

Virginia Woolf

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Virginia Woolf “is considered one of the most important modernist 20th-century authors. She pioneered the use of stream of consciousness as a narrative device.” She was born in 1882, the daughter of Lesley Stephens, A notable man of letters She had a sister, Vanessa who later married Clive Bell, the art critic. She attended the Ladies department of King’s College, London, from 1897 to 1901, married Leonard Woolf in 1912, published the first of --novels, Mrs. Dalloway, in 1925. She committed suicide in 1941 after years of mental health problems. There is an extensive article in Wikipedia which provides an account of her life and works.

Her connection to Fleet Street was fairly short. At the time of her marriage, she was living at 38 Brunswick Square in Bloomsbury. Her brother Adrian lived on one floor, she on another, with Maynard Keynes and Duncan Grant sharing the ground floor. Leonard had a room on the fourth floor. The whole arrangement was considered scandalous at the time.

She and Leonard went on their honeymoon, and on their return moved into a room in Cliffords Inn, off Fleet Street, which was a decayed Inn of Chancery with decrepit buildings let out mostly as single rooms. Virginia was a great letter- writer, and also kept a diary for most of her life, so we get a fascinating glimpse of the life of a young married couple at the time. Of course, they



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were a rather unusual couple, with their wide circle of friends, and their constant invitations to stay with their friends in the country

She wrote from 13 Cliffords Inn to Katherine Cox in November 1912

“Dear Bruin,

As you can imagine, it took me about 20 minutes to discover your note – and then look on the floor. When I did I was in a state of keen joy, - and at once fastened the embroideries first to a table, then a sofa, finally to our two armchairs. Desmond [MacCarthy] chanced to come in, I put him against the purple one; Leonard has the one with the green border. I never saw two more handsome men. They are lovely - the embroideries, and in the daylight they will be better still. My life as you know is one long agony of emulation and envy, and I’ve already had the joy of hearing my rooms praised – very highly, more highly than Nessa’s; on account of your present.

I came in tonight 2 minutes I daresay after you went waddling across London with about 6 parcels – 3 mutton cutlets, eggs, a cake, and a pound of potatoes. We had

dinner in tonight off these Karin came to lunch, old Cousins half way through the afternoon, so I was late going out, and thus missed Bru Cox; but she might name another day

Our servant shows extreme merit in not minding the sight of us naked which she has every morning. Indeed this is the kind of thing I hear. “And your husband, Mrs. Worsley – now what Society is he insured in? – A postman? – O well – they must give him a rise then after 5 years, in the Naval Reserve too” and all this with Leonard naked in his bath – Mrs. Worsley leaning on the W.C. door looking at him.” and then from 13 Cliffords Inn on 17 May 1913 to Lady Robert Cecil

“My dear Nelly,

It’s very bad luck but we are going to Asheham today. Perhaps you will ask us another time – at least which is what we hope.

But please come to tea again – I’ve just got some new curtains and rearranged the room. – said to be a great improvement.

The gentleman opposite has just got up in his pyjamas and fed his canary while that art student in the garret has got about 20 pigeons sitting on the sill Yr V.W.”



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Additional notes

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Source: Letters 651 and 699 in The Letters of Virginia Woolf Volume Two 1912–1922. HBJ Books. 1982 ISBN 978-0-15-650882-7.

Further reading: Wikipedia article “Virginia Woolf”