then lover, the writer Vita Sackville-West, the novel drew on Sackville-West’s own complicated aristocratic heritage, and included photographs of Sackville-West as Orlando. *A Room of One’s Own*, published in 1929, was based on a lecture entitled ‘Women and Fiction’ Woolf gave to a women’s college at Cambridge University in 1928, and is now a key text of feminist literary criticism and politics. Though very different in style and genre from *Orlando*, both works share the desire to challenge traditional gender identities.  File: Cover.jpg  Figure 5 The cover of the first edition of *A Room of One's Own*, designed by Woolf's sister Vanessa Bell and published by the Woolf's own Hogarth Press.  Source: <http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/exhibits/hogarth/comercl.htm>  Woolf’s next novel was arguably her most radical. *The Waves* (1931) alternates between the voices of six friends – or possibly aspects of the same character – describing their interrelations from childhood to maturity, with interludes describing the sun rising and then setting on a seaside landscape including an apparently abandoned house, devoid of human presence. Woolf herself envisaged it as an ‘abstract mystical eyeless book: a playpoem’. As if to emphasise her versatility, she then wrote another biography of sorts, from the perspective of the eponymous Flush, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning’s spaniel. Light-hearted in tone this text, published in 1933, playfully provokes received notions about human and animal interaction and psychology.  Audio Clip: *Craftsmanship*  Figure 6 The only surviving recording of Woolf's voice: an essay entitled *Craftsmanship* which she wrote for broadcast on BBC radio, 29 April 1937.  Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8czs8v6PuI>    *The Years* (1937) is often seen as a return to a more conventional narrative mode, though it was originally envisaged as a more experimental text, alternating between a fictional family history from 1880 to ‘the present,’ and passages of political and social history. Ultimately Woolf was dissatisfied with this experiment and the two texts were developed and published separately. The non-fiction part appeared as the anti-war feminist polemic *Three Guineas* (1938). Her final novel, *Between the Acts*, was published posthumously in 1941. A one-day narrative like *Mrs Dalloway*, this text depicts the staging of a village pageant celebrating English history; written in the shadow of war, its investigations of nationhood, community and violence speak powerfully to its historical context.  Alongside the fictional work for which she is best known, Woolf is also recognised as one of the foremost literary critics of her generation. She published dozens of essays and reviews, many of which were collected and republished during her lifetime. Woolf died with a major project on the history of English literature, which she had provisionally entitled ‘Anon,’ already part underway.  File: TimeMagazine.jpg  Figure 7 Woolf photographed by Man Ray for the cover of *Time* magazine in 1937.  Source: <http://kaykeys.net/passions/virginiawoolf/index.html> List of Works:Collected Works *The Complete Shorter Fiction* (1985)  *Essays* (6 vols, 1986-2011)  *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* (5 vols, 1977-1984)  *The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1888–*  *1941* (6 vols, 1975–1980) Novels *The Voyage Out* (1915)  *Night and Day* (1919)  *Jacob's Room* (1922)  *Mrs Dalloway* (1925)  *To the Lighthouse* (1927)  *Orlando* (1928)  *The Waves* (1931)  *Flush* (1933)  *The Years* (1937)  *Between the Acts* (1941) Short Story Collections *Monday or Tuesday* (1921)  *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories* (1944)  *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf* (1989) Drama Freshwater: A Comedy (1976) Essays *Modern Fiction* (1919)  *The Common Reader* (1925)  *A Room of One's Own* (1929)  *On Being Ill* (1930)  *The London Scene* (1931)  *The Common Reader: Second Series* (1932)  *Three Guineas* (1938)  *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942)  *The Moment and Other Essays* (1947)  *The Captain's Death Bed And Other Essays* (1950)  *Granite and Rainbow* (1958)  *Books and Portraits* (1978)  *Women And Writing* (1979) Biography *Roger Fry: A Biography* (1940) Autobiographical writings and diaries *A Writer’s Diary* (1953) [selected diary entries]  *Moments of Being* (1976) [autobiographical writings]  *A Moment's Liberty: the shorter diary* (1990)  *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals, 1897–1909* (1990)  *Travels With Virginia Woolf* (1993) [travel writings]  *The Platform of Time: Memoirs of Family and Friends* (2008) [selected biographical writings] Letters *Congenial Spirits: The Selected Letters* (1993) |
| Further reading:  (Bell)  (Briggs)  (Gordon)  (Lee)  (Rose) |