

‘I am fast locked up’, Janus and Miss Jan: Virginia Woolf’s 1897 journal as threshold text.



Stella, Vanessa and Virginia Stephen, c.1896 (b/w photo), English Photographer, (19th century) / Private Collection / The Bridgeman Art Library

On 6 January 1897, within a week of starting to write her first personal journal, Virginia Stephen’s privacy was encroached upon. She writes, ‘Pauline found the key of this book so that I am fast locked up’ (PA: 8). Virginia,¹ almost fifteen, identifies herself closely, but ambivalently, with ‘this book’, consistently personifying it. She locks up her journal denying it an audience, either to her self or any other. Conventionally a diary is seen as a place to freely express private thoughts about self and others. Frequently young diarists use their writing to release emotions and explore ideas but in 1897 Virginia refuses to do this: she prefers to lock her self away. She is unwell, her mother Julia’s premature death in 1895 was traumatic; during 1897 her half-sister Stella marries, becomes pregnant, suffers debilitating illness and dies. On 1 January 1898, after the grievous blow of losing Stella, Virginia reprises the act of locking, ‘Here is a volume of fairly acute life (the first really *lived* year of my life) ended locked & put away’ (134). The effect of combining ‘ended’ ‘locked’ with ‘put away’ is striking. ‘Put way’ implies being set aside, hidden from sight, boxed and compartmentalised.

Throughout 1897 Virginia was in abeyance: ‘a state of suspension, temporary non-existence or inactivity; dormant or latent condition liable to be at any time revived’ (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1978: 17). This journal shows Virginia averse to creating a personal narrative, she is ‘locked & put away’.

The lock is a trope described by Gaston Bachelard as ‘a psychological threshold’ (Bachelard 1994: 81). A key may turn two ways but it ‘closes more often than it opens’; ‘the gesture of closing is always sharper, firmer and briefer than that of opening’ (73). A key often effects a negation. *A Room of One’s Own* explores women’s access to education; famously dramatising a denial when Woolf is told not to trespass on the smoothly-rolled turf of an Oxbridge college. Woolf uses the idea of locking to indicate a closing off, a limiting of self-expression, ‘Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind’ (*AROO*: 76). I will argue that, in the 1897 journal, Virginia’s mind was locked up and not free. I will show how she uses a range of tactics to avoid reflection and to deny access to subjectivity.

On 10 January 1897 she writes as if the seven-day-old journal were a delicate newborn. She wonders ‘How many more weeks has it to live - At any rate it must and shall survive Nessas Collins and [As] Renshaw. It has a key, and beautiful boards, and is much superior’ (*PA*: 10). This journal was small, 8 x 13 cm, with a hard gilt-trimmed brown leather cover and a lock. The dated pages designate diurnal pauses and the journal seemed to reproach her if she failed to fill each day’s blank space. She laments, ‘Alas Alas alas; this diary has been entirely neglected’ (123). Using ideas from educational theory and applying neuroscientist Antonio Damasio’s analysis of how consciousness develops incrementally, through *proto-*, *core-* and *autobiographical* or *extended* selves, I will consider this journal as a liminal text. At this stage in her life Virginia is in stasis, tense but poised. She is waiting at the threshold, anticipating movement but not ready to cross into autobiographical consciousness.

This journal sits, quarantined, between two ‘missing’ years, 1896 and 1898.² It comes two years after the last edition of the Stephen children’s family newspaper, *Hyde Park Gate News* (1891-1895). With reference to the next extant journal (1899), Mitchell Leaska notes significant stylistic change, ‘Her writing now became more detached, more self-conscious in style and manner’ (*PA*: 135). Here ‘self-conscious’ suggests deliberation, an awareness of the choice of devices, diction and form; implying some consideration as to how the writing might be received by a reader. Leaska’s use of ‘self-conscious’ suggests that the writer is striving hard to achieve effects, applying and testing techniques, like an apprentice. The earlier 1897

journal is also an acutely 'self-conscious' text if we interpret this expression to mean conscious of one's 'self', mentally and socially ill-at-ease.³ Louise DeSalvo sees this as a self-conscious text in a more positive way, suggesting that Virginia is self-conscious 'about having discovered that she can think' (DeSalvo 1987: 103). My argument is rather that Virginia is resisting this discovery. The voice in this journal is tentative and uncertain, even when she employs her more assertive alter ego, 'Miss Jan'.

Philippe Lejeune points out that 'journal' was used as an adjective before it became a noun (Lejeune 2009: 57). Originally journals were a way of taking stock, literally accounting for day-to-day transactions. Writers use the form to exercise 'a modicum of power, however limited' (51) over external and internal undertakings. In the first half of the year Virginia records events, occasionally using her avatar to express opinions.⁴ DeSalvo argues that Virginia uses Miss Jan, 'to help her begin the process which psychoanalysts refer to as individuation' (DeSalvo 1987: 99); writing the diary was a way for Virginia to distance herself from her disquiet about fulfilling the expected role as compliant young woman. By July Stella is clearly unwell; Virginia's journal entries are brief, increasingly discontinuous; lacunae appear on the page. The daily exercise is patently a duty rather than a pleasure. A reader senses her unease when she does not fulfil the task of writing her journal: 'This dairy has been woefully neglected lately - what with one thing & another - Improvement must be made! (hear hear)' (112). Here the reading self appears to be cheering on the undisciplined writing self. The encouraging reading voice adds 'hear hear' agreeing with the writerly voice that instructs improvement. The discipline of recording seems important to her but there is no self-scrutiny, few articulated thoughts or feelings, nothing remotely confessional: the main narrative voice has no strong personality. Despite, or perhaps because of, her obvious discomfort, Virginia uses Stella's first name less often, resorting to 'she' and 'her'; writing about her half-sister's illness in an irritated, resentful way. Paradoxically, when entries become shorter, in the later part of the year, she does mention her feelings but without detail. Curt statements are often left suspended as at the end of a day's entry: 'It is all very strange' (116); 'It is hopeless & strange'; 'Most perplexing' (124); 'Very strange & unhappy' (129); 'V.S. and A.V.S. silent & miserable' (130). The subject of this text is resisting subjectivity. The teleological form of the journal with its controlling page-per-day space may be inadequate for Virginia's inchoate emergent feelings.

Autobiographical acts are frequently conceptualised spatially. The ontological aspect of life-writing is often theorised in terms of movement. The subject is in the process of becoming: negotiating a journey, in transit, finding a path, sometimes side-stepping. I suggest

that for much of the 1897 journal its subject is static, in an aporetic state, unable to move forward. Virginia's sister Vanessa wrote that this was a 'time of horrible suspense' (Bell 1997: 68). This is a liminal text because the subject is 'stuck' in between two parts of her life. It was written at the end of the nineteenth-century, at a time of incubation and evolution as Virginia was learning her craft. In the later 1899 journal she is prepared to try unfamiliar modes of writing, to test out new techniques and to mimic other writers' styles.

Educationalists write about the threshold concept as 'opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking' ... 'a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress'. It necessitates 'a shift in learner subjectivity' (Land et al 2005: 53). Another analysis of the process of learning accurately describes the adolescent Virginia's situation during 1897:

Difficulty in understanding thresholds concepts may leave the learner in a state of 'liminality', a suspended state of partial understanding, or 'stuck place', in which understanding approximates to a kind of 'mimicry' or lack of authenticity. Insights gained by learners as they cross thresholds can be exhilarating but might also be unsettling, requiring an uncomfortable shift in identity, or, paradoxically a sense of loss (Meyer et al: 2010: x).

Such affective and cognitive journeys can be difficult; subjects in transition move unsteadily across thresholds. According to Vanessa, Virginia underwent a transformation in childhood having had whooping cough, 'She was never again a plump and rosy child and I believe had actually entered into some new level of consciousness rather abruptly and was suddenly aware of all sorts of questions and possibilities hitherto closed to her' (Bell 1997: 60). The idea of a passage to fuller understanding is analogous to the autobiographical journey. Virginia's self-consciousness restrains her, effectively keeping her stationary. She is inhibited about acknowledging an emerging subjectivity. Rather than take on the role of subject, she warily and reflexively regards her self as object.

Woolf's lifelong interest in selfhood, consciousness and creativity is seen in these early journals and anticipates work in neuroscience. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Antonio Damasio analysed the layered ways in which selves are created. Damasio sets out a notion of the 'self-as-object' and the 'self-as-subject'. This model is not a dichotomy but a progression. It is evolutionary, 'the self-as-knower having had its origin in the self-as-object' (Damasio 2010: 8). Adhering to the notion that the self is not static but constantly changing, Damasio writes that 'There is indeed a self, but it is a process, not a thing, and the process is present at all times when we are presumed to be conscious' (8). In this journal, Virginia observes her self dispassionately as an object, refusing to accept that she

has agency. She has not yet become a 'self-as-subject'. Damasio writes, 'The self-as-subject, as knower, as the "I," is a more elusive presence, far less collected in mental or biological terms than the *me*, more dispersed, often dissolved in the stream of consciousness, at times so annoyingly subtle that it is there but almost not there' (9).

In *The Feeling of What Happens*, Damasio identifies three stages in the development of consciousness, stressing that it is not a 'monolith'. These stages are the *proto-self*; then *core consciousness* which 'provides the organism with a sense of self about one moment - now - and about one place - here. The scope of core consciousness is the here and now' (Damasio 2000: 16). The core self is 'a transient entity, ceaselessly re-created for each and every object with which the brain interacts' (17). The most developed stage is *autobiographical* or *extended consciousness* which 'provides the organism with an elaborate sense of self' and 'places that person at a point in individual historical time, richly aware of the lived past and of the anticipated future, and keenly cognizant of the world beside it' (16). The autobiographical self is the owner of what Damasio calls the 'movie-in-the-brain' (11) which is the narrative we claim and construct when relating our life story.

Damasio chooses a theatrical metaphor to describe the 'momentous coming of the sense of self into the world of the mental' (Damasio 2000: 3). He compares 'the birth of a knowing mind' (3) to a performer going through a door; stepping into the light of the stage. This is 'about the transition from innocence and ignorance to knowingness and selfness' (4). Damasio provides a simple definition of consciousness as 'an organism's awareness of its own self and surroundings'. Consciousness 'allows us to know sorrow or know joy, to know suffering or know pleasure, to sense embarrassment or pride, to grieve for lost love or lost life' (4). Once a subject has made this transition, empathy and desire are possible because 'consciousness helps us develop a concern for other selves' as well as concern for oneself (5). Damasio states that 'consciousness and emotion are *not* separable' so that 'when consciousness is impaired so is emotion' (16). His analysis perfectly describes Virginia's state of mind in 1897.

In this volume Virginia is hiding in the shade, unwilling to step forward into the light of consciousness. In *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*, Damasio develops his theatrical analogy, separating the 'self as witness' from the self as 'protagonist' (Damasio 2010: 12). Woolf recognised this division in a 'Sketch of the Past' when she writes, retrospectively, that there was 'a spectator in me who, even while I squirmed and obeyed, remained observant, note taking for some future revision' (*MOB*: 155). Joanne Campbell Tidwell writes, 'In her early diary, Woolf begins to see a separation between the "I" who

writes and the “I” who feels and thinks. However split or contradictory this sense of self is, it nonetheless expresses developing subjectivity. The development is neither smooth nor continuous’ (Campbell Tidwell 2008: 9). This supports Damasio’s analysis of the ‘self-as-object’ and the ‘self-as-knower’ and of his recognition of the incremental but uneven process of moving from one stage of consciousness to another. Damasio writes that ‘Subjectivity is not required for mental states to exist, only for them to be privately known’ (Damasio 2010: 16). Virginia is not yet able to admit the privately known autobiographical self into this journal; she effaces this self; it is elusive, ‘almost not there’ (9). Harriet Blodgett cites diary scholar Paul C. Rosenblatt, ‘Diarists need a certain amount of egocentrism, enough to be interested in recording some aspects of the world they experience’ (Blodgett 1989: 71). Virginia is witness to events but prefers to remain a dispassionate observer, a ‘self as witness’ rather than ‘protagonist’.

‘Miss Jan’ is a substitute self invented by the ‘real’ historical referent, Virginia Stephen, so that she may present her self-as-object. She thus presents herself as if she were other. She divides her ‘consciousness into subject and object, into the observer and the thing observed’ (Klaus 2010: 8). She creates a fictional mouthpiece to objectify, and sometimes silence, her self. Virginia probably took the name of her alter ego from January, her birthday month. The god Janus gives his name to the month at the ‘turn’ of the year. Janus sits at the gate of the year holding a key in his right hand; double-faced he simultaneously looks in opposite directions. He is the god of doors (*ianua*), gates, passages, bridges, transitions, of beginnings and of endings. The Romans worshipped him at planting and harvest times; for important transitional events in a life such as marriage or birth. The semantic link between Janus and Miss Jan⁵ seems pertinent as Virginia is pausing to look backwards to her childhood as well as forwards, reluctantly, to prospective adulthood.

Louise DeSalvo writes, ‘During this year, it was far easier for Virginia Stephen to record what Miss Jan said, as Miss Jan said it, than it was for her to deal with the feelings that she herself was having’ (DeSalvo 1987: 96). The creation of this character allows Virginia to simultaneously perform and observe her own bewilderment and embarrassment. ‘Miss Jan’ makes her debut in a lively letter to Thoby typewritten on a windy March day in 1896. In a farcical tableau Miss Jan is

quite afraid of venturing out. The other day her skirt was blown over her head, and she trotted along in pair of red flannel drawers to the great amusement of the Curate who happened to be coming out of Church. She swears that she blushed the colour of the said drawers, but that must be taken for granted (*L* 1: 2).

She reappears as ‘Poor Janet’ in another letter to Thoby (24 February 1897) venturing out to see the Queen but, again, dramatised as comically vulnerable. Struggling to ‘recross’ the threshold of the street she is ‘almost crushed’ by an agitated group of ‘stout females from the country’ and finds herself left ‘stranded’ (*L* 1: 6).

Using Miss Jan is an ingenious way of simultaneously appearing but not appearing, of being and not-being in the text. Virginia effaces her intimate self by inventing a persona. By wearing the mask of Miss Jan⁶ she uses prosopopoeia. Leigh Gilmore cites Paul De Man’s essay ‘Autobiography as De-facement’ where he defines prosopopoeia ‘as apostrophe, a call to the absent, dead or inanimate object’; Gilmore writes that this ‘involves giving and taking away voice’ (Gilmore 1994: 72). Miss Jan functions both to give and take away voice and face. Virginia shows ‘an imaginary or absent person as speaking and acting’ (Smith and Watson 2010: 208). The adult Woolf reflects on the idea of a diary having a face when she re-reads hers on the 28 December 1919, ‘Oh yes, I’ve enjoyed reading the past years [sic] diary, & shall keep it up. I’m amused to find how its grown a person, with almost a face of its [sic] own’ (*D* 1: 317). She seems to be describing the successful individuation of the feeble creature she was slightly wary of when she was fifteen; by 1919 the diary is a friend with whom she may converse.

The journal form is often seen as analogous to soliloquy because its voice is considered to be unified and single. This is anathema to Virginia because it requires her to articulate subjectivity. She artfully presents what is absent by appropriating a disguise; in Damasio’s terms she becomes a ‘protagonist’ by proxy. Miss Jan voices opinions that Virginia prefers to leave undeclared. Ian Blyth writes that ‘Miss Jan is the person to whom certain newsworthy events (more often than not those involving some form of personal embarrassment) are said to have happened’. He goes on to suggest that the Miss Janisms ‘owe their existence to the habit of always using a third-person narrative voice in *Hyde Park Gate News*’ (Blyth 2012: 354). I contend that the Miss Jan figure has a different, more protective function. The child writer’s use of the passive voice and of phrases such as ‘a certain young lady’, ‘the two youngest females’ and ‘the young juveniles’ was primarily to imitate a detached, anonymous journalistic style rather than to hide behind impersonation. A confident first-person singular voice is reserved for fictional sketches, philosophical reflections and for the narrators of invented letters in the Stephen children’s newspaper. This uncertain journal, Janus-like, presents two faces, one referential and one a mask. The Miss Jan mask allows Virginia to physically defend her mind which, looking back, she

acknowledged was ‘extraordinarily unprotected, unformed, unshielded, apprehensive, receptive, anticipatory’ (*MOB*: 130).

Two entries in the journal suggest Miss Jan also featured as the subject of a piece of fiction. On the 31 January Virginia mentions ‘the History of Ms. and Js. Grand Tour’; J is Miss Jan and M stands for Miss Maria, Vanessa’s surrogate. The second reference suggests that the narrative was very detailed or that Virginia was writing it very slowly, ‘After tea wrote the Eternal Miss Jan, which has not passed the first day yet’ (*PA*: 30). She confidently records what ‘Miss Jan thought’ as if she were the omniscient narrator of a traditional novel. Hiding her self behind an assertive character with an alternative perspective allows Virginia a measure of control. She is constructing her self in making the text. Writing calms her so she may ‘compose’ her self.⁷ Miss Jan also allows Virginia to present herself as a ridiculous caricature:

Poor Miss Jan utterly lost her wits dropped her umbrella, answered at random talked nonsense, and grew as red as a turkey cock. Only rescued from this by S. proposing to go away. So we left, I with the conviction that what ever talents Miss Jan may have, she does not possess the one qualifying her to shine in good society -’ (*PA*: 39).

Here she is depicted as a pitiable, socially gauche, disorganised member of the group. This strategy of using a persona is not quite an act of ventriloquism. In the journal Miss Jan may be animated but she is not allowed a direct voice. The phrase ‘Miss Jan says’ is only used once, on 11 February. Nessa and Virginia are bicycling on muddy roads in rainy Bognor. In a detailed and, for this journal, uncharacteristically amusing and dynamic description she writes, ‘we penetrated so far into the country, that footpaths ceased to exist’. They plough through ‘6 inches of sticky clay’ and ‘felt very desperate - The mist blew in our faces, the mud spurted all over us - and behold - here was a school of little boys marching towards us! Their remarks shall not be entered here, Miss Jan says;’ (*PA*: 33). Just as Virginia is beginning to create a vivid scene she halts, choosing to use her mouthpiece to censor the boys’ language, disallowing repetition of what the boys said. The prim, judgmental Miss Jan has assumed an editorial role: she can gag as well as give voice to her creator.

Virginia often reports, second hand, how Miss Jan feels, ‘Miss Jan rode her new bicycle, whose seat is rather uncomfortable’ (*PA*: 5). Just as Virginia seems to be attending to her feelings she hands them on to her surrogate. So, on 28 April, we read:

Stella in bed with a bad chill on her innards like she had at Christmas. They have a nurse, Dr Seton three times a day - they say she is getting better - but everyone getting miserable. Everything as dismal as it well can be. Oh dear - how is one to live in such

a world, which is a Miss Janism, but very much my mind at present. To bed in my new room, which was lonely & dismal too (*PA*: 77).

The 'Miss Janism' is almost a quotation but not quite; it is mediated, as if Virginia were reporting the words, or thoughts, of another. There is empathy and a near-alignment with the imprecise use of 'one' but Virginia is separate from Miss Jan. Often Virginia starts to express a personal view then disowns it. This device allows her to create a distance between Miss Jan's histrionic views and Virginia's own tentative ones. On 20 April, bike-riding again, she begins by using 'I' then elides this identity to becoming Miss Jan then returns to 'I', 'If I was a poet (which Miss Jan does not claim to be) I should write something upon this way of travelling' (*PA*: 73). The 'passing of the baton' from person to persona happens discreetly in mid-sentence. On 1 February she is angry that she will have to accompany Stella to Eastbourne:

I have been in a dreadful temper all day long, poor creature - and lead Stella and Vanessa a life - Can not protest *too* strongly against going (though I do) or else S will have to give it up, and her poor young man would be miserable - but think of going! (*PA*: 27).

The shifting perspective is intriguing; Virginia is caught in the act of evading subjectivity. She begins with the assertive 'I' then falters, using 'poor creature' to distance her self as an object. She then omits the subject of the phrase beginning 'Can not protest', hiding the 'I do' inside parenthesis, as if reluctant to use 'I'. The 'but think of going!' may refer to her self but seems to be addressed to a second person, perhaps an invitation for a reader (her self or another) to empathise with this vexing situation. The subsequent statement, 'This is a dreadful fix -' is not defined, though it sounds like something Miss Jan might say. The dash implies that she (Virginia *or* Miss Jan) is lost for words. The final remark sounds concurrently definite *and* uncertain, 'Poor Miss Jan is bewildered.' Virginia uses Miss Jan so she may deprecate her self. On the 2 May she writes about her father's lecture which, 'was very deep rather too deep for the audience; very logical & difficult for the ignorant (i.e. Miss Jan) to follow' (79). She is concurrently hiding and revealing her self. Miss Jan, who features in the most detailed sections of this journal, disappears after 2 May.

Virginia often eliminates the subject of a sentence so that it may be read ambiguously to refer to her selves⁸ or to others. She prefers the cover of first-person plural and frequently uses 'we', 'us three' or 'us four' as protection, to convey solidarity. She uses diary shorthand eliminating 'I' or substituting it with the less definite 'one'. Woolf's ambivalence about 'I' continued into her later life; she wished to dodge the 'straight dark bar' seeing it as a phallic

shadow on the page, a masculine mark of self-assertion, certainty and control (*AROO*: 98). Fothergill suggests that the suppression of the 'I' in diaries can be regarded as 'a gesture of self-effacement, a tacit apology for the appearance of self-preoccupation' (Fothergill 1995: 87). Here Virginia limits the first-person; denying the 'ego'⁹ full admission.

Interestingly, when Virginia expresses her views, albeit perfunctorily, about books she seems quite comfortable about writing possessively. She writes, 'After all books are the greatest help and comfort' (*PA*: 79). To be 'Bookless' (53) is to be friendless. She writes devotedly about her companion authors, 'my beloved Lockhart - which grows more and more beautiful every day' (25); 'My dear Pepys is the only calm thing in the house -' (66); 'my cherished Macaulay' (79); 'Read Mr. James to quiet me, and my beloved Macaulay' (80); 'my dearly beloved Hawthorne' (90). She personifies her stationary, seeming to code her own illness through the wellbeing of her writing materials, especially her pen, which is her agent. 'No - I shall not again desert my beloved Swan' (71). She is furious when Marie throws her 'beautiful pen *out* of the window' resulting in 'severe dislocation of the nibs, & general shock to the system, wh. it will probably never entirely get over.' Then she is bereft, 'Nothing to fill up this blank with, & therefore out of consideration to the enfeebled powers of my beloved it shall be left empty -' (106). Her pen, weakened, becomes 'terribly infirm' (119).

Virginia calls her journal 'Wonderful creature!' (*PA*: 16) but the word 'creature' is frequently chosen by her to indicate an abject thing; something animate but struggling and wretched; but moribund. The demise of this journal reflects her own declining willingness to write about her life. '*Forgot what happened*. This poor diary is in a very bad way' (121); the emphasis suggests desolation. 'Again I forget - This poor diary is lingering on indeed, but death would be shorter & less painful - Never mind, we will follow the year to it end, & then fling diaries & diarising into the corner - to dust & mice & moths & all creeping crawling eating destroying creatures' (128). After a month several pages are blank. She is relieved as the pages diminish, 'I see that my pages give out - wh. is just as well' (133). She is thankful to see the year buried, 'ended locked & put away' (134). It is profoundly ironic that she should consider this to be '(the first really *lived* year of my life)' (134).

The voices chosen in the 1899-1909 pieces are more able to express 'extended consciousness'. The unease a reader perceives in the egoless 1897 journal dissipates completely. Virginia is seeking to release emergent selves, to cross the threshold into new spaces. In the 1899 'Warboys' journal 'I' is used more often and with increasing confidence, 'I must make some mark upon the paper' even if it is 'frail and somewhat disjointed' (*PA*: 135). She becomes more assertive and 'self'-determining. By signing 'AVS' after 'A Chapter

on *Sunsets* she is acknowledging authorship of it (155-156). There is engagement, a sense of dialogue with a potential reader. Here is the burgeoning essayistic voice, ‘unmoored: explorative, open to self-doubt and prone to risky exchanges with its audience’ (Salomon 2012: 3).¹⁰ Virginia self-consciously imitates several different styles: satire, history, travel writing. There are overwritten purple passages of description. There is a tendency to use magisterial or archaic phrases: ‘methinks’, ‘bescrewed’, ‘perchance’, ‘dwells’, ‘beguile’. She uses humour and can be conversational. Authorial asides criticise the work as it is being created, ‘(what an awful sentence!)’, ‘What nonsense to write!’ (*PA*: 138). ‘I write this down to see if it looks any more credible in pen & ink’ (162). Elizabeth Podnieks suggests that when Virginia writes that she will put on her ‘dress clothes such as they are’ (*PA*: 144) she is responding to the need for her writing to be more formal (2000: 15). In contrast with the earlier journal Virginia is beginning to construct an ‘autobiographical self’ by choosing how to ‘dress’ and perform as protagonist in her own narrative.

Writing about the New Writers in ‘The Leaning Tower’ (1940), Woolf anticipates work done in the twenty-first century on creativity and consciousness. She wonders whether a writer needs ‘to become unconscious before he can create?’ (*E* 6: 264). She recognises that, to be able to write autobiographically, inter-war writers had, first, to overcome Victorian avoidance strategies:

By analysing themselves honestly, with help from Dr Freud, these writers have done a great deal to free us from nineteenth-century suppressions. The writers of the next generation may inherit from them a whole state of mind, a mind no longer crippled, evasive, divided (*E* 6: 274).

She envisaged writers such as Day Lewis, Auden, Spender, Isherwood and MacNeice seated on leaning towers, writing ‘under the influence of change, under the threat of war’ (267). ‘There was no tranquillity in which they could recollect. The inner mind was paralysed because the surface mind was always hard at work’ (273). Woolf uses a bi-layered model of consciousness: the ‘upper mind’ and the ‘under-mind’ (263). She suggests that unconsciousness is needed ‘to get beneath the surface’, recognising that unconsciousness is a ‘gift’ (274). Consciousness is paralysing. She could be describing her own situation, aged fifteen, when heightened self-consciousness hindered her expression and she suppressed unconsciousness to control the ‘under-mind’.¹¹ Lacking tranquillity and unable to express autobiographical consciousness, Virginia surrendered her voice. Woolf uses the metaphor of a veil to describe the liminal moment when the under-mind manages to outwit the censorious upper mind while it is relaxed and drowsing:

After a hard day's work, trudging round, seeing all he can, feeling all he can, taking in the book of his mind innumerable notes, the writer becomes - if he can - unconscious. In fact, his under-mind works at top speed while his upper mind drowns. Then, after a pause the veil lifts; and there is the thing - the thing he wants to write about - simplified, composed' (*E* 6: 263).

In a section called 'The Freudian Unconscious' Damasio also writes about this process, 'very conscious creators consciously seek the unconscious as a source and, on occasion, as a method for their conscious endeavors' (2010: 178). Woolf considers the writer as one who keeps 'his eye fixed, as intently as he can, upon a certain object' (*E* 6: 259). This recalls Lily Briscoe, powerlessly suspended at a moment of creative crisis, hearing 'some voice saying she couldn't paint, saying she couldn't create' (*TTL*: 151). She fixes her eyes on the canvas and then on the hedge. She has to lose 'consciousness of outer things' before she can regain creativity; 'her mind kept throwing up from its depths, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space' (152).

Using evidence from neuroscience, Jonah Lehrer¹² demonstrates that this kind of relaxed state is desirable for imaginative connections to be made:

When our minds are at ease - when those alpha waves are rippling through the brain - we're more likely to direct the spotlight of attention *inward*, toward the stream of remote associations emanating from the right hemisphere. In contrast, when we are diligently focused our attention tends to be directed *outward*, toward the details of the problems we are trying to solve (2012: 31).

Remote associations come from the right hemisphere of the brain and are necessary for moments of insight. A tense state of mind does not lead to insight or creativity, 'When we're intensely focused on something, more information is sent to the prefrontal cortex; the stage of consciousness gets even more crowded' (Lehrer 2012: 62). Lehrer uses 'stage' to mean a platform for a theatrical performance. He later uses a metaphor of restraint suggesting that the brain 'slips off' handcuffs (91), freeing the creative part of the mind. The 1897 journal shows Virginia in a tense, restrained state, self-conscious and unwilling to move onto the stage.

When she was writing her adult dairies Woolf anticipated re-reading them in later life to create a dialogue with a younger self. By looking at Woolf's later diaries and her more direct 'open' autobiographical works we can appreciate how much suppression took place in the earlier work. 'Sketch of the Past' has some dated entries, like a journal, although it is usually regarded as an incomplete memoir, not intended for publication. Aged 15 Virginia

resisted speaking personally; aged 57 she consciously re-engages with the self she once was, turning back, Janus-like, to speak from the platform of the present upon which she stands (*MOB*: 87 and 96). She is aware that she is presenting a double perspective, 'It would be interesting to make the two people, I now, I then, come out in contrast' (87).

Woolf structures her memoir through binaries: nineteenth-century/ twentieth-century; Victorian/ Edwardian; London/ St Ives; silence/ speech; girls/ boys; despair/ ecstasy; private/ public; dark/ light. She recognises the sensitising quality of these oppositions. For instance, she contrasts the 'blaze of magnificent light' streaming through the glass dome at the end of the railway station with the shut, 'shrouded and curtained rooms' of 22 Hyde Park Gate, after her mother's death (*MOB*: 103). She describes this as a revelatory experience, 'it was partly that my mother's death unveiled and intensified; made me suddenly develop perceptions, as if a burning glass had been laid over what was shaded and dormant'. She explains how this was a 'quickening', 'surprising' 'as if something were becoming visible without any effort' (103). Analysing this passage Linda Anderson sees it as expressing 'a new intensity of perception' (Anderson 1986: 70). What is noteworthy is that the visceral power of these 'moments of being' is completely missing from the journal written contemporaneously with the experience. Anderson takes a psychoanalytic approach to reading the diaries arguing that Woolf 'refused the choice of either being locked in or being locked out', concluding that she 'returns us to Freud with a renewed sense that the threshold is not hesitation' but, rather, 'its own beginning' (70).

In 'Sketch of the Past' contrasts are frequently expressed in terms of antagonistic spatial division. Victorianism is located in Old Kensington, modernism is associated with Bloomsbury; there is the upstairs/ downstairs separation inside the house and between children's and adults' space. Victoria Rosner sees domestic thresholds as threatening and unsettling; they are 'sites of intersection and difference' (Rosner 2005: 65). The double doors of the sitting room set up a tension between public and private. In the 1897 journal Virginia mentions being in her 'usual position behind the folding doors' (*PA*: 82). Woolf writes retrospectively about being in 'my covert, behind the folding doors of the Hyde Park Gate drawing room. I sat there, shielded, being half insane with shyness and nervousness' (*MOB*: 114). She is like a creature hiding from the hunt. After Stella's marriage, Virginia's room is divided into sleeping and sitting sides; it is split just like her concept of the 'upper mind' and the 'under-mind'. This passage leads to a well-known metaphor corresponding precisely to Damasio's description of the emerging self as evolutionary and gradual:

But I was thinking; feeling; living; those two lives that the two halves symbolized with the intensity, the muffled intensity, which a butterfly or moth feels when with its sticky tremulous legs and antennae it pushes out of the chrysalis and emerges and sits quivering beside the broken case for a moment; its wings still creased; its eyes dazzled, incapable of flight (*MOB*: 130).

The passage that follows describes in poignant detail the experience that Virginia preferred not to record when she was living through it. Of her mother's death, Woolf writes 'one could not master it, envisage it, deal with it'. She is not 'fully conscious' of what it meant, 'unconsciously absorbing' her father's 'demonstrative grief' and Stella's silent grief. She writes elliptically of 'the black clothes; the suppressions' the prohibitive 'locked door of her bedroom' (130). She admits the darkness of bereavement that was missing from the day-by-day 1897 account. Then she found it 'impossible to write' (*PA*: 115) but the 1939 memoir is therapeutic. This is writing for recovery, in both senses of the word. In the later work she uses speech marks to 'quote' the words she claims she voiced to her self at the time, "But this is impossible; things aren't, can't be, like this" - the blow, the second blow of death, struck on me; tremulous, filmy eyed as I was, with my wings still creased, sitting there on the edge of my broken chrysalis' (*MOB*: 130). This 'second blow of death' is ambiguous; it refers to another family death, Stella's, but simultaneously implies an assault on Virginia's vulnerable pubescent self. She has been inactive, encased in a hard, protective cocoon; dormant but evolving.¹³ At the very moment of transition, as she unfolds her creased wings, a deliberate blow is dealt and felt. It is uncertain as to whether the chrysalis is 'broken' by the surprise attack or if the metamorphosis had already occurred. A vibrating, unsteady, emotional creature emerges. A hypothetically glorious transformation becomes associated with subterfuge and death. The new creature has managed to mutate; it is damaged but potentially free to fly into the light. This delicate, ephemeral insect stands for Virginia's fragile, exposed self. She imagines that Thoby would have seen her as a 'shell-less little creature', 'sheltered, in my room' (*MOB*: 141). In her 1930 diary she describes being ill and uses the same metaphor for being blocked creatively, 'Something happens in my mind. It refuses to go on registering impressions. It shuts itself up. It becomes chrysalis. I lie quite torpid'. Then, after stasis, comes the epiphany, 'suddenly something springs' and ideas rush into the light. Significantly her refreshed ability to write is described as 'all the doors opening' (*D* 3: 287).

Three months after Stella's death, in continuing discomfort, Virginia longs for leathery protection, 'Life is a hard business - one needs a rhinoceros [sic] skin - and that

one has not got' (*PA*: 132). The small brown leather 1897 journal provided a sheltering cocoon for her thin-skinned self.¹⁴ Her 1899 journal is physically less constrained at 13 x 21.5 cm. Although it has hard covers it is not 'hide-bound'. Aged 17 Virginia is no longer in hiding; her writing grows more expansive and energetic. She is not defending her self from 'autobiographical consciousness'. Damasio conceptualised the coming into consciousness, as a 'passage through a threshold that separates a protected but limiting shelter from the possibility and risk of a world beyond and ahead' (2000: 3). He sees this as analogous to 'a performer who waits in semidarkness', sees the door open, 'revealing the lights, the stage, and the audience' (3) and steps into the light.

Janus-like, the door presents two possibilities, 'At times, it is closed, bolted, padlocked. At others, it is open, that is to say, wide open' (Bachelard 1994: 222). After 1897 Virginia is now prepared to venture through the door; she moves across the threshold into the light. And, in time, 'doors would be taken off their hinges' (*MD*: 1).

Notes

¹ I use Virginia (Stephen) when referring to the writer of the works collected in *A Passionate Apprentice, the Early Journals, 1897-1909* and Woolf for the adult author.

² Virginia writes on 18 January that the current 'diary beats my 1896 diary' (*PA*: 16); the earlier volume has not survived.

³ In the dated entries at the end of *The Mausoleum Book* Leslie Stephen notes, on 10 April 1897: 'Virginia has been out of sorts, nervous and overgrown too' (Stephen 1977: 103).

⁴ Deborah Martinson suggests, without offering specific evidence, that Leslie Stephen 'read and judged all she wrote as a child and adolescent, prompting Virginia to write anything remotely personal in the diary under the pseudonym of "Miss Jan"' (Martinson 2003: 13).

⁵ Louise DeSalvo makes the semantic link with *Jansenism*, arguing that in the early journals Virginia is exploring theological views that ran counter to her father's agnosticism. Miss Jan 'very often articulates pessimistic attitudes about the nature of the world (which she refers to as Miss Janism) that are close to, if not identical with, Jansenism' (DeSalvo 1987: 117).

⁶ On 3 January 1933, Woolf wrote of the impersonality provided by a mask, 'I like masks. I like the disorientation they give my feelings' (*D 4*: 139).

⁷ In her diary for 28 July 1939 she wrote, 'I have composed myself, momentarily, by reading through this years [sic] diary. Thats [sic] a use for it then. It composes' (*D 5*: 227).

⁸ Woolf was acutely aware of the plurality of selfhood and a frequently quoted line from her 1935 diary reiterates how perplexing this was for her, 'Well of course its [sic] extremely interesting having to deal with so many different selves' (*D 4*: 329).

⁹ Rudolf Dekker cites Jacques Presser's definition of egodocuments as "'those documents in which an ego intentionally or unintentionally discloses, or hides itself...". Texts in which an author writes about his or her own acts, thoughts and feelings' (Dekker 2002: 7). Virginia's 1897 journal avoids introspection.

¹⁰ Randi Salomon cites Woolf's early piece 'The Decay of Essay-Writing' (1905) where she writes that essays are 'primarily an expression of personal opinion'. 'Almost all essays begin with a capital I - "I think", "I feel"' (*E 1*: 25).

¹¹ Woolf considers this aspect of creativity, 'Yet it is in our idleness, in our dreams, that the submerged truth sometimes comes to the top' (*AROO*: 33).

¹² The final section of Jonah Lehrer's chapter 'Virginia Woolf, the Emergent Self' in *Proust Was a Neuroscientist* is about Lily Briscoe's artistic vision. Lehrer writes that, 'Consciousness is a process, not a place. We emerge, somehow, from the moment of attention' (Lehrer 2007: 188).

¹³ See Christina Alt for a detailed analysis of moths and butterflies. Alt summarises the ways in which metamorphosis has been interpreted in Woolf's work: the butterfly's association with the soul and its escape from the body; the transformation interpreted as a symbol of spiritual rebirth; as analogous with physical, sexual and/ or creative maturation.

¹⁴ For a discussion of skinlessness and 'epidermic fragility' see Nuala Hancock's section 'Fragile Embodiment: Woolf's Epidermic Transparency'.

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