REFLECTIONS OF A LIFE: BIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES OF VIRGINIA WOOLF ILLUMINATED BY THE MUSIC AND DRAMA OF DOMINICK ARGENTO'S SONG CYCLE, FROM THE DIARY OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

D.M.A. DOCUMENT

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Musical Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

by

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1996

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ABSTRACT

The 1975 Pulitzer Prize for music was awarded to American composer Dominick Argento for his song cycle, *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*. For this composition, Argento selected eight excerpts from Virginia Woolf's diary ranging chronologically from 1919-1941. Each of the eight entries depicts a different aspect of Virginia Woolf's life.

This document is designed to enhance future performances of Argento's song cycle by offering a performer's analysis of the composition in relationship to Virginia Woolf's life. Eight chapters correspond directly to the eight Argento settings. The chapters are divided into three sections: 1) Virginia Woolf's eight complete diary entries as they appear in *A Writer's Diary*; 2) Biographical perspectives of Virginia Woolf containing pertinent information about her life and works; 3) Examination of the musical and dramatic elements employed by Argento in each song.

Deeper knowledge of the complexities of Virginia Woolf affords performers a heightened perception and insight into Dominick Argento's *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*. 
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INTRODUCTION

"To know the psyche of Virginia Woolf, ... one would have to be either God or Virginia, preferably God."¹ Thus writes Quentin Bell, Woolf’s official biographer and nephew. Since the publication of Bell’s book, a plethora of materials exploring the life and works of Virginia Woolf have appeared on library shelves. The mass of information seems to be endless, and opinions are as numerous as they are varied. The list of her biographers continues to increase. This document is not intended as yet another biography of Virginia Woolf. Woolf herself writes,

My God, how does one write a Biography? ... How can one deal with facts--so many and so many and so many?²

It is my intent instead to provide the potential performer of Dominick Argento’s song cycle, From the Diary of Virginia Woolf, with glimpses into an interesting persona. In preparation for any stage role, a performer must first define and explore every aspect of the character being portrayed in order to bring it to life. Virginia Woolf is no exception. The fact that she was a living person, not a
fictional character created in the mind of an author or composer, makes the task even more challenging. Argento has provided a sketch of Woolf through his composition. It is the responsibility of the performer to complete the portrait. The greater the knowledge of the subject, the clearer the portrait. It is necessary then, to answer as many questions as possible about the life of Virginia Woolf. It is my hope that the information contained in these pages will not only stimulate curiosity, but create in the performer a desire to delve deeper into the complexities of Virginia Woolf. Yet, as Bell's quote suggests, it is impossible to "know" Virginia Woolf. It is equally impossible to completely recreate her on stage.

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that Argento's song cycle is a work of art, and as with any work of art, individual interpretation is an essential element. Argento's composition is his own personal expression or reaction to Woolf's words. The performers, both singer and pianist, add additional layers until ultimately all elements are combined to create a single work of art.

This artistic presentation will then be interpreted by the listener. In this connection, Argento believes that

... art—and music especially—is a form of communication: however, I think it is less a
matter of communication between the artist and the viewer/reader/or listener than a matter of communication between the viewer/reader/or listener and himself, provoked by the artist's skill.³

Art evokes personal responses. Each response is as unique as the individual responding. Similarly, no two people will ever have exactly the same view of Virginia Woolf. Perhaps Woolf expressed it best when she wrote:

*Do we then know nobody?—only our versions of them, which as likely as not, are emanations from ourselves.*⁴

In this instance the picture continuously changes. My version of Virginia Woolf today is not the same as it was yesterday, and it will continue to change and develop. The portrait is never completely finished. "One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with . . . ," writes Woolf in one of her novels. "Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with . . . ."⁵ In examining the many aspects of Virginia Woolf's life, I have felt the need of fifty pairs of eyes.

In 1974, the Schubert Club of St. Paul commissioned composer Dominick Argento for a work in honor of Mrs. Thomas F. Ellerbe, Sr. The work was to be performed by internationally known mezzo-soprano, Dame Janet Baker. The
process of how the song cycle *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf* developed is best expressed in Argento's words:

Bearing in mind Baker's particular voice, her immense sensitivity, her ability to transform herself in a song or a role, and most of all, the consummate artistry, I wanted to find something rich yet subtle, something with a wide range of emotions yet whole and singular, something feminine but not hackneyed sentiments so frequently ascribed to women by male authors. I decided I'd like to find a text by a woman writer, especially a woman of refined and modern sensibilities. The search quickly narrowed down to Virginia Woolf whose novels I had been reading over the past few years without, by the way, ever a thought of setting them to music. By this point, I had a pretty clear notion of how the piano and voice were going to collaborate, of a general mood I wanted to impart, and the kind of singer I had to work with. These were all clues to recognizing the right text when I found it, even though they eliminated ideas that otherwise might be possible. In various novels, certain passages and characters came close: for a while I thought *Mrs. Dalloway* might be it; later certain passages from *The Waves* attracted me. By accident almost I came upon her diary--I wanted to check up on certain details in the novels and so consulted the diary. No sooner had I read a few entries there than I realized this was the place to search, not the novels. Incidentally, that opinion or discovery--that the diary was suitable for my needs--was not based on reading any of the actual entries I finally selected. It was after my conviction that I found the eight sections I finally used. 

It is interesting to note that Argento did not have access to Virginia Woolf's complete diary. He used *A Writer's Diary*, which is an extremely condensed version edited by her
husband Leonard Woolf. The complete diary consists of five volumes and was published between 1977 and 1984.

Argento’s structural model for the song cycle was Robert Schumann’s Frauenliebe und Leben, which, in eight songs, follows a woman through the various stages of life. Similarly, each of the eight songs in *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf* represents a different aspect of Woolf’s life. Argento explains:

> I was looking for something chronologically spread out over her lifetime and then things that represent various attitudes about different things, so that what I finally have is a sampler of a woman’s life."

In keeping with Argento’s structure, I have divided this document into eight chapters. Each chapter addresses information which is relevant or related to the area of Woolf’s life contained in that specific diary entry. The complete entry as it appears in *A Writer’s Diary* begins each chapter with the text Argento used in boldface. Each biographical perspective of Virginia Woolf is followed by a section focusing on the musical and dramatic elements employed by Argento in the cycle.

Mezzo-soprano Janet Baker and pianist Martin Isepp premiered *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf* on January 5, 1975 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The work, as well as the
performance, was received with rave reviews. Later that year Argento was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his composition. Although Argento composed this cycle with Janet Baker’s musical profile in mind, he believes it readily accessible to other performers:

Janet Baker certainly inspired a kind of music, she also prompted me to find the Woolf text; she served as a framework all through the composing. But when the work was finished—this work that had been propped up from beginning to end by Miss Baker—Miss Baker herself could be withdrawn and the work continues to stand on its own. And it stands, I hope, as a work about Virginia Woolf, not Janet Baker. More than that: since the work was conceived for a specific singer and not some abstraction such as soprano or mezzo, I believe another singer is able to step into the work and find it comfortably made, to human scale, liveable, in short—perhaps even more liveable for the new occupant than the former.⁸

Argento also believes that songs, more than any other form, represent a composer’s “purest utterance, his most private being, unadorned, uncluttered, devoid of posturing, spontaneous, distilled.”⁹ A song reflects most honestly and intimately a composer’s musical speech. Likewise, what could be more intimate and honest for a writer than a diary? The coalescence of Argento’s personal musical expression and Woolf’s innermost thoughts is an intensely powerful combination. It becomes stronger still when the performer
connects personally with the words of the writer and the
music of the composer. Argento states:

Someone said once of poets: the poet speaks to
himself and the world overhears. I believe this
is the most important point a singer can emphasize
in performance of songs: the singer sings only for
himself or herself and the audience is permitted
to eavesdrop. When this happens we best serve the
composer—the song remains private, unaffected,
intimate, moving, and truthful.  

This is certainly true of From the Diary of Virginia Woolf.

An atmosphere of privacy must always be maintained in the
expression of the performer, so the audience fully senses
the intimacy of Woolf’s words and Argento’s music. As a
result, an opportunity for self-discovery is created through
art. Argento believes the purpose of art is

... “to reach the secret spring of responsive
emotions.” I do believe we all possess some
untapped secret spring within us—it may even be
synonymous with “soul”. And I also believe that
under normal circumstances we are unaware of this
treasure or unable to utilize it, but in the
presence of certain works of art we re-discover it
temporarily—not in the work of art: in ourselves.
Art merely unlocks the door or puts us in a proper
mood to make the discovery. That, it seems to me,
is the mystery and magic of music—music of all
kinds, of all times. 

Virginia Woolf herself recognized the power of art to
transcend expression:

After all we are a world of imitations; all the
Arts that is to say imitate as far as they can the
one great truth that all can see. Such is the
eternal instinct of the human beast, to try &
reproduce something of that majesty in paint, marble, or ink. Somehow ink tonight seems to me the least effectual method of all---& music the nearest to truth.\(^{12}\)


\(^{4}\) Woolf, p. 204.


\(^{6}\) Argento, p. 24.


\(^{8}\) Argento, p. 31.

\(^{9}\) Ibid., p. 20.

\(^{10}\) Ibid., p. 21.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 18.

CHAPTER 1

I. THE DIARY (APRIL, 1919)

Diary Entry

Easter Sunday, April 20th

In the idleness which succeeds any long article, and
Defoe is the second leader this month, I got out this diary
and read, as one always does read one's own writing, with a
kind of guilty intensity. I confess that the rough and
random style of it, often so ungrammatical, and crying for a
word altered, afflicted me somewhat. I am trying to tell
whichever self it is that reads this hereafter that I can
write very much better; and to take no time over this; and
forbid her to the eye of man behold it. And now I may add
my little compliment to the effect that it has a slapdash
and vigour and sometimes hits an unexpected bull's eye. But
what is more to the point is my belief that the habit of
writing thus for my own eye only is good practice. It
loosens the ligaments. Never mind the misses and the
stumbles. Going at such a pace as I do I must make the most
direct and instant shots at my object, and thus have to lay
my hands on words, choose them and shoot them with no more
pause than is needed to put my pen in the ink. I believe
that during the past year I can trace some increase of ease
in my professional writing which I attribute to my casual
half hours after tea. Moreover there looms ahead of me the
shadow of some kind of form which a diary might attain to.
I might in the course of time learn what it is that one can
make of this loose, drifting material of life; finding
another use for it than the use I put it to, so much more
consciously and scrupulously, in fiction. What sort of
diary should I like mine to be? Something loose knit and
yet not slovenly, so elastic that it will embrace anything,
solemn, slight or beautiful that comes into my mind. I
should like it to resemble some deep old desk, or capricious
hold-all, in which one flings a mass of odds and ends
without looking them through. I should like to come back,
after a year or two, and find that the collection had sorted itself and refined itself and coalesced, as such deposits so mysteriously do, into a mould, transparent enough to reflect the light of our life, and yet steady, tranquil compounds with the aloofness of a work of art. The main requisite, I think on re-reading my old volumes, is not to play the part of censor, but to write as the mood comes or of anything whatever; since I was curious to find how I went for things put in haphazard, and found the significance to lie where I never saw it at the time. But looseness quickly becomes slovenly. A little effort is needed to face a character or an incident which needs to be recorded. Nor can one let the pen write without guidance; for fear of becoming slack and untidy like Vernon Lee. Her ligaments are too loose for my taste.\(^1\)

**Biographical Perspective**

In January, 1897, at the age of fifteen, Virginia Stephen began to keep a diary. In July, following the death of her half-sister, Stella, the diary entries diminish, and on September 14 Virginia notes:

> This poor diary is lingering on indeed, but death would be shorter & less painful--Never mind, we will follow the year to its end, & then fling diaries and diarising into the corner--to dust & mice & moths & all creeping crawling eating destroying creatures.\(^2\)

On January 1, 1898, she did indeed conclude her diary. However, between the years 1898 and 1915, Virginia continued to record events in her life through essays and literary exercises. On January 1, 1915, Virginia, now married to Leonard Woolf, again began a daily journal. Six weeks later her writing was interrupted by a major nervous breakdown.
Virginia once more resumed her writing in August, 1917, and maintained her diary until her death in 1941.

At the time of her death, Virginia's diaries (1915-1941) were left in thirty separate notebooks. These notebooks have been combined and published in five complete volumes under the title *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. As previously noted, Dominick Argento composed *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf* before these volumes were available. The source Argento used, *A Writer's Diary*, begins with the year 1918. It should also be observed that the song titled "Last Entry" is actually the penultimate entry written on March 8, 1941. Virginia's last entry was written on March 24, 1941, four days before her death.

The art of observation was a prevalent factor in Virginia Woolf's life: "I could have been well content to take my evening's pleasure in observation merely."³ Virginia reserved half an hour after tea every day to record observations and opinions about the people, places, and events in her life. She also wrote regularly about her writing process and her works in progress. Her diary served not only as a private memoir, but as a writing exercise. Virginia's sharp sense of humor is represented, along with moments of complete desperation and despair. The mass of
entries coalesce into a whole which Quentin Bell describes as a “masterpiece” and “one of the great diaries of the world.” Whether or not her diary is a masterpiece, Virginia Woolf was successful in creating a work which “reflects the light,” as well as the darkness, of her life.

Chronology

1878: Marriage of Leslie Stephen, widower with one child (Laura), to Julia Jackson Duckworth, widow with three children (Stella, Gerald, George).


1895: Death of mother, Julia Stephen. First nervous breakdown.

1897: Death of half-sister, Stella Duckworth Hills.

1902: Begins close friendship with Violet Dickinson.


1906: Death of brother, Thoby Stephen.


1908: Birth of nephew, Julian Bell.

1910: Mental illness. Rest cure at nursing home. Birth of nephew, Quentin Bell.
1914: Britain declares war on Germany.
1918: Birth of niece, Angelica Bell.
1919: *Night and Day* published. Woolfs buy country home, Monks House in Rodmell, Sussex.
1921: *Monday or Tuesday* published. Mental illness.
1922: *Jacob's Room* published. Meets Vita Sackville-West.
1924: Woolfs move from Hogarth House to 52 Tavistock Square, Bloomsbury.
1925: *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Common Reader* published.
1926: Mental illness.
1927: *To the Lighthouse* published. Frequent visits with Vita Sackville-West.
1928: Death of poet, Thomas Hardy. Awarded Femina *Vie Heureuse* prize for *To the Lighthouse*. *Orlando* published.
1929: *A Room of One's Own* published.
1930: Begins friendship with composer, Dame Ethel Smyth.
1931: *The Waves* published.
1933: Refuses Honorary Doctorate from Manchester University. Declines Leslie Stephen Lectureship at Cambridge. *Flush* published.

1934: Death of half-brother, George Duckworth. Death of friend, Roger Fry.

1935: Declines to be recommended for Companion of Honour. Woolfs tour Holland, Germany, Italy, and France.

1936: Mental illness.


1938: *Three Guineas* published.

1939: Meets Sigmund Freud. Declines Honorary Doctorate from Liverpool University. Britain declares war on Germany.


1941: Completes *Between the Acts*. Drowns herself in the Ouse River.

Select List of Family and Friends

Sir Leslie Stephen               Father
Julia Duckworth Stephen         Mother
Laura Stephen                   Half-sister
George Duckworth                Half-brother
Gerald Duckworth                Half-brother
Stella Duckworth Hills          Half-sister
Jack Hills                      Stella’s husband
Thoby Stephen                   Brother
Adrian Stephen                  Brother
Vanessa “Nessa” Bell            Sister
Clive Bell                      Vanessa’s husband
Julian Bell                     Nephew, killed in Spain
Quentin Bell                    Nephew
Angelica Bell Garnett           Niece
Elements of Analysis

I should like to write four lines at a time, describing the same feeling, as a musician does; because it always seems to me that things are going on at so many different levels simultaneously.  

Virginia Woolf recognized the numerous elements a composer must combine to create his or her art. Text, tonality, tempo, rhythm, and dynamics are but some of the components
used in writing music. Discovering how a composer blends these separate components into a unified whole is an important part of a performer's process. Understanding a work musically and dramatically is essential for a successful performance.

In *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Dominick Argento utilizes elements of the twelve-tone technique. He begins with a tone row in the first song and continues to use it, or some portion of it in various forms throughout the cycle. Nevertheless, his opinions on the subject of detailed musical analysis are quite clear:

After you've made all of those damn diagrams, *ala* Schenker, what do you know about the piece that you didn't know before? ... It seems to me that what he finds when he's finished analyzing a piece is so unimportant that you've wasted one hell of a lot of time to come out and say, "It's daytime, therefore the sun is out." ... That's the same thing with twelve tone analysis. You can go through and circle all twelve tones and when you're finished, all you have is a messy score. That's bookkeeping, but you haven't really learned anything more about how that piece is put together and why it works.6

The analysis of a piece of music, then, must never become sterile. The process of discovering how drama is created through music is, for the purpose of this study, more serviceable. Argento successfully invents musical effects which are essential to the dramatic impact of his work.
Understanding this interdependence of words and music will ultimately provide the performer a clearer perception of how this "piece is put together and why it works." Argento offers additional insight into his music:

I think I write music as a way of learning who I am, what I really think, what I truly believe. Every new piece of music is like a piece of a puzzle: perhaps when all the pieces are in place I'll have an answer. . . . My own career as a composer has been one long exercise in self-discovery, and the music I have produced . . . has mirrored that concern. . . . Of all my cycles, Virginia Woolf most directly addresses the issue of "who am I, what do I really feel?" The strong concentration these texts focus on self-knowledge may have prompted me to write my most moving music.

The priority when examining Argento's music, then, should be deeper than merely identifying chord structure, key centers, and tone rows; it should be the discovery of the many musical and dramatic components combined to reveal Dominick Argento and Virginia Woolf.

Upon first glance, Argento's score can be technically intimidating. In addition to the difficult intervals and rhythms, the abundance of dynamic, tempo, and mood markings demand careful attention and preparation. Argento leaves little room for questions regarding his compositional intentions. Vern Sutton, a frequent performer of Argento's music, notes:
He is very specific. That is the really wonderful thing about his music—why I've always enjoyed performing his pieces. . . . I try to do absolutely everything he says: every accent, every diminuendo, everything. The more accurate I am with what he wants, the better [the work] comes out.  

If used effectively, the specific nature of Argento's style should not stifle, but only enhance a performer's personal interpretation.

Music and Drama

Argento opens "The Diary" with a six measure piano introduction made up of motivic material utilized throughout the song. The entrance of the vocal line in measure seven, together with the piano, introduces the tone row which serves in various forms as the basis of unification for the cycle. The sparseness and simplicity of this passage effectively establish the intimate mood of the piece.

(Figure 1)
Mosso e pensieroso \( J = 84 \) ca.

What sort of diary should I like mine to be?

Fig. 1 mm. 1-10, p. 1
Another motive originates in measure thirteen. The expansive half-note pattern in the right-hand piano line is gradually transposed higher until joined by the vocal line, which repeats material from the introduction.
A similar combination of this musical material occurs in measures thirty-five through thirty-eight.

The brief rests between the words "solemn," "slight," and "beautiful" provide subtle opportunities for changes in vocal color. The themes from the introduction are simultaneously continued in the piano line. Argento then reinforces the contemplative mood of the song by inserting the incomplete fragment, "I should like . . . .," suggesting Woolf's thought process. The thought becomes decisive at measure twenty-three when the continuous flow of eighth-notes in the piano ceases and the vocal line becomes a stable, even quarter-note rhythm with a pianissimo dynamic marking. The piano line concurrently recounts the theme underlying the opening question, "What sort of diary should I like mine to be?" (Figure 3)
will embrace anything. sal - emn, slight or beau - ti - ful that comes into my mind. I should like... I should like it to re - semble some

Tempo 1 (\( \dot{q} = 84 \))  
mp quasi parlato

deep old desk... in which one

Fig. 3 mm. 18–26, pp. 2–3
The vocal line then shifts into a static, speechlike style, while the piano resumes the lyrical flow, again presenting familiar motivic patterns. In measure twenty-nine, the flow is reduced to a steady, alternating minor third figure implying the ticking of a clock, perhaps symbolizing the passage of time. The half-note theme from Figure 2 can again be heard in the intervalic relationships of the vocal line beginning in measure thirty-one. (Figure 4)
Tempo I ($= 84$) \(p\) quasi parlato

Deep old desk... in which one flings a mass of odds and ends... rall.

Tempo II \((j = 76)\) \(p\) poco a poco rall.

Without looking them through, I should like to come

Quasi largo \((j = 66\text{ ca.})\)

Back, after a year or two, and find that the collection had

sort ed it self and re -
Argento supports the text in measure thirty-six by setting the word “mysteriously” to a section of the original thematic material which contains a major seventh, followed by a minor second leading into a tritone, producing an effectively eerie moment. Since the vocal line is often a continuous eighth-note pattern, plodding should be avoided by employing a consistent, legato forward motion.

Fig. 5 mm. 36-37, p. 4

Likewise, the sparse texture of the piano line, beginning in measure thirty-nine, reflects the idea of transparency. The tone row reappears transposed and inverted into an ascending motion. (Figure 6)
Fig. 6 mm. 38-42, p. 4

Argento closes the song with the tranquil half-note motive.

Fig. 7 mm. 44-46, p. 4
An atmosphere of serene solitude should be maintained throughout "The Diary." A singer must strive to create the illusion that the words being sung are, quite simply, the quiet, private musings in Woolf's head. The text must always remain personal, intended for her alone. Argento believes:

Most music is conceived to be "delivered out" in performance, addressed to an audience whose presence we are aware of; but songs, I feel, are meant to be "delivered in," addressed only to the singer and not, consciously, shared with an audience.\(^{10}\)

This is especially true of the entire Woolf cycle. The performer, in this instance, must be oblivious to the audience. This also reiterates the role of audience members as privileged eavesdroppers. When successful, this ambiance results in a compelling connection between performers and listeners.


"Ibid.


CHAPTER 2

II. ANXIETY (OCTOBER, 1920)

Diary Entry

Monday, October 25 (First day of winter time)

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. The fire burns; we are going to hear the Beggar’s Opera. Only it lies about me; I can’t keep my eyes shut. It’s a feeling of impotence; of cutting no ice. Here I sit at Richmond, and like a lantern stood in the middle of a field my light goes up in darkness. Melancholy diminishes as I write. Why then don’t I write it down oftener? Well, one’s vanity forbids. I want to appear a success even to myself. Yet I don’t get to the bottom of it. It’s having no children, living away from friends, failing to write well, spending too much on food, growing old. I think too much of whys and wherefores; too much of myself. I don’t like time to flap around me. Well then, work. Yes, but I soon tire of work—can’t read more than a little, an hour’s writing is enough for me. Out here no one comes in to waste time pleasantly. If they do, I’m cross. The labor of going to London is too great. Nessa’s children grow up, and I can’t have them in to tea, or go to the Zoo. Pocket money doesn’t allow of much. Yet I’m persuaded that these are trivial things; it’s life itself, I think sometimes, for us in our generation so tragic—no newspaper placard without its shriek of agony from someone. McSwiney this afternoon and violence in Ireland; or it’ll be the strike. Unhappiness is everywhere; just beyond the door; or stupidity, which is worse. Still I don’t pluck the nettle out of me. To write Jacob’s Room again will revive my fibres, I feel. Evelyn is due; but I don’t like what I write now. And with it all how happy I am—if it weren’t for my feeling that it’s a strip of pavement over an abyss.
Biographical Perspective

Virginia Woolf has frequently been described as "mad." But what is "mad"? Is madness inherent and innate? Is it an emotional reaction to life experiences? Is it physiological or psychological? What are the differences between the definition of "madness" today, and the definition of seventy-five years ago? These types of questions are currently creating quite a stir among Woolf scholars and biographers. The word "mad" suggests a certain amount of insanity. Anyone reading Woolf's works can clearly recognize that she did not possess the mind of a crazed lunatic. However, there were serious problems. Some scholars believe Woolf suffered from manic-depression, while others believe her so-called "madness" was a response to traumatic childhood experiences. Opinions are numerous and varied. Whatever the source, Woolf endured multiple nervous breakdowns and suffered serious bouts of depression throughout her life.

A history of depression already existed within Woolf's family. Both her parents suffered from depression and were at times suicidal. Her grandfather, James Stephen, had a "nervous breakdown" in 1824. Her cousin, J.K. Stephen, starved himself to death in an asylum. Following his death,
J.K.'s father, James Fitzjames Stephen, became suicidal and died two years later. Her brother Thoby attempted to "throw himself out of the window" when he was fourteen.¹

In addition, Virginia's half-sister, Laura, was described by her father as "mentally deficient" and "backward."² Her behavior was evidently difficult to control and her parents eventually locked her away in a separate part of the house where she remained throughout most of Virginia's childhood. "She ceased to exist, in any real sense, as far as the family was concerned."³ As her family nickname "Her Ladyship of the Lake" suggests, Laura was "isolated and confined as a prisoner within the household, banished, unseen."⁴ At the age of twenty-one she was sent to an asylum where she remained until her death at age seventy-five. Exactly what condition Laura Stephen suffered will never be determined. However, some Woolf experts believe that Laura's treatment within the family had a profound effect on Virginia. The threat of being locked away and banished for irregular behavior may have created an extreme sense of insecurity in a young child. Louise DeSalvo believes that Laura's situation was the

. . . tragic outcome of that institution of Victorian child-rearing. . . . Victorian ideology did not permit children to have problems; children were supposed to be angels of delight, not

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demanding, insecure, unhappy, or angry. . . . Victorian parents seemed unable to help children with problems.7

DeSalvo also believes that some of Laura’s symptoms suggest she may have been the victim of sexual abuse, like her sisters Vanessa and Virginia.

In April 1939 Virginia Woolf began an autobiographical work entitled “A Sketch of the Past.” In it she sets out to explore the possible causes of her lifelong depression.

“I’m interested in depression & make myself play a game of assembling the fractured pieces,” records Virginia in her April 15, 1939 diary entry.8

For the first time, she was exploring the possibility that her life might have been otherwise, that the bouts of depression and despair, the suicide attempts, were not an inevitable part of her makeup, but they were, instead, caused by her reaction to what she had lived through.9

Perhaps the most disturbing memory she records is the instance of sexual molestation by her half-brother, Gerald Duckworth. This experience occurred when she was six years old:

There was a slab outside the dining room door for standing dishes upon. Once when I was very small Gerald Duckworth lifted me onto this, and as I sat there he began to explore my body. I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes; going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private
parts. But it did not stop. His hand explored my private parts too. I remember resenting, disliking it—what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling?\textsuperscript{10}

Virginia Woolf experienced her first nervous breakdown in 1895, the year of her mother’s death. Her other half-brother, George Duckworth, appeared to be a model sibling. He was extremely devoted to his sisters and assumed the role of comforter following their mother’s death, showing them endless kindness. However, his fraternal sympathy crossed the line when he carried his comfort into their bedroom. Virginia recalls one of these experiences in “22 Hyde Park Gate,” written in 1920:

Sleep had almost come to me. The room was dark. The house was silent. Then, creaking stealthily, the door opened; treading gingerly, someone entered. “Who?” I cried. “Don’t be frightened,” George whispered. “And don’t turn on the light, oh beloved. Beloved—” and he flung himself on my bed, and took me in his arms.

Yes, the old ladies of Kensington and Belgravia never knew that George Duckworth was not only father and mother, brother and sister to those poor Stephen girls; he was their lover also.\textsuperscript{11}

There is much speculation and controversy among Woolf experts regarding the extent of this abuse. Some dismiss it as an exaggeration of inaccurate memories, while others believe it to be the key to Virginia Woolf’s behavior. This argument will never be settled. However, one fact is certain; Virginia Woolf was sexually molested in some form
by George Duckworth during the years 1895-1904. George was twenty-seven years old in 1895. Virginia was thirteen.

The years 1895-1915 have been referred to as the "twenty dark years" of Virginia Woolf's life. During this period she had multiple nervous breakdowns and attempted suicide twice. Her first suicide attempt occurred following the death of her father in 1904. She had a complete breakdown and threw herself out of a window. Her friend Violet Dickinson spent the next three months nursing her back to health.

In the summer of 1910, Virginia experienced her next major breakdown. Her typical symptoms included headaches, a racing pulse, insomnia, light-headedness, and nervous irritation. She sometimes heard voices and would often refuse to eat. Her doctors usually prescribed complete rest (which included no writing) and plenty of healthy foods, especially milk. In this instance she was sent to spend six weeks at 'Burley', Cambridge Park, Twickenham, "a kind of polite madhouse for female lunatics." According to Quentin Bell:

Here her letters, her reading, her visitors would all be severely rationed, she would be kept in bed in a darkened room, wholesome foods would be pressed upon her and she would be excluded from all the social enjoyments of London.
Despite Virginia’s desperate complaints and continuous pleadings to return home, her sister, Vanessa, urged her to remain at Twickenham in the hopes that it would provide a “cure”. She was released in August with a warning to continue a quiet life without much strain or excitement. There were no serious breakdowns in 1911, although bouts of depression are still evident. In a June letter to Vanessa she writes:

I could not write, & all the devils came out--hairy black ones. To be 29 & unmarried--to be a failure--Childless--insane too, no writer.\textsuperscript{15}

In February 1912 Virginia was again sent to Twickenham for several weeks following a marriage proposal from Leonard Woolf. Her health seemed to improve and Leonard’s proposal was accepted in May. Their marriage in August was the beginning of another series of breakdowns. Although the Woolfs returned from their honeymoon extremely happy and in love, they also returned with a concern about Virginia’s sexual frigidity. They sought advice from Vanessa, who, in a letter to her own husband, writes:

They seemed very happy, but are evidently both a little exercised in their minds on the subject of the Goat’s [Virginia] coldness. I think I perhaps annoyed her but may have consoled him by saying that I thought she never had understood or sympathized with sexual passion in men. Apparently she still gets no pleasure at all from the act, which I think is curious.\textsuperscript{16}
Vanessa, Leonard, and Virginia "were inclined to blame George Duckworth" for this problem. Certainly it is a strong possibility that her sexual abuse was a contributing factor to her ultimate rejection of sexual intercourse.

To further complicate these matters, both Leonard and Virginia wanted to have children. However, it became apparent to Leonard that Virginia's mental stability might be jeopardized by the stress and strain of motherhood. In January 1913 he began consulting Virginia's doctors about the question. The opinions differed, but Leonard ultimately decided and convinced Virginia that having children would not be wise. This would continue to be a source of grief and disappointment throughout her life.

In March of the same year, Virginia completed her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, which had been a seven year project. Her intense apprehension on how the book would be received is explained by Bell.

Almost anyone who has attempted to create a work of art will have an inkling of what she then felt. A book is so much a part of oneself that in delivering it to the public one feels as if one were pushing one's own child out into the traffic. If it be killed or hurt the injury is done to oneself, and if it be one's first-born, the product of seven years gestation, if it be awkward and vulnerable and needing all the tenderness and all the understanding that no critic will ever give, anxiety for it's fate becomes acute.
This anxiety resulted in Virginia’s usual symptoms and she was yet again sent to Twickenham for a “rest cure”. After two weeks Leonard took her on a vacation in the country in the hopes that it would improve her condition. Her symptoms deteriorated however and the Woolfs sought advice from two more doctors. On September 9, both doctors expressed the opinion that Virginia should return to Twickenham. That evening Virginia took an overdose of the sedative veronal. She was found unconscious on her bed, and near death. She was not sent back to Twickenham, but instead remained in the care of Leonard and several nurses. Despite many setbacks, Virginia’s condition seemed to improve.

The Voyage Out was to be published in late March, 1915. In February Virginia experienced another breakdown. In addition to her familiar symptoms (severe headaches, sleeplessness, refusal to eat) she began to exhibit violent rages directed toward her caregivers, especially Leonard. She became increasingly irrational and difficult to control. In June Vanessa wrote:

Ka [family friend Katherine Cox] had been to see Virginia & thinks she’s really getting better slowly, but it sounds most depressing as she seems to have changed into a most unpleasant character. She won’t see Leonard at all & has taken against all men. She says the most malicious & cutting things she can think of to everyone & they are so clever that they always hurt.19
Once again, Virginia began to make a gradual recovery. By November she appeared relatively stable. As Lyndall Gordon writes, "The twenty dark years were over and the fertile stretch of her life began."\textsuperscript{20} That is not to suggest that she was without problems for the rest of her life. She continued to have severe periods of depression, particularly following the completion of her books, in which invariably she was prescribed a long rest and plenty of food. Sometimes the depression was so intense that she would again become suicidal. Two especially difficult years were 1926 and 1936. However, the episodes never seemed to be quite as extreme as the 1912-1915 years.

The question of Virginia Woolf's "madness" continues to be a source of intrigue for Woolf experts and scholars. Many studies have been done and many theories presented. Yet, as Woolf notes, "how on earth does one explain madness and love in sober prose, with dates attached?"\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Music and Drama}

Argento abruptly shifts the calm mood of "The Diary" into an unsettling frenzy in "Anxiety," affording the listener an early glimpse into Woolf's mental fragility.
The song commences with an unrelenting, dashing speed and flies by in less than two minutes.

The rhythmic intensity in "Anxiety" serves as a representative of Virginia Woolf's perpetual inner turmoil. The piano provides a constant, frantic pulse underlying the panic of the vocal line. Shifting meters and accents create a sense of instability. The vocal line is doubled by the piano throughout most of the song, requiring extreme rhythmic precision from both performers.

![Musical notation]

Fig. 8 mm. 27-30, p. 6

Argento emphasizes Woolf's basic question "Why?" by repeating it nineteen times throughout the song. Argento stresses the significance of the question further by echoing it in the piano. (Figure 9)
Fig. 9 mm. 4-7, p. 5

The use of the word "giddy" in measure twenty-one is sometimes misinterpreted. Current definitions of "giddy" today might include words such as "silly" or "frivolous." Virginia Woolf's usage, however, refers to the original dictionary definition: having a sensation of whirling or reeling about; dizzy. Considering the mood of the song is far from silly, an awareness and understanding of this meaning will prevent confusion.

Fig. 10 mm. 20-21, p. 6
Woolf attempts to regain her composure by grasping at a solid, comforting thought: "The fire burns; we are going to see the Beggar's Opera." Argento depicts this by composing a relaxed, legato vocal line, creating a contrast to the previous hysterical intensity. Woolf's anxiety, ever close to the surface, is characterized with the continuation of the driving pulse in the piano.

Fig. 11 mm. 49-56, p. 8
In the measures directly following the text "Beggar's Opera," Argento interjects a rhythmic variation of the melody found in the opening vocal line of Johann Pepusch's The Beggar's Opera.²² (Figures 12 and 13)

Fig. 12 mm. 59-62, p. 8

Fig. 13 mm. 4-9, The Beggar's Opera, p. 6
The extreme musical and dramatic intensity demanded in this song presents challenges for a performer, both vocally and emotionally. The entire range of dynamics is represented, from pianissimo to fortissimo, and the rapidity of the words demands clear, articulate diction. A tight balance must be maintained between voice, piano, music, emotion, and drama. To prevent losing vocal control, it is helpful for the singer to allow the pianist to create Woolf's inner tension and agitation through the underlying pulse Argento provides. It is equally important that the pulse remain steady.

"Anxiety" is a brief glance into Virginia Woolf's neuroses. Awareness of the possible causes of her darkness and despair will support a deeper sensitivity and understanding in the performance of this song.


3 Ibid., p. 115.


5 Ibid., p. 23.

6 Ibid., p. 20.

7 Ibid., p. 31.

DeSalvo, p. 100.


11Ibid., p. 177.


14Ibid.

15Ibid., p. 176.


18Ibid., p. 11.


20Gordon, p. 54.


22Lecture by Gary Arvin, University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, Cincinnati, Ohio, 2 February 1996.
CHAPTER 3

III. FANCY (FEBRUARY, 1927)

Diary Entry

Monday, February 21st
Why not invent a new kind of play; as for instance:

Woman thinks ...
He does.
Organ plays.
She writes.
They say:
She sings.
Night speaks
They miss

I think it must be something on this line - though I can't now see what. Away from facts; free; yet concentrated; prose yet poetry; a novel and a play.¹

Biographical Perspective

Is it the method that inhibits the creative power? . . . In any case it is a mistake to stand outside examining ‘methods’. Any method is right, every method is right, that expresses what we wish to express, if we are writers; that brings us closer to the novelist’s intention if we are readers.

. . . the problem before the novelist at present, as we suppose it to have been in the past, is to contrive means of being free to set down what he chooses. He has to have the courage to say that what interests him is no longer ‘this’ but ‘that’: out of ‘that’ alone must he construct his work. For the moderns ‘that’, the point of
interest, lies very likely in the dark places of psychology. At once, therefore, the accent falls a little differently; the emphasis is upon something hitherto ignored; at once a different outline of form becomes necessary, difficult for us to grasp, incomprehensible to our predecessors.²

Virginia Woolf’s essay, “Modern Fiction,” provides insight into her perception of the writing process. She was innovative and visionary in the development of the novel, and though generally labeled a “Modernist,” critics continue to debate which genre of literature deserves the privilege of claiming her.

Woolf frequently sketched out new ideas for novels in her diary. Constantly searching for original forms, she developed new names to describe her works, such as “biographical fantasy,” “essay-novel,” “play-poem,” and “poet-prose book.” She writes: “I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant ‘novel’. A new ______ by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?”³

The February 21, 1927 entry Argento set to music is Woolf’s first conception of her novel The Waves, published in 1931. The sixth of her eight major novels, The Waves is considered by some to be Woolf’s masterpiece, as well as one of her most challenging and complex works. She employed her experimental passion to develop a unique form of fiction.
In her essay, "The Narrow Bridge of Art," Woolf elaborates on some of her visions depicted in the 1927 diary entry:

It will be written in prose, but in prose which has many of the characteristics of poetry. It will have something of the exaltation of poetry, but much more of the ordinariness of prose. It will be dramatic, and yet not a play. It will be read, not acted.

... it will give, as poetry does, the outline rather than the detail. ... It will resemble poetry in this that it will give not only or mainly people's relations to each other and their activities together, as the novel has hitherto done, but it will give the relation of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquy in solitude.\(^4\)

The result is a highly intricate and enigmatic book which Woolf herself called "unintelligible." "And it sells - how unexpected, how odd that people can read that difficult grinding stuff!"\(^5\) Woolf Scholar Mitchell A. Leaska expresses a typical reaction to The Waves: "exquisitely written, supremely complex, almost incomprehensible."\(^6\) For many, it represents "a classic text of modernism."\(^7\)

With the evolvement of new forms came the abandonment of certain traditional conventions. Woolf felt

... if he [the writer] could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style . . . Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.\(^8\)
In a sense, Woolf was less concerned with "telling a story" than with exploring the inner workings of the mind.

According to Michael Rosenthal:

Woolf's novels . . . contain no substantial narrative impulse. In a very real sense it is true she does write novels in which nothing happens. . . . For as an artist Woolf was obsessed with what we can call formal rather than thematic concerns, with finding ways of embodying as she says, 'the exact shapes my brain holds.' That Woolf was absorbed primarily in creating shapes is what makes her such an utterly original voice in modern literature. It is also what makes her such a difficult writer to talk about, for her work does not readily lend itself to critical analysis of character, theme, or philosophy.'

Similarly, Harvena Richter writes that "one does not draw a particular philosophy or discipline from her work. One can only conclude that her examination of her own encounter with lived experience was transmuted into the novel's form: modes of life became modes of fiction." Woolf's quest was to embody her personal visions of reality and life into her novels. She endeavored to create beauty and symmetry . . . by means of infinite discords, showing all the traces of the minds passage through the world; & achieve in the end, some kind of whole made of shivering fragments; to me this seems the natural process; the flight of the mind.'

In pursuing her "natural process" Virginia Woolf was successful in contributing an extensive and varied mass of
works to the world of literature. In addition, her exquisite talent provided a personal outlet for her inner conflict.

"Nothing is real unless I write it down," notes Woolf in 1937.\textsuperscript{12} Writing, it seems, was therapeutic for Woolf. According to her nephew, "Virginia's instinctive response to suffering was to write . . . ."\textsuperscript{13} Woolf's fiction is steeped in autobiographical and biographical material. Apparently, her creative impulse was closely linked to her mental health. In a letter to Ethel Smyth, Woolf observes:

As an experience, madness is terrific I can assure you, and not to be sniffed at; and in its lava I still find most of the things I write about. It shoots out of one everything shaped, final, not in mere driblets, as sanity does. And the six months—not three—that I lay in bed taught me a good deal about what is called oneself. Indeed I was almost crippled when I came back to the world, unable to move a foot in terror, after that discipline. Think—not one moment's freedom from doctor discipline—perfectly strange—conventional men; 'you shant read this' and 'you shant write a word' and 'you shall lie still and drink milk'—for six months.\textsuperscript{14}

It is interesting that most of Woolf's serious bouts of mental illness occurred as she was finishing a novel. The strain of intense work and the fear of failure have been blamed as contributing factors. However, Peter F. Alexander suggests:
Leonard, and many critics following him, speculated that the tension of writing unhinged her mind. It seems just as likely that the writing was a response and solution to the tension, and that reaching the end of a book meant an end of the release she found in creation, with consequent breakdown. It was not writing that unhinged her, but having to stop.15

Woolf herself observed: "The only way I keep afloat is by working. . . . Directly I stop working I feel that I am sinking down, down."16 Writing, for Woolf, was a powerful source of control. Not only was she able to produce exceptional works of art, she also maintained a connection to the reality of life which she so often found intolerable.

In her memoir, "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf explains:

... 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; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. 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; making a scene come right; making a character come together. ... I feel that by writing I am doing what is far more necessary than anything else.17

Music and Drama

Argento appropriately titled this song "Fancy," depicting the colloquial English definition of the word: conception, imagination, or idea. Aware of the entry’s
connection to Woolf’s novel, he comments: “I feel it to be an embryonic notion that finds its fulfillment in The Waves which she is concocting about this time.”

The Waves itself exhibits a mystical musical quality. Woolf includes interludes which, like musical themes, “recur with variations at regular intervals to counterpoint the development of the main melody, the progress through time of the lives of the six characters.” However, Woolf did not create characters in the traditional sense. According to Woolf scholar Eric Warner:

... Virginia Woolf is no longer interested in portraying ‘character’ in the normal way, but rather in giving the abstract essence of character; as she put it in her diary, ‘What I now think (about The Waves) is that I can give in a very few strokes the essentials of a person’s character’, and she adds it should be ‘almost as caricature’. Accordingly the six friends have not characters but characteristics which differentiate them from one another, and which hold true throughout the work.  

In this process, Woolf delineates the figures with “distinctive habits of mind, some of which are expressed in terms that become leitmotifs as they recur with slight variation ...” Woolf wrote to Ethel Smyth in 1930: “I am writing [The Waves] to a rhythm and not to a plot.”

Woolf scholar Susan Dick observes:

Like themes in music, Woolf’s images and symbols recur and are subtly altered by their changing
contexts. Their repetition and variation contribute to the "rhythm of the whole," ... which shapes The Waves. 23

It was certain poetic passages from The Waves that first attracted Argento to setting Woolf to music. While researching facts about the novel, he discovered her diary and changed his direction. 24 However, several similarities emerge when comparing The Waves to "Fancy." Most often, Argento favors tempo variations in his songs instead of metric shifts. However, "Fancy" is a twenty-six measure song containing a staggering twenty meter changes, in addition to thirteen tempo alterations. In this instance, it seems Argento, like Woolf, composed to a "rhythm."

"Fancy" also appears to contain six distinct figures, each with an individual motif and meter: 'fancy,' 'woman,' 'man,' 'organ,' 'they,' and 'night.'

The first figure is "fancy," Woolf's original conception or idea. Argento opens the song with a bold declaration in the vocal and piano lines marked like a fanfare. He emphasizes Woolf's announcement with heavy accents leading into a pattern of staccato thirty-second notes suggestive of a trumpet call. The meter shifts between 4/8, 5/8, and 3/4. (Figure 14)
Fig. 14  mm. 1-6, p. 11

Measures eight through ten contain three figures. The first, 'woman,' is marked dolce (sweet) and portrayed with a gentle triplet pattern in the piano under the words, "Woman thinks." The tempo marking is Adagio and the meter is 5/4. This is duplicated in measure fifteen for the words, "She sings," as well as in measures eleven through thirteen for the words, "She writes." Argento increases the intensity of "She writes" by repeating the words over a crescendo,
accelerando, and meter shifts, perhaps exemplifying Woolf's most exhilarating, yet comforting thought. The lyrical flow of 'woman' is abruptly contrasted in measure nine by 'man,' characterized with solid, steady chords in the piano. Argento uses a 9/8 meter, and marks the vocal line deciso (firm). The fourth figure, 'organ,' is represented in measure ten with a 4/4 meter and two expansive chords in the piano line marked sonoroso (resonant), implying the noble, dignified sound of the instrument.

Fig. 15 mun. 8-13, p. 11
‘They’ is the fifth figure appearing in 7/8 meter over two stark chords, partially sustained and partially staccato. This motif reappears in measures twenty through twenty-two for the words “They miss.” Argento contrasts the meanings of the two phrases with the dynamic markings. "They say" is fortissimo and "They miss" is pianissimo, as well as triste (sad).

Fig. 16 m. 14, p. 12

Fig. 17 mm. 20-22, p. 12
The final figure, 'Night,' is depicted in a 6/4 meter with a shimmering piano line marked pianissimo - ma sonoroso (soft - but resonant). Argento then represents Woolf's contemplation with a hum composed to the original tone row.

Fig. 18 mm. 16-19, p. 12

Throughout this song, Argento has significantly utilized the piano to represent and enhance the six 'figures.' It is appropriate that he chooses to end with the 'woman' motif, with the vocal melody from "Woman thinks" added and intertwined. He thus gives final emphasis to the primary premise of the song. (Figure 19)
Fig. 19 mm. 24-26, p. 12


10Hussey, p. xi.

57


21 Dick, p. 62.


23 Dick, p. 69.

CHAPTER 4

IV. HARDY’S FUNERAL (JANUARY, 1928)

Diary Entry

Tuesday, January 17th

Yesterday we went to Hardy’s funeral. What did I think of? Of Max Beerbohm’s letter, just read; or a lecture to the Newnhamites about women’s writing. At intervals some emotion broke in. But I doubt the capacity of the human animal for being dignified in ceremony. One catches a bishop’s frown and twitch; sees his polished shiny nose; suspects the rapt spectacled young priest, gazing at the cross he carries, of being a humbug; catches Robert Lynd’s distracted haggard eye; then thinks of the mediocrity of X. [J.C. Squire, founder and editor of the London Mercury]; next here is the coffin, an overgrown one; like a stage coffin, covered with a white satin cloth; bearers elderly gentlemen rather red and stiff, holding to the corners; pigeons flying outside, insufficient artificial light; procession to poets corner; dramatic “In sure and certain hope of immortality” perhaps melodramatic. After dinner at Clive’s [Bell] Lytton [Strachey] protested that the great man’s novels are the poorest of poor stuff; and can’t read them. Lytton sitting or lying inert, with his eyes shut, or exasperated with them open. Lady Strachey [Lytton’s mother] slowly fading, but it may take years. Over all this broods for me some uneasy sense of change and mortality and how partings are deaths; and then a sense of my own fame—why should this come over me? and then of its remoteness; and then the pressure of writing two articles on Meredith [“The Novels of George Meredith”] and furbishing up the Hardy [“Thomas Hardy’s Novels”]. And Leonard sitting at home reading. And Max’s letter; and a sense of the futility of it all.
Biographical Perspective

Virginia Woolf's father, Sir Leslie Stephen, was a prolific writer and critic. His circle of friends included prominent literary figures such as George Meredith, Henry James, and Thomas Hardy. As a child, Virginia was acquainted with her father's friends and developed a deep respect for their work.

Following the death of their father in 1904, the four Stephen children moved to 46 Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, where they gradually lost contact with Leslie Stephen's circle of friends. Virginia's older brother, Thoby Stephen, wishing to stay in contact with his Cambridge University friends, extended an open social invitation at the Stephen home in Bloomsbury. This marked what Virginia described as the beginning of the Bloomsbury Group.

The term "Bloomsbury Group" has been the source of much controversy and criticism. According to Woolf scholar Mark Hussey: "Definition of the Bloomsbury Group . . . depends on whose account is consulted, some of those who were central figures in it even denying that it ever really existed."² Leonard Woolf, for instance, wrote that "Bloomsbury"

. . . never existed in the form given to it by the outside world. For 'Bloomsbury' was and is

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currently used as a term—usually of abuse—applied to a largely imaginary group of persons with largely imaginary objects and characteristics.¹

Essentially, the "group" consisted of friends gathering together socially to exchange ideas. Traditional social conventions of the older generation were discarded "in that young men and women met and spoke freely with one another."⁴ In addition to art, literature, and philosophy, they discussed subjects not generally acceptable for mixed company at the time, such as love, copulation, and homosexuality. The atmosphere was informal, free, and open. The members of the group, however did not necessarily share common views, opinions, or beliefs. Hussey underscores Leonard Woolf's belief that "the work of the Bloomsbury Group was individual, not communal, and that the basis for the group was always friendship rather than shared doctrine."⁵ The personal relationships forged in this group remained steadfast throughout Virginia Woolf's life.

Virginia Woolf was, to a large extent, self-educated. Her father had guided her childhood literary tastes and given her access to his large library. A voracious reader, she consumed philosophy, history, and biography as well as drama, fiction, and poetry. She was instructed by various tutors who taught her Greek and Latin, but she was denied
the formal education which her brothers received. Though her knowledge was extensive, she considered herself poorly educated. Contact with Thoby’s circle of “educated” friends provided new and unique opportunities for learning, both scholastically and socially. According to Woolf scholar Alex Zwerdling:

... Woolf’s private university included not only writers but painters, art critics, political theorists and practical politicians, economists, feminist reformers, philosophers, and psychoanalysts. Far from narrowing her vision, her association with the group opened her eyes to different ways of seeing and saved her from the intellectual parochialism and shoptalk of an exclusively literary clique. It fed her natural curiosity about the world and strengthened her conviction that only a wider understanding of society and human history would illuminate some of the darker stretches of personal experience.⁶

In a sense, then, her “education”, or lack thereof, proved to be an ideal preparation for her career as a writer.

In 1906, the four Stephen children travelled to Greece, along with their friend, Violet Dickinson. Vanessa, Violet, and Thoby fell ill while travelling, and following their return home, Thoby died of typhoid fever. His death was devastating, not only for his siblings who had already experienced such profound loss, but for his circle of friends as well. Leonard Woolf (not yet married to Virginia) wrote to Lytton Strachey:
I am overwhelmed, crushed. If only I had a soul to whom I could speak a word. It was only a week ago that I wrote to you what we had so often written & said, that he [Thoby] was an anchor. He was above everything in his nobility. God! what an accursed thing life is, great stretches of dull insensibility & then these unbearable bitternesses.'

The tragedy of Thoby’s death forged an even deeper bond between his family and friends. The nucleus of the group he started continued to meet and expand. Following his death, the people who are generally considered the “Bloomsbury Group” are: Saxon Sydney-Turner, Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, E.M. Forster, Adrian Stephen, Leonard Woolf, Roger Fry, Duncan Grant, Desmond MacCarthy, Molly MacCarthy, John Maynard Keynes, Vanessa Bell, and Virginia Woolf.

Virginia memorialized Thoby in her novels Jacob’s Room and The Waves. Following the completion of The Waves in 1931 (twenty-five years after Thoby’s death), Virginia wrote in her diary:

... it [The Waves] is done; & I have been sitting these 15 minutes in a state of glory, & calm, & some tears, thinking of Thoby & if I could write Julian Thoby Stephen, 1881-1906 on the first page. I suppose not.'

Profoundly moved after reading The Waves, Vanessa wrote to her sister:

... there’s the personal side, the feelings you describe on what I must take to be Thoby’s death (though I know that is only what it means to me,
and perhaps to you). . . . if you wouldn't think me foolish I should say you have found the "lullaby capable of singing him to rest." [Hamlet]

To which Virginia responded: "You didn't think it sentimental, did you, about Thoby? I had him so much in my mind,—I have a dumb rage still at his not being with us always."

Woolf scholar Peter F. Alexander suggests that for Virginia, Thoby's death "coming on top of all the others, reinforced her conviction that if God existed, he was deeply malevolent: the force behind the universe struck out at her from the apparent chaos of being." Virginia's father was a staunch agnostic, and his children were raised to have disdain for organized religion. As Leslie Stephen was dying in 1903, some relatives, appalled at the children's lack of religious upbringing, attempted to enlighten and educate them. Virginia wrote to Violet Dickinson:

The religious allusion . . . was pounded in, by a fat religious cousin [Dorothea Stephen], very red in the face, who is arguing Christianity with Thoby. She is trying to prove that certain sections of her soul are alive and afloat while ours are 'atrophied.' She has now found a Bible, a sort of instinct (probably miraculous) leading her to the only Bible in the room, and has just read a psalm aloud, something about being saved from a Dog and her bowels. We try to look as though we are in church. Adrian entirely
collapsed. She is now intoning through her nose, in an uplifted and sonorous voice. Oh my Violet, what a jumble the world is.\textsuperscript{12}

These episodes must have made quite an impression on the young Virginia, as twenty-eight years later she wrote to her Christian friend Ethel Smyth:

\ldots what I can't abide is the man who wishes to convert other men's minds; that tampering with beliefs seems to be impertinent, insolent, corrupt beyond measure. I never pass through Hyde Park without cursing every God inventor there. This is partly because; unbaptised as we were, our religious friends, some cousins in particular [Katherine and Dorothea Stephen], the daughters of Fitzjames, rasped and agonised us as children by perpetual attempts at conversion. As they were ugly women, who sweated, I conceived a greater hatred for them than ever for anyone. And even now, when no one tries, I still draw in and shiver at the suspicion—he's got a finger in my brain.\textsuperscript{13}

The 1928 diary entry Argento selected is a typical representation of Woolf's attitude toward religion and its ceremonies. She often expressed her opinions in a lighthearted, humorous, yet sarcastic manner, as seen in a letter to Violet Dickinson:

A great attack was made upon my faith this Christmas, and I am led to think that Atheists are still persecuted. For instance, wishing to read just now, I was dinned crazy by a cracked church bell, which didn't peal, but merely hammered, like an arrogant and bigoted street seller. Then the congregation sings without understanding, and as for the psalms, which all the news boys and errand boys, sing, I never heard anything so senseless in my life. However, I suppose it would be too rash
to burn them all. They must have imaginations. I am more charitable about them than they are about me.  

Years later, when Virginia, at the age of fifty-three, first read the Bible, her response was one of overwhelming literary appreciation. In a letter to Ethel Smyth she wrote:

Why did you never tell me what a magnificent book it is? And the Testament? and the Psalms? ... Oh I've been in such a howling duststorm—to sit alone and read the Bible is like drawing into a sunny submarine hollow between deep waves.

This revelation, however, did not alter her own personal beliefs and opinions, which in themselves are difficult to label. Woolf is most often described as a mystic, believing in all aspects of the Universe connected as part of a whole. Quentin Bell elaborates:

... she tended to be, as she herself put it, "mystical"; but she entertained no comfortable beliefs. That the Universe was a very mysterious place she would certainly have allowed, but not that this mysteriousness allows us to suppose the existence of a moral deity or of a future life.

In her memoir "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf reveals what she calls "a philosophy":

... it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool [of daily life] 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.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Music and Drama}

Argento begins "Hardy's Funeral" with a liturgical somberness suggestive of a funeral. The tone row is set in a solemn, unmetered organum style in the bass clef, followed by open fifths set to the rhythm of the phrase \textit{Requiem Aeternam} in the treble clef. (Figure 20) Argento explains:

\begin{quote}
... the row is done in chant. I also use open fifths because to me that says "Requiem Aeternam" in my mind. I don't even know if it is real Gregorian chant but you can't miss the sound of it, the bare fifths and whole step kind of thing, and the rhythm of it.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

The entrance of the vocal line is marked \textit{senza tristezza} (without sadness), perhaps supporting Woolf's state of mind. There is no doubt that Woolf was saddened by Thomas Hardy's death. He had been a friend of her father's, and she held a deep respect for his literary work. England had suffered a great loss. However, Woolf had never had much personal contact with Hardy, so her individual loss was probably less profound.
Fig. 20 1st and 2nd systems, p. 13

As Woolf describes her wandering thoughts, Argento implies the continuation of the funeral proceedings with the chant motive and open fifths. (Figure 21) In the letter to which Woolf refers, Max Beerbohm, critic and caricaturist, "had written that he rated The Common Reader 'above any modern book of criticism,' but that in her novels Virginia Woolf was 'so hard on us common readers.'" The "lecture about women's writing" Woolf mentions was to be given to the
Newnham Arts Society. The two essays she presented on "Women and Fiction" were later expanded and published as *A Room of One's Own*.

![Musical notation](image)

Fig. 21 3rd system, p. 13, 1st system, p. 14

Argento marks the text "At intervals some emotion broke in" *senza espressione* (without expression), leaving Woolf detached. The "emotion" is reflected in the piano with *pianissimo* rolled chords. Argento then shifts into using
measures and employs a syncopated rhythm to depict the bishop's twitch. Woolf's disrespect and sarcasm continue as the twitch-like motive leads into suspicions that the priest is a fraud. Intensity increases as the vocal line broadens and a third line is added in the piano. (Figure 22)
Fig. 22 mm. 1-20, pp. 14-16
Argento continues broadening the texture of his writing as Woolf refers to Hardy's "overgrown" coffin.

By a gruesome historic compromise between his [Hardy's] own wishes and those of 'the nation,' his heart was interred in his own parish churchyard at Stinsford and his ashes in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey; both funeral ceremonies took place at the same hour on 16 January. What appeared to Virginia Woolf an 'overgrown' coffin was in fact the pall-covered bier bearing the casket of ashes.\(^{20}\)

Fig. 23 mm. 21-24, p. 16

Argento creates another musical shift marking the beginning of the funeral procession with thick rolled chords in the piano. As the dynamic level gradually increases, the music becomes more dramatic, portraying the grandiose nature of the ceremony. The intensity climaxes in measure

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forty-nine with expansive chords in the piano marked triple forte and eroico (heroic). The final chord in the progression provides an abrupt tonal contrast, establishing a sense of irony for the following "perhaps melodramatic." Argento's contrasts effectively underscore Woolf's contempt for the exaggerated, theatrical moments of the ceremony. (Figure 24)
Fig. 24 mm. 33–51, pp. 17–18
The last page of the song returns to unmetered writing. The first two systems are a slight variation of the musical material seen in Figure 22. The vocal line is again marked senza espressione as Woolf becomes introspective. The emotion motive recurring in the piano, with the twitch motive as an added layer perhaps serve as Woolf’s subconscious reflections on the events which seem to have provoked her despondent mood. (Figure 25) Her thoughts turn to “mortality” and the idea that “partings are deaths.” According to scholar Ruth Miller, Woolf believed:

. . . that part of us dies when another dies. When Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson died, she felt “how much of a piece with our friends, like him, we are; it is thus we die, when they die.” And, again, when she read of Stella Benson’s death, she experienced “A curious feeling . . . that one’s response is diminished. Here & Now [an early title for The Years] won’t be lit up by her; its life lessened. My effusion--what I send out--less porous and radiant--as if the thinking stuff were a web that were fertilized only by other peoples (her that is) thinking it too: now lacks life.”

21
In the last phrases, Argento's dissonant and static writing creates an aura of austerity, which is poignantly heightened by the return of the *Requiem Aeternam* motive. Argento personifies Woolf's melancholy acquiescence and resignation to "the futility of it all" with three staccato eighth notes in the vocal line marked *quasi parlato sotto voce* (almost spoken; under the voice). (Figure 26)
Throughout "Hardy's Funeral," a performer must be able to identify and portray many mental and musical shifts. The shifts occur between characteristics such as observation, sarcasm, humor, detachment, involvement, contempt, and despondency. The piano provides a continuous interplay with the voice, which both supports and enhances the text. As a result of Argento’s variety of compositional elements, "Hardy's Funeral" is powerfully intense, both musically and dramatically.


3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p. 272.

5. Ibid., p. 35.


10. Ibid.


Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

V. ROME (MAY, 1935)

Diary Entry

BRENNER. Monday, May 13th
Odd to see the countries change into each other. Beds now made of layers on top. No sheets. Houses building. Austrian, dignified. Winter lasts at Innsbruck till July. No spring. Italy fronts me on the blue bar. The Czecho-Slovaks are in front going to the Customs house.

PERUGIA
Came through Florence today. Saw the green and white cathedral and the yellow Arno dribbling into shallows. A thunderstorm. Irises purple against the clouds. So to Arezzo. A most superb church with dropped hull.

Lake Trasimen: stood in a field of red purple clover: plovers egg lake; grey olives, exquisite, subtle; sea cold, shell green. So on, regretting that we did not stay to Perugia. Brafani where we stayed in 1908. Now all the same. The same ardent sunburnt women. But lace and so on for sale. Better to have stayed at Trasimen. I went into an Albergo yesterday to buy rolls and found a sculptured fireplace, all patriarchal-servants and masters. Cauldron on the fire. Probably not much change since sixteenth century: the people preserve liquids. Men and women scything. A nightingale singing where we sat. Little frogs jumping into the stream.

Brafani: three people watching the door open and shut. Commenting on visitors like fates--summing up, placing. A woman with a hard lined aquiline face--red lips--bird like--perfectly self-satisfied. French pendulous men, a rather poor sister. Now they sit nibbling at human nature. We are rescued by the excellence of our luggage.


Biographical Perspective

In this diary entry, Virginia Woolf recorded descriptions of sights and experiences which made an impression or impact on her. She and Leonard took annual trips abroad, and in the spring of 1935 they drove through Germany, Verona, Bologna, Florence, Perugia, and Spoleto. Rome was their final destination, where they joined Vanessa and her family.

Similarly, this chapter focuses on some important and influential relationships which made an impact in Virginia Woolf's life: Violet Dickinson, Vita Sackville-West, Ethel Smyth, Vanessa Bell, and Leonard Woolf.

In 1902, Virginia became acquainted with Violet Dickinson, who had been a friend of Virginia's mother, Julia Stephen, and of her half-sister, Stella Duckworth. A mutual admiration developed between the two women, and Violet,
seventeen years Virginia's senior, was able to step into a maternal role during a time when stability and comfort were badly needed in the Stephen household.

When Virginia experienced a complete breakdown following her father's death, Violet assumed the role of nurturer, took her into her home, and helped her recover. A strong bond was formed, and although mothering was a central element of the relationship, Violet eventually became more than a maternal figure to Virginia. "My Violet", "My Beloved", and "My Woman" are all titles Virginia used to address the many letters written to her friend.

Virginia's numerous letters to Violet have been preserved and from this it is clear to the modern reader, though it was not at all clear to Virginia, that she was in love and that her love was returned. For they are passionate letters, enchanting, amusing, embarrassing letters full of private jokes and endearments, letters in which Virginia invents nicknames for herself, imagines herself as some shy half-wild animal, a pet to be fondled and cherished; . . . One must think of this friendship as an affair of the heart, where I think that in fact it remained; while the affair was at its height, that is to say from about 1902 to 1907, it was intense.²

The letters are indeed intimate, yet childlike and playful, creating an impression of a young woman seeking affirmation and approval. Violet responded, not only to Virginia the woman, but to Virginia the writer. Her interest in
Virginia's talent, as well as her constant encouragement helped fill the void which Virginia's father's death had left. Virginia writes to Violet,

    I have written quite a lot, always with your stern eye searching me out across the world. I wish I had you here to encourage. No one really takes very much interest, why should they, in my scribblings. Do you think I shall ever write a really good book? ... Writing is a divine art, and the more I write and read the more I love it.

Ultimately, Violet introduced Virginia to the editor of the Women's Supplement of The Guardian, a London weekly newspaper, which resulted in Virginia's first published works. Not only was Violet willing to provide for Virginia's demanding emotional needs, she also successfully gave the necessary nudge that began a professional career.

The relationship between Violet and Virginia continued through the years, evolving from an adoring infatuation to a comfortable, distant friendship. During the height of their affection, Violet fulfilled a need in the young Virginia which remained prevalent throughout her life; to be mothered, comforted, and loved by women.

In 1922, at the age of forty, Virginia met author and aristocrat Vita Sackville-West, ten years her junior. In a letter to her husband, Harold Nicolson, Vita responds to the meeting:
I simply adore Virginia Woolf, and so would you. ... Mrs. Woolf is so simple: she does give the impression of something big. She is utterly unaffected. ... At first you think she is plain, then a sort of spiritual beauty imposes itself on you, and you find a fascination in watching her. ... She is both detached and human, silent till she wants to say something, and then says it extremely well. She is quite old. I've rarely taken such a fancy to anyone, and I think she likes me. Darling, I have quite lost my heart.  

The rapport was from the beginning quite complex. A regular correspondence developed between the two, and as time passed the level of intimacy heightened. According to Mitchell A. Leaska:

... Virginia saw Vita as supple, savage, and patrician. To Vita, Virginia was the "gentle genius"—lovely, idolized, remote. ... Vita was the superior woman in Virginia's eyes, and Virginia was the superior writer in Vita's. ... Vita would become for Virginia the voluptuous aristocrat some of the time, and some of the time she would be the protective maternal figure, crooning affectionate reassurance. Virginia would represent to Vita the mistress of English letters at one moment, and at the next, the helpless, affectionate child soliciting Vita's custodial embraces.  

As with Violet Dickinson, it appears that a primary element in this relationship was Virginia's desire to be mothered. In her diary she writes that Vita

... lavishes on me the maternal protection which, for some reason, is what I have always most wished from everyone. What L. (Leonard) gives me, and Nessa gives me, and Vita, in her more clumsy external way, tries to give me.
It is clear from their letters that the attachment progressed into an intense love affair. Virginia’s husband was aware of the situation, but did not interfere. Vita, attempting to placate her own husband, writes,

I love Virginia— as who wouldn’t? But really my sweet, one’s love for Virginia is a very different thing: a mental thing; a spiritual thing, if you like, an intellectual thing, and she inspires a feeling of tenderness, which is, I suppose, owing to her funny mixture of hardness and softness—the hardness of her mind, and her terror of going mad again. She makes me feel protective. Also she loves me, which flatters and pleases me. . . . I am scared to death of arousing physical feelings in her, because of the madness. I don’t know what effect it would have, you see: it is a fire with which I have no wish to play. I have too much real affection and respect for her. . . . Besides, Virginia is not the sort of person one thinks of in that way. There is something incongruous and almost indecent in the idea. I have gone to bed with her (twice), but that’s all. Now you know all about it, and I hope I haven’t shocked you.’

Vita’s husband most likely was not shocked, as this was not the first affair she had with a woman, nor the last.

Nevertheless, Vita’s instincts regarding the physical aspect of her relationship with Virginia appear to be correct. Virginia Woolf was not comfortable expressing love in a physical manner, whether with a man or woman, and when this element emerged with Vita, Virginia withdrew in much the same way she had withdrawn from her husband. She wanted, and seemed to need a profound emotional connection without
erotic involvement. According to Woolf scholar, Joanne Trautmann Banks, Virginia "craved cuddling, but since she was not an especially physical person, relationships for her were essentially verbal." Speculation about the causes of this are varied, and include issues such as the absence of her mother, and childhood sexual abuse. Whatever the reasons for her hesitation, the love which she ultimately was able to share with Vita should not be diminished. In contrast, Vita was a highly passionate woman, and over the course of her nineteen-year relationship with Virginia had affairs with several other women. This proved to be a source of jealousy for Virginia. During one of these periods of jealousy Virginia wrote one of her most successful novels, Orlando, which was a fictional biography of Vita. At the time, Vita was involved with a woman named Mary Campbell. Virginia writes to Vita,

... suppose Orlando turns out to be Vita; and its all about you and the lusts of your flesh and the lure of your mind (heart you have none, who go gallivanting down the lanes with Campbell) ... Shall you mind?

Evidently Vita did not mind, and in fact was flattered. In Virginia’s unique way she was able to tuck her beloved Vita away in the pages of art where she would be forever safe from another’s arms. As Vita’s son, Nigel Nicolson said,
Orlando was "the longest and most charming love letter in literature."\textsuperscript{10} Despite the affairs, Vita and Virginia remained vital in each other's lives. The many letters shared between them capture their extraordinary love, a love which flourished until Virginia's death.

In 1930 Virginia met composer Ethel Smyth, who was to become Virginia's most consistent visitor and correspondent during the later years of her life. "An old woman of seventy-one has fallen in love with me," wrote Virginia to her nephew. "It is at once hideous and horrid and melancholy-sad. It is like being caught by a giant crab."\textsuperscript{11} Smyth had been friends with many influential composers such as Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Grieg, and Clara Schumann. Her works include the operas Standrect, The Boatman's Mate, and The Wreckers, as well as choral/orchestral works Mass in D and The Prison. She also composed many chamber works, piano pieces, and songs. Ethel, a leader in the women's suffrage movement, had read Virginia's A Room of One's Own and was convinced she had discovered a kindred spirit. From the beginning of their relationship Ethel declared a "violent but platonic love" for Virginia.\textsuperscript{12} Eccentric, opinionated,
and boisterous, Ethel soon became a source of endless frustration as well as amusement. Virginia expresses it best:

Ethel's new dog is dead. The truth is, no dog can stand the strain of living with Ethel. I went down one day and found it on the verge of nervous collapse, simply from listening to her conversation.¹³

Despite Ethel's exasperating qualities, a genuine affection and sincere friendship developed. Virginia appreciated her straight-forward attitude. Ethel was

... someone who would force her to express all her emotions, including anger, who would suck from her what she had always wanted to tell—that is, the ultimate truth about her past, her writing and her values.¹⁴

Consequently, their correspondence resulted in some of the most open and candid letters Virginia wrote. Though Ethel possessed an explosive personality, she was, like Violet and Vita, able to fulfill a need in Virginia which remained always close to the surface. Virginia writes to Ethel:

you are, I believe, one of the kindest of women, one of the best balanced, with that maternal quality which of all others I need and adore.¹⁵

Violet, Vita, and Ethel are women who had a profound impact on Virginia Woolf, both personally and professionally. Each contributed to her life uniquely, yet they all seemed to share a strong maternal instinct which
Virginia found so essential. The two people who provided this maternal support most consistently and dependably throughout Virginia’s life were her sister, Vanessa Bell, and her husband, Leonard Woolf.

“I rather think I am more nearly attached to you than sisters should be,” wrote Virginia to Vanessa in 1937. Beginning in childhood, Virginia was almost obsessed with her sister. The eldest of Leslie and Julia’s children, Vanessa took charge of her younger brothers and sister. Her family nickname was “Saint,” due to her extreme honesty and practicality. Virginia’s nickname, on the other hand, was “Goat,” owing to her ability to create mischief. Virginia placed Vanessa on a pedestal early in life. Vanessa played the role of the nurturing elder sister, and following the deaths of their mother, Julia, and their half-sister, Stella, Virginia naturally turned to Vanessa as a surrogate mother. Vanessa assumed much of the responsibility for Virginia during her early breakdowns, coaxing and encouraging her through the crises.

As children, it was decided between the two that Vanessa would become a painter, and Virginia, a writer. They had extreme impacts on each other’s creativity.
throughout their careers, offering criticism as well as praise. Virginia placed immense importance on Vanessa's opinion:

O what a mercy that you should like that book! [The Wayea] . . . Nobody except Leonard matters to me as you matter, and nothing would ever make up for it if you didn't like what I did. So it's an amazing relief—I always feel I'm writing more for you than for anybody: . . . I couldn't say if I'd the whole day how happy you make me. . . . Dearest Dolphin, how I adore you, whether you like what I write or not.17

Virginia, it seems, was most content when she controlled Vanessa's full attention. Shortly after their brother Thoby's death, Vanessa accepted a marriage proposal from Clive Bell. This was the beginning of a rather bizarre set of events.

Vanessa's marriage created extreme jealousy in Virginia. She was not jealous because Vanessa had a husband, but because Clive had Vanessa. After the marriage, Virginia wrote to Clive:

. . . Vanessa; and I am almost inclined to let her name stand alone on the page. It contains all the beauty of the sky, and the melancholy of the sea, and the laughter of the Dolphins in its circumference, first in the mystic Van, spread like a mirror of grey glass to Heaven. Next in the swishing tail of its successive esses, and finally in the grave pause and suspension of the ultimate A breathing peace like the respiration of the Earth itself. . . . ; for are not all Arts her tributaries, all sciences her continents and the
globe itself but a painted ball in the enclosure of her arms? But you dwell in the Temple and I am a worshipper without.  

Virginia now had to share her sister’s affection. The situation was intensified even more when a year later Vanessa gave birth to a son, Julian. Her maternal sympathies were now directed toward her child, not her sister. Clive also became jealous of Vanessa’s attention to the baby, and as a result, he and Virginia “entered into a violent and prolonged flirtation.”

She [Virginia] was not in the least in love with Clive. In so far as she was in love with anyone she was in love with Vanessa. . . . She longed for the comfort of Vanessa’s presence. But it was because she loved Vanessa so much that she had to injure her, to enter and in entering to break that charmed circle within which Vanessa and Clive were so happy and by which she was cruelly excluded, and to have Vanessa for herself again by detaching the husband who, after all, was not worthy of her.

The flirtation never developed into an affair. However, about this same time, Clive began a relationship with Mrs. Raven-Hill, who was the first of many mistresses.

In 1910, Vanessa and Clive’s second son, Quentin, was born. Some eight months later, Vanessa began a long and passionate affair with artist Roger Fry. The affair with Roger ended when she fell in love with another artist, Duncan Grant. Vanessa first met Duncan when he was involved
in a homosexual relationship with her brother, Adrian. She and Duncan spent an abundance of time together, and eventually became devoted to each other. They lived together until Vanessa’s death in 1961. Since Duncan was an admitted homosexual, it was

... an essentially asexual relationship. ... Vanessa made accommodations so that Duncan’s current male lover would choose to live in the household which Duncan and Vanessa had established, rather than setting up a separate household away from her.21

It appears that Vanessa’s love for Duncan was so strong that she would do anything necessary to keep him near. Despite the lack of an ongoing sexual relationship, Duncan and Vanessa decided to have a child together, and in 1918, their daughter was born. They concealed the identity of her father, except to a select few, and named her Angelica Bell. David “Bunny” Garnett, who was a former lover of Duncan’s, and who adored Vanessa, wrote to a friend on the day of Angelica’s birth: “Its beauty is the remarkable thing about it. I think of marrying it; when she is twenty I shall be 46—will it be scandalous?”22 Coincidentally, much to her parent’s dismay, Angelica married Bunny in 1942. It should be noted that throughout her life, Vanessa maintained a close friendship with both her husband, Clive Bell, and her
former lover, Roger Fry. These events serve to demonstrate a bit of the social atmosphere which surrounded Virginia throughout her life.

One of the most shattering events the sisters faced together was the death of Vanessa’s son, Julian. In 1937, Julian went to Spain to serve in the Spanish Civil War. He was hit by a shell fragment while driving an ambulance and died a short time later. Virginia was devastated. To Vita, she writes: “He was the first of Nessa’s babies, and I can’t describe how close and real and always alive our relation was.” But it was Vanessa’s pain that concerned her most. Vanessa experienced a complete physical breakdown, and it was now Virginia who responded to her sister’s needs. Virginia was “in constant attendance on her elder sister, who seemed to derive comfort only from her sibling.” Vanessa slowly recovered, but told Virginia, “I shall be cheerful, but I shall never be happy again.” Vanessa realized how vital her sister had been during this time, but was unable to express her gratitude. Instead she wrote to Vita, “I cannot ever say how much Virginia has helped me. Perhaps some day, not now, you will be able to tell her it’s true.” Vita did relay the message and Virginia responded:

Isn’t it odd? Nessa’s saying that to you, I mean, meant something I can’t speak of. And I can’t
tell anyone—but I think you guess—how terrible it is to me, watching her: if I could do anything—sometimes I feel hopeless. But that message gives me something to hold to.”

Vanessa again wrote to Vita four years later, “I remember all those days after hearing about Julian lying in an unreal state and hearing her voice going on and on keeping life going as it seemed when otherwise it would have stopped.”

Virginia was capable and successful in returning the emotional support which Vanessa had so consistently provided her over the years.

From Virginia’s childhood to her death, Vanessa remained a central figure in her life. In Virginia’s eyes, Vanessa never fell off the pedestal upon which she had been placed. The bond between them was unshakable. Virginia often tried to express her indescribable love for Vanessa.

Why is it I never stop thinking of you, even when walking in the marsh this afternoon and seeing a great snake like a sea serpent gliding among the grass? . . . my darling honey how I adore you, and Lord knows I can’t say what it means to me to come into the room and find you sitting there.”

In May, 1912, Virginia accepted a marriage proposal from Leonard Woolf. “I’ve got a confession to make. I’m going to marry Leonard Wolf [sic]. He’s a penniless Jew. I’m more happy than anyone ever said possible . . . ,” wrote Virginia to Violet Dickinson.” Leonard’s was not the
first marriage proposal Virginia received. In 1909, Virginia accepted her close friend Lytton Strachey’s proposal. However, Lytton was homosexual. The complexities of the situation soon became overwhelming and the engagement was broken. She also received proposals from Hilton Young, Walter Lamb, and Sydney Waterlow; all were declined.

For Virginia, the decision to marry Leonard had been a struggle. She wrote to Leonard following his proposal:

I say to myself, Anyhow, you’ll be quite happy with him; and he will give you companionship, children, and a busy life—then I say By God, I will not look upon marriage as a profession.\footnote{11}

She was also painfully honest with him:

I sometimes think that if I married you, I could have everything—and then—is it the sexual side of it that comes between us? As I told you brutally the other day, I feel no physical attraction in you. There are moments—when you kissed me the other day was one—when I feel no more than a rock. And yet your caring for me as you do almost overwhelms me.\footnote{12}

Virginia gradually overcame her doubts and agreed to marry Leonard. From the start, the marriage was less than perfect. Virginia was extremely intolerant of Leonard’s Jewish family, and was not above chastising Leonard for his Jewish traits. She completely rejected sexual intercourse, and was emotionally unstable. Despite these problems

... Virginia’s relationship with Leonard ... was rocklike in its dependability. Once he had
fallen in love with her Leonard never wavered; he
endured sexual frustration, her contempt of his
family, even her violent abuse of himself when she
was mad: nothing could shake him.33

Leonard was entirely devoted to Virginia. He took daily
notes on her health, and watched closely for signs of stress
that might incur a breakdown. She depended on him for daily
comfort and reassurance; the maternal care which for her was
so necessary. Leonard also provided endless encouragement
and constructive criticism regarding Virginia’s writing.

Had I married Lytton I should never have written
anything. . . . He checks & inhibits in the most
curious way. L. [Leonard] may be severe; but he
stimulates. Anything is possible with him.34

The purchase of a hand printing press proved to be a
wise investment for the Woolfs. It was the beginning of the
Hogarth Press publishing company. Not only were they able
to publish their own works, but also published authors such
as T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Katherine Mansfield, Vita
Sackville-West, and Sigmund Freud.

Ultimately, Virginia and Leonard’s marriage was one of
happiness. They never spent much time apart. As Virginia
told Vita: “You see, I would not have married Leonard had I
not preferred living with him to saying good bye to him.”35
And to Leonard: “I don’t think I could stand more than a
week away from you . . . .”36 Even the resentment she may

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have felt about her childlessness she turned on herself, not Leonard. In a letter to a friend, she writes,

... was I very absurd about children last night? I was rather shocked that you should think I didn't care for Nessa's. They are such a source of pleasure to me. But I see what it is: I'm always angry with myself for not having forced Leonard to take the risk in spite of doctors; he was afraid for me and wouldn't; but if I'd rather more self-control no doubt it would have been all right. That's I suppose why I don't talk of Nessa's children--it's true I never do--whom I adore."

Similarly, she notes in her diary that her childlessness was "my own fault too--a little more self-control on my part, & we might have had a boy of 12, a girl of 10: This always makes me wretched in the early hours."  

Despite the disappointments and struggles they experienced, Leonard and Virginia shared a mutual dependence and steadfast love for twenty-nine years. Before her death Virginia wrote Leonard:

What I want to say is that I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good... If anyone could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness... I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been."
Virginia Woolf’s relationships with Violet Dickinson, Vita Sackville-West, Ethel Smyth, Vanessa Bell, and Leonard Woolf offer fundamental insight into the personal complexities of her life.

**Music and Drama**

Virginia Woolf’s writing style in this diary entry is a spontaneous list of random impressions. She records various thoughts and observations about her surroundings with brief sentence fragments. Argento emulates this style by capturing the essence of Rome through the cafe melody sustained in the piano. Over this, the voice interjects a fragmented commentary on the scene. (Figure 27) Argento notes:

> I wanted it to have the sound of a rather high-class cafe orchestra, playing music of the day [i.e. circa 1935] perhaps even a slow tango [which I believe were popular at the time]."
Lento e languido (\( \text{j} = 58 \text{ca.} \))

\[ \text{tratt.} \quad \text{a tempo} \quad \text{mp} \quad \text{mf} \quad \text{sp} \]

Rome:

\[ \text{tratt.} \quad \text{a tempo} \quad \text{mf} \quad \text{sp} \]

\[ \text{tea} \quad \text{tratt.} \quad \text{Tea in café} \quad \text{a tempo} \quad \text{mf} \quad \text{sp} \]

\[ \text{Lady is bright coats and white hats} \]

Fig. 27 mm. 1-11, p. 20
Beginning in measure twenty-two, the vocal commentary continues as the "high-class cafe orchestra" shifts into the imitation of a mandolin. The right-hand piano mandolin line contains the tone row.

Fig. 28 mm. 20-26, p. 21

Argento exercises a bit of compositional license when he connects "Fierce large jowled old ladies" to "talking about Monaco." (Figure 29) Woolf was actually referring to her nephew, who was discussing the French principality of
Monaco, and the French diplomat, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord (1754-1838). With a slight alteration of her meaning, Argento creates a humorous picture of old gossips. He characterizes this through the setting of the word "talking"; the upward slide of a tritone on the first syllable creates an effect reminiscent of a squawking bird. He then doubles the irritation by repeating it. In the phrase, "Old man who haunts the Greco," Woolf is referring to the Caffe Greco, "frequented for centuries by artists."⁴¹

Fig. 29 mm. 30-34, p. 22
To accentuate the text, the lighthearted mood shifts suddenly in measure forty-four to a poignant somberness. The piano lines become stark, sustained chords as the vocal line becomes deliberate and speechlike.

Fig. 30 mm. 45-48, p. 23

The cafe orchestra melody resumes in measure fifty-one, although in a lower octave, perhaps implying the previous carefree spirit has not been completely regained. The melody leads into Woolf’s musing about the Companion of Honour. The Order of the Companions of Honour was founded by King George V in 1917 to recognize those who have provided a national service. Membership is restricted to no more than sixty-five, and it is often presented to artists who have participated in the advancement of culture. Prime
ministers of Commonwealth countries make the nominations.

Woolf wrote to Ethel Smyth regarding the invitation:

Did I tell you in my drunken bout that I was offered a red ribbon, and to be one of the 18 or so ladies and gentlemen calling themselves Companions of Honour, and to walk into the room behind you, the Dames? I said No thanks; I don't believe in Honours, though Ethel Smyth, I said, does. Was I right? - Would you like to see me wearing a red ribbon and walking behind you? Oh what d----d nonsense it all is!42

Woolf believed that awards, decorations, and honors, served to produce harmful attributes, such as pride, envy, and competitiveness. She encouraged women to "refuse all such distinctions and all such uniforms for ourselves."43 In addition to the Companion of Honour, Woolf refused honorary doctorates from Manchester University and Liverpool University.

Argento represents the grandness of the Honour with a gradual crescendo throughout the line and a regal sounding rolled chord on the downbeat of measure sixty-four. He then abruptly changes to a subito pianissimo marking to prepare Woolf's answer. Argento repeats "No" three times, each with less volume, until ultimately the song ends with a hushed, yet adamant sixteenth-note decision. (Figure 31)
Fig. 31 mm. 61-70, p. 24
"Rome" provides performers with the opportunity to explore many possibilities of expression. Each separate sentence fragment holds the potential for depicting a particular attitude or emotion. It is immensely inadequate to merely sing the words and notes on the page. An essential vitality is added when conclusions are reached about how Virginia Woolf might have felt about ices, music, ladies in white hats, or poor black women. The enactment of these decisions, however, should remain subtle; never overt. Introspection is a continuous consideration, and a simple facial expression can convey a wealth of information.


5Ibid., pp. 11-12.


7Leaska, p. 27.


9Woolf, Spiritus, p. 231.

10Leaska, p. 34.


Banks, p. xii.

King, p. 450.


Ibid., p. 296.

Ibid., p. 40.

Bell, *1882–1912*, p. 133.

Ibid.


King, p. 560.

Ibid.


Spalding, p. 229.


Spalding, p. 298.


Ibid., p. 72.

Ibid., p. 70.

Ibid., p. 71.


Ibid., p. 218.

King, p. 420.

Ibid.


CHAPTER 6

VI. WAR (JUNE, 1940)

Diary Entry

Saturday, June 22nd

Waterloo I suppose. And the fighting goes on in France; and the terms aren’t yet public; and it’s a heavy grey day, and I’ve been beaten at bowls, feel depressed and irritated and vow I’ll play no more, but read my book. My book is Coleridge: Rose Macaulay; the Bessborough letters—rather a foolish flight inspired by Hary—o: I would like to find one book and stick to it. But can’t. I feel, if this is my last lap, oughtn’t I to read Shakespeare? But can’t. I feel oughtn’t I to finish off P.H. [Pointz Hall, original title for Between the Acts]: oughtn’t I to finish something by way of an end? The end gives its vividness, even its gaiety and recklessness to the random daily life. This, I thought yesterday, may be my last walk. On the down above Baydean I found some green glass tubes. The corn was glowing with poppies in it. And I read my Shelley at night. How delicate and pure and musical and uncorrupt he and Coleridge read, after the Left Wing Group. How lightly and firmly they put down their feet, and how they sing; and how they compact; and fuse and deepen. I wish I could invent a new critical method—something swifter and lighter and more colloquial and yet intense: more to the point and less composed; more fluid and following the flight; than my C.R. [Common Reader] essays. The old problem; how to keep the flight of the mind, yet be exact. All the difference between the sketch and the finished work. And now to cook dinner. A role. Nightly raids in the east and south coast. 6, 3, 22 people killed nightly.

A high wind was blowing: Mabel, Louie [servants] picking currants and gooseberries. Then a visit to Charleston threw another stone into the pond. And at the moment, with P.H. only to fix upon, I’m loosely anchored. Further, the war—our waiting while the knives sharpen for
the operation—has taken away the outer wall of security. No echo comes back. I have no surroundings. I have so little sense of a public that I forget about Roger [Roger Fry: A Biography] coming out or not coming out. Those familiar circumvolutions—those standards—which have for so many years given back an echo and so thickened my identity are all wide and wild as the desert now. I mean, there is no “autumn”, no winter. We pour to the edge of a precipice... and then? I can’t conceive that there will be a 27th June 1941. This cuts away something even at tea at Charleston. We drop another afternoon into the millrace.¹

Biographical Perspective

Oh I try to imagine how one’s killed by a bomb. I’ve got it fairly vivid—the sensation: but can’t see anything but suffocating nonentity following after. I shall think—oh I wanted another 10 years—not this—& shant, for once, be able to describe it. It, I mean death; no, the scrunching & scrambling, the crushing of my bone shade in on my very active eye & brain: the process of putting out the light,—painful? Yes. Terrifying. I suppose so—Then a swoon; a drum; two or three gulps attempting consciousness—& then, dot dot dot²

World War II was a threatening reality for Virginia Woolf. Her diary is filled with descriptions of air raids, artillery fire, and bombings. In 1940, while at their country house in Rodmell, the Woolf’s London home, 37 Mecklenburgh Square, was seriously damaged by a bomb. Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant’s art studios, along with the Woolfs’ former home, 52 Tavistock Square, were completely...
destroyed. Familiar parts of London were demolished. Furthermore, if the Nazis successfully invaded Britain it was almost certain that a prominent Jewish socialist and his prominent literary wife would be sent to a concentration camp. In fact, "both their names appear on a Gestapo arrest list prepared for the planned German attack." In this event, Virginia and Leonard had a suicide pact. They planned to

... poison themselves with the fumes of their car and Leonard kept enough petrol for this purpose in the garage; later they managed to get sufficient morphia from Adrian [Virginia's brother] for a lethal dose."

The Woolfs were no strangers to war and the horrors it inflicted. Virginia had been deeply affected by the death of her close friend, Rupert Brooke, in World War I. Leonard's brother, Cecil, was killed by a shell in the Battle of Cambrai, and his brother, Philip, was wounded by the same shell. Leonard and Virginia had endured air raids and bombings similar to the ones they experienced in World War II. In 1937, news about the Madrid massacres of the Spanish Civil War was reported daily in London newspapers. Perhaps most personally devastating was the death of Virginia's nephew, Julian, who was killed in 1937 while driving an ambulance in Spain:
It's odd that I can hardly bring myself, with all my verbosity--the expression mania which is inborn in me--to say anything about Julian's death--. . . . But one must get into the current again. That was a complete break; almost a blank; like a blow on the head: a shriveling up. Going round to 8 [Fitzroy Street, Vanessa's studio] that night; & then all the other times, & sitting there. . . . An incredible suffering--to watch it--an accident, & someone bleeding. Then I thought the death of a child is childbirth again; sitting there listening.\(^5\)

The atmosphere the Woolfs experienced before and during World War II is vividly represented in Virginia's diary as she provides a running commentary on their situation. The number of entries is abundant:

Friday, March 13 [1936]
. . . it's odd, how close the guns have got to our private life again. I can quite distinctly see them & hear a roar, even though I go on, like a doomed mouse, nibbling at my daily page.\(^6\)

Tuesday, May 24 [1938]
Aeroplanes growling overhead in the cloudy blue sky. They look like sharks, seen through our wavy window.\(^7\)

Sunday, August 28 [1938]
. . . at any moment the guns may go off & explode us. L. is very black. Hitler has his hounds only very lightly held. A single step--in Cheko Slovakia--like Austrian Archduke in 1914 & again it's 1914.\(^8\)

Wednesday, September 6 [1939]
This war has begun in cold blood. One merely feels that the killing machine has to be set in action. . . . It seems entirely meaningless--a perfunctory slaughter, like taking a jar in one hand, a hammer in the other. Why must this be done? Nobody knows. This feeling is different
from any before. And all the blood has been let out of common life. . . . Of course all creative power is cut off. 9

Friday, August 16 [1940]
They came very close. We lay down under the tree. The sound was like someone sawing in the air just above us. We lay flat on our faces, hands behind head. Don’t close yr teeth said L. They seemed to be sawing at something stationary. Bombs shook the windows of my lodge. Will it drop I asked? If so, we shall be broken together. 10

Monday, August 19 [1940]
Yesterday, 18th, Sunday, there was a roar. Right on top of us they came. I looked at the plane, like a minnow at a roaring shark. Over they flashed—3, I think. Olive green. Then pop pop pop—German? Again pop pop pop, over Kingston. . . . The closest shave so far. 11

Wednesday, September 11 [1940]
A plane shot down before our eyes just before tea: over the race course; a scuffle; a swerve; then a plunge; & a burst of thick black smoke. . . . Now & then there’s a thud. The windows shake. So we know London is raided again. 12

Sunday, October 6 [1940]
Will it ever seem strange that L. & I walking on the marsh first look at a bomb crater: then listen to the German drone above: then I take 2 paces nearer L., prudently deciding that 2 birds had better be killed with one stone? 13

Sunday, January 26 [1941]
Yes, I was thinking: we live without a future. That’s what’s queer, with our noses pressed to a closed door. 14

It is clear that the physical threat of war loomed ominously in Virginia Woolf’s thoughts. Yet, the threat was equally menacing for Virginia the artist. She notes: “It
struck me that one curious feeling is, that the writing 'I', has vanished. No audience. No echo. That's part of one's death.\textsuperscript{15} Writing was a vital and essential element of Virginia Woolf's life. She depended on her work and the responses she received to "thicken" her identity. War seemed to erase this identity. Art and artists become insignificant during times of chaos. Both audience and artist are distracted with other concerns. The frustration Virginia experienced as a result of this loss appears frequently throughout her personal writings:

Wednesday, July 24 [1940]
There's no standard to write for; no public to echo back; even the 'tradition' has become transparent.\textsuperscript{16}

September 11 [1940]: To Ethel Smyth
It's odd to feel one's writing in a vacuum--no-one will read it. I feel the audience is gone. Still, so oddly is one made, I find I must spin my brain even in a vacuum.\textsuperscript{17}

March 13 [1941]: To Elizabeth Robins [actress, author]
It's difficult, I find, to write. No audience. No private stimulus, only this outer roar.\textsuperscript{18}

These expressions mirror the ones reflected in the June 22, 1940 diary entry selected by Argento.

Virginia Woolf witnessed the devastation of war throughout her life. However, she was not an idle spectator. In her memoir of Julian Bell she notes:
. . . I understand that this [war] is a 'cause',
can be called the cause of liberty and so on,
still my natural reaction is to fight
intellectually: if I were any use, I should write
against it: I should evolve some plan for fighting
English tyranny. The moment force is used, it
becomes meaningless & unreal to me."

Indeed, Virginia Woolf did write against war, and the
resonance of her political voice continues to be heard.
Some of her ideas and theories about topics such as
pacifism, socialism, feminism, and antifascism were
considered to be quite radical. Her polemical essay, Three
Guineas, specifically deals with the question, "How do we
prevent war?" Some of her works, such as The Years, Between
the Acts, and Jacob's Room, have been labeled war novels.
Yet, Woolf scholar, Mark Hussey, suggests

. . . that all Woolf's works are deeply concerned
with war; that it helps redefine our understanding
of the nature of war; and that from her earliest
to her final work she sought to explore and make
clear the connections between private and public
violence, between the domestic and the civic
effects of patriarchal society, between male
supremacy and the absence of peace, and between
ethics and aesthetics."

The aspects of war permeate both Woolf's public and private
writings. The significance of her political voice has only
recently been recognized. War, it appears, was one of the
many muses stimulating her genius. She established her own
type of warfare on the written page. In her diary she
observes: "This idea struck me: the army is the body: I am the brain. Thinking is my fighting." And fight she did.

Music and Drama

"'War' is in effect a long, long cadenza for voice," explains Argento.\textsuperscript{22} There are no bar lines and no time signatures. Argento specifies a grave, quasi improvvisato (serious, almost improvisatory) quality, con stanchezza (with tiredness). The right hand piano line contains no key signature, while the vocal and left hand piano lines are marked with three sharps.

Virginia Woolf was an avid walker. She frequently hiked for miles exploring and enjoying her surroundings. By connecting Woolf's apprehensive thoughts about her last walk directly to her thoughts about the war, Argento immediately generates a disturbing mood. The voice is unaccompanied save for the intermittent appearance of two distinct motives. The right hand piano motive is a rapid rhythmic pattern repeated consistently throughout the song on various high-pitched notes from the tone row. Essentially it represents the sounds of war: machine-gun fire, airplanes, air-raid sirens, bombings. The dynamic levels fluctuate, but the unrelenting urgency must remain constant. Argento
further heightens the tension by instructing the pianist to keep the “sustaining pedal depressed as indicated throughout to pick up undertones and sympathetic vibrations,” creating a haunting reverberation.\textsuperscript{23}

Fig. 32 1st and 2nd systems, p. 25
The left hand motive is a foreboding, march-like alternation between G# and C#, which also emerges sporadically throughout the song. Both motives clash tonally with the vocal lines.

Fig. 33 3rd system, p. 28

Argento composes the phrase following 'war,' over the intervals of a major triad. The tonality seems out of place, but subtly suggests the essence of a military tune, such as "Taps" or "Reveille." He accentuates the anxiety of the phrase with crescendo, accelerando, and staccato markings in the vocal line, in addition to a sforzando marking in the piano. The rhythmic motive of the vocal line reappears several times throughout the song. Argento produces a foreshadowing echo effect in the subsequent vocal phrase. (Figure 34)
Fig. 34 2nd, 3rd, and 4th systems, p. 26
Argento's vocal writing is most often syllabic. Some of the vocal lines in "War" are virtually the only phrases in the cycle which Argento sets melismatically. He utilizes this effect to depict and emphasize certain words, such as 'echo,' 'wild,' 'wall,' and 'We pour.' All of the melismas are composed to the rhythmic motive represented in Figure 35. Similarly, Argento delineates the unsettled mood by incorporating several sudden leaps in the vocal line on words such as 'outer,' 'echo,' and 'wide.'

Fig. 35 4th system, p. 28, 1st system, p. 29
The diary entry Argento chose for this song is labeled June 22nd. It is actually the condensation and combination of two separate entries; June 22nd and June 27th. The second paragraph, beginning with "A high wind was blowing" is part of the June 27th entry, thus clarifying Woolf's final thought: "I can't conceive that there will be a 27th June 1941." The complete diary entries are contained in volume five of *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Argento finishes Virginia Woolf's prophetic line with a sound reminiscent of a large bell, symbolizing the tolling of the death knell. (Figure 36) Each peal draws nearer as the dynamic level increases. Virginia Woolf's premonition became reality. She committed suicide on March 28, 1941.
Fig. 36 2nd and 3rd systems, p. 30

In “War,” Argento effectively surrounds Woolf with an atmosphere of tormented apprehension. Her perpetual anticipation of the worst could be a result of the external forces of war, the internal reelings of her mind, or both. In a sense, a justified paranoia. Unwavering dramatic concentration from the performers serves to heighten the musical intensity. Questions must be answered regarding
each phrase. Where are the sounds coming from? Are they real or in her head? How would she react? The list goes on, and the answers are personal and individual. One should be careful, however, not to allow the performance to develop into a melodrama. All the information the performer needs to convey can be expressed with the eyes.

Color is also a vital element in this song, for both pianist and singer. The sounds of war are harrowing. Therefore, the pianist is responsible for creating a shrill, biting color in the upper motive while producing a dark, menacing color in the lower motive. Likewise, the singer must color the voice to reflect varying emotions. Argento assists by designating certain phrases with specific markings such as agitato (agitated), calmo (calm), disperato (desperate), and freddamente (cold). The singer must occasionally be willing to sacrifice beautiful, rich tones to achieve the desired color.

The vocal, musical, and dramatic challenges of "War" are immense. Through the culmination of these highly intense musical and dramatic devices, Argento has provided performers with a song possessing the potential to impose lasting impressions on its listeners.


5 Woolf, *Diary 5*, p. 104.

6 Ibid., p. 17.

7 Ibid., p. 142.

8 Ibid., p. 164.

9 Ibid., p. 235.

10 Ibid., p. 311.

11 Ibid., p. 312.

12 Ibid., p. 318.

13 Ibid., p. 327.

14 Ibid., p. 355.

15 Ibid., p. 293.

16 Ibid., p. 304.


18 Ibid., p. 442.

19 Bell, pp. 258-259.


CHAPTER 7

VII. PARENTS (DECEMBER, 1940)

Diary Entry

Sunday, December 22nd

How beautiful they were, those old people—I mean father and mother—how simple, how clear, how untroubled. I have been dipping into old letters and father’s memoirs. He loved her: oh and was so candid and reasonable and transparent—and had such a fastidious delicate mind, educated, and transparent. How serene and gaiety even, their life reads to me: no mud; no whirlpools. And so human—with the children and the little hum and song of the nursery. But if I read as a contemporary I shall lose my child’s vision and so must stop. Nothing turbulent; nothing involved; no introspection.¹

Biographical Perspective

... ‘Parents’ is more about my parents than it is her parents, a sentimental song. In retrospect, we need to think back to our parents and how wonderful they were. I don’t know what her parents were like. From everything I’ve read about them, they were not the sort of people I would get very sentimental over.²

Ironically, Argento has perhaps just described the very nature of Woolf’s perspective reflected in her diary entry. In April 1939 Woolf was writing “A Sketch of the Past,” in which she recounts several memories and events of her

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childhood. She questions the effects these childhood experiences may have had on her emotional stability. It is clear from the episodes she describes that life in the Stephen household was not quite as simple and serene as it may appear in the 1940 diary portrait.

"Her death was the greatest disaster that could happen," wrote Virginia. When Virginia was thirteen years old, her mother died. Julia Stephen, a woman of extraordinary beauty, was in constant service to others. She was widowed at the age of twenty-four and left with three young children, George, Stella, and Gerald. In 1878 she married Leslie Stephen, a widower with a daughter named Laura. Between the years 1879 and 1883 they had four more children; Vanessa, Thoby, Virginia, and Adrian. Virginia and Adrian were unplanned. In addition to the demands of her large family, which included caring for her sick mother, Julia was involved in charitable activities and spent much of her time visiting and nursing the poor. In 1895 the stress of her daily life became overpowering, and at the age of forty-eight, Julia Stephen died of rheumatic fever.

What type of relationship, then, did Virginia have with her overworked mother? Perhaps, it is best described in her own words:
I see now, . . . why it was that it was impossible for her to leave a very private and particular impression upon a child. She was keeping what I call in my shorthand the panoply of life—that which we all lived in common—in being. I see now that she was living on such an extended surface that she had not time, nor strength, to concentrate, except for a moment if one were ill or in some child’s crisis, upon me, or upon anyone . . . . The later view, the understanding that I now have of her position must have its say; and it shows me that a woman of forty with seven children, some of them needing grown-up attention, and four still in the nursery; and an eighth, Laura, an idiot, yet living with us; and a husband fifteen years her elder, difficult, exacting, dependent on her; I see now that a woman who had to keep all this in being and under control must have been a general presence rather than a particular person to a child of seven or eight. Can I remember ever being alone with her for more than a few minutes? Someone was always interrupting. When I think of her spontaneously she is always in a room full of people; . . . What a jumble of things I can remember, if I let my mind run, about my mother; but they are all of her in company; of her surrounded; of her generalised; dispersed, omnipresent, of her as the creator of that crowded merry world which spun so gaily in the centre of my childhood.

Of course, this is a reflection of a grown woman looking back with the wisdom of adulthood. As a young child it must have been extremely frustrating not to have access to her mother. The memories Virginia goes on to describe of her mother do not seem negative. It appears that her mother was responsible for much of the happiness in the home. However, it is clear that Virginia as an individual did not receive a great deal of attention from her mother.
It must also be pointed out that the Stephens were considered a typical Victorian household. According to Woolf scholar Louise DeSalvo:

Victorian infants, in upper-middle-class homes, were left very much to themselves. Self-regulation was a principle of child care in upper-middle-class families; if infants cried, they were ignored so that a firm moral character would be ingrained from the beginning.5

Children in Victorian England "were supposed to be a comfort to their parents, not vice versa."6 DeSalvo also points out that as a result, "many Victorian upper-middle-class children would be classified as emotionally deprived by contemporary standards."7 Yet it must also be noted that Victorian wives and mothers were expected to be the "angel in the house": always beautiful, always gracious, always able to provide complete care and comfort, regardless of how large the burden may be. Julia did her best to live up to these expectations. Given the complete responsibility of running a household, which in the Stephen family numbered eleven, it is no wonder that quality time with each child was limited. Participation by husbands was minimal, especially concerning children, and in Julia Stephen's case her husband's needs outweighed all else. Bell writes:

Despite her charities and maternal commitments, Julia lived chiefly for her husband; everyone needed her but he needed her most. With his
temperament and his necessities this was too great a task for even the most heroic of wives; . . . he had to be fortified and protected from the world. He was, as he himself said, a skinless man, so nothing was to touch him save her soothing and healing hand.  

Julia’s children came to believe that her premature death was in part due to the extreme emotional and physical demands placed on her by her husband.

As Virginia expressed, Julia was more of a “general presence” to her than a mother.  
Despite this, Virginia was haunted by her for most of her life.

Until I was in the forties . . . the presence of my mother obsessed me. I could hear her voice, see her, imagine what she would do or say as I went about my day’s doings. She was one of the invisible presences who after all play so important a part in every life.

At the age of forty-four Virginia finished her novel To the Lighthouse. It was meant to be a portrait of her family, especially her mother and father. Upon completion of the novel her mother ceased to obsess her: “I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her.”  
Perhaps she provided herself with a form of therapy.

I suppose that I did for myself what psychoanalysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest.
"Essentially the happiness of the Stephen home derived from the fact that the children knew their parents to be deeply and happily in love."\textsuperscript{13} This could explain why Virginia describes the period after her mother's death as one of "Oriental gloom".\textsuperscript{14} Her father was plunged into a miserable state of despair and he called upon his children "to feel, not simply their natural grief, but a false, a melodramatic, an impossibly histrionic emotion which they could not encompass."\textsuperscript{15} In addition, "... the children had to live with a father who was in such a state of despairing, oppressive, guilt-ridden gloom that their own sharp, uncomplicated unhappiness seemed by contrast a relief."\textsuperscript{16} It does not appear that Leslie Stephen was overly concerned with his children's adjustment following the death of their mother. He seems self-absorbed and self-pitying. His children existed to comfort him. Instead of attempting to fill the empty void, he added to it by creating a household filled with darkness. In a sense, Virginia was dealing with the loss of her father as well as the loss of her mother. Again, here is an example of a Victorian parent placing his burdens on the shoulders of his children. Nobody paid a higher price for these burdens than Virginia's half-sister, Stella.
"It was Stella who lifted the canopy again. A little light crept in," recalls Virginia.17 "The family name for her, 'the Old Cow,' portrays her as a mindless, slow-witted supplier of the family's needs for nurture."18 Stella Duckworth was ten years old when the first of Leslie and Julia's children was born. From that moment on she was "an unpaid servant within the Stephen household."19 She attempted to relieve some of the strain placed on her mother by assuming many of the family responsibilities, an effort which was left unrewarded and unacknowledged, especially by her mother. After Julia's death Stella was thrown into the position of filling her mother's shoes. The demands on her were great, especially concerning her step-father. Virginia writes, "I do not think that Stella lost consciousness for a single moment during all those months of his immediate need."20 Leslie expected her to replace his wife in the running of his household and the fulfilling of his emotional needs. This control was especially apparent in 1896 when Stella received a marriage proposal from John Waller Hills, "Jack". She denied him twice, probably out of a sense of "duty" to her step-father. Jack's proposal was finally accepted with a condition from Leslie that they live across the street from the family so Stella could continue her
responsibilities in running his household. Happily in love, Stella married Jack on April 10th, 1897. On April 28, they returned from their honeymoon and Stella was diagnosed with peritonitis. In late May, after a long convalescence, Stella’s health seemed to improve. It was learned that she was pregnant and the fears of her family began to subside, but on the morning of July 19, she underwent emergency surgery and died, only three months after her marriage.

The effects of Stella’s death on Virginia were devastating. During the summer of Stella’s illness Virginia’s health was also poor. She had some of her typical psychological symptoms which also manifested in physical symptoms. It is believed that her illness was caused by worry and concern over Stella’s health. Indeed, she lost her surrogate mother a mere two years after Julia’s death.

Virginia Woolf explained that Stella’s nickname, "the Old Cow" had been chosen because of Stella’s association with “large white flowers—elderblossom, cow parsley” or “a white faint moon in a blue sky.” The nickname suggests that she associated Stella with some primal, natural, life-giving, maternal force; she was both beautiful and fragile.21

Stella had been a maternal figure in Virginia’s life since the day she was born. Virginia had possibly depended on her even more than her own mother. It may be true that, “in
many ways, the woman that Virginia Woolf became was due far more to Stella's daily care than to Julia's chilly and distant supervision.\textsuperscript{22} Certainly, both deaths had an extreme impact on the life of the adolescent Virginia. Virginia herself reflects:

Why should our lives have been so tortured and fretted? by two unnecessary blunders--the lash of a random unheeding flail that pointlessly and brutally killed the two people who should, normally and naturally, have made those years, not perhaps happy but normal and natural. Mother's death: Stella's death. . . . I am thinking of the stupid damage that their deaths inflicted.\textsuperscript{23}

During the years after Stella's death Virginia silently watched as Leslie tried to claim his next "victim"; her sister Vanessa. Vanessa was next in line for the privilege of meeting his every need, and when this was not accomplished to his satisfaction she was subjected to tyrannical rantings and ravings.

Virginia, who witnessed it all, was consumed with silent indignation. How could her father behave with such brutality and why was it that he reserved these bellowings and screamings for his women? With men his conduct was invariably gentle, considerate, and rational. . . . But he needed and expected feminine sympathy.\textsuperscript{24}

Vanessa was not sympathetic. She had witnessed Julia, then Stella "wear themselves out and die" trying to meet his expectations.\textsuperscript{25} She had no desire to follow suit.
Despite Virginia's frustration with the behavior of her father throughout his life, a bond existed between them built upon a common interest in literature and writing. He was an author, and recognized her gifts very early. In a letter written to his wife when Virginia was eleven he states:

Yesterday I discussed George II with "Ginia."... She takes in a great deal and will be an author in time, though I cannot make up my mind in what line. History will be a good thing for her to take up as I can give her some hints."26

He did indeed give her some hints, encouraging her to read, write, and follow in his footsteps. Writing was considered a "fitting" profession for women in Victorian England, so he "was not challenging the conservative norms of proper conduct for women which prevailed within his society, to which he adhered ...."27 Through this mutual interest, father and daughter were able to develop a connection which otherwise might not have existed. By recognizing her potential, Leslie Stephen helped guide Virginia in the development of her art.

In 1903 Virginia's father was dying of cancer. Nothing could be done except make his life as comfortable as possible. The illness lasted over a year and the Stephen household was once again one of unhappiness.
Altogether it was a time of mounting and unendurable distress. "Why must he die? And if he must why can't he?" Such, roughly, were Virginia's sentiments. Death was no stranger to that house but never before had he come with so deliberate a tread.\(^28\)

On February 22, 1904 Leslie Stephen's suffering ended.

Following the completion of To the Lighthouse, Virginia wrote a letter to Vita Sackville-West concerning her parents, in which she observed: "I was more like him than her, I think; and therefore more critical; but he was an adorable man, and somehow, tremendous."\(^29\) She was critical, however, and could not seem to forget the images of her childhood. She provides a portrait of her father through the character of Mr. Ramsey in To the Lighthouse:

But what remained intolerable . . . was that crass blindness and tyranny of his which had poisoned her childhood and raised bitter storms, so that even now she woke in the night trembling with rage and remembered some command of his; some insolence: "Do this," "Do that," his dominance: his "Submit to me."\(^30\)

Despite the love Virginia ultimately felt for her father, it appears that she was never able to deny the anger, as well as the devastation she suffered as a child. She writes, "How I see father from the 2 angles. As a child condemning; as a woman of 58 understanding--I should say tolerating. Both views true?"\(^31\)
Two years after her father's death, Virginia's beloved brother, Thoby, died of typhoid fever. During the span of a decade Virginia lost her mother, father, sister, and brother. Henry James called the Stephen household "that house of all the Deaths." In addition to these blows she was sexually molested by her half-brothers. Reasons abound for her emotional fragility. Public awareness of the causes of her instability was non-existent in the early 1900's, but the result seemed obvious; she was "mad." Today, any adolescent enduring these same traumas would be rushed to therapy and analyzed. Breakdowns would be expected and considered part of recovery. Virginia never had this opportunity; instead she endured doctors who told her to rest.

Louise DeSalvo believes that the 1940 diary entry was a form of denial. Virginia had worked for a year creating a portrait of her childhood in "A Sketch of the Past." The diary entry appeared to be a contradiction. She was also reading Sigmund Freud at the time, who wrote about human behavior as "the result of drives, complexes, fantasies, wish-fulfillment and other subterranean and seemingly uncontrollable forces." Virginia writes, "Freud is upsetting: reducing one to whirlpool; I daresay truly. If
we’re all instinct, the unconscious, what’s all this about civilization, the whole man, freedom.” According to DeSalvo:

Faced with Freud’s view, she might have felt a need to deny the reality of her experience rather than reinterpret it in the light of Freud. . . . In her diary entry about the idyll of childhood, she was writing about the parents she wished she had had, the child she wished she had been, the childhood she would have wanted—“the little hum & song of the nursery.” She wanted “no mud; no whirlpools.” She wanted to stop thinking about her abuse and the violence that she had lived with, or she wanted to deny it. As she was reading her father’s letters, however, she must have encountered the reality of her parents’ lives, because she wrote “if I read as a contemporary I shall lose my child’s vision & so must stop. Nothing turbulent; nothing involved; no introspection.”

Perhaps. It is certainly an interesting concept, and one which appears to be quite valid. No amount of speculation or investigation will ever afford the luxury of knowing what was in Virginia Woolf’s mind on December 22, 1940. She may have been in a state of denial about her parents when she wrote this entry. Or, maybe she simply needed to remember “how wonderful they were.”

Music and Drama

Argento opens “Parents” with a gentle, lyric vocal melody which, following the abrasiveness of “War,” provides
soothing relief. The piano part is reminiscent of an Edward Elgar processional. Argento elaborates:

I appreciate a certain elegance in my music. I do want my music to be elegant and to have a kind of really classic calm and simplicity about it. When you do arrive at that thing, it’s bound to sound like the one person who specialized in that kind of mood, Elgar. Most of Elgar’s music has a quality that is very much like a Handel “Largo,” very broad, majestic, and noble, and that’s a sound I just love.\(^3\)

The right-hand piano motive in measure three, found frequently throughout the song, creates an aura of dreamlike tranquility. (Figure 37)
Largo ed affettuoso ($\lambda = 69$ ca.)

How beautiful they were, those old...

quasi pizzicato

Più mosso ($\lambda = 44$)

people... I mean father and mother... how

pechino crysc.

Fig. 37 mm. 1-4, p. 31

In measure ten, Argento adds a romantic lushness to the sound by thickening the texture and creating a legato interplay between the voice and piano, thus effectively enhancing Woolf's memory of her father's love for her mother. (Figure 38)
The tranquil piano motive from measure three appears in measure twenty underlying the upward motion of the vocal line on the word "serene." The motive then leads into a four measure waltz beginning in measure twenty-three, depicting a light-hearted peacefulness. (Figure 39)
Fig. 39 mm. 19-24, p. 33
Argento inserts the syllable "O" into Woolf's diary entry to represent "the little hum and song of the nursery." The "O" is set to the same tranquil motive seen in Figures thirty-seven and thirty-nine, as well as supported by it in the piano. The tranquility is sharply interrupted by the reappearance of the machine-gun motive from "War," which symbolizes Woolf's abrupt return to reality: the reality of war, or more probably the reality of her tumultuous childhood.

Fig. 40 mm. 29-34, p. 34
Argento proceeds with a recitative style vocal line and a stark, single line piano passage which together contain the tone row. The last note of the row, G-sharp, is repeated five times, reproducing the death knell in "War." The phrase "Nothing turbulent" is marked *agitato* (agitated), while "nothing involved" immediately following is marked *calmandosi* (calm), perhaps personifying Woolf’s struggle to remain composed.

Argento editorializes Woolf’s thought process throughout the song by inserting the phrase "How beautiful they were" in several places. In measure forty-one, the calm, lyric melody associated with the phrase resumes as the words are once again repeated. However, the phrase is left unfinished, implying another abrupt transition to reality. The singer can most effectively mirror this transformation by simply relaxing the facial muscles into a blank expression. Anything more disturbs the stillness and silence Argento has created. The change must be clear, but subtle. (Figure 41)
But if I read as a con-temp-o-ra-ry
I shall lose my child’s vi-sion

and so must stop.
Nothing sur-bu-lent; nothing in-

Molto largo (\( \text{\textcopyright} \) \( \text{\textcopyright} \) 63)

How beau-ti-ful— they....

Allow to fade away completely; begin No. 3 immediately thereafter.
The pervasive melancholy mood of Woolf's recollections is skillfully reflected by Argento's music. Beneath the serene melodies lies a consistent trace of muted despondency. Argento further reinforces this ambience by never allowing the dynamic level to rise above a mezzo-piano in the voice or piano, except on the phrase "Nothing turbulent." A performer must go beyond what first appears to be Woolf's fond memories, and delve deeper into her psyche. Ideally, this will result in an intense emotional contradiction, adding an essential layer to the performance. "Parents" demands a keen sensitivity to the balance between delusion and reality; tranquility and denial.


6Ibid., p. 117.

7Ibid., p. 116.


9Woolf, Moments, p. 83.
Ibid., p. 80.
Ibid., p. 81.
Ibid.
Bell, p. 38.
Bell, p. 41.
Ibid., p. 42.
DeSalvo, p. 62.
Ibid., p. 42.
DeSalvo, p. 62.
Ibid., p. 63.


Bell, p. 63.
Ibid., p. 64.
DeSalvo, p. 219.
Ibid., p. 138.
Bell, p. 85.


DeSalvo, p. 126.
DeSalvo, pp. 131-132.
"Garton, p. 47.

"Ibid., p. 55.
CHAPTER 8

VIII. LAST ENTRY (MARCH, 1941)

Diary Entry

Sunday, March 8th

Just back from L.'s [Leonard] speech at Brighton. Like a foreign town: the first spring day. Women sitting on seats. A pretty hat in a teashop--how fashion revives the eye! And the shell encrusted old women, rouged, decked, cadaverous at the tea shop. The waitress checked in cotton. No: I intend no introspection. I mark Henry James' sentence: observe perpetually. Observe the oncome of age. Observe greed. Observe my own despondency. By that means it becomes serviceable. Or so I hope. I insist upon spending this time to the best advantage. I will go down with my colours flying. This I see verges on introspection; but doesn't quite fall in. Suppose I bought a ticket at the Museum; biked in daily and read history. Suppose I selected one dominant figure in every age and wrote round and about. Occupation is essential. And now with some pleasure I find that it's seven; and must cook dinner. Haddock and sausage meat. I think it is true that one gains a certain hold on sausage and haddock by writing them down.¹

Biographical Perspective

In his book Portraits, Desmond MacCarthy records Henry James as saying, "Never cease to watch whatever happens to you."² Virginia Woolf's connection to this idea was strong, perhaps because it was a concept she had practiced throughout her life. She observed "perpetually," and for
about twenty-five years she heightened the significance of her observations by recording them in her diary. Whether major events, emotional instabilities, relationships, or the trivialities of daily life, Woolf gained "a certain hold . . . by writing them down."

Death, Virginia said to Vita Sackville-West, "is the one experience I shall never describe." On the morning of March 28, 1941, Virginia walked half a mile to the Ouse River, placed a large stone in her pocket, and threw herself into the water. She left letters for Vanessa and Leonard explaining that she felt she was going "mad" again and could not recover. Leonard found her walking stick on the bank; three weeks later some children found her body. Only Leonard was present at her cremation on April 21. He buried her ashes in the garden of Monk's House under two intertwining elm trees they had called 'Leonard' and 'Virginia.' He chose Virginia's own words for the epitaph from the penultimate line of her novel, The Waves: "Against you will I fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!"

There is much speculation on what caused Woolf to lose her hold on life in 1941. Some scholars believe it was a direct result of the war. Hitler's invasion was expected at
Newhaven, three miles from Woolf’s home, during the third week of March. Perhaps Woolf preferred controlling her own death instead of waiting for a bomb. In addition, she had lost her writing identity which had become such a vital element to her existence. Others believe that Woolf was simply tired of fighting. Stress increased, and familiar signs of mental illness began to appear. Woolf knew from experience that strength, patience and endurance would be required to overcome the symptoms. Virginia Woolf’s thoughts as she walked toward the water will never be known. What is known, however, is that for Virginia, water represented peace.

Water is a prevalent factor throughout Virginia Woolf’s writing. According to Woolf scholar Roger Poole:

Water is Virginia’s central symbol. Water, the sea, the waves: in these symbols, the meanings, moods and varieties of her experience find their synthesis, their point of repose. At least three of her novels—The Voyage Out, To the Lighthouse, and The Waves—have the sea in their very titles, and the sea is part of their structure too. But there is scarcely a page of her novels where the sea, or water, does not make a fleeting appearance, as if her imagination was rocked on the swell of an invisible current of water which ran ceaselessly through her thinking.¹

Woolf’s fascination with water stems from her earliest childhood memories in Cornwall. In her memoir, “A Sketch of the Past,” she writes:
If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills—then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St. Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive. ³

Water was a source of intrigue for Woolf. Scholar Marie-Paule Vigne observes that water predominates all Woolf’s novels and that “water alone occupies almost one half of the cosmic vocabulary.”⁶ Woolf recurrently portrays the water as a place of tranquility and comfort. Through her own symbolism, she perhaps provided insight into her choice of drowning. For her, death by water held no fears.

The water was her friend, and had been her friend ever since she was a child in Cornwall. The water could be trusted. The water was peace. The water would receive her with the dignity that she felt she needed, and indeed, deserved.⁷

**Music and Drama**

It’s odd, for I’m not regularly musical, but I always think of my books as music before I write them. . . . there was such a mass of detail that the only way I could hold it together was by abstracting it into themes. I did try to state them in the first chapter, and then to bring in developments and variations, and then to make them all heard together and end by bringing back the first theme in the last chapter.⁸
Ironically, Virginia Woolf's observation about her own musical method of writing directly corresponds to the methods employed by Argento in his song cycle. The tone row presented in the first song serves as the base Argento uses throughout the cycle to develop and create individual themes. Like Woolf, he brings them all together in the end, concluding with the closing theme of the first song.

"Last Entry" opens with an erratic syncopated rhythm in the vocal line struggling against solid, steady chords in the piano, effectively characterizing Woolf's inner conflict. (Figure 42) Argento editorializes Woolf's diary entry by stressing the word "No" through repetition in much the same manner he emphasizes the word "Why" in "Anxiety." (Figure 9)
Observation becomes the central idea of the song as Woolf reflects on Henry James' advice, "Never cease to watch whatever happens to you." Beginning in measure twenty-six, Argento appropriately repeats the word "observe" as the piano serves to recollect excerpts from each of the preceding songs. Meter shifts and key signature variations occur between each of the two or three measure passages.
The excerpts from previous songs appear in the following order: "Anxiety" mm. 25-27, "Hardy's Funeral" mm. 28-29, "Rome" mm. 30-33, "Parents" mm. 34-36, "Fancy" mm. 37-38, "War" mm. 40-41. (Figure 43) Each extract holds the potential to elicit various memories and emotions.

Intensity builds in measure thirty-eight as the dynamic level increases to *fortissimo* and Argento marks the vocal line *con amarezza* (with bitterness), depicting Woolf's growing frustration. Argento abruptly interrupts Woolf's bitterness with the marking *tronco* (cut off) and a *Grand Pause*. 
Fig. 43 mm. 25–41, pp. 39–40
Argento then smoothly shifts from Woolf’s emotional unrest to her simple, calming thoughts about cooking dinner. He proceeds with the original tone row material from measures seven through eighteen in “The Diary,” with modifications in the text and melody of the vocal line. (Figures 1 and 2) Argento adds poignancy to the complex connotations of Woolf’s words, “by writing them down,” with a repeated half-note motive which also echoes in the piano line. (Figure 44) Each time the phrase recurs, the dynamic level diminishes and a word is omitted, creating the impression of a trance. This sense is heightened in measure fifty-seven with the return of the passage of time motive from “The Diary.” (Figure 4)
Fig. 44 mm. 42-59, pp. 40-41
In measures fifty-six through seventy-four, Argento ingeniously leads the passage of time motive into an exact repetition of the closing text and music from the first song (Figures 4-7), thus bringing the piece full circle and reiterating the objectives of Woolf’s diary;

... to come back after a year or two, and find that the collection had sorted itself and refined itself and coalesced, as such deposits so mysteriously do, into a mould transparent enough to reflect the light of our life...

As in the first song, Argento concludes with the tranquil half-note motive. (Figure 7) However, this time the motive, like Virginia Woolf’s life, is left unfinished.

Fig. 45 mm. 70-74, p. 42


Poole, p. 259.

Ibid., p. 279.


MacCarthy, p. 155.

EPILOGUE

In a 1931 letter to Ethel Smyth, Virginia writes:

... I don't mind what people write about my 'life'—indeed should be immensely amused and interested by their interpretation.¹

Woolf probably could not have imagined that sixty-five years later library shelves would be overflowing with "interpretations" of her life, nor that the personal thoughts in her diary would be interpreted musically. Perhaps she would be amused.

Woolf's life and works continue to be a source of intrigue for many. For most, however, general knowledge of Virginia Woolf remains relatively limited. "In 1982, Nigel Nicolson said, 'Ask the average Briton what he knows about Virginia Woolf and he will give you Albee.'"² In 1962, playwright Edward Albee wrote to Leonard Woolf requesting permission to use Virginia's name in the title of his new play. The play, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?,"

... concerns an all-night drinking party in which a middle-aged couple, George and Martha, torment each other verbally; they have an imaginary child that at the end of the play they 'kill' by abandoning their fantasy.³
Leonard saw the play in 1965 and "wrote Albee that he thought it was about 'the really important things in life.'" Although the play never deals directly with the subject of Virginia Woolf, scholar Brenda R. Silver believes that it, as well as the Mike Nichols film with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, was "the major event that precipitated Woolf into public awareness." Silver also suggests that the play made Woolf's name synonymous with the power to elicit fear and wreak psychological death and destruction."

In spite of the dissonance evident in Virginia Woolf's life, it is my hope that Dominick Argento's song cycle will continue to successfully enrich and enhance public knowledge of her personal strength and courage, as well as her professional genius. Through Woolf's own words Argento has created a sensitive work of art which, together with an equally sensitive performance, holds the potential to impose lasting impressions of this remarkable and unique woman. Hers was a life of extraordinary insight and triumph. She left us no reason to be afraid.


'Ibid.

'Ibid.

'Ibid.

'Ibid.
APPENDIX

DEGREE PERFORMANCES

NOELLE WOODS, MEZZO-SOPRANO

Performance One: The Turn of the Screw
Performing the role of Mrs. Grose
January 27-30, 1994
Thurber Theatre
The Ohio State University

Performance Two: Chamber Recital
May 6, 1994
Weigel Hall Auditorium
The Ohio State University

Performance Three: South Pacific
Performing the role of Nellie Forbush
October 27-29, 1994
Mershon Auditorium
The Ohio State University

Performance Four: Recital
April 18, 1995
Weigel Hall Auditorium
The Ohio State University
LIST OF REFERENCES

Books and Music Scores


**Works by Virginia Woolf**


Periodicals, Reviews, Lectures, and Theses


Papers Presented at the Fifth Annual Virginia Woolf Conference at Otterbein College, Westerville, OH, 15-18 June, 1995

Bishop, Edward. "From Typography to Time: Producing Virginia Woolf."


Campbell, Ann Gibaldi. "Virginia Woolf's 'Reminiscences': An Early Study in Ambiguity."

Clark, Hillary A. "Mother Virginia: The Construction of Virginia Woolf in Feminist Object-Relations Discourse."

Cucullu, Lois. "Revisiting Woolf's Domestic Angels."

Froula, Christine. "Virginia Woolf and Modernism's Body."

Frye, Joanne S. "Virginia Woolf's Three Guineas: Redefining Authority."

Gilman, Bruce E. "The Absent Mother: Loss and Reparation in the Novels of Virginia Woolf."


Grimm, Mary. "The Reclamation of the Dead: The Embodiment of Time in Fiction as Woolf Practiced It."

Hussey, Mark. "Hiding Behind the Curtain: Reading (Woolf) Like a Man."


Lounsberry, Barbara. "The Diaries vs. the Letters: Continuities and Contradictions."

McNaron, Toni. "Memoir as Ghost-fighter: Virginia's Mother and My Own."

Moore, Madeline. "Virginia Woolf and the Good Brother."

Norton, Ann V. "Woolf's Fictional Mothers and Mothers of Fiction: What do they say to us today?"

Ostriker, Alicia. "Chloe and Olivia Meet the Death of God."

Podnieks, Elizabeth. "Virginia Woolf's Diary: 'the proper stuff of fiction'."

Raser, Joy. "A Rendezvous with the Big Bad Woolf."

Saxton, Ruth. "Teaching Virginia Woolf in a General Education Course."


Zappa, Stephanie. "Woolf, Women, and War."