



PENGUIN BOOKS

To the Lighthouse

Virginia Woolf is now recognized as a major twentieth-century author, a great novelist and essayist and a key figure in literary history as a feminist and a modernist. Born in 1882, she was the daughter of the editor and critic Leslie Stephen, and suffered a traumatic adolescence after the deaths of her mother, in 1895, and her step-sister Stella, in 1897, leaving her subject to breakdowns for the rest of her life. Her father died in 1904 and two years later her favourite brother Thoby died suddenly of typhoid. With her sister, the painter Vanessa Bell, she was drawn into the company of writers and artists such as Lytton Strachey and Roger Fry, later known as the Bloomsbury Group. Among them she met Leonard Woolf, whom she married in 1912, and together they founded the Hogarth Press in 1917, which was to publish the work of T. S. Eliot, E. M. Forster and Katherine Mansfield as well as the earliest translations of Freud. Woolf lived an energetic life among friends and family, reviewing and writing, and dividing her time between London and the Sussex Downs. In 1941, fearing another attack of mental illness, she drowned herself.

Her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, appeared in 1915, and she then worked through the transitional *Night and Day* (1919) to the highly experimental and *impressionistic* *Jacob's Room* (1922). From then on

her fiction became a series of brilliant and extraordinarily varied experiments, each one searching for a fresh way of presenting the relationship between individual lives and the forces of society and history. She was particularly concerned with women's experience, not only in her novels but also in her essays and her two books of feminist polemic, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938). Her major novels include *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), the historical fantasy *Orlando* (1928), written for Vita Sackville-West, the extraordinary poetic vision of *The Waves* (1931), the family saga of *The Years* (1937), and *Between the Acts* (1941). All these are published by Penguin, as are her *Diaries*, Volumes I-V, selections from her essays and short stories, and *Flush* (1933), a reconstruction of the life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spaniel.

Stella McNichol is the author of a critical study of *To the Lighthouse* (1971) and of *Virginia Woolf and the Poetry of Fiction* (1990), and the editor of a group of Virginia Woolf's stories, *Mrs Dalloway's Party* (1973).

Hermione Lee is the Goldsmiths' Professor of English Literature and Fellow of New College, Oxford. She reviews for the *Observer*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, the *Financial Times*, the *New York Review of Books*, and elsewhere. Her books include *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (1977), *Elizabeth Bowen* (1981, 1999), *Philip Roth* (1982), *Stevie Smith: A Selection* (1983), *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen* (1986), *Willa Cather A Life Saved Up* (1989), an

edition of Willa Cather's stories (1989), two selections of stories by women writers, *The Secret Self* (1985, reissued 1991), and *Virginia Woolf* (1996).

Julia Briggs is General Editor for the works of Virginia Woolf in Penguin.

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

VIRGINIA WOOLF

TEXT EDITED BY STELLA McNICHOL

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

AND NOTES BY HERMIONE LEE



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Bibliographical Note

The following is a list of abbreviated titles used in this edition.

MS: To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft, transcribed and ed. Susan Dick (Toronto University Press, 1982; Hogarth Press, 1983). Square brackets are used to indicate words deleted in original draft.

TL: To the Lighthouse, first British edn (Hogarth Press, 5 May 1927).

Moments of Being: Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings of Virginia Woolf ed. Jeanne Schulkind (Chatto & Windus, 1976).

Diary: The Diary of Virginia Woolf, 5 vols., ed. Anne Olivier Bell (Hogarth Press, 1977; Penguin Books, 1979).

Letters: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, 6 vols., ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (Hogarth Press, 1975–80).

Essays: The Essays of Virginia Woolf 3 vols, (to be 6 vols.), ed. Andrew McNeillie (Hogarth Press, 1986).

CE: Collected Essays, 4 vols., ed. Leonard Woolf (Chatto & Windus, 1966, 1967).

Mausoleum: Sir Leslie Stephen's Mausoleum Book (1895), introduced by Alan Bell (OUP, 1977).

Introduction

To the Lighthouse is the story of a marriage and a childhood. It is a lamentation of loss and grief for powerful, loved, dead parents, which Virginia Woolf wanted to call an 'elegy' rather than a novel. It is, less apparently, about the English class-structure and its radical break with Victorianism after the First World War. It demonstrates the urgent need for an art form which could, though with great difficulty, adapt to and register that break. It is all these things at once.

Since fiction is not music or painting or film¹ or unspoken thoughts, it requires formal strategies if it is to try and be several things at once. These strategies may be as complicated as a whole section written from the point of view of the passage of time, or as simple as a pair of brackets.

Mr Bankes, for instance, has a conversation in brackets on the telephone. He is talking to Mrs Ramsay about a train time. Then he looks out of the window 'to see what progress the workmen were making with an hotel which they were building at the back of his house'. The 'stir among the unfinished walls' reminds him of her incongruities. The work outside goes on, inside another pair of brackets – '(they were carrying bricks up a little plank as he watched them)' – while he builds up his version of Mrs Ramsay's idiosyncrasies. More than one thing happens at once: what he says

to Mrs Ramsay on the phone and what he thinks of saying; what he sees from his window and what he sees in his mind's eye; and, in his mind's eye, her beauty and her incongruities. More than one time coexists: the time of Mr Bankes's narrative, which is under pressure to move onwards ('Yes, he would catch the 10.30 at Euston'; 'He must go to his work'); the moments in which she appears to his mind's eye; and, outside Mr Bankes's brackets, the moment in which Mrs Ramsay is knitting her stocking and talking to James.

A great deal goes on in brackets in *To the Lighthouse*: silent gestures – '(she glanced at him musing)'; identifications of a point of view – '(James thought)'; comments and qualifications – '(For she was in love with them all, in love with this world)'; reminders – '(The bill for the greenhouse would be fifty pounds)'; sudden deaths; a world war. The middle section, 'Time Passes', reads like a long parenthesis between the first and last sections. Its square brackets enclose the facts of death, as if they belonged to another kind of language. As 'Time Passes' comes to a close, its last section bulges with bracketed phrases about the return of life to the house, which will open themselves out into the third part of the novel. While she was writing the third part, moving between Lily on the lawn and the Ramsays in the boat, Woolf imagined finishing off Lily and her painting in brackets: 'Could I do it in a parenthesis? so that one had the sense of reading the two things at the same time?'²

Brackets are a way of making more than one thing happen at once. But they also create an unsettling ambiguity about the status