

Virginia Woolf and Freud

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In his encyclopedic work, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, Henti F. Ellenberger states:

At the beginning of the twentieth century, literature began giving subtler descriptions of the many facets of human personality, of their interplay, and of the polypsychic structure of the human mind, as seen in the works of Pirandello, Joyce, Italo Svevo, Lenormand, Virginia Woolf, and above all in those of Marcel Proust. (1)

One has to add, however, that Virginia Woolf herself was influenced by the scarcely less subtle psychological writings of nineteenth century novelists: Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, George Meredith, Henry James, and others. Sir Leslie Stephen was a close friend of Meredith and James, and, as editor of *Cornhill Magazine*, published or reviewed all of them; and he edited their biographies for the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Virginia read Trollope's *Barchester Towers* when she was fifteen, and doubtless discussed many such writings with her father.

In some respects Virginia was a Freudian before she ever heard of Freud. In Trollope she would encounter themes of unconscious motivation, latent meanings of actions performed unconsciously, and endless analysis of character and human behavior. Various selves or aspects of the self were among Meredith's concerns, while James dissected interpersonal relationships. Virginia could not have foreseen all of Freud, of course; but she grew up with a dynamic view of character.

Virginia's Early Interest in Dreams

Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* was first published in 1900, but I have never read that it was discussed in Virginia's circles before Leonard read Brill's first English translation in 1914. One never knows, however, just what was "in the air." Early Bloomsbury Group discussions of sexual freedom might have been derived from (or blamed on) Freud as much as Moore; but the consensus seems to be that Freud was unheard of, except by Ernest Jones and a few other neurologists, until just prior to World War I - that is, when Freud was first translated into English.

For whatever reasons, Virginia began mentioning dreams in an occasional letter as early as 1903. In August the Stephen family were in Salisbury, and Leslie, who had terminal cancer, was chafing to return to London. The four Stephen children were already talking among themselves of a move to Bloomsbury after their father's death. Virginia wrote to her friend Emma Vaughan: "I dreamt of you last night...We met in London and you said 'At last the summer is over' ..." (2) Virginia makes no attempt to interpret her dream except to suggest that's what Emma will say when they meet in London at the end of September. But one may imagine that Virginia unconsciously puts her own wishes into Emma's mouth, saying in the dream: "At last father's seemingly interminable illness is over." She must have felt something of the sort despite her love for him.

On October 3, 1903, Virginia wrote to Violet Dickinson that there was little change in Leslie's condition and that the family were still discussing a move to Bloomsbury: "... I'm in a damned bad temper ... We have had endless affectionate sentimental visiting here, at their wits end what to say I suppose, and so saying the wrong thing. Why cant people be simple and straightforward in this world...Nessa and Thoby sit together and plan his career ... It is this

kind of thing that's so damned pathetic. I do hate taking life seriously, and making plans and thinking about money and the future - but one must...

"Nurse comes in to get a book - wants to know how you are 'Miss Dickinson would make a good nurse' she says - so strong minded, unselfish and practical...

"The London hospital haunts me. I dream I'm a nurse there - which is of all likelihoods the least likely."⁽³⁾ Virginia gave no interpretation or other explanation of her dream. One may speculate (a) that part of her would like to take the place of her father's nurse (a mother figure); (b) that she would like her father's nurse to praise her as she did Violet Dickinson; and (c), perhaps, she would like to send her father to die in London Hospital, but must both, punish and gratify herself by being a nurse there. These were very trying times for Virginia, and she concluded her letter to Violet by saying that the situation is extraordinarily pathetic somehow, but that there is nothing to be unhappy about.

Virginia made few attempts to analyze her dreams. In a dream about Lady Ottoline Morrell, Virginia thought that it revealed a dark side of Lady Ott that no one would suspect from her surface personality. From another, in which Vanessa was killed in an accident, Virginia concluded that the dream indicated her great concern for her sister. This dream, in fact, repeats conscious anxiety states of Virginia's childhood: that Vanessa might be killed when riding her bicycle home from her art school. Virginia must have had a literary knowledge of mixed feelings toward people at about the time of her father's death (when she was twenty-two), but not of deep-seated (unconscious) ambivalence or of early childhood contributions to dreams. Without a much more detailed knowledge of Virginia's emotional life and many more spontaneous associations to her dreams, we are in little better position than she was to interpret their complex meanings.

In July 1906 Virginia wrote to Madge Vaughan that she has been reading Flaubert's correspondence with George Sand. She said: "...She brings out all his peculiar qualities so finely that no autobiography could tell so much as he tells almost unconsciously..."⁽⁴⁾ This recognition of unconscious mental processes is in the tradition of Trollope and others, but it does not carry over into Virginia's understanding of her dreams. A little joke among psychoanalysts has been that a problem of self-analysis is the countertransference— i.e., that we are too ambivalent toward ourselves to be objective and that, in any case, we need our defenses against all that we have repressed in the past. Perceptive and intuitive as Virginia was, she too had her defenses. I have suggested that "madness" was required for deep feelings of despair and fury to escape her normal and habitual ego controls.

Virginia's Direct Awareness of Freud

Virginia's first knowledge of Freud may have been when Leonard read him in 1914 and recognized his genius. Leonard read *The Interpretation of Dreams* in preparing to review *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* - both recently translated into English by Brill. Virginia was between her most serious mental illnesses at this time, and Leonard may not have shared his discovery with her. Virginia made no mention of Freud in her letters at that time.

On February 3, 1917, however, Virginia wrote the following to Saxon Sydney-Turner:

As to Aeschylus...I've been reading him in French which is better than English...Aeschylus however excited my spirits to such an extent that, hearing my husband snore in the night, I woke him to light his torch and look for zeppelins. He then applied the Freud system to my mind, and analyzed it down to Clytemnestra and the watch fires, which so pleased him that he forgave me. (5)

Inasmuch as Virginia probably used her reading as an excuse to put a stop to Leonard's snoring, his "analysis" can hardly have been that of a dream, but in any case we get a notion of Virginia's conception (in 1917) of "the Freud method".

In her diary, dated January 21, 1918, Virginia described Lytton Strachey's account of a meeting of the British Sex Society: They "...discussed without shame such questions as the deformity of Dean Swift's penis whether cats use the w.c.; self-abuse; incest - Incest between parent & child when they are both unconscious of it, was their main theme, derived from Freud. I think of becoming a member..."(6) There is no further comment on Freud or on the notion of unconscious incest between parent and child, and there is no mention of this discussion in Virginia's letters at the time.

On November 21, 1918 Virginia was still dealing with the aftermath of the Armistice. Leonard may be asked to attend the Peace Conference. Virginia has completed *Night and Day*. In the midst of these and other matters, she wrote: "Poor James Strachey was soft as moss, lethargic as an earthworm. James, billed at the 17 Club to lecture on 'Onanism,' proposes to earn his living as an exponent of Freud in Harley Street. For one thing, you can dispense with a degree."(7) [James had started medical training, in fact, but had dropped out because of illness and boredom; and in 1920 he and Alix got married in time to go to Vienna for analytic training with Freud. For details see *Bloomsbury/Freud*. (8)]

J.D. Beresford wrote a novel, *An Imperfect Mother*, which Virginia reviewed under the title "Freudian Fiction" in the *Times Literary Supplement* of March 25, 1920. (9) Virginia was critical of Beresford for, as she felt, reducing his characters to case histories according to the new psychology. She is sarcastic in describing an imaginary analytic patient who formerly collapsed in a fit at hearing a canary sing, but who after treatment can walk through an avenue of cages without a twinge of emotion, having faced the fact that his mother kissed him in his cradle." Virginia was entitled to her fun, of course; but neither she nor Beresford were au courant with Freud's writings. By 1920 Freud had amplified his views of the Unconscious, further defined the "Oedipus complex," and made major revisions in his theories as to the causes of the neuroses. As I recall it, behaviorists much more than child analysts were concerned about spoiling infants by picking them up or stimulating their erogenous zones. Freud himself was as much interested in the normal resolution of Oedipal conflicts as in their contribution to psychopathology. The point here, in any case, is that Virginia's review reveals very limited knowledge of Freud and psychoanalysis.

Virginia's review appeared, actually, about three months before James and Alix Strachey went to Vienna to begin their analytic work with Freud and at about the time that Adrian and Karin Stephen started medical training because of Ernest Jones's insistence that this was the proper route to becoming psychoanalysts. It was 1926 or so before Karin and Adrian were fully qualified doctors and psychoanalysts, and they never forgave Jones for making an exception of Alix and James. The difference, I think, was partly that the Stracheys negotiated directly with Freud about going to Vienna to work with him, probably knowing that he favored the training of non-medical psychoanalysts. In any event, Freud not only took James and then Alix into analysis, but also put them to work translating the case histories that became Volume III of his *Collected Papers*, published in 1925 by the Hogarth Press.

After a year in Vienna, James and Alix came home for a vacation. Virginia wrote to Janet Case: "The last people I saw were James and Alix, fresh from Freud - Alix grown gaunt and vigorous - James puny and languid - such is the effect of 10 months psychoanalysis..."(10). Her diary impressions are more detailed: "...I said goodbye to James & Alix at 9 this morning: therefore the whole day is contaminated. Freud has certainly brought out the lines in Alix. Even physically, her bones are more prominent. Only her eyes are curiously

vague. She has purpose & security; but this may well be marriage. James remains precisely where he was - the only human being, Alix says, fit for the contemplative life, which is the highest. To look on comprehendingly is, she says, better than to create. But James claims no such eminence. He is the least ambitious of men - not ambitious even of being a character - low, muted, gentle, modest. I suspect that his points show in the shade - which Alix certainly provides. I can fancy him very considerate - selfish, of course; but not blind selfish, nor at all possessive, masculine, or dominating. The worst of it, as I should feel, is the grayness; nothing is worth doing; & his mind is capable enough to make out a case for anything, or against. I daresay his monotony is partly due to us. I fancy that in private he may be as gay as a small boy; perhaps they have a private language. Perhaps they go for treats..."(11)

By May 1923, Adrian and Karin Stephen were in their personal analyses as well as their medical studies. Virginia had this to say in her diary:

Adrian is altogether broken up by psychoanalysis. ...His soul rent in pieces with a view to reconstruction. The doctor says he is a tragedy: & this tragedy consists in the fact that he can't enjoy life with zest. I am probably responsible. I should have paired with him, instead of hanging on to the elders. So he wilted, pale, under a stone of vivacious brothers & sisters. Karin says we shall see a great change in 3 months. But Noel [Olivier] would have done what none of these doctors can do. The truth is that Karin, being deaf, ...does not fertilize the sunk places in Adrian. Neither did I. Had mother lived, or father been screened off - well, it puts it too high to call it a tragedy. Ann is like him, pale, lank, sensitive, with the long cold fingers I know so well. For my part, I doubt if family life has all the power of evil attributed to it, or psychoanalysis of good. (12)

Adrian was analyzed by James Glover until Glover's death in 1926, when he went to Ella Sharp. Glover was Karin's analyst also until he died. Then, in 1927, she went to work at the Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital near Baltimore and had a second analysis with Clara Thompson. The Stephen marriage was exceedingly stormy - marked by several separations - during the 1920s, and both of them were severely criticized by relatives and friends for neglecting their two daughters.

In early March 1924 the Woolfs moved to 52 Tavistock Square and installed the Hogarth Press in the large basement there. At about this same time, James Strachey asked Leonard and Virginia, on behalf of Ernest Jones, if the Press would publish the *International Psycho-Analytical Library*, including Freud's *Collected Papers* in four volumes.

By May 1924 negotiations were in progress with Dr. James Glover representing the British Psycho-Analytical Institute and a contract was signed within a few weeks. Volumes I and II the *Collected Papers* were published before the end of 1924.

The chronology is of interest because Virginia was writing *Mrs. Dalloway* at the same time. She noted in her diary for April 5 that she finished the doctor chapter. This, as I have suggested, contained much of her fury at the Harley Street doctors who, hardly knowing her, had prescribed the hated rest cure. She already knew, of course, that Alix and James Strachey, as well as Adrian and Karin Stephen, aspired to join the ranks of such specialists. She knew intellectually that the practice of psychoanalysis would be quite different from that which she had encountered on Harley Street, but she gave the Stracheys and Stephens little credit for sensitivity - an opinion shared by her sister, Vanessa.

By October 1924 Virginia was reading the proofs of one of Freud's early case histories, and she wrote in disgust to a friend: "...we are publishing all Dr Freud, and I glance at the proof and read how Mr. A.B. threw a bottle of red ink in the sheets of his marriage bed to

excuse his impotence to the housemaid, but threw it in the wrong place, which unhinged his wife's mind, - and to this day she pours claret on the dinner table. We could all go on like that for hours; and yet these Germans think it proves something - besides their own gull-like imbecility.”(13) This is certainly food for those who believe that Virginia had great resistance to psychoanalysis, but she was never fond of the Germans as she encountered them over the years at Bayreuth, in Berlin, and elsewhere. Reading proofs cannot be considered reading Freud, and I think Virginia is essentially correct in saying that she did not read Freud seriously until after meeting him shortly before his death in 1939.

Meanwhile, the day after writing about Freud's case history, Virginia wrote this to another friend:

Our Karin Stephen sent me to bed with a violent headache last week, and ruined the last pages of my novel ... She descended on us, and God knows I like her; but there's a deafness of spirit about her, which exhausts more than dragging a ton of coal upstairs. So hearty she is, good-humoured, and right-minded. The poor devil interests me for having tried to live with Adrian, and for being inarticulately aware of her own obtuseness. She can't feel; she can't enjoy; she can't be intimate: she cares for nothing ... To cure herself she pays L1 daily to a psychoanalyst; and would, she told me, prefer to be entirely destitute could she only feel things, instead of being as she is now non-feeling. But this may convey nothing to you... (14)

This, coupled with a somewhat similar description of Adrian, indicates Virginia's knowledge of why at least two people were in analysis (apart from its being a requirement of their training), but says nothing of her understanding of the process itself. Karin's earlier statement that Adrian was to be taken apart and put back together again cannot have been reassuring to Virginia.

More than six months later, on May 1, 1925, Virginia wrote, partly in response to a friend's comments on the madness and suicide of Septimus Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*: "...It was a subject that I have kept cooling in my mind until I felt I could touch it without bursting into flame all over. You can't think what a raging furnace it is still to me - madness and doctors and being forced. But let's change the subject.”(15) This is one of the very few occasions, except during her 1904, 1913, and 1915 periods of madness, when Virginia reveals her fury at the doctors who prescribed the rest cure with its various restrictions and probably also at Leonard when he demanded a modified rest cure at home. The fact that having to go to bed and take sedatives may have helped and prevented more serious illness is beside the point so far as Virginia's feelings about being dominated and controlled are concerned.

Mrs. Dalloway was published on May 14, 1925, and its fate with the reviewers was certainly on her mind the evening before when the Woolfs had James Strachey and Dadie Rylands for dinner. Of James Virginia said only (in her diary) that he was very easy and affable, but she went on at some length about Dadie's qualities and potential as a writer. James, however, wrote to Alix: "Last night I dined with the Wolves, the other guest being Dadie. Virginia made a more than usually ferocious onslaught upon psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts, more particularly the latter ... Our book really is published today ... Also, by the way, Virginia's new novel.”(16) This is the only mention James or Alix make of *Mrs. Dalloway*, and Virginia makes no reference in her letters or diary to her attack on psychoanalysts. One may guess, however, that her controlled rage, as expressed in the "doctor chapter" of *Mrs. Dalloway*, was in the back of her mind along with her usual anxiety about how her friends and relatives, as well as reviewers, would respond to her new novel. Again, I

am not at all certain that Virginia saw clearly that psychoanalysts could be less controlling and domineering than traditional Harley Street specialists.

Virginia's attacks were partly conversational ploys, but could be formidable. Frances Marshall Partridge (who later did the Index for the Standard Edition) describes one:

Later, in 1936 I think, when Ralph Partridge and I were living in Gordon Square, we invited the "Woolves" to dinner. Alix Strachey, then in her thirties, and Julia Strachey came in afterwards. Virginia once more returned to the theme of the younger generation and gave an astonishing display of trying to charm them and make them look ridiculous at the same time. She certainly succeeded in the first.

Alix had (and has) a first-rate brain, but at this time was indulging in a post-dated passion for parties and dancing. Virginia greeted her with, 'Oh yes, Alix, I know all about you. You simply spend your whole time dancing, and sink further into imbecility every moment.' It was not really said as a joke, and led to a duel of wits between Virginia and Alix. When they got on to psychoanalysis, Virginia was out of her depth, and worsted. (The Hogarth Press published translations of Freud, but I doubt if she had read much of them.) As they left, Leonard said to her, 'Come on, Virginia, don't disgrace the older generation!' To Julia Strachey, who was pretty and elegant, she had been entirely charming. (17)

At the time of this provocative exchange with Alix Strachey, Virginia knew perfectly well that Alix and James Strachey had slaved over translating parts of Freud's *Collected Papers* for publication, during the mid-1920s, by the Hogarth Press; but Virginia sometimes envied the bright, younger women who had been educated at Oxford or Cambridge.

In 1933 Karin Stephen brought out *Psychoanalysis and Medicine*, a book based on eight lectures given mainly to medical students at Cambridge. Except for Freud's *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Karin's book was probably the best introduction to psychoanalysis in English. For some purposes it was superior to Freud in directing itself to the particular resistances of a medical audience and in explicating the use of free association and transference phenomena in the psychoanalytic process itself. Readers who might have read a goodly amount of Freud's writings could learn from Karin's book how a therapeutic psychoanalysis is actually conducted, and why. I can find no evidence that either Virginia or Leonard read this book, nor is it mentioned in Barbara Strachey's *Remarkable Relations: The Story of the Pearsall Smith Women*, where three others (published or projected) are listed among Karin's writings. Many of Freud's theories were gradually disseminated among British intellectuals before World War II, but usually not the procedures and rationale of clinical psychoanalysis - use of a couch, free association, and so on.

Toward the end of 1935, the Aldous Huxleys persuaded Virginia to have a reading by Charlotte Wolff, M.D., a refugee from Nazi Germany who was a palmist and had had a Jungian analysis. A diary entry dated December 14 reads: "...But Maria [Huxley] & I talked after dinner, about Lotte Wolf - did I say I'd spent 2 hours over their Dutch writing table under the black lamp being analyzed?"(18) A few days later, Virginia was "terrified" about what to wear and how to do her hair for a formal dinner, but added: "...When I'm there it'll be as easy as shelling peas - why this apprehension? Wolff never touched on that by the way."(19)

Virginia was intrigued by Charlotte Wolff who became the subject of an argument the next day as revealed in a letter to Julian Bell: "This week end Quentin was up; and we had a crack on Sunday at Nessas. I was glad to find that we could still argue with some heat

the question of palmistry. Aldous Huxley asked me to have my hand read by his friend - Maria's rather - Lotte Wolff; so I did; with the result that she got some things hopelessly wrong; others she guessed amazingly right...Leonard said it was all disgusting humbug; Clive said That's not the scientific spirit; you must try things. Nessa was on L's side. I kept my distance, having the idea that after all some kind of communication is possible between beings, that cant be accounted for; or what about my dive into them in fiction? Anyway old Quentin, who has a sagacious clear sure footed mind.. put us through our, paces admirably. I was glad to argue again..."(20)

After the palm reading, Virginia invited Wolff for tea. On one of these occasions, Wolff took an impression of Virginia's palm, which she interpreted in a subsequent book on palmistry. Virginia, on her part, remained skeptical. In a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, Virginia said that she was "...much more curious to investigate than to have her analyze me. And I thought she flattered me too much. All the same she's got a great scent for character - only isn't it merely that and nothing to do with marks on one's palm, and shouldn't we all - all that have a nose for character - know as much if we chose and had to make a living by it? But I liked her."(21) Virginia also wrote with greater skepticism to Ethyl Smyth, asking her to translate from the German Charlotte Wolff's interpretation of the handprint.

Wolff's version of her encounter with Virginia is in her autobiography, *Hindsight*, published in 1980. She says that Maria Huxley told her that Virginia was a shrewd observer of people's weaknesses and warned her of Virginia's haughty air and sharp tongue. Wolff continues:

...Her manner was reserved and somewhat suspicious. But her curiosity to meet a member of the medical profession who read hands had obviously intrigued her ...I found her neither beautiful nor attractive at first sight ... she put my hackles up with the cynical question: 'You really believe that there is something to hand-reading?' 'I don't believe, I know,' was my answer. For the first time she looked into my face with a smile of surprise. A hard woman, I thought...

...I reached for Virginia Woolf's left, and after a while for her right hand. I now had command of the situation. I spoke to her about herself, but didn't say anything about her work as I had read none of her books. I saw, either by intuition or method but probably a mixture of both, a deeply disturbed person fighting to emotional balance and sanity. She paled at times, took in every word (I spoke in French), and after a long period of listening, she asked questions. The interview ended apparently to Virginia Woolf's satisfaction. She asked me to come to tea...Maria was delighted and couldn't wait for me to tell her about my personal impression, and what I had seen in her hands. I cannot recall the answer I gave, but Sybille Bedford remembered that I told Maria: 'I think that Virginia Woolf is mad.' If so, I would have blatantly offended against medical ethics...

"...There was a hiatus between having tea and what happened after, which has escaped my recollection. But I vividly remember that she said rather hesitatingly to me: 'Let's sit "dos a dos"; it is easier for me to relax.' And each of us sat in an easy chair facing a wall. She wanted to know if I would treat people with nervous tension and anxiety. 'No advice should ever be given by a psychologist. No therapeutic shortcuts exist for anxiety states, and nervous states have many causes.' When I did however come forward with the suggestion that one could use common sense to alleviate such

symptoms, she nodded in complete agreement ... Pause. The silence lasted for about a minute, or maybe two. Then she asked hesitantly, "What do you think of psychoanalysis?" "You mean Freudian analysis?" "Yes" "I cannot judge it as I had a Jungian analysis. I can only tell you that it is costly and takes years. It may help some people but not others. In certain cases it is contraindicated." She jumped in. "You mean, in my case?" "Yes, I would think so." "Tell me about the Jungian analysis." "I can only speak about my own experience, and cannot judge its general value," I answered. "it did me good, but not for the reasons one might expect from psychotherapy...No answer from the back for a while. Then: 'I have misgivings about psychiatry.' 'Many people have,' I said, avoiding a real answer.

[Virginia inscribed a copy of *To the Lighthouse* for Dr. Wolff.] 'I want you to have this,' she said, and handed me the book. How beautiful she looked! Her tall and slim figure bore a high and narrow head with a face of classical design. She was in mind and body an aristocrat. With all her understanding of the false and humiliating position of women, she never would have been a Suffragette. She was an elitist, whose feminism remained intellectual. (22)

Charlotte Wolff did not meet Virginia again, and it was more than forty-five years later - with uncertain memories - when she published her autobiography. She was thirty-four years of age when she met Virginia. She had attended several German universities studying philosophy as her first love, but taking a medical degree as a livelihood. Her friends were poets, artists, and philosophers, including pioneer existentialists. She did careful research in clinics and hospitals in an effort to make hand-reading a scientific discipline, and she earned a good living reading palms in France and England. Later she turned to sexology, writing on female homosexuality and bisexuality. She became established as a psychotherapist some years after her meetings with Virginia, but was never a psychoanalyst. This sequence of events in her career probably accounts for some of her gingerly replies to Virginia's questions.

Virginia's accounts of her meetings with Charlotte Wolff were written within a few days whereas Wolff's was certainly modified by the accumulated knowledge and rumors of years. I suspect that Virginia was, as Wolff surmised, curious about a physician who read palms. By 1935 Virginia knew most of what Wolff could tell her about psychoanalysis except what it is really like to be in an analysis, and she may have learned already that psychoanalysis was contraindicated for her either because of her age - she was now fifty-three - or because of her history of mental illness. She had certainly had her share of analytic gossip.

Freud's eightieth birthday was celebrated - against his wishes - on the sixth of May 1936. Among his gifts was an Address, probably written by Thomas Mann, signed by nearly 200 writers and artists, including H.G. Wells, Romain Rolland, Stefan Zweig, Jules Romains, and Virginia Woolf. The final paragraph of the Address was: "We, the undersigned, who cannot imagine our mental world without Freud's bold lifework, are happy to know that this great man with his unflagging energy is still among us and still working with undiminished strength. May our grateful feelings long accompany the man we venerate." (23) Virginia had yet to read Freud, but by now she was fully aware of the impact of his work on writers, artists, and other intellectuals.

Later in 1936 (November 10), Virginia met John Rickman, one of the pioneer British psychoanalysts and, from 1931, the editor of the *British Journal of Medical Psychology*. Her next diary entry included: "Dined with Adrian last night: a solid man called Rickman there-

A good deal of p[sycho]. A[nalysis]. talked; & I liked it. A mercy not always to talk politics ...R[ickman].’s family had always lived in Lewes & he remembered the violent Guy Fox days, when you had to wear goggles & wet straw...”(24) Some of the psychoanalytic talk was almost certainly gossip because the British group of psychoanalysts was largely Kleinian, and Rickman (having been analyzed by Melanie Klein) was one of them. Anna Freud, who was still in Vienna, and other Viennese analysts carried on a running feud with the Kleinians in papers and at meetings; and this intensified when the Freuds and others moved to England in 1938. Adrian and Karin deplored the disruptive acrimony and sought a middle course among the factions.

On January 28, 1939, Leonard and Virginia went to visit Freud. Virginia wrote, in part: “Dr. Freud gave me a narcissus...A screwed up shrunk very old man: with a monkey’s light eyes, paralyzed spasmodic movements, inarticulate: but alert...Difficult talk. An interview... Immense potential, I mean an old fire now flickering...”(25)

Virginia wrote more the following day: “Freud said It would have been worse if you had not won the war. I said we often felt guilty - if we had failed, perhaps Hitler would not have been. No, he said, with great emphasis; he would have been infinitely worse...”(26)

A few weeks later, on March 8, 1939, the British Psycho-Analytic Society held its twenty-fifth anniversary dinner. Monk’s House had just been burglarized, but the Woolfs attended. Virginia wrote: “...Then the Great Psycho Analysts dinner on a wild wet night: Adrian late: dinner at 9 till 12:30. Speeches of a vacancy & verbosity incredible. Lord de la Ware [President of the Board of Education] rambling jocosely. And gossip with Duncan & Adrian: and rest of our: table sit in unmitigable gloom. Poor. Mrs. so & so - Meynell & Money Kyrle dead silent ... Mary Hutch: Rebecca West: & set upon & committed to ask to dinner Mrs. Klein” (27). Virginia did dine with Melanie Klein and found her to be a woman of character and force, but there is no record of other meetings.

When Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism* was published by the Hogarth Press (July 1939), Virginia wrote to John Lehmann about reading it. There are no comments in her diary. Indeed, there is a gap of about ten days because the Woolfs were having a busy social life and also packing to move from Tavistock Square to Mecklenburgh Square. [Note that Great Britain would be at war with Nazi Germany on September 3rd.]

In a diary entry dated December 2, 1939, Virginia wrote: “Began reading Freud last night; to enlarge the circumference to give my brain a wider scope: to make it objective; to get outside. Thus defeat the shrinkage of age...”(28) About a week later she added: “...I dislike this excitement. yet enjoy it. Ambivalence as Freud calls it. (I’m gulping up Freud)”.(29) The next day she added: “Freud is upsetting: reducing one to whirlpool; & I daresay truly ... His savagery against God good. The falseness of loving one’s neighbors... Hate ... But I’m too mixed.”(30) On December 17th Virginia noted further that she had read Freud on Groups. Her reading in December 1939 apparently included *The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and Its Discontents*, and *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. She was now nearly fifty-eight years of age...

Virginia returned to reading Freud in June 1940 when she was also writing “A Sketch of the Past.” She made good use of the term “ambivalence” as she wrote about her father. Recalling his scenes when the household accounts were reviewed each Wednesday, she contrasts her reactions and Vanessa’s: “But in me, though not in her, rage alternated with love. It was only the other day [actually six months earlier] when I read Freud for the first time, that I discovered that this violently disturbing conflict of love and hate is a common feeling; and is called ambivalence...”(31) She must have been considerably relieved to have a name for her turbulent feelings, and even more to learn that she was not alone.

That was on June 19th. Then, the diary for June 27th includes: “How difficult to make oneself a centre after all of the rings a visitor stirs in one - in this case E. Bowen. How

difficult to draw in from all those wide ripples & be at home, central. I tried to center by reading Freud..."(32). This is the last reference to Freud in Virginia's diary.

Virginia read Freud seriously, then, only after meeting him in 1939. The works she read are not primarily about clinical psychoanalysts; that is, about psychoanalysis as a form of treatment, or of the analytic process. She apparently overlooked the book by Karin Stephen that would have given her an account of the procedures of psychoanalysis and their rationale.

Virginia's curiosity was such that she must have asked about psychoanalysis, particularly during the early 1920s, when James and Alix Strachey went to work with Freud and Adrian and Karin started medical studies in order to become practicing psychoanalysts. But these budding analysts were younger than Virginia, and there is little evidence that she took them seriously. I think that Virginia's early resistance to psychoanalysis was in lacking respect for the analysts she knew, apart from whether it was ever indicated for her.

Why Didn't Virginia Have an Analysis?

Several writers have made the point that Virginia might have been helped by psychoanalysis, but that she had too much resistance to accept such help. There are two different issues here. The first is whether analysts were available or in good standing when Virginia might have been referred to one. The second is whether analysis was indicated for her and, if so, at what point in her life. There is no suggestion in her writings or in Leonard's *Autobiography* that they ever considered the idea of an analysis for Virginia or that it was recommended for her by any of their friends or relatives in the field.

At the time of Virginia's adolescent turmoil (1895-1897), Freud was still a neurologist and just beginning his study of the neuroses. She certainly could have been helped by a modern child psychiatrist, but there were none. As it was, the standard treatment included diet, rest, fresh air, and avoidance of mental stimulation, e.g. lessons. The same treatment could have been recommended for a mild case of rheumatic fever, especially with chorea.

By 1904, when Virginia had delusions and hallucinations, and made a questionable suicide attempt, Freud's work was known in London through early papers and, for those who knew German, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Individuals such as Havelock Ellis, Wilfrid Trotter and other scholars were fascinated by Freud's theories and a few physicians, notably Ernest Jones, were trying Freud's methods with patients, but mostly in institutional settings. Freud later spoke of David Eder as the first practicing psychoanalyst in England, and he was the only one during much of the time Ernest Jones spent in Canada (1910 to 1913). Jones himself records the fact that Sir William Osler, Professor of Medicine at Oxford, referred a patient to Freud in 1910 (33). In 1911, Eder read an account of a psychoanalysis before the Neurological Section of the British Medical Association and, when he came to the sexual etiology of the neurosis, his audience walked out. In view of such attitudes toward Freud's early theories, it was highly unlikely that any of Virginia's doctors would refer her for an analysis in London. Even if they had, her severe mental illnesses of 1913 and 1915 would (at that time) have been considered beyond the purview of psychoanalysis.

Acceptance of psychoanalysis as a form of therapy came slowly to England, as to America, after World War I. Virginia apparently knew very little, as we have seen, even as James and Alix Strachey, followed by Adrian and Karin Stephen, were becoming analysts, and the Hogarth Press began publishing Freud. By that time, Virginia was in her forties: (a little old for an analysis in those days) and, knowing her history of mental illnesses, few, if any, of the analysts in the 1920s would have considered taking her as a patient. She might have benefited from another form of psychotherapy, but the question apparently did not

arise.

One highly important fact of Virginia's illnesses is the extent to which Leonard took charge of them. During the acute illnesses of 1913 and 1915, Leonard turned to family doctors and specialists, of course; and Virginia was sent to private "rest homes." Later, however, Leonard was more skeptical of the specialists, and more disposed to manage Virginia's medication and modified rest cure at home. Virginia was not entirely passive, of course, as we have seen in her relationships with Drs. Eleanor Rendel and Octavia Wilberforce. I have already suggested that there were some objective and personal reasons why both Virginia and Leonard might have taken a dim view of the psychoanalysts among their friends and relatives as well as what they heard about the warring factions of the British Psycho-Analytical Society. As far as resistance to a personal analysis for Virginia is concerned, Leonard even more than Virginia may have been responsible - quite apart from the indications or contraindications for that kind of therapy at any given time.

In his autobiography Leonard recalled:

In October 1966 the Institute of Psycho-Analysis gave a great banquet to celebrate the completion of the work [Standard Edition of Freud], and Anna Freud, James [Strachey], and I made speeches. I do not find psycho-analysts in private life - much as I have liked many of them - altogether easy to get on with, because they' so often cannot conceal the professional fact that they know or seem to know not only what one is thinking, but also what one is not thinking. To stand up in evening dress and make a speech to several hundred psycho-analysts I found an intimidating experience, partly because they would know (1) what I was thinking, (2) that I was not thinking what I thought I was thinking, (3) what I was really thinking when I was not thinking what I thought I was thinking.(34)

Alix Strachey added a footnote to Leonard's speech:

[After the dinner he] was talking to me about emotions - or, more precisely, the lack of them. He said there was one emotion which he never felt - I forget which particular one it was now - and I said to him casually, 'How do you know you don't in your unconscious mind?' I thought we would have an interesting discussion about it, but instead he looked rather hurt and moved away.

James often wondered why Leonard did not persuade Virginia to see a psychoanalyst about her mental breakdowns...I did not agree with James that it would be of help to Virginia. Leonard, I think, might well have considered the proposition and decided not to let her be psychoanalyzed...

Virginia's imagination, apart from her artistic creativeness, was so interwoven with her fantasies - and indeed with her madness - that if you had stopped the madness you might have stopped the creativeness too. It seemed to me quite a reasonable judgment for Leonard to have made then, if he did so. It may be preferable to be mad and be creative than to be treated by analysis and become ordinary. (35)

Creative people are not necessarily made ordinary by a personal psychoanalysis. Many have been helped. I rather believe that Alix found an irresistible *bon mot* and perhaps expressed some ambivalence about her own analyses.

What I note here especially is that Alex struck a nerve of Leonard's resistance to the notion of unconscious feelings. Even more, she took it for granted that Leonard would decide whether Virginia should be psychoanalyzed. I suggest, in these circumstances, that any doubts that Virginia might have had about having an analysis may have been more than matched by Leonard's apparent fear of the Unconscious. But I doubt if the question ever arose.

Conclusion

In pulling together the data about Virginia Woolf's feelings and attitudes about Freud, psychoanalysis, and psychoanalysts, I have served my own purposes more than those of anyone interested primarily in her illnesses. In doing this I have responded to writers who have suggested too easily that, except for her resistances, Virginia might have had a therapeutic analysis. I do not share that opinion.

There was little acceptance of psychoanalysis in England before the 1920s. Then, Virginia might have gone to any one of a half dozen analysts; but she was in her forties and had a history of three psychotic episodes. Although there were exceptions, even among student analysts, forty was regarded as past the ideal age for analysis; and Virginia's history would have deterred most analysts from taking her. We do not know whether analysis was ever suggested or whether she ever asked - until the conversation with Mrs. Wolff when Virginia was in her fifties. My view is that Virginia might have tolerated a psychoanalysis in her twenties, but there was no one available in England. By the 1920s, when there were analysts, psychoanalysis was contraindicated for her. Ten years later, a few analysts, using modified techniques of analysis, were experienced enough to treat individuals who had been psychotic; but by then Virginia had little reason to seek such help. Even had she wished to, she would, I suspect, have had to deal with Leonard's resistances even more than her own.

Notes

1. Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1970, p. 167.
2. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Volume One. P. 92.
3. Same reference, pp. 97-98
4. Same reference, p. 229.
5. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Volume Two, p. 141.
6. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Volume One, p. 110.
7. Same reference, p. 221.
8. *Bloomsbury/Freud: The Letters of James and Alix Strachey*. Edited by Perry Meisel and Walter Kendrick. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985, pp. 22-29.
9. Virginia Woolf, "Freudian Fiction." Review of *An Imperfect Mother* by J.D. Beresford (25 March 1920). In *Contemporary Writers: Essays on Twentieth Century Books and Authors*. Preface by Jean Guignet. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965, pp. 152-154.
10. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Volume Two, p. 482.
11. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Volume Two, pp. 135-136.

12. Same reference, p. 242.
13. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Volume Three, pp. 134-135.
14. Same reference, p. 137.
15. Same reference, p. 180.
16. *Bloomsbury/Freud: The Letters of James and Alix Stratchey*. p. 264.
17. Frances Marshall (Mrs. Ralph Patridge) in *Recollections of Virginia Woolf by Her Contemporaries*, p. 75.
18. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Volume Four, p. 357.
19. Same reference, p. 358.
20. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Volume Five, p. 452.
21. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Volume Six, p. 3.
22. Charlotte Wolff, M. D., *Hindsight*. London: Quartet Books Limited, 1980, pp. 144-148.
23. Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*. Volume III. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1957, pp. 205-206.
24. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Volume Five, pp. 32-33.
25. Same Reference, p. 202.
26. Same Reference, p. 202.
27. Same Reference, p. 208.
28. Same Reference, p. 248.
29. Same Reference, p. 249.
30. Same Reference, p. 250.
31. Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*. Second Edition, p. 108.
32. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Volume Five, p. 299.
33. Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*. Volume II, p. 88.
34. Leonard Woolf, *The Journey Not the Arrival Matters*, p. 118.
35. Alix Stratchey in *Recollections of Virginia Woolf by Her Contemporaries*, pp. 116-117.