

# Virginia Woolf's Illnesses

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Psychoanalyst Douglass Orr declares that his book about Virginia Woolf “is not a psychobiography.” Instead, he offers a number of diagnostic possibilities in psychiatry based on extensive records that we have of Virginia Woolf’s “life history, both in her own words and in the reminiscences of others.” His general thesis is that, “however neurotic Virginia may have been, her usual, day-to-day self was within normal limits. The normal self was, even so, extremely vulnerable to traumata in the area of separations and losses, on the one hand, and, on the other, to direct blows to her self-



esteem.” Dr. Orr interprets Virginia’s five or six experiences of “madness” to be “separate and distinct illnesses having quite different proximate causes. This view differs from the common assumption that Virginia had a single, life-long psychiatric disease, such as manic-depressive disorder, or manic depression.”

Despite his own efforts and the assistance of Quentin Bell, however, Orr had not found a publisher for this book at the time of his death in 1990. Many years later, a fortuitous meeting between Orr’s daughter Nancy Adams (herself a psychiatrist) and Wayne K. Chapman (Director of Clemson University’s Center for Electronic and Digital Publishing and himself a Woolf scholar) paved the way for its publication.

**Douglass W. Orr, *Virginia Woolf's Illnesses*, edited and with a preface by Wayne K. Chapman (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Digital Press, 2004), pp. xiv + 182.**



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