

Virginia Woolf  
novelist, critic, essayist (1882-1941)

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), was a British novelist as well as a distinguished feminist essayist, critic, and a central figure of the Bloomsbury group.

Virginia Woolf was born on January 25, 1882 in London, as the daughter of Julia Jackson Duckworth, a member of the Duckworth publishing family, and Leslie Stephen, a literary critic and the founder of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Virginia was educated at home by her father and grew up at the family home at Hyde Park Gate. Her mother died when she was in her early teens. Stella Duckworth, her half sister, took her mother's place, but died two years later. Leslie Stephen, her father, suffered a slow death from cancer. When her brother Toby died in 1906, she had a prolonged mental breakdown, the first of many that would mark her life. Following the death of her father in 1904, Virginia moved with her sister Vanessa and two brothers to the house in Bloomsbury,

which would become central to activities of the Bloomsbury group.

Virginia began to write for the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1905. In 1912 she married the political theorist Leonard Woolf and published her first book, *The Voyage Out* in 1915. In 1919 appeared *Night And Day*, a realistic novel set in London, contrasting the lives of two friends, Katherine and Mary. *Jacob's Room* (1922) was based upon the life and death of her brother Toby.

With *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931), Virginia established herself as one of the leading writers of modernism. In these works Virginia developed innovative literary techniques in order to reveal women's experience and find an alternative to the male-dominated views of reality. *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) is formed of a giant web of thoughts of several groups of people during the course of a single day.

During the inter-war period Virginia was at the center of literary society. The Bloomsbury group was initially based at the Gordon Square residence of Virginia and her sister Vanessa.

Virginia Woolf's concern with feminist thematics are dominant in *A Room Of One's Own* (1929), which deals with the obstacles and prejudices that have hindered women writers; the last chapter explores the possibility of an androgynous mind. *Three Guineas* (1938) examines the necessity for women to make a claim for their own history and literature. *Orlando* (1928), a fantasy novel, traces the career of the androgynous protagonist from a masculine identity within the Elizabethan court to a feminine identity in 1928. Virginia was also prolific as an essayist, publishing some 500 essays in periodicals and collections, beginning in 1905.

After her final attack of mental illness Virginia loaded her pockets with stones and drowned herself in the River Ouse near her Sussex home on March 28, 1941.

Some thoughts from Virginia Woolf:

“Once conform, once do what other people do because they do it, and a lethargy steals over all the finer nerves and faculties of the soul.”

- Virginia Woolf, “Montaigne,” *The Common Reader*, 1<sup>st</sup> series (1925)

“It is in our idleness, in our dreams, that the submerged truth sometimes comes to the top.”

- Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929)

“Intimacy is a difficult art.”

- Virginia Woolf, “Geraldine and Jane,” *The Common Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series (1932)

“All extremes are dangerous.”

- Virginia Woolf, “Montaigne,” *The Common Reader*, 1<sup>st</sup> series (1925)

“I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman.”

- Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929)

“A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.”

- Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929)

“The beauty of the world...has two edges, one of laughter, one of anguish, cutting the heart asunder.”

- Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929)

“On the outskirts of every agony sits some observer fellow who points.”

- Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (1931)

Some of Virginia Woolf’s works include:

*A Room of One’s Own*  
*Mrs. Dalloway*  
*Orlando*  
*Three Guineas*  
*To the Lighthouse*  
*Between the Acts*  
*Jacob’s Room*  
*The Waves*

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“If you do not tell the truth about yourself you cannot tell it about other people.”