**Virginia Woolf**

Born 25 January 1882(1882-01-25)

London, England

Died 28 March 1941 (aged 59) near Lewes, East Sussex, England

Born Adeline Virginia Stephen in London to Sir Leslie Stephen, considered the father of the Bloomsbury Group, and Julia Prinsep Stephen (born Jackson) (1846–1895), she was educated by her parents in their literate and well-connected household at 22 Hyde Park Gate, Kensington. Virginia's parents had each been married previously, and their spouses had died. Consequently, the household contained the children of three marriages: Julia's children with her first husband Herbert Duckworth: George Duckworth (1868–1934); Stella Duckworth (1869–1897); and Gerald Duckworth (1870–1937). Laura Makepeace Stephen (1870–1945), Leslie's daughter with Minny Thackeray, who was declared mentally disabled and lived with them until she was institutionalised in 1891 to the end of her life; and Leslie and Julia's children: Vanessa Stephen (1879–1961); Thoby Stephen (1880–1906); Virginia; and Adrian Stephen (1883–1948).

Sir Leslie Stephen's eminence as an editor, critic, and biographer, and his connection to William Thackeray (he was the widower of Thackeray's eldest daughter) meant that Woolf was raised in an environment filled with the influences of Victorian literary society.

Henry James, George Eliot, George Henry Lewes, Julia Margaret Cameron (an aunt of Julia Stephen), and James Russell Lowell, who was made Virginia's godfather, were among the visitors to the house. Julia Stephen was equally well connected. Descended from an attendant of Marie Antoinette, she came from a family of renowned beauties who left their mark on Victorian society as models for Pre-Raphaelite artists and early photographers. Supplementing these influences was the immense library at 22 Hyde Park Gate, from which Virginia (unlike her brothers, who were formally educated) was taught the classics and English literature.

According to her memoirs her most vivid childhood memories, however, were not of London but of St Ives in Cornwall, where the family spent every summer until 1895. The family stayed in their home called the Talland House, which looked out over the Porthminster Bay. Memories of the family holidays and impressions of the landscape, especially the Godrevy Lighthouse, informed the fiction she wrote in later years, notably To the Lighthouse. She also based the summer home in Scotland after the Talland House and the Ramsay family after her own family.

The sudden death of her mother in 1895, when Virginia was 13, and that of her half sister Stella two years later, led to the first of Virginia's several nervous breakdowns. The death of her father in 1904 provoked her most alarming collapse and she was briefly institutionalized.

Her breakdowns and subsequent recurring depressive periods, modern scholars have claimed,[1] were also induced by the sexual abuse she and Vanessa were subject to by their half-brothers George and Gerald (which Woolf recalls in her autobiographical essays A Sketch of the Past and 22 Hyde Park Gate).

Throughout her life, Woolf was plagued by drastic mood swings. Though these recurring mental breakdowns greatly affected her social functioning, her literary abilities remained intact. Modern diagnostic techniques have led to a posthumous diagnosis of bipolar disorder, an illness which coloured her work, relationships, and life, and eventually led to her suicide. Following the death of her father in 1904 and her second serious nervous breakdown, Virginia, Vanessa, and Adrian sold 22 Hyde Park Gate, and bought a house at 46 Gordon Square in Bloomsbury.

Following studies at King's College London, Woolf came to know Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Saxon Sydney-Turner, Duncan Grant, and Leonard Woolf, who together formed the nucleus of the intellectual circle known as the Bloomsbury Group which came to notorious fame in 1910 with the Dreadnought hoax Virginia Woolf participated in, dressed as a male Abyssinian royalty.

**Personal life**

Virginia Stephen married writer Leonard Woolf in 1912, referring to him during their engagement as a "penniless Jew." The couple shared a close bond, and in 1937 Woolf wrote in her diary "Love-making — after 25 years can’t be attained by my unattractive countenance ... you see it is enormous pleasure being wanted, a pleasure that I have never felt." They also collaborated professionally, in 1917 founding the Hogarth Press, which subsequently published most of Woolf's work.[2] The ethos of Bloomsbury discouraged sexual exclusivity, and in 1922, Woolf met Vita Sackville-West. After a tentative start, they began a relationship that lasted through most of the 1920s.[3] In 1928, Woolf presented Sackville-West with Orlando, a fantastical biography in which the eponymous hero's life spans three centuries and both genders. It has been called by Nigel Nicolson, Vita Sackville-West's son, "the longest and most charming love letter in literature."[4] After their affair ended, the two women remained friends until Woolf's death.

**Death**

After completing the manuscript of her last (posthumously published) novel Between the Acts, Woolf fell victim to a depression similar to that which she had earlier experienced. The war, the Luftwaffe's destruction of her London homes, as well as the cool reception given to her biography of her late friend Roger Fry, worsened her condition until she was unable to work.[5]

On 28 March 1941, rather than having another nervous breakdown, Woolf drowned herself by weighing her pockets with stones and walking into the River Ouse near her home. Her body was not found until April 18. Her husband buried her cremated remains under a tree in the garden of their house in Rodmell, Sussex.

In her last note to her husband she wrote:

“I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I don't think two people could have been happier 'til this terrible disease came. I can't fight any longer. I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I can't even write this properly. I can't read. What I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that — everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can't go on spoiling your life any longer. I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been.”