





These paintings are the work of Elam School of Design student Roseanne Waetford, winner of the Air New Zealand Elam Design Competition. Their depiction of fine arts, dance, theatre, and music, seem an appropriate way to represent our proud involvement with all forms of the arts at all levels.



VITA VIRGINIA

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Eileen Atkins VITA & VIRGINIA, the sixth and penultimate production of Auckland Theatre Company's 1998 Montana Season, SEVEN PLAYS OF PASSION.

The play you are about to see is crafted from the actual correspondence of two of the twentieth century's most gifted and gloriously unconventional women. Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf met at a time when the horrors of one World War were receding from memory and the ominous seeds for a second and more devastating were being sown. During this twenty-year period, they shared ideas, experience and love.

Their letters record a remarkable history: tempestuous and challenging, infused with an aristocrat's wry wit and an artist's self-revelatory commentary on the pleasures and pains of the creative process. Beneath their exchanges of literary opinion, (extra-) marital adventures, romantic jealousies and dark political prophecy, one senses the joyful engagement of two human souls seeking and finding in each other a companion, mate, and guide through the awesome complexities of their time. To a modern audience, subjected as it is to the sound bite, pre-packaged emotion, and virtual communication, the words and works of these two rare and rebellious spirits seem all the more poignant and passionate.

*ATC has assembled a powerful artistic team to realise their story. We extend a warm welcome home to Barbara Ewing as Virginia Woolf, who recently added "author" to her already impressive credentials as an actress. After her unforgettable portrayal of Maria Callas in last year's **MASTER CLASS**, Elizabeth Hawthorne makes a welcome return to the stage as Vita Sackville-West. Director Sarah Peirse, Designer Tracy Grant and Lighting Designer Bryan Caldwell, the team behind **MASTER CLASS**, join forces once more for tonight's performance.*

We are especially grateful for the support of Third Stage Ltd, who has donated its time and talent on the construction of the set you see before you. The artistry of Rob Peters, Graham Munford and their team has been a critical component in the realisation of ATC's set designs since our inception in 1992.

We salute our cultural partners, particularly Principal Sponsor Montana Wines and Supporting Sponsor The British Council and gratefully acknowledge the continuing support of TVNZ, The Carlton Hotel, Air New Zealand, Arthur Andersen, BDO, Alternative Rentals, Canon and NewstalkZB. Tonight's performance is made possible through major funding from Creative New Zealand and Auckland City's Arts Alive Programme. ATC is indebted to Paul Minifie and his team at the Maidment Theatre for their support and extends its gratitude to the Sydney Theatre Company for its kind permission in granting performance rights.

*We take this opportunity to thank you for patronage and look forward to seeing you at the final production of the SEVEN PLAYS OF PASSION season, Alan Bennett's sparkling adaptation of **THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS**, which opens at Sky City Theatre in November.*



Photo: Latham Gaines

Simon Prast
PRODUCER





Dear Auckland Theatre Company Patron
Life should only be lived with passion.

What has become one of the most famous and enduring love stories of the twentieth century comes to life in this play where two women defied society with their private love. This is the story about how an aristocratic society hostess met the darling of the Bloomsbury set and how their friendship blossomed into a cause celebre.

Montana began from one man's passion to create wine. Today, this same passion drives the company to reach higher and higher goals, be it in the vineyard, the community, or the wine itself. As a company we believe that this force is the core to our success.

Montana is proud to continue its partnership as Principal Sponsor with the Auckland Theatre Company in this drama where choosing the most unorthodox path turns out to be the most worthwhile.

The sixth in the series of SEVEN PLAYS OF PASSION that make up the 1998 Montana Season, **VITA & VIRGINIA** exemplifies the thrill and emotion of being extraordinary. We feel sure that you will enjoy this impassioned and insightful play.

Peter Hubscher
Managing Director
Montana Wines Ltd



THE STAGE SET

A vital component of any production is the set. Together with the lighting design, sound, props and wardrobe, the set helps establish the 'world of the play' situating the cast in time and space. Often a playwright will not be explicit in the physical setting. It is therefore left to the creative talents of the designer working in tandem with the director to realise a writer's vision.

Once the concept is developed and the design is realised in the form of a scale model and put to paper, the set builders will begin to build from the drawings. Much as a construction team will work with an architect, the designer works with the set builders and scenic artists

to bring their idea from concept into three dimensions.

Tucked away on Auckland's North Shore is a workshop that houses **Third Stage Ltd**. They are the team responsible for all Auckland Theatre Company sets.

Third Stage Ltd has been associated with Auckland Theatre Company since the Theatre Company's inception in 1993



and is dedicated to supporting the Arts in New Zealand. Their main interests are in 'Live' theatre, drama, opera and dance. They are also involved in providing services for corporate events such as product launches and award ceremonies.

In its twelve years of operation, **Third Stage Ltd** has developed a highly skilled team incorporating all aspects of set construction, special effects, lighting and design in-house.

Auckland Theatre Company is proud of the ongoing partnership with **Third Stage Ltd**, and would like to thank Graham, Rob and their team for the sponsorship of the set of **VITA & VIRGINIA** you see before you this evening.

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VIRGINIA WOOLF

Virginia Woolf is considered one of the most important writers of this century. Her major works include the novels *Mrs Dalloway* (1924), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), *A Room of One's Own*, based on lectures she gave at Oxford, describing barriers put in the way of women writers (1929), *The Waves*, a beautiful yet perhaps her most difficult book (1931) and her last novel, *Between the Acts*, which her husband Leonard published after her death (1941).

She was born Virginia Stephen in 1882. She and her sister Vanessa were educated at home by their parents, and in her adolescence Virginia was given the run of her father's library. These hours of reading were her real education. Her mother died when she was 13, and it was at this time that she began to suffer symptoms of the recurrent mental illness that would plague the rest of her life, rendering her physically and emotionally debilitated for long periods. Her father's death in 1904, when she was 22, set another breakdown and a suicide attempt. After their father's death, Virginia, Vanessa and younger brother Adrian moved into their own home in Gordon Square in Bloomsbury London. It was to this house that her elder brother, Thoby, first brought his Cambridge friends — a group which would later become the Bloomsbury group. Around this time Virginia

began to write regular articles and reviews for the *Guardian* and the *Times Literary Supplement*.

Virginia married Leonard Woolf, one of the Bloomsbury group, in 1912 after several months hesitation on her part. When her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, was published in 1913 she became ill. After a slow recovery in Sussex, the Woolfs returned to London and settled at Hogarth House, where Leonard set up a small hand printing press in 1917. They both learned how to set type and in time what started as a hobby became a distinguished and flourishing publishing house, Hogarth Press. Virginia's third novel, *Jacob's Room* (1922), was the first full-length book published by the Hogarth Press.

Virginia met Vita Sackville-West in 1922 at a dinner party. The friendship grew and somewhere between 1925 and 1929 developed into a love affair. The book *Orlando* was written and dedicated to Vita. Although it somewhat bewildered the critics, it was a popular success.



Virginia Woolf, c. 1925. Photo from *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, Quentin Bell, The Hogarth Press, 1990.

With the advent of war, Virginia became increasingly depressed and feared she was about to become ill again. On 28 March 1941 she drowned herself in the river Ouse, leaving letters to Leonard and Vita on the mantelpiece. Her note to Leonard told him "I owe all the happiness of my life to you."

VITA SACKVILLE-WEST



Vita Sackville-West, c. 1928. Photo from *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, Quentin Bell, The Hogarth Press, 1990.

Vita Sackville-West was born in 1892. Her family, the Sackvilles, went back to William the Conqueror and were made Earls of Dorset in the 16th century. Her maternal grandmother was Pepita, an internationally famous Spanish dancer, who had been the mistress of the second Lord Sackville. This diverse heritage fascinated Vita and made her intriguing to her many lovers and suitors. In her youth she very

much enjoyed the social scene, attending balls and parties and having both male and female admirers.

She fell in love with Harold Nicolson, a young diplomat, when she was 20 (she was also romantically involved with two women at the time). And they were married in 1913. She found out he was homosexual four years later after having two boys, Ben and Nigel. A year later she began a passionate affair with her childhood friend Violet Trefusis. In 1920 she eloped with Violet to France and their respective husbands followed them forcing them to return to London. Vita and Harold's marriage eventually developed into a close

companionship, which accommodated both their respective affairs and lasted until her death in 1962.

Vita loved to travel and as well as Europe, the Americas and Indonesia, lived in Turkey, Persia, and in Germany as a diplomat's wife.

Vita had many lesbian lovers throughout her life including Mary Campbell, Hilda Matheson, Evelyn Irons and Dorothy Wellesley. Much of her

fiction deals transparently with lesbianism. Her book *Challenge* portrays her affair with Violet, albeit thinly disguised.

Although Vita has become better known for her life story and her gardens than for her writing, in the 1920's, when she was intimate with Virginia, it was Vita that was the more popular and best selling author. She was prolific, writing poetry including *The Land* (1926), *Solitude* (1938) and *The Garden* (1946), novels which included *Heritage* (1919) *Challenge* (1923), *Seducers in Ecuador* (1924), *The Edwardians* (1930) and *All Passion Spent* (1931), family history, biography and travel as well as numerous gardening books.

Vita is closely associated with two large estates: Knole, her childhood home and one of the largest and oldest houses in England, which although she loved, was not able to inherit because she was a woman; and Sissinghurst, the property she and Harold bought in 1930. The National Trust now runs Sissinghurst, which includes a now famous garden lovingly created by Vita and Harold over a thirty-year period.

Vita became increasingly reclusive in her later years and died of cancer in 1962 at the age of 70, leaving Harold devastated. Her room at Sissinghurst is still exactly as it was when she died.

EILEEN ATKINS

Born in London, Eileen was a student at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. After her first appearance in London as Jaquenetta in *Love's Labour's Lost*, she performed repertory including two-years with the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford upon Avon and a season at the Old Vic. Other performances include *The Killing of Sister George*, *The Cocktail Party*, *Vivat! Vivat Regina!*, *Saint Joan* and *The Night of the Iguana*. For the Royal National Theatre Eileen performed in *Heartbreak House*, *A Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* and most recently, *John Gabriel Borkman* for which she received an Olivier award nomination. Television credits include *The Vision*, *A Room of One's Own*, *The Lost Language of Cranes* and *The Maitlands*. With Jean Marsh she was the co creator of *Upstairs Downstairs* and *The House of Elliot*. Her many film credits include *The Dresser*, *Equus*, *Wolf* and *Cold Comfort Farm* which was directed by John Schlesinger. She received great critical acclaim for her performance in *A Room of One's Own* at the Hempstead Theatre, which went on to the West End, and eventually to New York to the Lamb's Theatre where she received a Special Citation from the NY Drama Critics' Circle.

In 1992 *Vita & Virginia* opened at the Chichester Festival Theatre, then transferred to the Ambassadors Theatre before going on to Broadway where Eileen played Virginia opposite Vanessa Redgrave's Vita. Eileen's screen adaptation of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* opened in London in 1997. In May 1997 Eileen was adapting *Vita & Virginia* for screen.



LIFE
LIFE
LIFE

In 1945, four years after Virginia's death, Vita, together with Harold Nicolson, compiled an anthology of poetry called *Another World Than This...* in that volume is a 'poem' by Virginia Woolf which Vita lineated from this *Orlando* passage:

*Let us go, then, exploring
This summer morning,
When all are adoring
The plum-blossom and the bee.
And humming and hawing
Let us ask of the starling
What he may think
On the brink
Of the dust-bin whence he picks
Among the sticks
Cumbings of scullion's hair.
What's life, we ask;
Life, Life, Life! Cries the bird
As if he had heard...*

That Vita should have chosen this very passage from *Orlando*, Virginia's longest love letter to her, has by itself a certain commemorative importance. But its valedictory significance to Vita only becomes clear when we remember that in her teens, Virginia had had lessons in Latin and Greek. For in this posthumous novel "Life, Life, Life!" translates into Latin as 'Vita, Vita, Vita!' and nothing could have been more fitting for Virginia's last farewell to Vita, who had given her so much life - with all its happiness and sorrow - in almost twenty years of friendship.

SARAH PEIRSE

Director

Directing: Auckland Theatre Company: *Master Class*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*. Mercury Theatre: *Mrs. Klein*, *A Doll's House*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *Squatter*, *Agnes of God*. Theatre Corporate: *Fen*, *Wednesday To Come*, *Top Girls*. Independent: *The Trojan Women*. STCSA: *A Delicate Balance*. VCA: *Victory*. **Theatre:** Mercury Theatre: *The Rose Tattoo*, *The Secret Rapture*, *South Pacific*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Hayfever*. Theatre Corporate: *Gulls*, *Three Sisters*, *Cabaret*, *Rooted*, *Fanshen*, *Jacques Brel*, *As You Like It*, *Mother Courage*, *Randy Newman (Who's Randy)*, *The Elephant Man*, *Piaf*, *La Ronde*, *Total Eclipse*, *Wings*, *Nativity*, *Hamlet*, *Phaedra*, *Murder in The Cathedral*. MTC: *Molly Sweeney*, *The Heidi Chronicles*. STC: *Dead Funny*. **Television:** *Murder Call*, *Fable*, *G.P.*, *Water Rats*, *Flying Doctors*, *Skirts*, *The Champion*, *Country G.P.*, *Inside Straight*, *The Garden Party*, *A Woman of Good Character*. **Film:** *Heavenly Creatures*, *The Art of Drowning*, *The Navigator*, *Arriving Tuesday*, *Mesmerised*, *Sylvia*, *Queen Street*, *Hotel Hitler*. **Training:** Theatre Corporate Drama School 1978. **Positions:** Associate Director Mercury Theatre 1987-1989. **Awards:** Best Actress *A Woman of Good Character* NZ Film & Television 1983, Best Supporting Actress *The Navigator* NZ Film & Television 1989, Best Supporting Actress *Heavenly Creatures* NZ Film & Television 1995, Best Actress *Molly Sweeney* 1997.



TRACY GRANT

Designer

Theatre: ATC: *The Herbal Bed*, *Master Class*, *Arcadia*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Melbourne Theatre Company: *The Herbal Bed**, *Arcadia**, *Hysteria**. Sydney Theatre Company: *The Threepenny Opera**. Downstage Theatre: *Let's Do It*. Mercury Theatre: *Hamlet*, *Yerma*, *Wild Honey*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hayfever*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof**, *Squatter*, *Camille*, *Ladies Night*, *The Normal Heart*, *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd*, *Rivers of China*, *Summit Conference*, *Summer*, *Loving Women*, *Night Mother*. **Opera:** Opera New Zealand: *Il Trovatore**, *Don Giovanni**. Mercury Theatre: *La Traviata*, *Lucia Di Lammermoor*,



*Carmen**, *Faust*, *Don Giovanni*, *Turandot*. Metropolitan Opera/Mercury Theatre: *The Marriage of Figaro*. Auckland Opera: *The Flying Dutchman**, *The Magic Flute**. Victoria State Opera: *Don Giovanni**, *The Pearl Fishers*. Opera Australia: *Falstaff**. **Musicals:** Mercury Theatre: *West Side Story*, *South Pacific*, *A Slice of Saturday Night*, *A Marvellous Party*, *Peter Pan the Musical*, *Stepping Out*, *The Pack of Women*. Aotea Centre: *My Fair Lady*. **Film:** *Possum*. **Special Projects:** Placido Domingo at Western Springs, Kiri Te Kanewa at the Mission (IMG), CEPsi Opening Ceremony (Christchurch). **Training:** Bachelor of Spatial Design 1996, A.I.T. **Positions:** Head of Design and Associate Director Mercury Theatre 1984-1990. **Awards:** Finalist NZ Film & Television Awards Best Craft in Short Film Drama 1997, Winston Churchill Memorial Fellowship 1987. **Exhibitions:** Prague Quadriennial, Czechoslovakia 1991. * Costume Design only.

BRYAN CALDWELL

Lighting Design

Stage: ATC: *Julius Caesar*, *Twelve Angry Men*, *Honour*, *Master Class*, *All My Sons*, *Arcadia*, *Molly Sweeney*, *Uncle Vanya*. International Festival of the Arts: *Quick*. Aotearoa Young People's Theatre: *Legacy*. Douglas Wright Dance: *Forbidden Memories*. Watershed: *Assassins*, *The Changeling*, *Into The Woods*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Pinocchio*, *Aladdin*, *Hamlet*, *Cabaret*, *The Hungry City*. Mercury Theatre: *Gershwin by George*, *Rivers of China*, *The Homecoming*, *Ladies Night*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Courting Blackbird*, *Amadeus*, *Private Lives*, *The Rose Tattoo*, *Secret Rapture*, *The Sex Fiend*, *A Marvellous Party*, *Shirley Valentine*. Inside Out: *The Lover and Beloved*, *Decline and Fall of A Good Family*, *The Song of The Civilised Thief*, *A Spectacle of One*, *The Crossing*, *The Holy Sinner*. Maidment Youth: *Cool Gangs*, *Alice in Cyberspace*, *Fire in The Heart*, *Still Speeding*, *The Judas Zoo*, *Blood and Bone*. Auckland Ballet: *Giselle*. Independent: *The Boat*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *Under Milkwood*, *Dark of the Moon*, *Taming The Shrew*, *East*, *Equus*, *Folie a Deux*, *Manawa Taua/Savage Hearts*. **Script & Design:** *Alice in Wonderland*. **Events:** 1993/94 Axis Advertising Awards, DB Warriors Opening Match, Telecom Xtra Launch, Sky Orange Channel Launch, My Fair Lady Ball, Carmen Ball, Hero 3. **Installations** (with Tracey Collins): *Our Name is Object*, *I Had A Thought*. **Positions:** Technical Director: Watershed 1992-1994, Auckland Comedy Festival 1997. Event Coordinator: Auckland Comedy Festival 1996. Producer (with Aotea Centre) & Production Manager: *Alice in Wonderland*. TV Producer & Director (with C De Nave & P Horan): Auckland Comedy Festival Gala 1996 & 1997. **Travel Grants:** Lighting Design Seminar, London 1995, Theatre in the 21st Century London 1997.



BARBARA EWING

Virginia Woolf

Theatre: NZ: ATC: Debut. Taki Rua Theatre: *Whaea Kairau (Mother Courage)*. Downstage Theatre: *Death and the Maiden, A Streetcar Named Desire, The Knack*. **Australia:** Sydney Festival of the Arts: *Alexandra Kollontai*. **England:** London BAC: *Dust*. Derby Playhouse: *Time of My Life, Blood Relations, Loot*. Bristol Old Vic: *She Stoops to Conquer, A Doll's House*. London ICA: *Alexandra Kollontai*. London Offstage Theatre: *The Two Marys*. Watermill Theatre: *The Drummer, Alexandra Kollontai*. Ipswich Theatre: *Alexandra Kollontai, Passion Play, The Glass Menagerie*. Old Vic: *The Women*. Greenwich Theatre: *Cider with Rosie, Caste*. Leicester Theatre: *Day in the Death of Joe Egg*. Coventry Theatre: *Mother Courage, Twelfth Night, Widowers Houses*. London Arts Theatre: *Old Flames*. Royal Court Theatre: *Don's Party*. Nottingham Theatre: *The Idiot, Barefoot in the Park*. Liverpool Theatre: *Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, Macbeth, Peer Gynt*. Glasgow Citizens Theatre: *The Strange Case of Martin Richter, The Knack, Mrs Warren's Profession*. Edinburgh Festival: *Alexandra Kollontai, Leaving Home*. **Tours:** NZ: Royal Shakespeare Company: *A Comedy of Errors*. **England:** Cambridge Theatre Company: *Mrs Warren's Profession*. Prospect Theatre Company: *Dr Johnson, Venice Preserved, Much Ado About Nothing*. **Russia:** *Alexandra Kollontai*. **Television:** NZ: *Pioneer Women (Nurse Maude), Rachel*. **England:** *The Ruth Rendell Mysteries, Peak Practice, The Bill, Dangerfield, Out of the Blue, The Vet, Harry, Chiller, Lovejoy, Casualty, September Song, In Suspicious Circumstances, Watch with Mother, Alas Smith and Jones, Comrade Dad, Brass, Boon, Clouds of Glory, The Last Picture Show, Steven, The Sweeney, Hard Times, Sam, The Little Farm*. **Film:** *When the Whales Came, Eye of the Needle, The Reckoning, Dracula Has Risen From the Grave, Torture Garden*. **Writing:** "Strangers", "The Actresses", next novel: "A Dangerous Vine" (set in NZ), NZ Listener "Occasional London Diary". **Awards:** Best Actress *Rachel* NZ Film & Television Awards 1979, Best Student Bancroft Gold Award Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts 1965.



ELIZABETH HAWTHORNE

Vita Sackville-West

Theatre: Auckland Theatre Company: *Master Class*. Theatre Corporate: *The Beggars Opera, Lady with Lapdog, Measure for Measure, Hedda Gabler, The Cherry Orchard, the Two Tigers, Pygmalion, Under Milk Wood, Richard III, Sweeney Todd, The Plough and The Stars, Metamorphosis, A Doll's House, Jack, Spring Awakening, Twelfth Night, The Seagull, As You Like It, Piaf, The End of the Golden Weather, Lady From the Sea, King Lear, The Threepenny Opera, A Kind of Alaska, Three Sisters, A Winter's Tale, Wednesday to Come*. Mercury Theatre: *Pygmalion, Hayfever, Agnes of God, Wild Honey, The Widowing of Mrs Holyroyd, Camille, The Normal Heart, The Tales of Hoffman, The Winslow Boy, A Streetcar Named Desire, Romeo and Juliet, Squatter, Les Liaisons Dangereuses, Oedipus Rex, The Rivers of China, Twelfth Night, The Homecoming, Burn This, The Three Musketeers, The Cherry Orchard, M Butterfly, The Crucible, The Merchant of Venice, Glorious Ruins, Turandot, The Rose tattoo, Mrs Klein, Secret Rapture, The Rover, Hamlet, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. **Television:** *A Woman of Good Character, Both Sides of The Fence, Shortland St, Tommyknockers, Hercules, Gloss, Plainclothes, Letter To Blanche, Marlin Bay, TNN, Adrift, Greenstone*. **Film:** *Savage Honeymoon, Restless, Alex, Jack Be Nimble, The Last Tattoo, Memory and Desire, The Frighteners, The Beach, The Bar*.



Photo: Vireki Leopold



AUCKLAND THEATRE COMPANY
Presents

VITA VIRGINIA

By Eileen Atkins

Adapted from correspondence between Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West
Presented by arrangement with the Sydney Theatre Company
First presented in the Minerva Studio, Chichester Festival Theatre 8 September 1992
Sixth production of ATC's 1998 Montana Season

Cast

Virginia Woolf
Vita Sackville-West

Barbara Ewing
Elizabeth Hawthorne

Director
Designer
Lighting Designer
Stage Manager
Wardrobe
Technical Manager
Props
Director's Assistant
Set Construction
Music

Sarah Peirse
Tracy Grant
Bryan Caldwell
Gregory Smale
Elizabeth Whiting
T.O. Robertson
Suzanne Gratkowski
Cherise Mitchell-Stone
Third Stage Ltd
John Ireland, *Sextet (1898)*
Phantasie Trio in A
Piano Trio N°3
Constant Lambert, *Sonata for Piano*

There will be a Fifteen-Minute Intermission

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AN ENCOUNTER WITH VIRGINIA WOOLF

I came to Tavistock Square and paused at number 37. I hesitated for a moment. Then I plucked up my courage. I stepped through the door of the Hogarth Press and peered into the office.

"Could I help you, sir?" said a willowy young man with amber hair.

"Could I speak with Mrs Woolf?"

"Mrs Woolf, I fear, is busy." He gazed at me appraisingly. "Is it anything in particular?"

"Nothing urgent," I muttered.

"Just a moment," he said swiftly. "I'll see if she's free. I'll tell her it's a young American poet."

I waited in suspense. I heard a rustling behind the door. The dust danced in the sunlight with a gilded elusiveness.

This dancing dust was like an embodiment of the style of Virginia Woolf. In the back of my mind I felt a certain ambivalence about Mrs Woolf. Her novels reminded me of the music of Debussy. I was enthralled while I read them but they slid away through my fingers when I tried to remember them. All I saw was a golden haze like these grains of dust diving in the sunlight.

The man poked his head through the half-open doorway. "Is it something to do with poems, sir?"

"Yes, it's something about poems."

He nodded sympathetically. "Mrs Woolf will be glad to see you."

She was sitting at a desk behind a waterfall of galley proofs. She held a pencil upright and stared at me hopelessly as though from the brink of an unbridgeable abyss. She looked like Andromeda waiting to be rescued.

Andrew has described Mrs Woolf as looking like "an exposed nerve." It seemed like a shrewd description on the basis of her photographs. But now that I saw her it seemed to miss the point. She looked profoundly vulnerable and painfully frail, but also rather dowdy and faded and foxy. She had a tapering nose and an apprehensive chin. Her forehead was creased by horizontal lines (I counted six of them) and her eyebrows were pale and abnormally far apart. Her hair flowed untidily over her brow and ears and curled in little wisps on the back of her neck. Her eyes

shone nocturnally under her dusky lids. They transformed her oval face from a haggard gentility into strange and sudden and heartbreaking loveliness.

"Yes? You wanted to see me?"

"Yes, I did, Mrs Woolf. I've collected a sheaf of poems and I thought you might look at them. There are only thirty-three of them so it won't be laborious. Mr Elliot printed two of them in *The Criterion*, as it happens..."

I blushed uncontrollably. I was appalled by my clumsiness. I was disgusted by my obsequiousness and my bright purple necktie.

Her lips curved into a malignant little smile, almost a leer. "I shall be happy to look over them, since there are only thirty-three..."

"Oh, Mrs Woolf," I said despairingly, "That's not the reason I came here! I came here because..."

"You wanted to look at me, I suppose?"

The magical contact had been made all of a sudden. Her face grew more distinct, as in a film under the acid.

"Exactly!" I said.

"Well, now you have looked at me."

She lowered her eyes sedately. She was secretly laughing at me. Not at my uncouthness or absurdity but with an all-enveloping indifference.

I felt dizzy with frustration.

I made a final effort.

"*The Waves* - oh, Mrs Woolf, what a miraculous book it is! It is not a novel, it is a cobweb full of sunlight..."

"But after all," she parried, "What is a novel, my dear boy? Have you really thought about it? What is this so called novel?"

She glanced at me mischievously, like a disreputable little girl. She was unveiling, with fiendish stealth, a shadowy facet in my character and revealing simultaneously just a hint of her hidden malady. She was playing a secret game, both with zest and with sadness, and for a thrilling little moment I caught a glimpse of Virginia Woolf.

"Well," I said rather lamely, "there is an ambiguity in all great novels. Take Dostoevsky for example. How do you feel about Dostoevsky?"

"Today," she said blandly, "I have no feelings about Dostoevsky."

"Or Gogol, Mrs Woolf. What are your thoughts about Gogol?"

"I have no thoughts today," she said softly, "about Gogol."

"Or Pirandello?" I said wildly. "Are you amused by Pirandello?" The face of Pirandello sprang in front of me like a jack in the box.

Mrs Woolf froze imperceptibly. "I feel no kinship with Pirandello."

My voice rose into a falsetto. "Or Ulysses, Mrs Woolf! What are your personal sentiments about Ulysses?"

She gazed astutely at her fingernails. There was a hush of suspense. "I have no sentiments about Ulysses. At least none that are worth mentioning. When I read it it struck me as a wild miscalculation."

She looked suddenly ten years older. Her hair was tinged with gray. Her eyes looked strangely bloodshot and her cheeks were streaked with weariness. She stared at a fly which was clinging to a light bulb. Then she tilted her head, as though posing for a photograph.

"A catastrophe," she murmured. "A veritable collapse of the critical faculties." She lowered her eyelids, which looked like wilted petals. Then she pressed her hands together in what looked like a prayer. She sat motionless for a moment. She seemed to have turned into an effigy.

I sensed that the end of the ritual was approaching.

"Well, goodbye, Mrs Woolf. It was lovely to see you..."

The sweat flowed down my brow. I kept staring at the window. I picked up my manuscript and headed for the doorway. I looked back for an instant and she sat there, still motionless, still nocturnal and foxy behind her cataract of galley proofs.

From Frederic Prokosch, *Voices: A memoir*, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983.

VITA SACKVILLE-WEST



Vita photographed by Leonard Woolf in 1928. Photo from *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf*, Edited by Louise DeSalvo and Mitchell A Leaska, Hutchinson & Co (Publishers) Ltd., 1984.

Vita, on her side, was a catalogue of contradictions. She was rebellious and she was reticent. She was fearless and she was frightened; she was sociable and reclusive; bold as well as shy. She was a woman who concealed an essentially timid nature under a carapace of managerial competence and extravagant courage. Then she was a woman who saw only what she wanted to see, who was lavish with those of whose love and obedience she was sure, but who neglected those whose wishes failed to coincide with her own; and she was someone who had taught herself from a very early age to spot weaknesses of others.

What Virginia saw in Vita, however, was a sensuous person who could be just noticeably elusive and often puzzling. But this was 'the real woman', as Virginia often said, and a passionate one she was too. But as with all contradictory personalities there was something slightly deceptive about her. Not far from the surface, one could touch the stargazer, the lonely Vita who sought privacy and shunned messy emotional embroilments. Yet it was this same woman who lived often enough on false promise and counterfeit hope, who seemed forever fanning the embers of love

and forever stepping back from its blaze.

There were other sides to Vita which Virginia seems to have detected almost from the beginning. One of them was the indomitable woman who took charge of one's life and charted one's destiny, whose arrogance flattened obstacles and whose vanity refused to acknowledge shabbiness, poverty or familiarity. This was the exalted woman who strode her own private acres and lived in castles and who spoke her mind with devastating simplicity. Then there was the compassionate woman who understood life's miseries and dispensed her bounty on the world's downtrodden - the gentle Vita whose strong hands cupped the fragile moth and nursed the injured nightingale. And there was also the heroic Vita who worked like a slave and played like a prince and saw the whole world as her personal challenge. All of these Vitas, wrapped into one, held Virginia magnetized in a bright circle of high romance and adventure.

From M A Leaska's introduction in *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf* Edited by Louise DeSalvo and Mitchell A Leaska, Hutchinson & Co (Publishers) Ltd., 1984, pg. 11-12

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The Wind in the Willows

SKY CITY THEATRE
12 November - 19 December

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Enid Bagnold (1889-1981) playwright and novelist whose works include the play *The Chalk Garden* (1955) and the novel *National Velvet* (1935).

Clive Bell (1881-1964) English art historian, critic and theorist of Post-Impressionism. He was Vanessa's husband and father to her sons Julian and Quentin. He helped Roger Fry selected works for the Post-Impressionism exhibition of 1910, and is the author of *Art* (1914) and *Civilisation* (1928).

Julian Bell (1908-37) Vanessa and Clive's son, killed in the Spanish Civil War.

Vanessa Bell (Nessa) (1879-1961) Virginia's sister, to whom she was very close. A painter and decorative designer. Married to Clive Bell. Her lovers included Roger Fry and Duncan Grant, who fathered her daughter Angelica.

Arnold Bennett (1867-1931) English novelist and playwright whose works include the novels *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908) and the trilogy *The Clayhanger Family* (1925) and the plays *The Great Adventure* (1913) and *Milestones* (1912).

John Buchan (1875-1940) Scottish novelist and historian, author of *The Thirty Nine Steps* (1915) and governor-general of Canada from 1935-40.

Roy Campbell (1901-57) South African poet whose works include

The Waygoose (1928) and *The Georgiad* (1931) in which the Nicolsons were savagely satirised, due to the affair his wife Mary had with Vita.

Kenneth Clark (1903-83) British art critic and historian who wrote many popular books on art. Widely known for his television series *Civilisation* (1969).

Lady Sybil Colefax (c.1875-1950) a noted society hostess.

T.S. Eliot (Tom) (1888-1965) British poet, critic and essayist, born in the US; his poetry includes *The Waste Land* (1922) and *Ash Wednesday* (1930); his verse plays include *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) and *The Family Reunion* (1939).

E.M. Forster (Morgan) (1879-1970) novelist whose major works include *A Room with a View* (1908), *Howard's End* (1910) and *A Passage to India* (1924).

Roger Fry (1866-1934) English painter and highly influential art critic. In 1910 he organised the first exhibition in England of the Post-Impressionist painters Cezanne, Gauguin and Matisse. He founded the Omega Workshops in 1913.

John Galsworthy (1867-1933) English novelist, short-story writer and prolific playwright. Author of *The Forsyte Saga* (1906-28) and winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1932.



Harold Nicolson. Photo from *Vita*, Victoria Glendinning, Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd, 1983.

Duncan Grant (1885-1978) a pioneer of abstract art and the best known British painter of his generation between the wars. He also designed textiles and pottery for the Omega Workshops.

Radclyffe Hall (1886-1943) author of *Adam's Breed* (1926) and *The Well of Loneliness* (1926) which was seized and withdrawn from sale because of its lesbian subject matter.

St John (Jack) Hutchinson (1884-1942) liberal barrister, whose wife Mary, was Lytton Strachey's cousin and Clive Bell's mistress from 1914-1927.

Rose Macaulay (1881-1958) English novelist, poet and essayist. Author of works including *The Towers of Trebizond* (1956) and *Dangerous Ages* (1921-Femina Vie Heureuse Prize) as well as travel books.

Archibald MacLeish (1892-1928) American poet and playwright. Works include *The Happy Marriage* (1924). He won the Pulitzer Prize three times, for *Conquistador* (1932), his *Collected Poems* 1917-1952 and his verse play *JB*.

Ben Nicolson (1914-78) Vita's elder son. Art historian.



Ben and Nigel Nicolson, 1939. Photo from *Vita The Life of V. Sackville West*, Victoria Glendinning, Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd, 1983.



Leonard Woolf. Photo from *Virginia Woolf*, Hermione Lee, Chatto and Windus, 1996.

Harold Nicolson (1886-1968) Vita's husband and a diplomat, historian and diarist. His works include *Some People* (1927), biographies of Tennyson, Swinburne and George V, and historical and political works. He also wrote for the *Evening Standard* and was Literary Editor of the *Daily Express*. He was the National Liberal MP for West Leicester (1935-45).

Nigel Nicolson (1917-) Vita's younger son, who would later publish secret manuscripts detailing his mother's affair with Violet Trefusis as *Portrait of a Marriage*.

Philip Ritchie (1899-1927) English barrister and a friend of Lytton Strachey.

Gwen St Aubyn (1896-1995) Harold Nicolson's sister and close companion of Vita.

Ethel Sands (1873-1962) American painter who lived in England and France. Vita and Virginia spent the last night before their holiday in France of 1928 at the home of Ethel Sands and painter Nan Hudson.

Rheza Shah (187-1944) the Shah of the Pahlavi Dynasty, ruling Persia from 1925-41 following a coup.

Edith Sitwell (1877-1964) Experimental English poet and critic. Works include *Bucolic Comedies* (1923), *Elegy for Dead Fashion* (1926), *The English Eccentrics* (1933) and *Facade* which, with William Walton's music, was given its first performance in London in 1923.

Logan Pearsall Smith (1865-1946) American born writer who produced critical editions of several authors, including *Milton and His Modern Critics* (1941). Best known for his essays, collected in *All Trivia* (1933) and *Reperusals and Recollections* (1936).

Ethel Smyth (1858-1944) English composer, conductor and suffragette. Works include symphonies, choral works and several operas including *The Wreckers* (1906) and *The Boatswain's Mate* (1916). In prison, in the cell next to Emmeline Pankhurst, she composed the *March of the Women* (1911). Her feminism was to greatly influence Virginia's thoughts on the independence of women.

Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) Experimental American writer and feminist. Author of works including *Three Lives* (1908), *Tender Buttons* (1914), *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* (1933) and two operas with music by Virgil Thomson.

Lytton Strachey (1880-1932) English writer and biographer, author of influential works including *Eminent Victorians* (1918), *Queen Victoria* (1921) and *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928). His innovative style of biography changed the nature of the genre.

Violet Trefusis (1894-1972) Society hostess and writer. Daughter of Alice Keppel, who was the mistress of Edward VII. Vita had an intense affair with Violet between 1918 and 1921.

Dorothy (Dottie) Wellesley (1889-1956) Poet whose works include her collected poems, *Early Light* (1955). Duchess of Wellington from 1943. She invested money in the Hogarth Press when it was in financial

difficulties and was one of Vita's closet friends.

Rebecca West (1880-1983) Irish novelist, biographer, journalist and critic. Author of works including the novels *The Return of the Soldier* and *The Fountain Overflows* (1957) and an analysis of the origins of World War II, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941). She was involved with the suffragettes and wrote for the newspapers *Freewoman* and *Clarion*.

Leonard Woolf (1880-1969) Virginia's husband, and a published, editor and political writer. He founded the Hogarth Press in 1917 and was Literary Editor of *The Nation* from 1923-30. His works include *Socialism and Co-operation* (1921), *After the Deluge* (1931 and 39), *Principia Politica* (1953) and his five volume autobiography (1960-69).



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