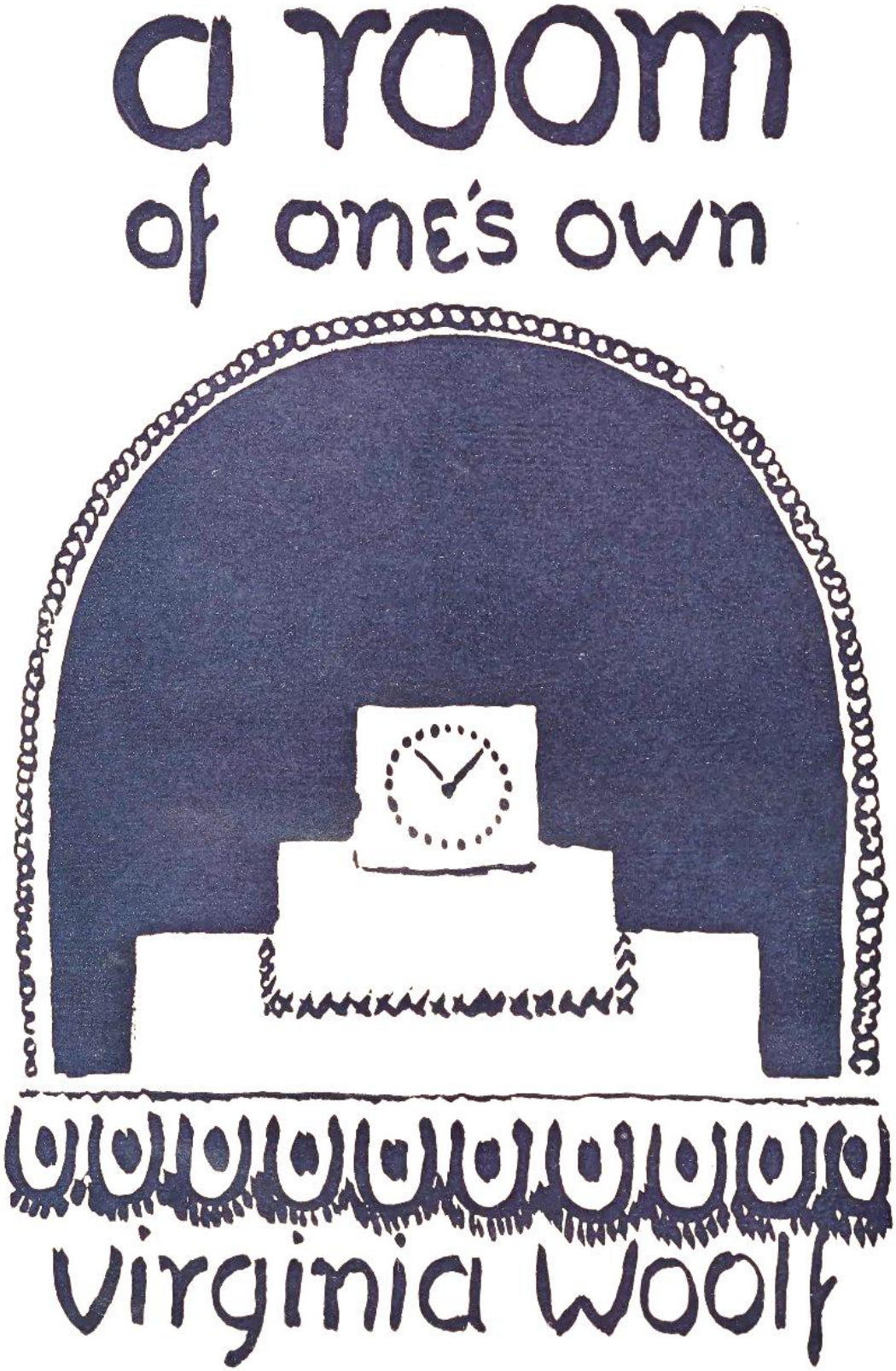
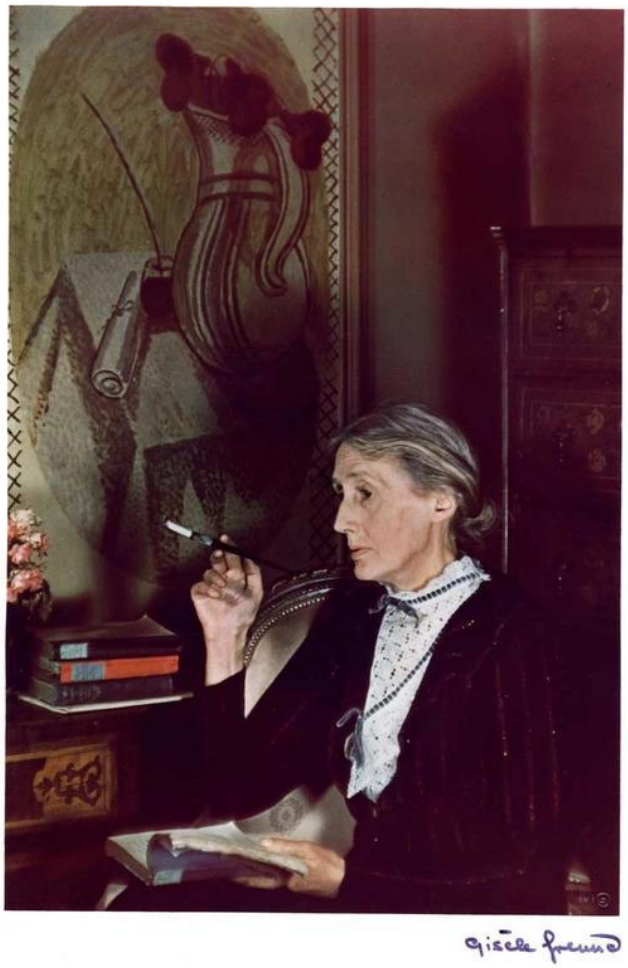



# English-language students' resource handbook

# Rooms of Woolf's own

In Monk's House, Virginia Woolf's countryside house in Rodmell, Sussex, 1920s.
Source : Houghton Library, Harvard University, MS Thr 564 (76).




Virginia Woolf in her sitting-room at 52 Tavistock Square, London, 1939.
Colour photograph by Gisèle Freund (1908-2000). Source : Centre Pompidou, Paris, AM 1992-171.

# Woolf's first published article (referenced in ROO)

## "Haworth, November 1904", *The Guardian*, 21/12/1904 – published anonymously –

I do not know whether pilgrimages to the shrines of famous men ought not to be condemned as sentimental journeys. It is better to read Carlyle in your own study chair than to visit the sound-proof room and pore over the manuscripts at Chelsea. I should be inclined to set up an examination on Frederick the Great in place of an entrance fee; only, in that case, the house would soon have to be shut up. The curiosity is only legitimate when the house of a great writer or the country in which it is set adds something to our understanding of his books. This justification you have for a pilgrimage to the home and country of Charlotte Brontë and her sisters.

The *Life*, by Mrs Gaskell, gives you the impression that Haworth and the Brontës are somehow inextricably mixed. Haworth expresses the Brontës; the Brontës express Haworth; they fit like a snail to its shell. How far surroundings radically affect people's minds, it is not for me to ask: superficially, the influence is great, but it is worth asking if the famous parsonage had been placed in a London slum, the dens of Whitechapel would not have had the same result as the lonely Yorkshire moors. However, I am taking away my only excuse for visiting Haworth. Unreasonable or not, one of the chief points of a recent visit to Yorkshire was that an expedition to Haworth could be accomplished. The necessary arrangements were made, and we determined to take advantage of the first day for our expedition. A real northern snowstorm had been doing the honours of the moors. It was rash to wait fine weather, and it was also cowardly. I understand that the sun very seldom shone on the Brontë family, and if we chose a really fine day we should have to make allowance for the fact that fifty years ago there were few fine days at Haworth, and that we were, therefore, for sake of comfort, rubbing out half the shadows on the picture. However, it would be interesting to see what impression Haworth could make upon the brilliant weather of Settle. We certainly passed through a very cheerful land, which might be likened to a vast wedding cake, of which the icing was slightly undulating; the earth was bridal in its virgin snow, which helped to suggest the comparison.

**Charlotte Brontë by G. Richmond, 1850 (NPG 1452).**

Keighley - pronounced Keethly - is often mentioned in the *Life*; it was the big town four miles from Haworth in which Charlotte walked to make her more important purchases - her wedding gown, perhaps, and the thin little cloth boots which we examined under glass in the Brontë Museum. It is a big manufacturing town, hard and stony, and clattering with business, in the way of these Northern towns. They make small provision for the sentimental traveller, and our only occupation was to picture the slight figure of Charlotte trotting along the streets in her thin mantle, hustled into the gutter by more burly passers-by. It was the Keighley of her day, and that was some comfort. Our excitement as we neared Haworth had in it an element of suspense that was really painful, as though we were to meet some long-separated friend, who might have changed in the interval - so clear an image of Haworth had we from print and picture. At a certain point we entered the valley, up both sides of which the village climbs, and right on the hill-top, looking down over its parish, we saw the famous oblong tower of the church. This marked the shrine at which we were to do homage.

It may have been the effect of a sympathetic imagination, but I think that there were good reasons why Haworth did certainly strike one not exactly as gloomy, but, what is worse for artistic purposes, as dingy and commonplace. The houses, built of yellow-brown stone, date from the early nineteenth century. They climb the moor step by step in little detached strips, some distance apart, so that the town instead of making one compact blot on the landscape has contrived to get a whole stretch into its clutches. There is a long line of houses up the moor-side, which clusters round the church and parsonage with a little clump of trees. At the top the interest for a Brontë lover becomes suddenly intense. The church, the parsonage, the Brontë Museum, the school where Charlotte taught, and the Bull Inn where Branwell drank are all within a stone's throw of each other. The museum is certainly rather a pallid and inanimate collection of objects. An effort ought to be made to keep things out of these mausoleums, but the choice often lies between them and destruction, so that we must be grateful for the care which has preserved much that is, under any circumstances, of deep interest. Here are many autograph


**Haworth's main street (photo : E. Champeau, July 2024).**

letters, pencil drawings, and other documents. But the most touching case - so touching that one hardly feels reverent in one's gaze - is that which contains the little personal relics of the dead woman. The natural fate of such things is to die before the body that wore them, and because these, trifling and transient though they are, have survived, Charlotte Brontë the woman comes to life, and one forgets the chiefly memorable fact that she was a great writer. Her shoes and her thin muslin dress have outlived her. One other object gives a thrill ; the little oak stool which Emily carried with her on her solitary moorland tramps, and on which she sat, if not to write, as they say, to think what was probably better than her writing.

The church, of course, save part of the tower, is renewed since Brontë days ; but that remarkable churchyard remains. The old edition of the Life had on its title-page a little print which struck the keynote of the book ; it seemed to be all graves - gravestones stood ranked all round; you walked on a pavement lettered with dead names; the graves had solemnly invaded the garden of the parsonage itself, which was as a little oasis of life in the midst of the dead. This is no exaggeration of the artist's, as we found : the stones seem to start out of the ground at you in tall, upright lines, like and army of silent soldiers.

Haworth’s churchyard (photo : E. Champeau, July 2024).

There is no hand's breadth untenanted ; indeed, the economy of space is somewhat irreverent. In old days a flagged path, which suggested the slabs of graves, led from the front door of the parsonage to the churchyard without interruption of wall or hedge; the garden was practically the graveyard too; the successors of the Brontës, however, wishing a little space between life and death, planted a hedge and several tall trees, which now cut off the parsonage garden completely.

Haworth parsonage (photo : E. Champeau, July 2024).

The house itself is precisely the same as it was in Charlotte's day, save that one new wing has been added. It is easy to shut the eye to this, and then you have the square, boxlike parsonage, built of the ugly yellow-brown stone which they quarry from the moors behind, precisely as it was when Charlotte lived and died there.

Inside, of course, the changes are many, though not such as to obscure the original shape of the rooms. There is nothing remarkable in a mid-Victorian parsonage, though tenanted by genius, and the only room which awakens curiosity is the kitchen, now used as an ante-room, in which the girls tramped as they conceived their work. One other spot has a certain grim interest - the oblong recess beside the staircase into which Emily drove her bulldog during the famous fight, and pinned him while she pommelled him. It is otherwise a little sparse parsonage, much like others of its kind. It was due to the courtesy of the present incumbent that we were allowed to inspect it ; in his place I should often feel inclined to exorcise the three famous ghosts.

**Emily Brontë's bedroom, featuring her "little oak tool" (photo : E. Champeau, July 2024).**

One thing only remained: the church in which Charlotte worshipped, was married, and lies buried. The circumference of her life was very narrow. Here, though much is altered, a few things remain to tell of her. The slab which bears the names of the succession of children and of their parents - their births and deaths - strikes the eye first. Name follows name; at very short intervals they died - Maria the mother, Maria the daughter, Elizabeth, Branwell, Emily, Anne, Charlotte, and lastly the old father, who outlived them all. Emily was only thirty years old, and Charlotte but nine years older. 'The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.' That is the inscription which has been placed beneath their names, and with reason; for however harsh the struggle, Emily, and Charlotte above all, fought to victory.


**Memorial plaque to the Brontë family, Haworth church (photo : E. Champeau, July 2024).**

# Entries from Virginia Woolf's diary relevant to ROO

## 1928

*Saturday, February 18th.*

And I should be revising Lord Chesterfield at this moment, but I'm not. My mind is wool-gathering away about *Women and Fiction,* which I am to read at Newnham in May. The mind is the most capricious of insects—flitting, fluttering. I had thought to write the quickest most brilliant pages in *Orlando* yesterday—not a drop came, all, forsooth, for the usual physical reasons, which delivered themselves today. It is the oddest feeling: as if a finger stopped the flow of the ideas in the brain; it is unsealed and the blood rushes all over the place. Again, instead of writing 0., I've been racing up and down the whole field of my lecture. And tomorrow, alas, we motor; for I must get back into the book—which has brightened the last few days satisfactorily. Not that my sensations in writing are an infallible guide.

*Thursday, March 22nd.*

These are the last pages at the end of *Orlando* and it is twenty five minutes to one; and I have written everything I have to write and on Saturday we go abroad.

Yes it's done—*Orlando*—begun on 8th October, as a joke; and now rather too long for my liking. It may fall between stools, be too long for a joke, and too frivolous for a serious book. All this I dismiss from a mind avid only of green fields, the sun, wine; sitting doing nothing. I have been for the last 6 weeks rather a bucket than a fountain; sitting to be shot into by one person after another. A rabbit that passes across a shooting gallery, and one's friends go pop-pop. Heaven be praised, Sibyl today puts us off; which leaves Dadie only and a whole day's solitude, please Heaven, tomorrow. But I intend to control this rabbit-shooting business when I come back. And money making. I hope to settle in and write one nice little discreet article for £25 each month; and so live; without stress; and so read—what I want to read. At 46 one must be a miser; only have time for essentials. But I think I have made moral reflections enough, and should describe people, save that, when seen so colourlessly, by duty not wish, one's mind is a little slack in taking notes.

Watery blowy weather; and this time next week we shall be in the middle of France.

*Saturday, October 27th.*

A scandal, a scandal, to let so much time slip and I leaning on the Bridge watching it go. Only leaning has not been my pose; running up and down, irritably, excitedly, restlessly. And the stream viciously eddying. Why do I write these metaphors? Because I have written nothing for an age. *Orlando* has been published. I went to Burgundy with Vita. It flashed by. How disconnected this is! My ambition is from this very moment, 8 minutes to 6, on Saturday evening, to attain complete concentration again. When I have written here, I am going to open Fanny Burney's diaries and work solidly at that article which poor Miss McKay cables about. I am going to read, to think. I gave up reading and thinking on 26th September when I went to France. I came back and we plunged into London and publishing. I am a little sick of *Orlando.* I think I am a little indifferent now what anyone thinks. Joy's life in the doing—I murder, as usual, a quotation; I mean it's the writing, not the being read, that excites me. And as I can't write while I'm being read, I am always a little hollow hearted; whipped up; but not so happy as in solitude. The reception, as they say, surpassed expectation. Sales beyond our record for the first week. I was floating rather lazily on praise, when Squire barked in the Observer, but even as I sat reading him on the Backs last Sunday in the showering red leaves and their illumination, I felt the rock of self esteem untouched in me. 'This doesn't really hurt,' I said to myself; even now; and sure enough, before evening I was calm, untouched. And now there's Hugh in the *Morning Post* to spread the butter again, and Rebecca West—such a trumpet call of praise—that's her way—that I feel a little sheepish and silly. And now no more of that I hope.

Thank God, my long toil at the women's lecture is this moment ended. I am back from speaking at Girton, in floods of rain. Starved but valiant young women—that's my impression. Intelligent, eager, poor; and destined to become schoolmistresses in shoals. I blandly told them to drink wine and have a room of their own. Why should all the splendour, all the luxury of life be lavished on the Julians and the Francises, and none on the Phares and the Thomases? There's Julian not much relishing it, perhaps. I fancy sometimes the world changes. I think I see reason spreading. But I should have liked a closer and thicker knowledge of life. I should have liked to deal with real things sometimes. I get a sense of tingling and vitality from an evening's talk like that; one's angularities and obscurities are smoothed and lit. How little one counts, I think: how little anyone counts; how fast and furious and masterly life is; and how all these thousands are swimming for dear life. I felt elderly and mature. And nobody respected me. They were very eager, egotistical, or rather not much impressed by age and repute. Very little reverence or that sort of thing about. The corridors of Girton are like vaults in some horrid high church cathedral—on and on they go, cold and shiny, with a light burning. High Gothic rooms: acres of bright brown wood; here and there a photograph.

*Wednesday, November 28th.*

Father's birthday. He would have been 96, 96, yes, today; and could have been 96, like other people one has known: but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely 1928 ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, 1832 no books;—inconceivable.

With her father Leslie Stephen (1832–1904). Source : National Portrait Gallery, London, NPGx4600.

I used to think of him and mother daily; but writing the *Lighthouse* laid them in my mind. And now he comes back sometimes, but differently. (I believe this to be true—that I was obsessed by them both, unhealthily; and writing of them was a necessary act.) He comes back now more as a contemporary. I must read him some day. I wonder if I can feel again, I hear his voice, I know this by heart?

So the days pass and I ask myself sometimes whether one is not hypnotized, as a child by a silver globe, by life; and whether this is living. It's very quick, bright, exciting. But superficial perhaps. I should like to take the globe in my hands and feel it quietly, round, smooth, heavy, and so hold it, day after day. I will read Proust I think. I will go backwards and forwards.

*Tuesday, December 18th.*

L. has just been in to consult about a 3rd edition of *Orlando.* This has been ordered; we have sold over 6,000 copies; and sales are still amazingly brisk—150 today for instance; most days between 50 and 60; always to my surprise. Will they stop or go on? Anyhow my room is secure. For the first time since I married, 1912-1928—16 years, I have been spending money. The spending muscle does not work naturally yet. I feel guilty; put off buying, when I know that I should buy; and yet have an agreeable luxurious sense of coins in my pocket beyond my weekly 13/- which was always running out, or being encroached upon.

# 1929

*Thursday, March 28th.*

It is a disgrace indeed; no diary has been left so late in the year. The truth was that we went to Berlin on 16th January, and then I was in bed for three weeks afterwards and then could not write, perhaps for another three, and have spent my energy since in one of my excited outbursts of composition—writing what I made up in bed, a final version of *Women and Fiction.*

And as usual I am bored by narrative. I want only to say how I met Nessa in Tottenham Court Road this afternoon, both of us sunk fathoms deep in that wash of reflection in which we both swim about. She will be gone on Wednesday for 4 months. It is queer how instead of drawing apart, life draws us together. But I was thinking a thousand things as I carried my teapot, gramophone records and stockings under my arm. It is one of those days that I called 'potent' when we lived in Richmond.

Perhaps I ought not to go on repeating what I have always said about the spring. One ought perhaps to be forever finding new things to say, since life draws on. One ought to invent a fine narrative style. Certainly there are many new ideas always forming in my head. For one, that I am going to enter a nunnery these next months; and let myself down into my mind; Bloomsbury being done with. I am going to face certain things.

*Sunday, May 12th.*

Here, having just finished what I call the final revision of *Women and Fiction so* that L. can read it after tea, I stop; surfeited. And the pump, which I was so sanguine as to think ceased, begins again. About *Women and Fiction* I am not sure—a brilliant essay? —I daresay: it has much work in it, many opinions boiled down into a kind of jelly, which I have stained red as far as I can. But I am eager to be off—to write without any boundary coming slick in one's eyes: here my public has been too close; facts; getting them malleable, easily yielding to each other.

*Monday, August 19th.*

I suppose dinner interrupted. And I opened this book in another train of mind to record the blessed fact that for good or bad I have just set the last correction to *Women and Fiction,* or A *Room of One's Own.* I shall never read it again I suppose. Good or bad? Has an uneasy life in it I think: you feel the creature arching its back and galloping on, though as usual much is watery and flimsy and pitched in too high a voice.

*Wednesday, October 23rd.*

As it is true—I write only for an hour, then rush back feeling I cannot keep my brain on that spin any more—then typewrite, and am done by 12. He wrote yesterday, 3 Dec. and said he very much liked it.I will here sum up my impressions before publishing A *Room* of *One's Own.* It is a little ominous that Morgan won't review it. It makes me suspect that there is a shrill feminine tone in it which my intimate friends will dislike.I forecast, then, that I shall get no criticism, except of the evasive jocular kind, from Lytton, Roger and Morgan; that the press will be kind and talk of its charm and sprightliness; also I shall be attacked for a feminist and hinted at for a Sapphist;

Sybil will ask me to luncheon; I shall get a good many letters from young women. I am afraid it will not be taken seriously. Mrs Woolf is so accomplished a writer that all she says makes easy reading … this very feminine logic … a book to be put in the hands of girls. I doubt that I mind very much. The Moths; but I think it is to be waves, is trudging along; and I have that to refer to, if I am damped by the other. It is a trifle, I shall say; so it is; but I wrote it with ardour and conviction.

*Saturday, November 2nd.*

Oh but I have done quite well so far with *Room of One's Own;* and it sells, I think; and I get unexpected letters. But I am more concerned with my *Waves.* I've just typed out my morning's work; and can't feel altogether sure. There is *something* there (as I felt about *Mrs Dalloway)* but I can't get at it, squarely; nothing like the speed and certainty of the *Lighthouse: Orlando* mere child's play. Is there some falsity of method, somewhere? Something tricky?—so that the interesting things aren't firmly based? I am in an odd state; feel a cleavage; here's my interesting thing; and there's no quite solid table on which to put it. It might come in a flash, on re-reading—some solvent. I am convinced that I am right to seek for a station whence I can set my people against time and the sea—but Lord, the difficulty of digging oneself in there, with conviction. Yesterday I had conviction; it has gone today.

*A writer's diary, being extracts of the diaries of Virginia Woolf, edited by Leonard Woolf*, 1953.

# Inception : the Cambridge lectures

## I : Newnham College, 20th October 1928

The visit of Miss Strachey's close friend, Virginia Woolf, in 1929 to read us a paper was a rather alarming occasion.[1] As I remember it she was nearly an hour late; and dinner in Clough Hall, never a repast for gourmets, suffered considerably. Mrs Woolf also disconcerted us by bringing a husband and so upsetting our seating plan. After the paper there was coffee with Mrs Woolf in the Principal's rooms. Mrs Woolf was really very well disposed to us as a group of intellectual young women; but we found her formidable. All I remember of her talk is that she praised very highly a poem of Stella Gibbons's, 'The Hippogriff'.[2] It was disquieting to learn later, when I was in Paris as a research student, that Mrs Woolf had brought out a book (*A Room of One's Own*) describing her Newnham dinner. Her purpose was, of course, to evoke pity for the poverty of the women's colleges: but at the time it made us, her hosts, decidedly uncomfortable.

I return once more to the room of my own. Because it was here, after, I think, the famous or infamous dinner, when prunes and custard were eaten and wine was not drunk, that Virginia Woolf stood and sat, and looked and spoke. She had come to address a Newnham society, and the post-address coffee and biscuits were distributed in my room, because it was a fairly large one. I think I had expected some profound, philosophic remarks, even after prunes and custard; but fixing me with that wonderful gaze, at once luminous and penetrating, what she actually said was, 'I'd no idea the young ladies of Newnham were so beautifully dressed'.

The prig in me was chagrined, even if my vanity sat up and purred; but over the years what has persisted has been the quality of her look, which seemed to say so much more than the words that came with it. The look held a hint of a smile, a hint of compassion, but it was above all an absolutely ruthless look; my pretty frock was no proof against it.

NOTES

1. Joan Pernel Strachey (1876–1951), Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge. Woolf addressed the Newnham Arts Society on 'Women & Fiction' on 20 October 1928.
2. Stella Dorothea Gibbons (1902–89), poet, novelist, journalist and short-story writer.

Elsie DUNCAN-JONES (née Phare), "Mrs Woolf comes to dine", *A Newnham Anthology*, 1979, p. 174-175, quoted in John Henry Stape, *Virginia Woolf : interviews and recollections*, 1995, p. 14-15.

Joan Pernel Strachey by Henry Lamb, 1926 (Newnham College).

Virginia Woolf with Dadie Rylands (1902-1999), sitting in his lodgings at King's College, Cambridge, where the sumptuous lunch described in ROO was held on 21st October 1928.
Source : *A night's darkness, a day's sail*, documentary by the BBC, 1970.

**Dadie (everyone calls him by his nickname) Rylands was born in 1902. He was a Scholar at Eton and at King 's College, Cambridge, where he read classics and English literature. After graduation he worked for a few months at the Hogarth Press with Virginia and Leonard Woolf, who printed and published two volumes of his poetry. He then wrote his fellowship thesis, *Words and Poetry*, also published by the Hogarth Press, and came back to King's as a director of studies.**

[…] Rylands has lived in King's College, Cambridge, since 1927 when he first became a fellow and a don. His residence consists of two large rooms divided by a corridor, a small bedroom at the back, a kitchen and a bathroom. The apartment is known as the Old Provost's Lodge and the spacious study and drawing-room below are still used by the present provost; while the grand staircase is adorned with portraits of past college dignitaries.

The rooms are lined with books and filled with an abundance of antique china and silver. Pictures by various friends and also a Constantin Guys and a Ghika hang on the walls. The doors and fireplace of the north room were painted by Dora Carrington in 1928 with pink, apricot and gray motives that are remarkably preserved : "I had no possessions then—l have a lot now, as you see—and Carrington offered to help by painting the doors," Rylands explains as he shows me around. The high recessed window, where we sit on a sofa to talk, looks out on the west view of King's Chapel and Gibbs1 splendid building, the south front of Clare College and the glassy waters of the river Cam. On this sunny late-April day the avenues are lushly carpeted with daffodils and bluebells, and the stream dotted with varieties of duck. Now and again a punt glides past—a timeless scene.

Susha Guppy, introduction to an interview with Dadie Rylands,
*The Paris Review*, 1988.

# Inception : the Cambridge lectures

## II : Girton College, 26th October 1928

The reception room at Girton College (seen here in 2018), where Woolf delivered her 2nd Cambridge lecture. Source : https://www.literaturecambridge.co.uk/news/girton-2018.

It was during the summer term that Virginia Woolf visited Girton – the first famous person with whom I had ever been in the same room. She came – it is all history now – at the invitation of the Girton Literary Society, to give her paper, *A Room of One's Own*.[1] The meeting took place in Girton's reception-room, with its mural panels, the work of a benefactor of the College who, having lived before the benefits of higher education, had devoted those long, idle Victorian hours (what happened to all that abundance of time after the turn of the century?) to embroidering in wool on ivory satin rather heavy foliage and flowers and birds and squirrels for the pleasure of those ladies who were to be educated away from the immemorial and symbolic occupations of Helen, Penelope, Persephone, and Blake's Daughters of Albion. The portrait of Lady Carew herself, in voluminous blue silk, hung over the chimney, reminding us that the eye of the Liberal aristocracy was upon all our comings and goings.[2] The grand piano, draped with a piece

of oriental embroidery, was pushed to one side. Outside those tinted neo-Gothic windows cedar and tulip trees spread their branches over the sweep of the lawns upon whose green cedar-shaded carpet I was now no trespasser, but one of the happy and thrice-happy permitted to walk.

In the fairyland of the Girton reception-room, then, members of the Literary Society were gathered for coffee, after Hall; young Eton-cropped hair gleaming, Chinese shawls spread like the plumage of butterflies. (I vainly longed for one of those shawls, fringed with silk and embroidered with silken flowers and birds, fashionable at that time.) With Virginia Woolf had come her friend Victoria Sackville-West: the two most beautiful women I had ever seen.[3] I saw their beauty and their fame entirely removed from the context of what is usually called 'real' life, as if they had descended like goddesses from Olympus, to reascend when at the end of the evening they vanished from our sight. The divine *mana* may belong to certain beings merely by virtue of what they are; but *mana* belongs also to certain offices, royal or priestly; and masters in some art were, in those days, invested with the dignity of their profession. A 'great writer' had about him or about her an inherited glory shed from the greatness of writers of the past; and about Virginia Woolf this glory hovered. Every sacred office can be discredited, and in the present world, in England, the profession of the writer has been brought into disrepute by the same looting of sanctuaries as has taken place in other spheres of life.

I had not read any of Virginia Woolf's novels at the time; a few months before I had not even heard of her. Now from her famous paper I learned for the first time, and with surprise, that the problems of 'a woman writer' were supposed to be different from the problems of a man who writes; that the problem is not one of writing but of living in such a way as to be able to write. *A Room of One's Own* made claims on life far beyond mine: a room and a small unearned income were, to me, luxuries unimaginable. To elude the vigilance of my parents, and to write poems on the marble-topped table of a Lyons' or an ABC tea-shop was all I had at home, or for long after, hoped for. At Girton I had a room of my own; but while feeling it my due, I did not, at the same time, expect it to last, any more than a dream lasts; and yet, within that dream, we accept all that comes as a matter of course.

The pioneers to whom Girton owed its foundation had fought for the freedom I there enjoyed. Even so, I cannot truthfully say that I have ever found that my problems as a writer have been made greater or less by being a woman. The only problem – to write well and to write truly – is the same for either sex. As for time to write, there is always time. Volumes might have been written in the time of Lady Carew spent on all the wool embroidery upon satin. But perhaps the embroidery was a wiser choice, after all.

## NOTES

Kathleen Jessie Raine (b. 1908), poet and autobiographer, counted among her Cambridge acquaintance William Empson, I. A. Richards and Bertrand Russell. Winner of the W. H. Smith award in 1972 for a book of poetry, she has also been Andrew Mellon Lecturer in Washington, DC.

1. Woolf went to Cambridge to address Girton College's ODTAA (One Damn Thing After Another) Society on 26 October 1928.
2. Julia (Mary), Lady Carew, née Lethbridge (d. 1922). In 1921 she donated to Girton College embroidered panels made by herself.

Kathleen RAINE, *The land unknown*, 1975, p. 21–23, quoted in John Henry Stape, *Virginia Woolf : interviews and recollections*, 1995, p. 15–17.

*Students at Girton working* by Mary Evans, c. 1910.

# ROO's first published iteration

A five-page essay featured in the American cultural magazine *The Forum* (1886–1950), New York, March 1929


# Women and FICTION

*by* VIRGINIA WOOLF

THE TITLE of this article can be read in two ways: it may allude to women and the fiction that they write, or to women and the fiction that is written about them. The ambiguity is intentional, for, in dealing with women as writers, as much elasticity as possible is desirable; it is necessary to leave oneself room to deal with other things besides their work, so much has that work been influenced by conditions that have nothing whatever to do with art.

The most superficial inquiry into women's writing instantly raises a host of questions. Why, we ask at once, was there no continuous writing done by women before the eighteenth century? Why did they then write almost as habitually as men, and in the course of that writing produce, one after another, some of the classics of English fiction? And why did their art then, and why to some extent does their art still, take the form of fiction?

A little thought will show us that we are asking questions to which we shall get, as answer, only further fiction. The answer lies at present locked in old diaries, stuffed away in old drawers, half-obliterated in the memories of the aged. It is to be found in the lives of the obscure — in those almost unlit corridors of history where the figures of generations of women are so dimly, so fitfully perceived. For very little is known about women. The history of England is the history of the male line, not of the female. Of our fathers we know always some fact, some distinction. They were soldiers or they were sailors; they filled that office or they made that law. But of our mothers, our grandmothers, our great-grandmothers, what remains? Nothing but a tradition. One was beautiful; one was red-haired; one was kissed by a Queen. We know nothing of them except their names and the dates of their marriages and the number of children they bore.

Thus, if we wish to know why at any particular time women did this or that, why they wrote nothing, why on the other hand they wrote masterpieces, it is extremely difficult to tell. Anyone who should seek among those old papers, who should turn history wrong side out and so construct a faithful picture of the daily life of the ordinary woman in Shakespeare's time, in Milton's time, in Johnson's time, would not only write a book of astonishing interest, but would furnish the critic with a weapon which he now lacks. The extraordinary woman depends on the ordinary woman. It is only when we know what were the conditions of the average woman's life —

the number of her children, whether she had money of her own, if she had a room to herself, whether she had help in bringing up her family, if she had servants, whether part of the housework was her task — it is only when we can measure the way of life and the experience of life made possible to the ordinary woman that we can account for the success or failure of the extraordinary woman as a writer.

Strange spaces of silence seem to separate one period of activity from another. There was Sappho and a little group of women all writing poetry on a Greek island six hundred years before the birth of Christ. They fall silent. Then about the year 1000 we find a certain court lady, the Lady Murasaki, writing a very long and beautiful novel in Japan. But in England in the sixteenth century, when the dramatists and poets were most active, the women were dumb. Elizabethan literature is exclusively masculine. Then, at the end of the eighteenth century and in the beginning of the nineteenth, we find women again writing — this time in England — with extraordinary frequency and success.

*Jane Austen*

Law and custom were of course largely responsible for these strange intermissions of silence and speech. When a woman was liable, as she was in the fifteenth century, to be beaten and flung about the room if she did not marry the man of her parents' choice, the spiritual atmosphere was not favorable to the production of works of art. When she was married without her own consent to a man who thereupon became her lord and master, "so far at least as law and custom could make him," as she was in the time of the Stuarts, it is likely she had little time for writing, and less encouragement. The immense effect of environment and suggestion upon the mind, we in our psychoanalytical age are beginning to realize. Again, with memoirs and letters to help us, we are beginning to understand how abnormal is the effort needed to produce a work of art, and what shelter and what support the mind of the artist requires. Of those facts the lives and letters of men like Keats and Carlyle and Flaubert assure us.

Thus it is clear that the extraordinary outburst of fiction in the beginning of the nineteenth century in England was heralded by innumerable slight changes in law and customs and manners. And women of the nineteenth century had some leisure; they had some education. It was no longer the exception for women of the middle and upper classes to choose their own husbands. And it is significant that of the four great women novelists — Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot — not one had a child, and two were unmarried.

Yet, though it is clear that the ban upon writing had been removed, there was still, it would seem, considerable pressure upon women to write novels. No four women can have been more unlike in genius and character than these four. Jane Austen can have had nothing in common with George Eliot; George Eliot was the direct opposite of Emily Brontë. Yet all were trained for the same profession; all, when they wrote, wrote novels.

Fiction was, as fiction still is, the easiest thing for a woman to write. Nor is it difficult to find the reason. A novel is the least concentrated form of art. A novel can be taken up or put down more easily than a play or a poem. George Eliot left her work to nurse her father. Charlotte Brontë put down her pen to pick the eyes out of the potatoes. And living as she did in the common sitting room, surrounded by people, a woman was trained to use her mind in observation and upon the analysis of character. She was trained to be a novelist and not to be a poet.

Even in the nineteenth century, a woman lived almost solely in her home and her emotions. And those nineteenth century novels, remarkable as they were, were profoundly influenced by the fact that the women who wrote them were excluded by their sex from certain kinds of experience. That experience has a great influence upon fiction is indisputable. The best part of Conrad's novels, for instance, would be destroyed if it had been impossible for him to be a sailor. Take away all that Tolstoi knew of war as a soldier, of life and society as a rich young man whose education admitted him to all sorts of ex-

perience, and *War and Peace* would be incredibly impoverished.

Yet *Pride and Prejudice*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Villette*, and *Middlemarch* were written by women from whom was forcibly withheld all experience save that which could be met with in a middle class drawing-room. No first-hand experience of war or seafaring or politics or business was possible for them. Even their emotional life was strictly regulated by law and custom. When George Eliot ventured to live with Mr. Lewes without being his wife, public opinion was scandalized. Under its pressure she withdrew into a suburban seclusion which, inevitably, had the worst possible effects upon her work. She wrote that unless people asked of their own accord to come and see her, she never invited them. At the same time, on the other side of Europe, Tolstoi was living a free life as a soldier, with men and women of all classes, for which nobody censured him and from which his novels drew much of their astonishing breadth and vigor.

*George Sand*

But the novels of women were not affected only by the necessarily narrow range of the writer's experience. They showed, at least in the nineteenth century, another characteristic which may be traced to the writer's sex. In *Middlemarch* and in *Jane Eyre* we are conscious not merely of the writer's character, as we are conscious of the character of Charles Dickens, but we are conscious of a woman's presence — of someone resenting the treatment of her sex and pleading for its rights. This brings into women's writing an element which is entirely absent from a man's, unless, indeed, he happens to be a working man, a Negro, or one who for some other reason is conscious of disability. It introduces a distortion and is frequently the cause of weakness. The desire to plead some personal cause or to make a character the mouthpiece of some personal discontent or grievance always has a distracting effect, as if the spot at which the reader's attention is directed were suddenly twofold instead of single.

The genius of Jane Austen and Emily Brontë is never more convincing than in their power to ignore such claims and solicitations and to hold on their way unperturbed by scorn or censure. But it needed a very serene or a very powerful mind to resist the temptation to anger. The ridicule, the censure, the assurance of inferiority in one form or another which were lavished upon women who practised an art, provoked such reactions naturally enough. One sees the effect in Charlotte Brontë's indignation, in George Eliot's resignation. Again and again one finds it in the work of the lesser women writers — in their choice of a subject, in their unnatural self-assertiveness, in their unnatural docility. Moreover, insincerity leaks in almost unconsciously. They adopt a view in deference to authority. The vision becomes too masculine or it becomes too feminine; it loses its perfect integrity and, with that, its most essential quality as a work of art.

The great change that has crept into women's writing is, it would seem, a change of attitude. The woman writer is no longer bitter. She is no longer angry. She is no longer pleading and protesting as she writes. We are approaching, if we have not yet reached, the time when her writing will have little or no foreign influence to disturb it. She will be able to concentrate upon her vision without distraction from outside. The aloofness that was once within the reach of genius and originality is only now coming within the reach of ordinary women. Therefore the average novel by a woman is far more genuine and far more interesting to-day than it was a hundred or even fifty years ago.

But it is still true that before a woman can write exactly as she wishes to write, she has many difficulties to face. To begin with, there is the technical difficulty — so simple, apparently; in reality, so baffling — that the very form of the sentence does not fit her. It is a sentence made by men; it is too loose, too heavy, too pompous for a woman's use. Yet in a novel, which covers so wide a stretch of ground, an ordinary and usual type of sentence has to be found to carry the reader on easily and naturally from one end of the book to the other. And this a woman must make for herself, altering and adapting the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural

shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it.

But that, after all, is only a means to an end, and the end is still to be reached only when a woman has the courage to surmount opposition and the determination to be true to herself. For a novel, after all, is a statement about a thousand different objects — human, natural, divine; it is an attempt to relate them to each other. In every novel of merit these different elements are held in place by the force of the writer's vision. But they have another order also, which is the order imposed upon them by convention. And as men are the arbiters of that convention, as they have established an order of values in life, so too, since fiction is largely based on life, these values prevail there also to a very great extent.

It is probable, however, that both in life and in art the values of a woman are not the values of a man. Thus, when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values — to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important. And for that, of course, she will be criticized; for the critic of the opposite sex will be genuinely puzzled and surprised by an attempt to alter the current scale of values, and will see in it not merely a difference of view, but a view that is weak, or trivial, or sentimental, because it differs from his own.

But here, too, women are coming to be more independent of opinion. They are beginning to respect their own sense of values. And for this reason the subject matter of their novels begins to show certain changes. They are less interested, it would seem, in themselves; on the other hand, they are more interested in other women. In the early nineteenth century, women's novels were largely autobiographical. One of the motives that led them to write was the desire to expose their own suffering, to plead their own cause. Now that this desire is no longer so urgent, women are beginning to explore their own sex, to write of women as women have never been written of before; for of course, until very lately, women in literature were the creation of men.

Here again there are difficulties to overcome, for, if one may generalize, not only do women submit less readily to observation than men, but their lives are far less tested and examined by the ordinary processes of life. Often nothing tangible remains of a woman's day. The food that has been cooked is eaten; the children that have been nursed have gone out into the world. Where does the accent fall? What is the salient point for the novelist to seize upon? It is difficult to say. Her life has an anonymous character which is baffling and puzzling in the extreme. For the first time, this dark country is beginning to be explored in fiction; and at the same moment a woman has also to record the changes in women's minds and habits which the opening of the professions has introduced. She has to observe how their lives are ceasing to run underground; she has to discover what new colors and shadows are showing in them now that they are exposed to the outer world.

If, then, one should try to sum up the character of women's fiction at the present moment, one would say that it is courageous; it is sincere; it keeps closely to what women feel. It is not bitter. It does not insist upon its femininity. But at the same time, a woman's book is not written as a man would write it. These qualities are much commoner than they were, and they give even to second and third-rate work the value of truth and the interest of sincerity.

But in addition to these good qualities, there are two that call for a word more of discussion. The change which has turned the English woman from a nondescript influence, fluctuating and vague, to a voter, a wage earner, a responsible citizen, has given her both in her life and in her art a turn toward the impersonal. Her relations now are not only emotional; they are intellectual, they are political. The old system which condemned her to squint askance at things through the eyes or through the interests of husband or brother, has given place to the direct and practical interests of one who must act for herself, and not merely influence the acts of others. Hence her attention is being directed away from the personal centre which engaged it exclusively in the past to the impersonal, and her novels naturally become more critical of society, and less analytical of individual lives.

We may expect that the office of gadfly to the state, which has been so far a male prerogative, will now be discharged by women also. Their novels will deal with social evils and remedies. Their men and women will not

be observed wholly in relation to each other emotionally, but as they cohere and clash in groups and classes and races. That is one change of some importance. But there is another more interesting to those who prefer the butterfly to the gadfly — that is to say, the artist to the reformer. The greater impersonality of women's lives will encourage the poetic spirit, and it is in poetry that women's fiction is still weakest. It will lead them to be less absorbed in facts and no longer content to record with astonishing acuteness the minute details which fall under their own observation. They will look beyond the personal and political relationships to the wider questions which the poet tries to solve — of our destiny and the meaning of life.

The basis of the poetic attitude is of course largely founded upon material things. It depends upon leisure, and a little money, and the chance which money and leisure give to observe impersonally and dispassionately. With money and leisure at their service, women will naturally occupy themselves more than has hitherto been possible with the craft of letters. They will make a fuller and a more subtle use of the instrument of writing. Their technique will become bolder and richer.

In the past, the virtue of women's writing often lay in its divine spontaneity, like that of the blackbird's song or the thrush's. It was untaught; it was from the heart. But it was also, and much more often, chattering and garrulous — mere talk spilt over paper and left to dry in pools and blots. In future, granted time and books and a little space in the house for herself, literature will become for women, as for men, an art to be studied. Women's gift will be trained and strengthened. The novel will cease to be the dumping ground for the personal emotions. It will become, more than at present, a work of art like any other, and its resources and its limitations will be explored.

From this it is a short step to the practice of the sophisticated arts, hitherto so little practised by women — to the writing of essays and criticism, of history and biography. And that, too, if we are considering the novel, will be of advantage; for besides improving the quality of the novel itself, it will draw off the aliens who have been attracted to fiction by its accessibility while their hearts lay elsewhere. Thus will the novel be rid of those excrescences of history and fact which, in our time, have made it so shapeless.

So, if we may prophesy, women in time to come will write fewer novels, but better novels; and not novels only, but poetry and criticism and history. But in this, to be sure, one is looking ahead to that golden, that perhaps fabulous age when women will have what has so long been denied them — leisure, and money, and a room to themselves.

**Next month, an essay on poetry by the distinguished French critic, PAUL VALÉRY.**

*Morosaki*

# FORUM

## Next Month

### FULL GARAGES, EMPTY PURSES
*Roger W. Babson*

The master statistician of business believes that American prosperity has been largely created by the expansion of the automobile industry. When will that expansion end? When the saturation point for the automobile has been reached, will business depression set in? Will full garages bring empty purses? In answering these questions Mr. Babson charts the future course of our national prosperity.

### THE SCHOOL OF WOMEN
*André Gide*

The third and concluding installment of a novel by the author of *The Counterfeiters*.

### DRY ROT IN HOLY PLACES
*Frederick K. Stamm*

A Protestant minister protests against the spiritual bankruptcy of The Protestant churches, and concludes that nothing short of a new Reformation can save them from the fate of the dodo.

### ARE WE VICTIMS OF PROPAGANDA?
*Everett Dean Martin vs. Edward L. Bernays*

By newspaper, radio, and airplane an army of special pleaders for new tooth pastes, cigarettes, and what-have-you besiege the citizen with appeals to buy, subscribe, obey that impulse, and sign on the dotted line. Is this new phenomenon in American life an open war on common sense, a concerted raid on the public's pocketbook, or is it a helpful campaign of enlightenment and public instruction?

### WOMEN AND FICTION
*Virginia Woolf*

A leading woman essayist and novelist explains why women have attained such startling success in recent literature.

### SPAIN AND AMERICA
*Salvador de Madariaga*

A Spaniard makes a fiery charge against our "idealistic imperialism" in Latin America.

### THE HOUND OF HEAVEN
*Sarah Addington*

A fantastic and humorous story recounting the post-mortem adventures of a hound pup in a hound's heaven.

### WHY EDUCATE WOMEN?
*Dr. W. Béran Wolfe*

A psychologist urges that all women's colleges be abolished on the ground that their best graduates, in the academic sense, tend to become neurotic and maladjusted women in later life. He replies to President Neilson's article in this issue and calls for a new set of purposes in female education with the object of making women the partners and not the thwarted competitors of men.

### STOICISM AND MENTAL HEALTH
*Bertrand Russell*

How to prepare children to accept the fact of death, so that their lives will not be shattered when death strikes their friends and family.

## FOREWORD
***Continued***

— that Mr. Babson makes of the coming age of the aërial flivver. This brave prediction comes from the same Mr. Babson whose bulletins during the past years have warned American investors against the wild bull of speculation which Mr. John Flynn seeks to tame in the present issue of The Forum.

In this number Mr. G. K. Chesterton again holds the leading position. With a Catholic bias tempered by his own kindly humor, he reviews The Forum essays scrutinizing current American literature that began in our January issue a year ago, and he pays his respects to Mr. H. L. Mencken and the *American Mercury*. This British critic and American writers in The Forum do not deny the ability of Mr. Mencken, Mr. Dreiser, Mr. Lewis, and their friends; nor do they belittle their usefulness in ridding the American scene of the ridiculous. They do fail to find in these inconoclasts a mode of life that will serve America. In The Forum last year Irving Babbitt offered humanism as a constructive formula, and Professor Gass deplored its failure even in our better artists like Willa Cather. Mr. T. S. Eliot criticized Professor Babbitt's humanism as something for the few rather than the many who must, he believes, cling to religion to give their lives consistency and purpose. With Mr. Mencken demolishing Puritan romanticism, Mr. More and Mr. Babbitt demolishing Mencken, and Mr. Eliot challenging Mr. Babbitt's humanism and at the same time showing the weakness of Protestantism, the field was opened for the essay by Mr. Michael Williams on American literature and the Catholic spirit, a paper which Mr. Chesterton naturally endorses.

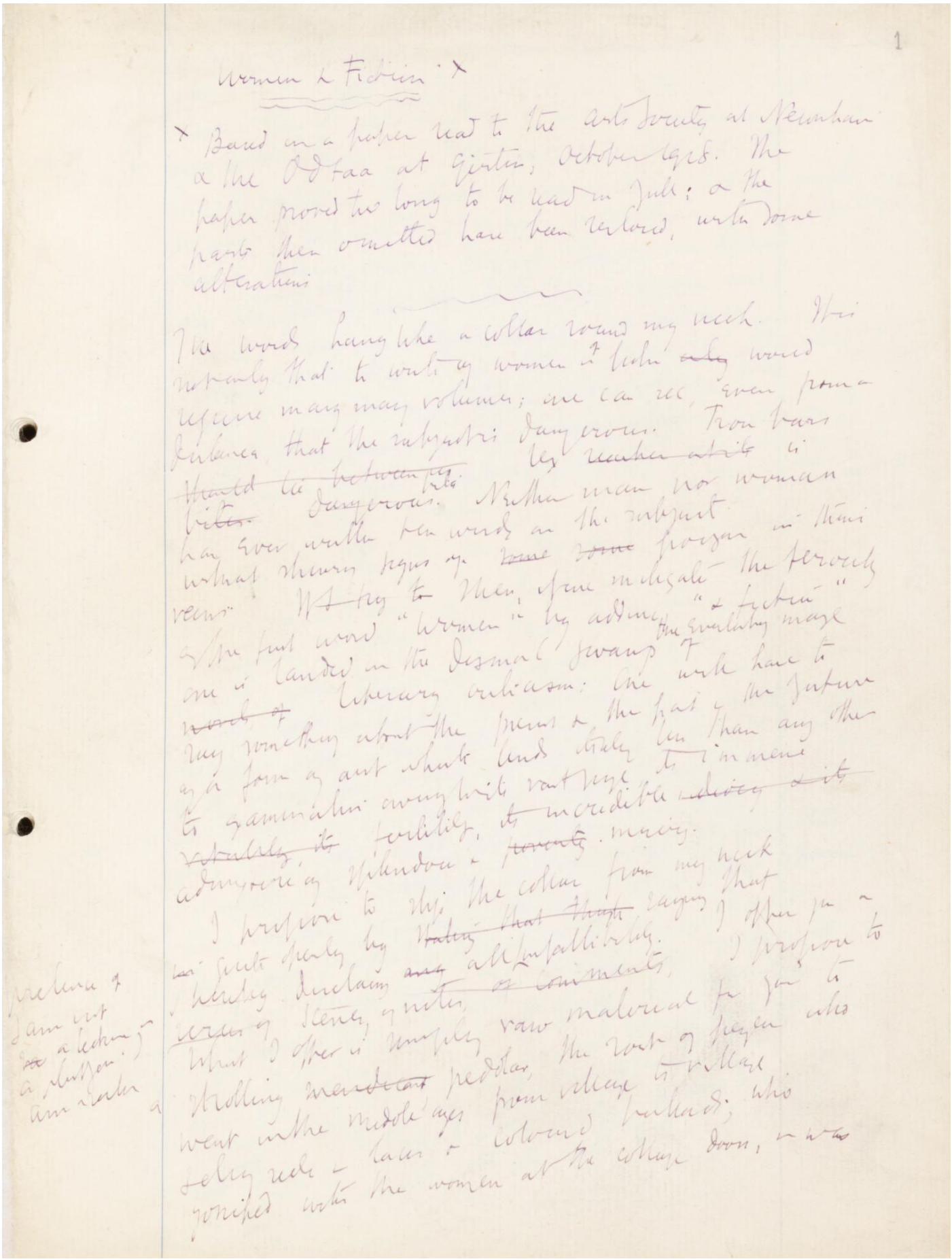
In the December *Bookman*, Mr. Gorham B. Munson, reviewing the same series of articles, says, "The Forum virtually declared war on 'the facile penmen of the *American Mercury*.'. . . Fortune was with the editors of The Forum and their readers . . . for unfolding of ideas in this series has assumed a dramatic form and worked up to a crisis that is exciting." Act One, according to Mr. Munson, was an issue between Humanism and Romanticism, which he declares actually settled. Act Two is the issue between Humanism and Religion. Mr. Munson predicates a Third Act in which the skeptic will be driven to psychology. But, Mr. Munson, psychology still seems too uncertain and incoherent to Forum writers, and you will have to wait at present for other scenes in your Act Two. Religion will be heard from again, and Humanism requires more definition. In an early issue you will read a programme for the American humanist by Professor Gass of the University of Nebraska.

Advertisement for Woolf's upcoming piece in the February 1929 issue.

"A leading woman essayist and novelist explains why women have attained such startling success in recent literature."

# Autograph manuscript

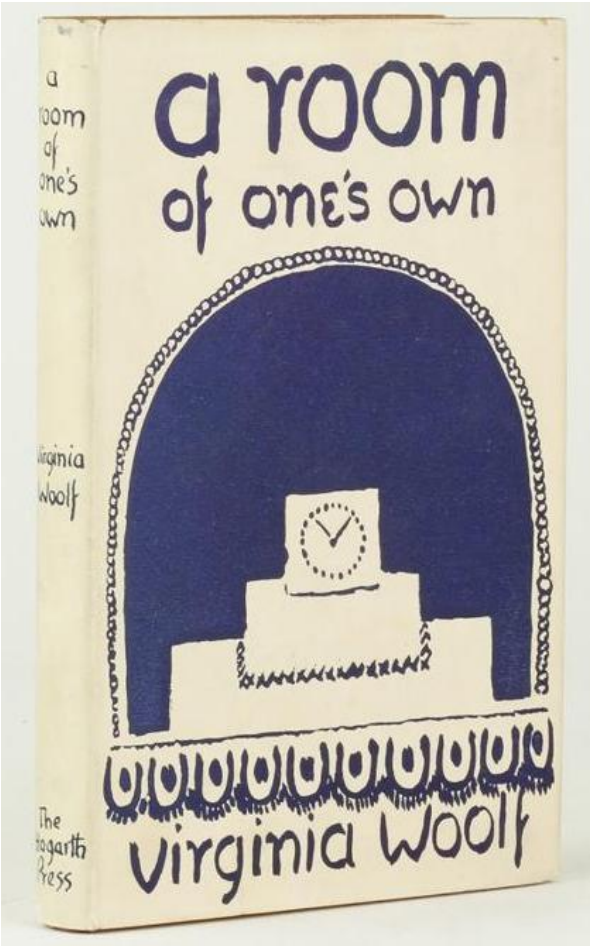
**6th March – 2nd April 1929**

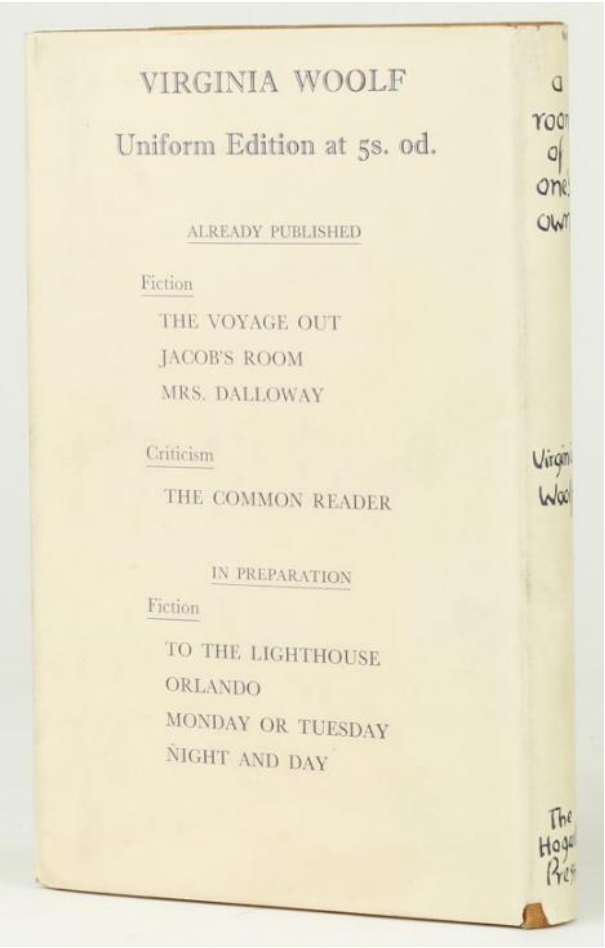


Opening page. Source : Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, MS 1-1942.

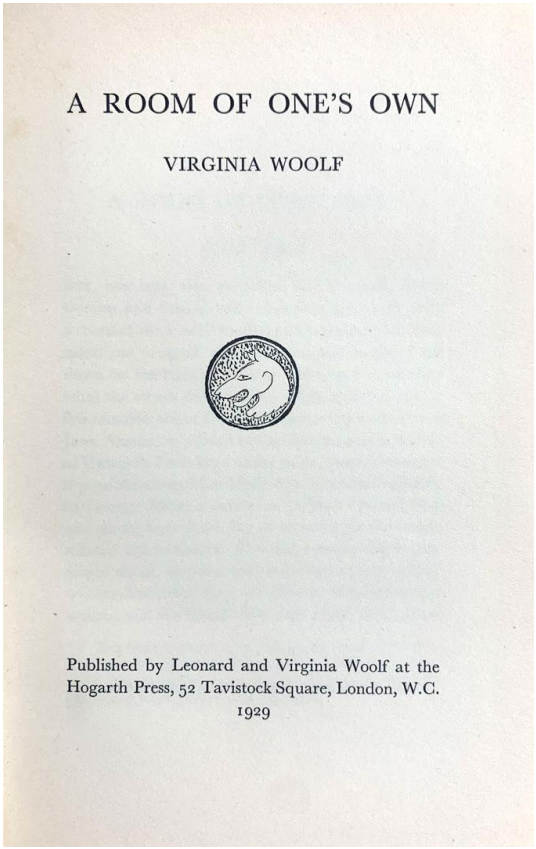
# Original British edition

## The Hogarth Press, London, 24th October 1929



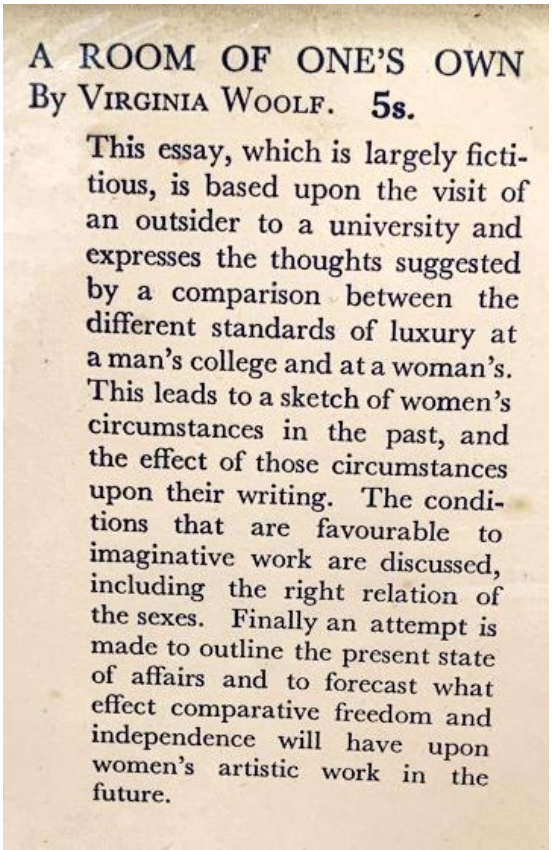

**Dust-jacket** of the first British **hardback** edition, illustrated by Woolf's sister, the painter Vanessa Bell.


A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

VIRGINIA WOOLF

Published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, 52 Tavistock Square, London, W.C.
1929

**Title page**

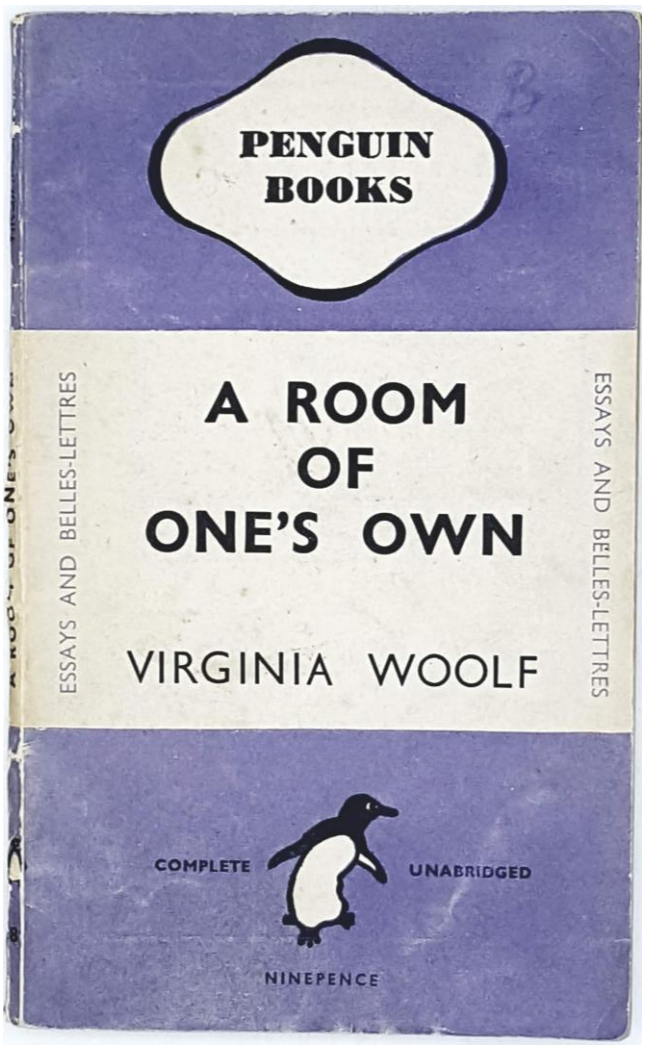

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN
By VIRGINIA WOOLF. **5s.**

This essay, which is largely fictitious, is based upon the visit of an outsider to a university and expresses the thoughts suggested by a comparison between the different standards of luxury at a man's college and at a woman's. This leads to a sketch of women's circumstances in the past, and the effect of those circumstances upon their writing. The conditions that are favourable to imaginative work are discussed, including the right relation of the sexes. Finally an attempt is made to outline the present state of affairs and to forecast what effect comparative freedom and independence will have upon women's artistic work in the future.

**Blurb**

# First British paperback edition

**Penguin, London, 1945**





Blurb : "Virginia WOOLF, who died in 1941, was the daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, K.C.B. [Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath], and the wife of Leonard Woolf.

Her first books were novels, and at the time of her death she had won a foremost place in English fiction, but she also ranks high among literary critics and essayists. Two collections of her essays, *The Common Reader* and *The Second Common Reader*, have been published by Penguin Books in the Pelican series ; and her fantastic and beautiful novel Orlando has also appeared as a Penguin Book."

23 November 1929 The Saturday Review 615

## LODGINGS OF THE MUSE

*A Room of One's Own.* By Virginia Woolf. The Hogarth Press. 5s.

MRS. WOOLF went to "Oxbridge" to speak about "Women and Fiction." At "Oxbridge" there were smooth-shaven lawns, oak-panelling, and rare old libraries—for men. In this male and mellow "Oxbridge" she lunched. Sole, partridge, and a confection beyond naming:

> Meanwhile the wine glasses had flushed yellow and flushed crimson; had been emptied; had been filled. And thus by degrees was lit, half-way down the spine, which is the seat of the soul, not that hard little electric light which we call brilliance, as it pops in and out upon our lips, but the more profound, subtle and subterranean glow which is the rich yellow flame of rational intercourse. No need to hurry. No need to sparkle. No need to be anybody but oneself. We are all going to heaven and Vandyck is of the company.

Later Mrs. Woolf attended dinner in feminine "Oxbridge," where there is no mellowness and much that is mean and hustled and ugly. Gravy soup, beef and greens, prunes and custard. "Biscuits and cheese came next, and here the water-jug was liberally passed round, for it is the nature of biscuits to be dry, and these were biscuits to the core." And so out to corridors and banging doors. It set Mrs. Woolf thinking, as well it might, this dinner among the feminine dons in the mingled atmosphere of boarding house and boarding school, after lunching amid the amenities deemed proper to the regnant academic male.

So Mrs. Woolf goes back, beautifully, wisely, and humorously, to the history of the feminine amenities. Women who were not queens or courtesans have always had this inferior status; who were they to join the lyrical choir of the poets, for it is difficult to be a poet on prunes? Who were they to speak out who had no platform, who to write who had no desk, who to meditate who had no room of their own? So the women artists have been tortured with grievances; repressions have rankled within them and left a mental acidity or a nervous distortion of balance. Perhaps Mrs. Woolf overrates the relations of the room-space to genius, but she does well to remind us how far cash and comfort have been the springs of the grandest utterance of the spirit. After all, Shakespeare only plunged into his most tremendous mood and music of tragedy when he was an established "Gent." Mrs. Woolf postulates for good writing solitude and five hundred a year. She well knows that Jane Austen had neither, Jane who wrote on the sly in a common sitting room and hid her script under pieces of blotting paper. She triumphed, but over what terror and tribulation. Charlotte Brontë always dreading blame for her audacity in practising composition and George Eliot, living "sinfully" in St. John's Wood and willing to be cut off from the social world for her offence, are typical of the women who made literary careers of their own. It was always the fight against odds. The moral attitude may be different now; there are less prudes but there are more prunes.

And so we come back to it:

> Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time. Women have had less intellectual freedom than the sons of Athenian slaves. Women, then, have not had a dog's chance of writing poetry. That is why I have laid so much stress upon money and a room of one's own.

It is impossible to do justice in brief to Mrs. Woolf's essay, which richly embroiders this argument. It has so much wit to sharpen its compassion for women, so much learning to inform its retrospect of domestic life and letters in England, and such a beauty of style to convey the whole trend of thought which springs to the larger matters from a good lunch and a bad dinner. Feminist dissertation is so often harsh and hectoring, reminding one of the teetotallers who lump into the category of "liquor" the loveliest vintage with the foulest swipes and assume that nobody can want or enjoy a drink unless he has been bribed to do so by a mysterious criminal called the Liquor Traffic. Mrs. Woolf's feminism has none whatever of that rawness of temper, none of the nagging note, and it has been the cause of an exquisite piece of writing. The writer's perception of humanity does not mistake a vote for everything. It may be a symbol. But has it ever done as much for feminine happiness as a sofa, a door you can shut, a key you can turn, and money in the bank? On this text has a most delicate discourse been woven.

## POMPS AND VANITIES

*The Life of Solomon.* By Edmond Fleg. Translated by Viola Gerard Garvin. Gollancz. 12s. 6d.

M. FLEG'S life of Moses was met last autumn with a warm reception. The land of Albion flowed for M. Fleg with the milk of human kindness and the honey of welcoming words. The praise should not diminish. With Solomon he has an even richer theme and an equally skilful translator. Moses was, as we know, an austere man. His head reached continually into the clouds and the tables of the law offered more jejune banquets than any considered supportable by King Solomon. Nor would Moses have fitted easily into a party of what Mr. Priestley would call "good companions." If Moses was Johnny-head-in-air, Solomon was Johannes Factotum. Solomon was indeed versatile. An industrious husband, he regarded matrimony as a multiple store and far preceded Augustus the Strong in meriting the title of Father of his People. He was gourmet, architect, poet, potentate, law-giver, philosopher and family man. He solved leading cases as easily as he rattled off proverbs. Unfortunately, there was no Sabbatical journalism in his time; otherwise, as the editor of a gossip column, this regal blender of aphorism and amour would have been at the pinnacle of an august profession.

Naturally rumours gathered round the records and legends round the official chronicle of the King's career. M. Fleg uses it all to fashion what one may fairly call a Solomon fantasy. Tradition and the Talmud assist the Authorized Version. Even that most international of legends, the ring found in the caught fish, attaches to Solomon, who has become a magnet of miraculous tales. Furthermore, the biographer can draw on the poetry as he can draw on the regalia of the monarch. The Song of Solomon is the tale's accompaniment, ringing its way like piano-music heard across a garden on a summer night. Just as the Old Testament glitters with carbuncle and chrysoprase, so is the life of Solomon bejewelled with word and gem. M. Fleg has the advantage of all the worlds. East is here most lavishly Oriental, but Babylon is linked with fairyland and one cause of half the trouble is Maimel, King of the Ocean, who lives in the Distant Isle.

Yet, with all his scope and his embroidery, M. Fleg keeps the essential quality. Or, if he strays, his translator has wisely called him to order. It is the quality of the Authorized Version and of its dynamic prose whose muscular rhythms are the early inheritance of every English ear. He has shaped his story finely and with a craftsman's touch, beginning with that precocity which made Solomon a judge over Israel almost before he was breeched—or its contemporary Jewish equivalent—and ending with the upright death by the gallent envenomed sword in the innermost depth of the Holy

MODERN LIFE IN BOOKS

By OLIVER WAY

# THE TALES OF TWO WOMEN

## Virginia Woolf Discusses "Shakespeare's Sister" and Mary Borden Writes an Unforgettable War Book

*A Room of One's Own*, by Virginia Woolf. Hogarth Press, 5s.)
*The Forbidden Zone*, by Mary Borden. (Heinemann, 6s.)

HERE are two books by women. They are interesting because neither one could have been written by anyone else but a woman. Both are books that will live, and first editions of them are worth securing at any price—now.

Once again, in *A Room of One's Own*, Mrs. Virginia Woolf weaves the familiar spell of delight, and from the first word to the last—as happens to me each time I read a book of hers—I was enchanted. This time I was more completely enchanted than ever, so just and exquisite are her descriptions of scenes I know, of meals whose counterparts I have eaten, of adventures I too might have had if I had been able to see the things she sees and feel the things she feels, and also if I were not a man.

Lenare

"THE SPELL WEAVER"

Mrs. Virginia Woolf, who is described in the accompanying article as "weaving the familiar spell of delight" in her new book, *A Room of One's Own*

Fiorini

A WOMAN WAR-WRITER

Miss Mary Borden (Mrs. Spears), whose *The Forbidden Zone*, a "stark and terrible" war book of hospital life, is reviewed on this page

NOT generally evident in Mrs. Woolf's work is humour—perhaps the one gift of the gods withheld till now from this singularly talented lady. But this book dimples with it, and there is a passage about prunes which might have come straight out of Max, that most delicately dimpled of writers, and a single brief sentence about bis cuits which caught me into a sudden burst of laughter.

I have never had any particular zeal for the young women of Newnham and Girton—who all, unfairly I know, suggest to me fountain pens and cocoa—but I can't help feeling really obliged to them now, for it is to their hunger after lectures that we owe this book. The sentences lull one along, take one into quiet places, where October flames along the trees, and ideas, like fishes, can be angled for in the clear water, wrap one in beauty, and put argument to sleep. But when the book is shut and the music dies away, questions begin.

Not the manner—it is throughout perfect—but the matter rouses doubt. Why, one enquires, does Mrs. Woolf, who has the most distinguished of minds, suggest to these girls, with minds improbably distinguished, that in order to write they must earn £500 a year and have a room of their own? Mrs. Woolf herself, with all her gifts, tells us that until an aunt died and left her this precise amount of income she only did odd jobs.

"Before that I had made my living by cadging odd jobs from newspapers, by reporting a donkey show here or a wedding there; I had earned a few pounds by addressing envelopes, reading to old ladies, making artificial flowers, teaching the alphabet to small children in a kindergarten."

DOES she suppose that these others will be able to earn enough to keep them from having to read to old ladies and make artificial flowers, when she couldn't? Or does she—the rich in money are like that too—assume that everyone is as comfortably off, intellectually, as herself? If so, she is most modest, and her modesty may involve in disappointment the young women who had the good fortune to hear her lecture.

And indeed it would be to be deplored if, having slaved for years after the conscientious fashion of women, they were at last able to pay for a room of their own, and, sitting down to write in it, found they couldn't. Rooms don't make writers. Streetsful of rooms of their own won't turn women into poets. The only time Shakespeare was born he was a man. The same thing happens punctually whenever anybody great comes into the world. There is no getting away from it. And, after all, it is the women who produce these men. The women are really Shakespeare and Einstein and Aeschylus and the rest, but at one remove.

Ought this not to be enough? Why stir up the ladies of Girton and Newnham to believe that if they try hard enough, keep at it doggedly enough, and have £500 a year and a room of their own into the bargain, some day, in the course of centuries, Shakespeare's sister will be born? As well tell the young men of King's and Trinity that in the course of centuries, should they have concentrated, one of them may, with luck, produce a baby.

Such were some of my reflections, coming oddly, I myself perceived, as the result of an afternoon's intense pleasure; and possibly in those

Fiorini

"GOSSIP" AND AN AUTHORESS

Miss Jane Starr, author of *Eve in Egypt* (Geoffrey Bles, 10s. 6d.), a new book which blends fiction with travel, and "human interest" with Egyptology-made-easy. In method it resembles the early travel romances of C. N. and A. M. Williamson, but the style and nicely spiced dialogue are individual. Miss Starr, besides being an insistent traveller—she has crossed the Alps, Appennines, Rockies and much of the Soudan in a baby Austin car—is a lover of cats, to whom she gives queer names. The one in the picture has the appropriately feline name of "Gossip," and another, which won many prizes at cat shows, was called "Plantaganet Maybe"

footstools of learning, Newnham and Girton—they are hardly big enough or developed enough as yet to be called seats—they may be regarded as foolish.

But sometimes when I hear women talk of what they might be, and ought to be, or would be, if only this, that and the other were different, they remind me of taxis that should wish to abandon their proper function, which is the safe carrying of passengers, and try instead to get inside their passengers, and be themselves, and God knows whither, conveyed. Isn't it enough to carry the passenger, sometimes magnificently, for a journey down the centuries? Does it matter who sings the songs of the world, so long as they get sung?

I opened the book again and re-read the end. Yes, at the end, Mrs. Woolf seems not quite so sure (though still exquisite) that she is leading her flock aright, and enjoins them to be themselves—which would rather, if they were, upset my discontented taxi theory, besides a good deal reducing Shakespeare's sister's chances of being born. Also she urges her listeners not to attempt to influence anybody, and this I think is really admirable. Here not only the manner but the matter is perfect; and it is to be hoped the young women will take it to heart, for how much time does not a man waste dodging being influenced? And finally she says, only more beautifully, "Don't be angry."

Excellent advice, making for comfortableness all round. Only it seems to me that if it were followed, while the cosy security men enjoy, and Mrs. Woolf admires, would become even cosier, even more secure, women would remain exactly where they are.

NOW that the war book has become inescapable, there is talk of some of the more terrible of them being formidable tracts against war. Broadcast their horrors, it is said, to the million, and leave the million with no stomach for another war. I have read most of the war books, but in none of them have I encountered the truth more stark and more terrible than in this one—by a woman. It is called *The Forbidden Zone*, by Mary Borden. I would like to see it sold by the hundred million.

Here are some sketches, stories and poems written by a woman who, between 1914 and 1918, served in a French hospital unit "on a strip of land immediately behind the zone of fire" which was known in the French Army as "La Zone Interdit." Every man in our own forces who passed through a Casualty Clearing Station, and, still more, those who lingered there under the shadow of death, will recognise the burning truth in these sketches. Yet they could only have been written by a woman.

Of the men who passed through, the majority went to a fearful death; the rest only dumbly understood their surroundings, under a torment of pain and blessed anæsthetics. And only the permanently maimed could have survived, for only extreme cases were detained there. The surgeons were scarcely spared a minute from action, in their ceaseless fight to save life. It was the women who watched, who ministered, who fought, through long hours without relief, with the terrors and tortures of shattered, torn and dying men.

> For companions there are, of course, the surgeons and the nurses, and the old grizzled orderlies, but I have other companions more intimate than these. Three in particular, a lascivious monster, a sick, bad-tempered animal, and an angel; Pain, Life and Death.

What the author does not mention is that, towards the end of it all, her hospital was blown to bits by the German guns within whose range it had always been.

I have called Mrs. Woolf's descriptions just and exquisite; she is a master of prose. Miss Borden has also an exquisite mastery over language. She wrings out terrible scenes with a poet's feeling for words; only a sensitive pen could have encompassed such unbearable things. And I would say that she cares more for this book than for all the novels she has written—or is likely to write.

*The Graphic*, London, 21st December 1929.

# Do Women Make Good Artists?

YOU have heard, of course, about Women.

How they talk too much, quarrel amongst themselves, are silly and frivolous or disagreeable and ugly. How they put on airs, cannot be trusted with responsibility or power over others. How they distract men's attention from important things. How they have never produced any great art. How they are slaves to fashion and supports of outworn conventions. Most dreadful of all, how restricted and personal is their outlook, and how incapable they are of abstract thought.

## MISLEADING IDEAS

In fact, when you consider the inevitability of their imperfections and remember that they comprise slightly more than one-half of the human race, you can only marvel that, hampered and hindered as they are, men have gone so far in their upward and onward march.

Only, if you have contracted the habit of comparing your own observation and experience with what you have been led to expect, you have probably reached the conclusion long ago that of all silly and misleading generalisations those about women as compared with men are most silly and misleading. And yet you will find you have been assuming that these generalisations were roughly true, as Mrs. Woolf did when she began to prepare her lectures to Cambridge women undergraduates on Women and Fiction, and as you will when you read the little book which is the result, *A Room of One's Own*, by Virginia Woolf (Hogarth Press, 5s.).

For we are only just entering on the era of scientific observation of male and female human nature. Marx began it when he formulated the Materialist Conception of History, that is, when he sought for the highest common factor among human motives, as discoverable in history. Dr. Watson, the American Behaviourist, has continued it by his investigations into the minds of very young children

MRS. WOOLF

in order to discover what is instinctive and what is acquired.

It took a very long time for men to stop arguing why a badger's legs were longer on one side than on the other, and to look and see whether they actually were. *A Room of One's Own* gives the first ray of hope that we have passed the stage of assuming that women are fundamentally different from men in every detail, and that, given luck, we can scramble rapidly through the pre-scientific stage of argument and in due course settle the question calmly and without prejudice.

It gives this hope because it is not a feminist tract, though most men (who enjoy masculine prestige solely because of the prevailing assumption of feminine inferiority, whether they realise it or not) will think that it is. Mrs. Woolf's argument that to produce art one must have an assured income (£500 a year she stipulates) and a room with a door that can be locked if need be, applies not only to women, but to men, who are, say, out of work.

Why, she asks herself, have not women been Shakespeares and Beethovens, and concludes that it is because they have, until recently, never had any money of their own or been allowed to earn any, and have been occupied in keeping house, bringing up children, and remembering what side their bread was buttered. What chance have they had of viewing the world impersonally, what leisure to put their experience into art forms? Considering that they have been restricted in their activities and discouraged in their adventurings, how can you say what they might do if conditions were altered, as they are altering gradually now?

## LOST SHAKESPEARES

This is, I repeat, not a feminist argument. You can ask the same questions about the children leaving school now, going into blind alley occupations, being unemployed thereafter for years at a stretch, existing on a grudged pittance or earning a bare living by exhausting or soul-deadening occupations. How can you tell what Shakespeares and Beethovens may not be dwindling and dying amongst this army of those who are casualties before the battle begins?

There are less than two hundred pages in *A Room of One's Own*, yet it is one of the most important books of the year. It is thought-provoking, because it is original and reasonable. It remains in the mind because of the consummate craftsmanship of the writing, the sweep and impersonality and inevitability of the argument, the lucidity of the thought, the flow of the imagery, so easy and yet so controlled, so logically connected, and so deftly woven, and the aptness of the illustrations.

It is an adventure to read this book. It is also fun to watch other people reading it, being irritated, rushing up with objections that you, having read it already, know are provided for, making a dignified retreat, and finally, if they are men, taking the book away to read again in the hope of finding some way of getting this woman down. And, later, succumbing and saying it is so good it might almost have been written by a man. AILEEN MEARS.

*The Daily Herald*, London, 28th December 1929.

# Current critical reception

TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

Mary Beard: A don's life | *Column*

## A Room of One's Own?


**Mary Beard (1955–), Royal Academy of Arts Professor of Ancient Literature and fellow of Newnham College, Cambrige.**

Virginia Woolf has put her trademark on the phrase "room of one's own" – in the essay of that name, based on lectures originally given in Cambridge (at both Newnham and Girton Colleges) in 1928. The argument that Woolf elaborates here is a simple one : as she repeats several times, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction"; "it is necessary to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry"; "my belief is that if we live another century or so – I am talking of the common life which is the real life and not of the little separate lives which we live as individuals – and have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own," we will all be able to be writers. (£500 then is the equivalent of something over £30,000 now, something that many writers, male and female, could only dream of.)

It is a great piece of feminist rhetoric, and I had always imagined that it was very much Woolf's own idea, as she herself implies ("I am going to do what I can to show you how I arrived at this opinion about the room and the money"). I only recently discovered that the point about the room (though not the cash) was very much part of standard womens' arguments around then, not original to Woolf at all (even if she did nail it expertly). Already in 1875, Anne Jemima Clough, Newnham's first principal, had insisted to a group of college supporters

that a young woman should have "undisturbed possession of one room … where she can have access to any books that she may need" (discussed by Gillian Sutherland here).

But I came across a much wittier version in an essay by Jane Ellen Harrison (who has a walk-on part as a ghost in Woolf's *Room of One's Own*). Entitled "Scientiae sacra fames" ("sacred hunger for knowledge"), this was first given as a lecture in 1911, and published in Harrison's collection of essays, *Alpha and Omega* (1915). Her point was that women should be able to pursue knowledge for its own sake. In the course of this, she comments on the physical layout of middle-class domestic life, which deprives women of any space to think :

> The difference between men and women is illustrated, expressed, "projected" as we nowadays say, by the arrangements of the ordinary middle-class home, which are to me deeply depressing.
>
> Man and wife share a dining room. They are both animals, and must eat, so they do it together. Next comes the wife's room, the drawing room : not a room to withdraw into, by yourself, but the room into which "visitors are shown" – a room in which you can't possibly settle down to think, because anyone may come in at any moment. The drawing room is the woman's province ; she must be able and ready to switch her mind off and on at any moment, to anyone's concerns.
>
> Then, at the back of the house, there is a hole or den called a "study" – a place inviolate, guarded by immemorial taboos. There man thinks, and learns, and knows. I am aware that sometimes the study contains more pipes, fishing-rods, foxes' brushes, and golf-clubs, than books or scientific apparatus. Still, it is called the "study" or the "library", and the wife does not sit there. There are rarely two chairs – there is always one – possibly for a human being to sit on. Well, that study stands for man's insularity ; he wants to be by himself. The house where you don't and mustn't sit in the study is to me no home. But then I have long known that I am no "true woman". One of the most ominous signs of the times is that woman is beginning to demand a study.

Harrison was a sharp observer of modern life, as of ancient. And I think her prequel to the "room of one's own" argument rather "out-Woolfs" Woolf.

Jane Ellen Harrison (1850–1928), linguist and lecturer in classical archeology at Newnham college (1899–1922), painted by A.-E. John, c. 1874–1879.

# Echoes

May 28, 1938 THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS 973

a room of one's own . . .

Here's a group to evoke and satisfy the innate longing for a place to call your own. The choice wisely falls on mahogany reproductions, enlivened with a dash of velvet and chintz, and the eagle mirror that relieves the wall.

| | |
|---|---|
| Breakfront bookcase, with 3 cupboards and 3 drawers | £48.10.0 |
| Writing desk with 9 drawers, leather top and shaped concave corners | £32.10.0 |
| Circular bookstable with drawers in frieze | £12.15.0 |
| Writing chair, velvet covered seat | £6.7.6 |
| Flower stand | £5.15.0 |
| Eagle and ball gilt convex mirror | £2.9.6 |
| Urnstand | £5.10.0 |
| Easy chair covered in chintz; 2 feet 5 inches wide, seat 1 foot 8 inches deep | £10.17.6 |

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Advertisement for interior design items published in *The Illustrated London News*, 28 May 1938.


Poster for a film by Israeli director Matan Mair, 2023.


Front cover of *The Times Literary Supplement*, May 2026.


# A Podcast of One's Own with Julia Gillard

Julia Gillard, the only woman to have served as Prime Minister of Australia sits down for insightful, moving and thought-provoking conversations with some of the most interesting people from around the world working to advance gender equality – whether that's by actively dismantling gender-based barriers, or by being inspirational trailblazers in their field. We'll bring you stories from the worlds of business, entertainment, media, sport and many more, shining a light on people doing amazing things that you might not have heard about, and learning more about those we already know and love.

Julia presents a podcast in her role as Founder and Chair of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership (GIWL). GIWL is a world-leading research institute working to advance gender equality within workplaces, communities and societies. The podcast is produced by the GIWL team at the Australian National University, Canberra, with support from our sister institute at King's College London. Earnings from the podcast go back into the Institute, supporting the work we do to advance gender equality in Australia and the Asia Pacific, and beyond.

## Julia's Book Club - A Room of One's Own

Season 8, Ep. 5 • Wednesday, May 20, 2026

In this very special episode of Julia's Book Club, Julia Gillard and Sarah Holland-Batt discuss the work that inspired the name of this podcast.

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* was originally delivered as two lectures at Girton College, Cambridge almost a hundred years ago.

**Despite the passage of time many of the themes and ideas Woolf explores in this short but weighty book remain startlingly relevant today.**

Julia and Sarah discuss what has and hasn't changed for women since the 1920s, the evolution of women's writing and Virginia Woolf herself.

>>> LISTEN : https://shows.acast.com/a-podcast-of-ones-own/episodes/julias-book-club-a-room-of-ones-own

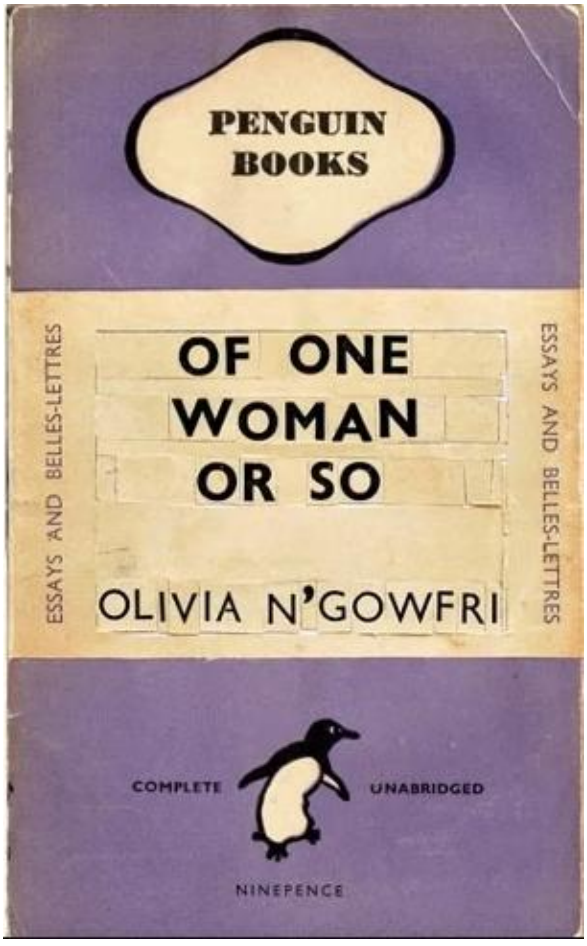
# KABE WILSON, OF ONE WOMAN OR SO

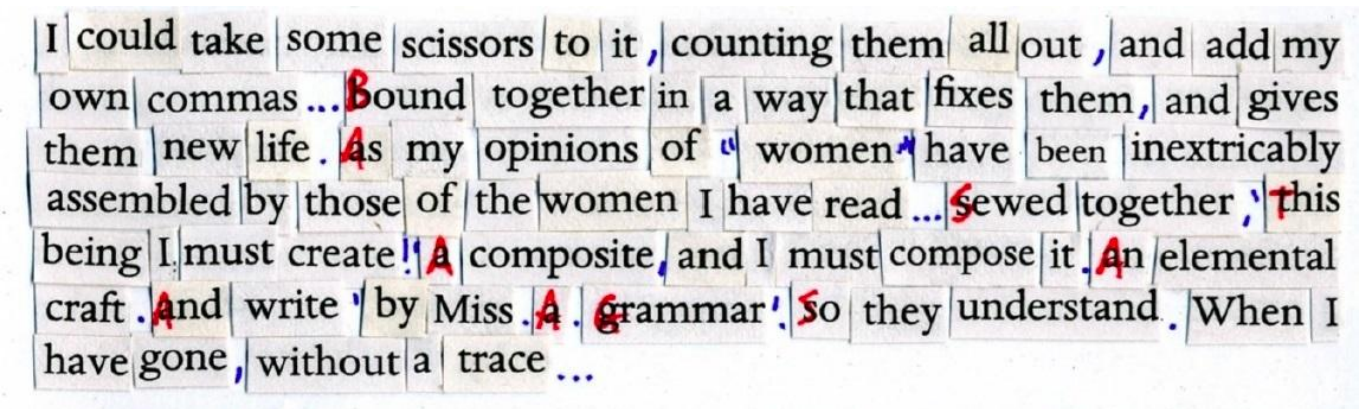
Our 2019 Woolf summer course ended with a most interesting talk by artist Kabe Wilson, who undertook a huge project over several years, rewriting Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Kabe offers both a tribute to, and a critique of, this classic work.

Woolf's book contains 37,971 words, every one of which is re-used by Kabe to create a new story entitled *Of One Woman or So* by Olivia N'Gowfri (anagrams of the original title and author's name). The story is set in contemporary Cambridge. A young African woman student challenges her course of study, and offers some radical rethinking of what she wants from an education, what an institution can offer; what needs to be overturned, and what preserved. How should change come about; how can we create the new while keeping the good parts of the old? These are complex questions which much exercised Woolf in the 1920s and 1930s, and continue to challenge students today.

Kabe Wilson explores some of the changing views on class, gender, nation, and race in the 90 years since *A Room of One's Own* was written, and he also celebrates the power of Woolf's brilliant, playful, imperfect work.

Once he had worked out the story, Kabe then cut up two printed copies of Woolf's book and pasted every word in its new place, set in pages which are spread neatly across a vast sheet, 4 feet wide x 13 feet long. The sheer shape and size of this 'exploded' book are part of the fascination of this remarkable project. Grateful thanks to Kabe for sharing this work with us. He has spoken at several of our summer courses, and each time his work reveals further layers of meaning.




Source : https://www.literaturecambridge.co.uk/news/kabe-2019.

matters that appear to show a lack of proper respect for English history were the most vocal, due in part, one might suppose, to how foreign the name of the suspect sounded. In light of this, they were even able to disregard class enmity (a big ask for some, considering the intense criticism that had been aimed at the Oxbridge educated suits of Parliament and the banks for so many months). No longer 'old snobs' the deans and dons were written of with sympathy; these were the wounded soldiers of a war declared on our great history. Their remarks were therefore repeated with a reverence that seemed to Miss the ludicrous affectation (and, often, gown) on show. One professor, constantly quoted afterwards gave the grave assertion that 'On this day, thousands of books have lost their lives. On this day, knowledge has died.'

Though prouder Fellows of five colleges are still claiming that they were the most affected people generally agree that the University Library came off worst. This, as you will see, is because it was thought to be the most at fault, and to the one who passed judgement upon it 'the sentence could only be death.' The massive structure, itself in a year of celebration, suffered such serious damage in some parts that they had to immediately close almost a quarter of its open access shelves. These remain closed even Now. I am told they do not expect them to be opened again, with the millions of pages restored, for at least four years, in time, they hope, for the shelves to turn the modest old age of eighty. I later discovered that the great Germaine herself had been writing a piece on her 'favourite library' for The Guardian at the time, referring to it as 'heaven on earth'. It must be assumed that her notes went the same way as those pitiable books that hellish night when she saw the brilliant crimson sky and realized the observation was no longer relevant. Her brick heaven was about to go from being the subject of free comments that very few would read to the front page of every paper in Europe and many beyond.

As yet noone has been caught in relation to what happened. This is not through lack of effort or information, those in charge of the case know precisely who they are looking for as only one student was caught on camera running away the moment that magnificent building became, in the words of one reporter, 'the longest candle on six very costly cakes'. Everything found suggests she was acting alone, though they were unable to discern a motive. No sign was left as to whereshe was going and there was nothing to suggest a plan for other such activities (though all Oxbridge colleges were told to be aware). The whole business has not been easy to investigate, and considering the significance of what happened it is not surprising that


>>> WATCH : https://www.speech.almeida.co.uk/virginia-woolf.


## 10 Smiths singles that didn't appear on a Smiths album

18 March 2026, 18:09

**Morrissey and Marr were the masters of the one-off single. While a lot of their best 45s would appear on the accompanying LPs, some amazing tracks were standalone singles...**

**1. Shakespeare's Sister (March 1985)**

At just two minutes and nine seconds long, this single struggled to get radio airplay due to its brevity, but that didn't stop it getting to Number 26 in the UK charts. The title is taken from a feminist essay by writer Virginia Woolf and the lyric also tips its hat to Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody: "No, mama let me go!"


Source : radioX.co.uk, 18th March 2026.

# The four Maries

**Scottish folk ballad**

## • Scottish version

Yestreen the Queen had four Maries, the nicht she'll hae but three
There was Mary Seaton, and Mary Beaton and Mary Carmichael and me.

Word's gone through the kitchen, and word's gone through the ha,
That Mary Hamilton has a wean by the highest Stuart of aa.

As she gae'd up the Canongate, a loud loud laugh gied she,
But as she gaed doon the Canongate the saut tear blinded her ee.

'Oh, oftimes hae I dressed my Queen, and pit gold in her hair,
But noo I've gotten for my reward the gallows to be my share.

Little did my mither think the day she cradled me,
The lands I was tae travel in, the death I was tae dee.'

**Source :** https://www.scotslanguage.com/articles/node/id/436.

## • American version

Word is to the kitchen gone and word is to the hall
And word is up to Madam the Queen and that's the worst of all
That Mary Hamilton's born a babe
To the highest Stuart of all

"Oh, rise, arise, Mary Hamilton
Arise and tell to me
What thou hast done with thy wee babe?
I saw and heard weep by thee"

"I put him in a tiny boat
And cast him out to sea
That he might sink or he might swim
But he'd never come back to me"

"Oh, rise, arise, Mary Hamilton
Arise and come with me
There is a wedding in Glasgow town
This night we'll go and see"

She put not on her robes of black
Nor her robes of brown
But she put on her robes of white
To ride into Glasgow town

As she rode into Glasgow town
The city for to see
The bailiff's wife and the provost's wife
Cried, "Alack and alas for thee"

"Ah, you need not weep for me", she cried
"You need not weep for me
For had I not slain my own wee babe
This death I would not dee"

"Oh, little did my mother think
When first she cradled me
The lands I was to travel in
And the death I was to dee"

"Last night I washed the Queen's feet
And put the gold in her hair
And the only reward I find for this
The gallows to be my share"

"Cast off, cast off my gown", she cried
"But let my petticoat be
And tie a napkin 'round my face
The gallows I would not see"

Then by 'em come the king himself
Looked up with a pitiful eye
"Come down, come down, Mary Hamilton
Tonight you'll dine with me"

"Oh, hold your tongue my sovereign liege
And let your folly be
For if you'd a mind to save my life
You'd never have shamed me here"

Last night there were four Marys
Tonight there'll be but three
It was Mary Beaton and Mary Seton
And Mary Carmichael and me

## Version sung by American folk singer Joan Baez at the BBC Television Theatre, London, 5th June 1965.

# BAD LIEUTENANTES

J'écris de chez les moches, pour les moches, les vieilles, les camionneuses, les frigides, les mal baisées, les imbaisables, les hystériques, les tarées, toutes les exclues du grand marché à la bonne meuf. Et je commence par là pour que les choses soient claires : je ne m'excuse de rien, je ne viens pas me plaindre. Je n'échangerais ma place contre aucune autre, parce qu'être Virginie Despentes me semble être une affaire plus intéressante à mener que n'importe quelle autre affaire.

[...]

Parce que l'idéal de la femme blanche, séduisante mais pas pute, bien mariée mais pas effacée, travaillant mais sans trop réussir, pour ne pas écraser son homme, mince mais pas névrosée par la nourriture, restant indéfiniment jeune sans se faire défigurer par les chirurgiens de l'esthétique, maman épanouie mais pas accaparée par les couches et les devoirs d'école, bonne maîtresse de maison mais pas bonniche traditionnelle, cultivée mais moins qu'un homme, cette femme blanche heureuse qu'on nous brandit tout le temps sous le nez, celle à laquelle on devrait faire l'effort de ressembler, à part qu'elle a l'air de beaucoup s'emmerder pour pas grand-chose, de toutes façons je ne l'ai jamais croisée, nulle part. Je crois bien qu'elle n'existe pas.

> « Vraiment, si la femme n'avait d'existence que dans les oeuvres littéraires masculines, on l'imaginerait comme une créature de la plus haute importance, diverse, héroïque et médiocre, magnifique et vile, infiniment belle et hideuse à l'extrême, avec autant de grandeur qu'un homme, davantage même, de l'avis de quelques-uns. Mais il s'agit là de la femme à travers la fiction. En réalité, comme l'a indiqué le Professeur Trevelyan, la femme était enfermée, battue et traînée dans sa chambre. »
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> Virginia Woolf, *Une chambre à soi*.

Virginie DESPENTES (1969–), *King Kong théorie*, 2006.