

From *A Writer's Diary* by Virginia Woolf

Saturday, August 20, 1932

A curious day in London yesterday. I said to myself standing at L's window, Look at the present moment because it's not been so hot for 21 years. There was a hot wind as if one passed over a kitchen, going from the studio to the Press. Outside girls and young men lying in white on the square grass. So hot we couldn't sit in the dining room. L. fetched and carried and hardly let me walk upstairs carrying my own body. Coming back, we had the car shut and the windscreen open--thus sat in a hot rough gale which, as we came to the lanes and woods, became deliciously cold and green. The coolest place is the front seat of car going 40 or 50 miles with the windscreen open. Today, at 12:30, a wind rose: clouds descended; now at 3:45, it's almost a normal warm summer day. For 10 days this heat has lasted. After my faint, my head soon throbs, or so I think. A think a little of dying suddenly and reflect, Well then, go about eating and drinking and laughing and feeding the fish. Odd--the silliness one attributes to death--the desire one has to belittle it and be found, as Montaigne said, laughing with girls and good fellows And L. is staking out the dewpond and I am going in to be photographed. . .

A very good summer, this, for all my shying and jibbing, my tremors this morning. Beautifully quiet, airy, powerful. I believe I want this more humane existence for my next--to spread carelessly among one's friends--to feel the width and amusement of human life: not to strain to make a pattern just yet; to be made supple, and to let the juice of usual things, talk, character, seep through me, quietly, involuntarily, before I say Stop and take out my pen. . . .

Yesterday we took plums to old Mrs Grey. She is shrunk and sits on a hard chair in the corner. The door open. She twitches and trembles. Has the wild expressionless state of the old. L. liked her despair: "I crawls up to bed hoping for the day; and I crawls down hoping for the night. I'm an ignorant old woman, can't write or read. But I prays to God every night to take me--oh to go to my rest. Nobody can say what pains I suffer. Feel my shoulder," and she began shuffling with a safety pin. I felt [her shoulder]. "Hard as iron; full of water, and my legs too." She pulled down her stocking. The dropsy. I'm ninety-two; and all my brothers and sisters are dead; my daughter's dead; my husband is dead. . ." She repeated her misery, her list of ills, over and over; could see nothing else; could only begin all over again; and kissed my hand, thanking us for our pound. This is what we make of our lives--no reading or writing--keep her alive with [words missing] when she wishes to die. Human ingenuity in torture is very great.

To notice:

- Both the section on the weather and the section on Mrs. Grey conclude with Woolf's notions of mortality.
- The section on Mrs. Grey follows Woolf's earlier desire to feel the "width" of human life. Does she succeed?