

1-1-1990

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Recommended Citation

Culver, Sara (1990) "Virginia Woolf as an Incest Survivor," *Grand Valley Review*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 18.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvr/vol6/iss1/18>

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Virginia Woolf as an Incest Survivor

SARA CULVER

Virginia Woolf's mental breakdowns should not be interpreted—as they have often been in the past—as evidence that she was over-sensitive and under-equipped for the normal shocks of life; or even that she was fundamentally unsound or somehow deficient in character. Many critics who are sympathetic and friendly to Woolf have tended to regard her as secluded, protected, “the Invalid Lady of Bloomsbury,” and unfriendly critics have called her snobbish and isolated—their attitudes implying that she was a spineless, ivory-tower aesthete, and that if she knew anything about suffering, it was suffering somehow self-inflicted. But Woolf's sufferings were neither imagined nor easy to bear. The notion that she was the victim of nothing but her own febrile imagination and hypersensitivity is absurd. Her experience must be interpreted in the light of what psychologists have learned about the effects of incestuous abuse on its victims.

By a close reading of what Virginia Woolf had to say about some of her childhood memories as these appear in “Sketches of the Past,” “22 Hyde Park Gate,” and in her letters and diaries, by reflecting on what Simone de Beauvoir writes about the complexity of a girl's coming to terms with her sexuality, and by comparing Virginia Woolf's testimony with experiences reported by incest victims today, we may discover some clearer insight into the causes of her emotional pain.

Virginia Woolf's mental breakdowns seem to have been attributed, by herself and others, to the Stephen temperament. Supposedly she had inherited not only a brilliant intellect and a hypersensitive nervous system, but also a predisposition to “madness.” While Woolf had certainly inherited a hypersensitive temperament, there is no reason to suppose she inherited mental illness. It is more plausible to assume that the responsibility for her emotional problems must be borne by those who abused her incestuously—her half-brothers—and by those who allowed this to happen. At the age of six she was molested by her half-brother, Gerald, who was eighteen at the time. After her mother's death, when Woolf was thirteen, she was molested by her other half-brother, George, who was then twenty-nine. His interference continued throughout her adolescence and into her early adulthood. When Quentin Bell's biography of his aunt was first published, at least one critic doubted that the molestations had actually taken place (Henig 58). The subsequent publication of the autobiographical material, *Moments of Being*, and then the *Letters and Diaries*, should have cleared up any lingering doubt that Woolf was sexually abused at least once as a child and continually throughout her adolescence.

Research on the effects of incestuous abuse indicates that the most serious damage is done when it is a father or father-figure who abuses the victim's trust. The age dis-

crepancy between Virginia and her brothers was considerable; not only was each of the men much older, they stood in relationship to her as father-figures. This was especially true of George's position of authority over Virginia during her adolescent years. Depending on the situation, a child reacts variously to the abuser's advances; rarely does she respond with anger. If the abuser is loved and (hitherto) trusted, and especially if he stands in a position of authority over the child, as father, uncle, elder brother, or trusted family friend, the child will be divided in her feelings between loyalty to self and loyalty to the offender (Gelinias 328). If the advances were not physically painful, even pleasurable, and if such caressing is the only sort of physical affection she gets, she may seek more of it. If she has sexual feelings for the perpetrator, she will almost certainly feel these have provoked the violation. Even if the victim is a six-year-old and the offender is her father, in her confusion she will almost certainly take on the full burden of guilt for having somehow brought about the encounter (Thibeault). This seems to have been true in Woolf's case.

The seriousness of this kind of betrayal of trust has only recently been understood in psychiatric circles, let alone among the lay public. Until recently, many therapists believed that incest was not only quite rare, but—unless it had been physically brutal—rather harmless or even benign. According to one of Kinsey's researchers, a W. B. Pomery, incest between adults and younger children can also prove to be a satisfying and enriching experience (Russell 8). Probably the most harmful attitude on the part of society—when it was not the attitude of the therapist as well—was that the victim was somehow responsible for what had happened to her. The Kinsey report stated:

In many instances, the experiences (incest) were repeated because the children had become interested in the sexual activity and had more or less actively sought repetitions of their experience (Russell 6).

This lays the blame on the children, who are presumed to be provocative or flirtatious with helpless adult males, who have no choice but to succumb to the wiles of their seductive offspring (Russell 392, 231; see also Browne & Finklehor 73). Without regard to the helplessness and vulnerability of the child, they have projected onto her the imagined female power of turning a law-abiding male into a rapist. Even so perceptive an author as Jean Love wrote in her study of Woolf's emotional background: "If George was her lover, then she was his."¹

Until very recently, few incest victims received help, as few were able to find a therapist that would 1) draw them out on the topic and 2) not regard their participation as collusion or free choice rather than the result of coercion. But children are rarely able to defend themselves effectively against the manipulation or coercion of an older member of the family, especially when they have been trained in deference and obedience to the elder's wishes. Add to this the gender difference in power, and it becomes apparent that a sister with a brother even two or three years older is at a

considerable disadvantage (Russell 172, 292, 42). Since the publication of Woolf's biography there has been a revolution in the attitudes of professional therapists towards incest, at least partly because of such feminist studies as *The Best Kept Secret* by Florence Rush, or *Voices in the Night* edited by Toni McNarron. Incest is terribly damaging in its effects, but much of the harm may not become evident for years. It is a violation of the child's integrity and trust, a traumatic shock to the developing ego, and it can cripple the victim permanently. The after-effects of incestuous abuse range from nightmares and sexual dysfunction, to psychotic behavior and suicide. Woolf's extreme body shame—which troubled her even in her best times—and the anorexia that accompanied her breakdowns are psychological phenomena often found in women who have been sexually abused. Incest victims account for a disproportionate share of the inmates of mental asylums and outpatient psychiatric clinics and are frequently alcoholic or addicted to other drugs. Seen in this light, Woolf's occasional breakdowns become understandable by something other than a congenital disposition to madness (Herman 1293; Lindbergh 329; Gelinas 317, 314, 312; Browne 71-72, 69, 66; Bryer 1429, 1426; Russell 12; see also Oppenheimer, Love, Henig).

Quite a few of Woolf's biographers and critics have mentioned the incest, and most seem to agree that it caused her *sexual* difficulties; but no one seems to have pointed out that nearly all her emotional problems appear in the psychological profiles of other incest victims. Some have suggested that because she was so starved for attention, Woolf may have welcomed George's attentions (Russell 48). The suggestion would seem to be that if that were the case, then not only would Woolf be as guilty as George, but also that the experience would not have been traumatic. Both suppositions are incorrect. Neither as a child nor as an adolescent was she in a position to forbid her half-brothers access to her person. Assuming she could have conquered her famous reticence and attempted to tell her father about George's behavior, there would have been no language available to her which would not have condemned her before it accused George. The very fact that she perceived his caresses as being in any way sexual would have seemed an admission of knowledge she was not supposed—as a young girl—to have. Insofar as a supposed ambivalence mitigating the traumatic effects of the molestation, the opposite is true (Russell 86, 48).

As the victim matures, she will have to carry the pain of the incest as best she can. One response is to become what doctors used to call "frigid." She numbs herself to her sexual feelings partly in the unconscious belief this will protect her from further attacks, and partly because sex becomes repellent to her. Conversely, she may become sexually promiscuous: consciously or unconsciously seeking to find affection in sexual encounters, affection which may have been entirely absent during the incest (Thibeault; Hamilton). Sometimes a woman associates all men with the incest, finds them repulsive, and seeks a sexual partner in another woman (Russell 199).

One of the more common symptoms of an incest survivor is her acute discomfort

in any situation that draws attention to her body as an attractive object (Thibeault; Hamilton; Pace). Any kind of self-display, dancing, dressing up, especially in clothing or jewelry that is in any way obtrusive or revealing, even so innocuous a thing as receiving a compliment upon her appearance, can cause her embarrassment and uneasiness. Woolf writes about her extreme self-consciousness in "Sketches of the Past":

... the looking-glass shame has lasted all my life. . . . I cannot now powder my nose in public. Everything to do with dress—to be fitted, to come into a room wearing a new dress—still frightens me; at least makes me shy, self-conscious, uncomfortable (*MOB* 68).

Not only in *Moments of Being*, but occasionally in her letters and diaries, Woolf makes reference to her distressing shyness and embarrassment in regard to matters of dress (*Diaries* III, 90-91, 127). Leonard Woolf and Quentin Bell each make references to her extreme shyness and self-consciousness. It was far too exaggerated in her to have been mere modesty.

Denise Gelinas writes about one way an incest victim can cope: she deliberately attempts to numb her body during the violation or may even imagine herself as "disembodied," able to regard her vulnerable body with detachment, as an onlooker. This phenomenon has also been reported by those who have experienced torture.

The use of denial and repression is reasonably expectable from what is known about traumatic neuroses; less expectable is the special place reserved for the knowing use and induction of dissociation by the victims. Former victims have related their conscious efforts to induce some type of dissociative defense while the incest was occurring. . . . Most commonly they would attempt to "become part of the wall" or to "float near the ceiling and look at what was happening" (Gelinas 316).

Stephen Trombley, in his perceptive study of Woolf's emotional problems, describes her central difficulty as one of *embodiment*. He traces her emotional distress to the incest and points out passages in Woolf's novels where the characters consciously or unconsciously seek to escape unbearably painful emotion by disembodiment; i.e., Rachel Vinrace in *The Voyage Out*, when she is kissed by Richard Dalway

... stood up and went. Her head was cold, her knees shaking, and the physical pain of the emotion was so great that she could only keep herself moving above the great leaps of her heart. She leant upon the rail of the ship, and gradually ceased to feel, for a chill of body and mind crept over her. Far out between the waves the little black and white sea-birds were riding. Rising and falling with smooth and graceful movements in the hol-

lows of the waves they seemed singularly detached and unconcerned (TVO 73).

Rachel appears to be imagining herself as one of the sea-birds. Trombley's point is that Woolf describes Rachel's reaction to the intrusive behavior of Dalloway in terms of her own physiological reaction to the sexual molestation she endured from George Duckworth.

Woolf had not apparently discussed the matter of George's molestation with anyone but her sister Vanessa, who was also abused. There is no mention of it except for a reference to a conversation in a letter written to Vanessa in July of 1911, a few months before her marriage. In it she mentions in a letter to Vanessa a conversation with Janet Case during which they had discussed "all George's malefactions."² According to Woolf, Janet Case was shocked and sympathetic, but not entirely surprised. Woolf's first public reference to George's misbehavior occurs in "Reminiscences," written in 1907 or 1908 when she was about twenty-five. She writes about him rather obliquely, saying that "He had been once, when we were children, a hero to us; strong and handsome and just . . ." As she continues to write, however, it is obvious that her opinion of him declined as the years progressed. There is no *overt* reference to his incestuous advances, but she censures him for behaving "little better than a brute" (*MOB* 57-58).

Sometime between 1920 and 1921, when she would have been about thirty-eight years old, she wrote a caricature of him for the amusement of the "Memoir Club." In it she develops the idea of his animality, or rather, bestiality. She goes on at length in a savagely satirical vein, making George Duckworth immortal in a way he could not have foreseen.

His small brown eyes seemed perpetually to be boring into something too hard for them to penetrate. But when one compares them to the eyes of a pig, one is alluding not merely to their stupidity, or their greed . . . but to something obstinate and pertinacious in their expression as if the pig were grouting for truffles with his snout and would by sheer pertinacity succeed in unearthing them (*MOB* 146).

Probably the most startling thing she says is that he was her "lover." She writes that after she had gone to bed, George would enter her room in the dark, whisper to her not to turn on the light, and then fling himself on her bed and take her in his arms. Certainly this is not proper fraternal behavior. As the piece is satirical, perhaps her tone has led people to believe that she is making it all up. But there are plausible reasons for Woolf's adopting a satiric tone: first, a reference in Woolf's diary for the 18th of March, 1920, to a paper which we do not have, but which she had read for the Memoir Club the night before and recorded her distress at their reception of it:

'Oh but why did I read this egoistic sentimental trash!' That was my cry, & the result of my sharp sense of the silence succeeding my chapter. It started with loud laughter; this was soon quenched; & then I couldn't help figuring a kind of uncomfortable boredom on the part of the males; to whose genial cheerful sense my revelations were at once mawkish and distasteful. What possessed me to lay bare my soul! (*Diary* II, 26)

Since we do not have the paper she read on this occasion, there is no way of knowing whether or not she made reference to George and his misbehavior in some more serious fashion, or whether she had dealt with an entirely different subject. At any rate, she seems quite determined not to risk a repetition of that scene. That may be one reason. Another, also perfectly plausible, would be her desire to write about something that weighed on her, but in such a fashion as to deny its importance; or, in the jargon of psychiatry, to "distance herself" from it by being witty or facetious.

Woolf's way of dealing with her memory of the incest is to take revenge on George by making him ridiculous. Her descriptions of him in "22 Hyde Park Gate" are unkind, but his behavior warrants unkindness. It is a pity she could not have released some of that anger more directly and much earlier in her life; it might have spared her the anguish of mental breakdown.

Virginia and Leonard Woolf were married in August of 1912, when she was thirty. In the long run it may have been, as Quentin Bell writes, "... the wisest decision of her life" (Bell I, 187). However, the first two years were not promising. She did not find the physical side of marriage at all gratifying, and before the honeymoon was over, she had begun suffering severe headaches. The following summer she was on the brink of her worst breakdown. Incest victims often suffer varying degrees of distress when they have experiences that remind them of the incest.

Woolf seems to have an intellectual understanding that she had been wounded by George Duckworth, but—perhaps from pride—does not want to acknowledge how deep was the wound nor how terribly it pained her. There are only hints in "A Sketch of the Past." In 1939-40, when she is fifty-eight, and looking back on her youth, she writes very frankly of her vulnerability in regard to George's opinion of her evening dress (*MOB* 130). That she—in spite of her developing a standard of values that were opposed to his Philistine and crassly snobbish measure of human worth—was still child enough (at 15 or 16) to be so shamed by his censure suggests that she would have been as defenseless against his advances as she was against his disapproval and scorn. Indeed "he had been a hero to us." When she wrote "Hyde Park Gate," in 1921, years after she was free of George, she could laugh at him. But the intensity of her anger at his betrayal of her trust is revealed in the ferocity of her satire and is a measure of her pain.

Also in "A Sketch of the Past" is an especially revealing passage, not at all satirical, in which Woolf describes her remembered feelings about looking at herself in the mirror:

Let me add a dream; for it may refer to the incident of the looking-glass. I dreamt that I was looking in a glass when a horrible face—the face of an animal—suddenly showed over my shoulder. I cannot be sure if this was a dream, or if it happened. Was I looking in the glass when something in the background moved, and seemed to me alive. I cannot be sure. But I have always remembered the other face in the glass, whether it was a dream or a fact, and that it frightened me (*MOB* 69).

These images haunted Woolf's writing: for example, Rachel's nightmare after her encounter with Richard Dalloway is a dream of barbarian men who "snuffle" at her door (*TVO* 77). And in *The Years*, Rose, after encountering an exhibitionist with a scarred face, cannot get rid of its nightmare presence; the face seems to hover over her bed (*TY* 40). This "horrible face," "the face of an animal," which Woolf recalled (either dream or reality) would seem to be connected with her depiction of George as "bestial," whether faun, satyr, or goat. Over the course of her life, Woolf had to deal with the residue of the incest; her most severe breakdown may have had some cathartic elements in it, but she was haunted by the specter of male animality and male violence until she died.

In "Sketches of the Past," Woolf does not mention George's caressing her. However, she includes some new information: her other half-brother, Gerald, molested her when she was six years old. It would seem that she did not reveal that to anyone in her life—not even to her sister. The fifty-two-year old secret is intertwined with many related feelings and memories, and seems almost peripheral to Woolf's main subject: her feelings of shame at looking at herself in a mirror. Moreover, this vignette of Woolf's childhood contains passages that would seem to reveal that—at an early age—she felt the need to deny her femininity, and perhaps, by extension, her sexual feelings. It is necessary to quote the passage at length.

There was a small looking glass in the hall at Talland House. It had, I remember, a ledge with a brush on it. By standing on tiptoe I could see my face in the glass. When I was six or seven perhaps, I got into the habit of looking at my face in the glass. But I only did this if I was sure that I was alone. I was ashamed of it. A strong feeling of guilt seemed naturally attached to it. But why was this so. One obvious reason occurs to me—Vanessa and I were both what was called tomboys; that is, we played cricket, scrambled over rocks, climbed trees, were said not to care for clothes and so on. Perhaps therefore to have been found looking in the glass would have been against our tomboy code. But I think that my feeling of shame went a great deal deeper (*MOB* 68).

Certainly Virginia's face must have been worth looking at: her enormous green eyes, set in a face composed of very fine, delicate features and framed with bright red hair,

stared back at a miniature Titania. Vanessa recalled that she was like “a sweet pea of a special flame colour.” Virginia must have derived a pleasure more highly charged than that which came from the perusal of even very lovely flowers. The first thing that springs to mind in connection with the guilt is that perhaps she had been cruelly teased or scolded about the sins of vanity. The second is that perhaps she is remembering feelings of shame that came *after* Gerald’s molestation. But if she really felt shame before that incident (or incidents) it could be that she felt ashamed of admiring her reflection because of the nature of the pleasure she felt.

Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, points out the close relation of “sex feeling and allurements,” that looking into a mirror can be, for a narcissist, a sexually charged experience. Simone de Beauvoir uses the word *narcissist* in the original Freudian sense: one enamoured of her own appearance. Most little girls in Western patriarchal culture are socialized to develop narcissistic personalities. And in a culture which combines a paradoxical preoccupation with feminine appearance coupled with a strong prohibition of the female’s enjoyment of sexual pleasure, it is not strange that little Virginia Stephen felt guilt and shame were “naturally” coupled with her pleasure in her own attractiveness. Woolf’s linking of the memory of the “mirror shame” with Gerald’s exploration of her genitals suggests that she felt her pleasure in gazing at her reflection was shameful not only because the pleasure may have had narcissitic or erotic overtones, but also because she might have confusedly felt that her interest in herself as an attractive object *caused* Gerald to be curious about her body. The unconscious guilt caused by this sort of confusion might have been the reason she felt so uncomfortable about drawing attention to her beauty—even as a grown woman.

The looking-glass shame has lasted all my life, long after the tomboy phase was over. I cannot now powder my nose in public. Everything to do with dress—to be fitted—to come into a room wearing a new dress— still frightens me; at least makes me shy, self-conscious, uncomfortable. ‘Oh to be able to run, like Julian Morrell, all over the garden in a new dress’ I thought not too many years ago (*MOB* 68).

She envies Julian Morrell her unselfconscious delight in her physical attractiveness, but despairs of being able to enjoy that kind of pleasure herself. It is too risky.

Also it could be that she felt ashamed of admiring her reflection because that is a specifically *feminine* kind of behavior. Not only were girls rather spectacularly devalued in Victorian times, but Virginia’s mother was quite openly partial to her sons and to men in general. It could be that both Virginia and Vanessa became “tomboys” in an effort—not only to escape the onus of being female, but also to gain more of their mother’s attention:

Yet femininity was very strong in our family. We were famous for our

beauty—my mother’s beauty, Stella’s beauty, gave me as early as I can remember, pride and pleasure. What then gave me this feeling of shame, unless it were that I inherited some opposite instinct? . . . Yet this did not prevent me from feeling ecstasies and raptures spontaneously and intensely and without any shame or the least sense of guilt, *so long as they were disconnected with my own body*. I thus detect another element in the shame which I had in being caught looking at myself in the glass in the hall. *I must have been ashamed or afraid of my own body*. Another memory, also of the hall, may help to explain this. There was a slab outside the dining room door for standing dishes upon. Once when I was very small Gerald Duckworth lifted me onto this, and as I sat there he began to explore my body. I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes, going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But it did not stop. His hand approached my private parts too. I remember resenting, disliking it—what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling? It must have been strong, since I still recall it. This seems to show that a feeling about certain parts of the body; how they must not be touched; how it is wrong to *allow* them to be touched; must be *instinctive* . . . Though I have done my best to explain why I was ashamed of looking at my own face I have only been able to discover some possible reasons; there may be others; I do not suppose that I have got at the truth; yet this is a simple incident; and it happened to me personally; and I have no motive for lying about it . . . (*MOB* 68-69; italics mine).

To be angry about such pawing may be instinctive, but the shame that causes her to keep silent about molestation is not instinctive, but taught. While she writes, “We were famous for our beauty. . . ,” it is only her mother’s beauty, Stella’s beauty, that gives her “pride and pleasure.” Her own attractiveness is somehow a source of shame to her. It couldn’t be a lack of beauty that would cause her shame, and that, in any case, wouldn’t cause “fear.” This suggests that the (probably) narcissistic pleasure she derived from gazing at herself in the mirror was *connected with* her body, induced by and located in her body. Moreover, the incorrect use of “with” instead of “from” might indicate both her awareness that the feelings were connected with her body and her need to insist that they were “*disconnected from*” her body. And it is possible that she felt afraid of her erotic or sexual feelings because she connected them with Gerald’s interest in her body, that she believed her feelings, not his, caused Gerald’s intrusion. It may have been impressed upon her so early in life and to such a degree that any sexual feelings were shameful she believed her shame to be “instinctive.” While some of her references to her sexual difficulties are rather flippant, this one is not. The unconscious assumption of guilt betrayed in “allow” seems to indicate she had not—even after fifty-two years—come to terms with that

experience. Even though she was only six years old, Gerald was eighteen, and she was too much in awe of him to struggle or protest this unwelcome invasion of her privacy, of her body. Like nearly all molested children, she felt guilty rather than angry. She finally could bring herself to write about the incident, but she is awkward, reticent, and self-blaming. She takes upon herself the responsibility for his molestation, in spite of her having had no choice but to put up with it or endure the greater shame of having her parents know about it and then having either Gerald or her parents or all of them angry with her. Her perception of the situation was probably correct, for the usual response to a scenario like that has been to suspect the victim of having been in some way provocative or seductive. Woolf—as a child—may have wanted more attention than she got, but to be the center of an attention consisting wholly of shocked displeasure was not the sort she had in mind. There is a passage in Woolf's *Diary* that suggests the continuing pain of this early molestation; it is dated March 1st, 1937:

I wish I could write out my sensations at this moment. They are so peculiar and unpleasant . . . very cold: impotent & terrified. As if I were exposed on a high ledge in full light. . . . As if something cold & horrible—a roar of laughter at my expense were about to happen. And I am powerless to ward it off: I have no protection (*Diary V*, 63).

What is the significance of Woolf's having suffered this, or the purpose in bringing it up? One wishes to clear up a misconception about the life and character of an author one admires. Whether we admit it or not, our attitudes as readers are influenced by our opinion of an author's character. We read not only for pleasure, but for insight and understanding. The easily accessible author has no difficulty engaging the interest of posterity, who may not know or care what sort of person the writer was. However, Woolf's serious work makes demands on her readers which may well discourage them unless they have some good reason for persevering.

Woolf's experience gave her insight worth sharing. Perhaps one effect of the incest was to make Woolf aware of a reality unrecognized by conventional culture, and not expressible in conventional terms. Her painful initiation into the multifaceted nature of any situation involving human beings may have laid the foundation for her rather complex way of developing a scene, of revealing it from various perspectives. Her refusal to let us possess or grasp her characters may have had its origin in her loathing of being grasped, of being used as a possession. A character—for Woolf—is an end in himself or herself, as is a human being, and not a means to an end. In spite of her having some characters which seem more percipient than the rest, Woolf will not allow us to rest comfortably with the assurance that any one character—or the author herself—has summed up all there is to say about reality. No one point of view is supreme or authoritative. The cliché that method is inseparable from message is apt here because her message is that we must expand our percep-

tions, and her method is to move from perceptor to perceptor enabling us to arrive at a composite picture of the world only by the exercise of our imaginations. Woolf's oblique and shifting glimpses of reality, force us to become dependent on multiple points of view; this should make us sharply aware of how much our perception of reality is partial and imperfect, and how understanding it requires an active attentiveness to the perceptions of others. This implies not only an intellectual understanding of another's point of view, but an emotional appreciation of it. The wider an individual's or a community's perceptions extend, the greater the possibility for a just and humane society. "Memory is morality; community is collective memory" (Bly).

Her detractors have dismissed Virginia Woolf as a pretentious snob, comfortably insulated from the "real world" by her sex, her class, and her recurring illness. This is a slander that needs to be disproved. Woolf—while still a child—had to face realities so ugly they tormented her for years. But they did not conquer her. That she not only survived such violations of her integrity, but survived magnificently, argues that she was neither weak nor spineless, but remarkably strong and courageous.

Notes

1. The passage I refer to reads: "Is it not possible that someone as much in need of affection as Virginia both wanted and liked affection from George, and imagined that he had made erotic advances when he was merely being kind and innocently affectionate, in short, was trying to be a brother and not a lover? . . . When George made his so-called advances, Virginia was at an age when she may have been as confused by her own response as she was by whatever he may have done. It should be noted in this regard that when she said George was her lover, she did not say she resisted his advances, thus leaving the impression (if one wants to read the story as literal fact, which is not advised) that she was also his lover. In short, the accusation about the alleged incest as made in her first paper for the 'Memoir Club,' by implication, indicted her as well as George. If this line of reasoning is valid, and there is no way to determine whether it is or is not, it may follow that Virginia felt all the more repelled because she found it pleasant to be caressed by someone she despised" (207-208). The assumption here is that Virginia had the authority to forbid George to fondle her. Assuming she conquered her shyness and remonstrated with George, her very acknowledgement that his caresses made her uncomfortable would be to admit to having "improper" feelings; there would have been no language Virginia could have used that would not have condemned her before it condemned George. Moreover, from the way she describes his behavior, it is doubtful that he would have paid attention to anything she said in protest. Finally, as Diana Russell points out, the victim is far more distressed when her feelings about the incest are ambiguous or confused.

2. "She [Janet Case] has a calm interest in copulation . . . and this led us to the revela-

tion of all George's malefactions. To my surprise, she has always had an intense dislike of him; and used to say 'Whew—you nasty creature', when he came in and began fondling me over my Greek. When I got to the bedroom scenes, she dropped her lace, and gasped like a benevolent gudgeon. By bedtime she said she was feeling quite sick. . . ." (*Letters I*, 472).

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