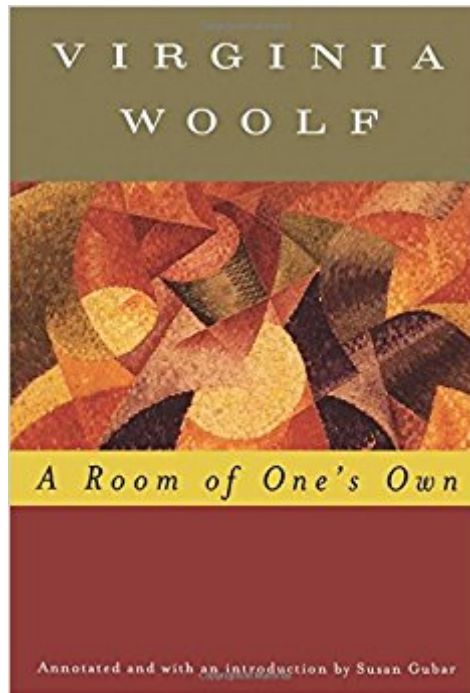


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A Room Of One's Own (Annotated)



Synopsis

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf imagines that Shakespeare had a sister: a sister equal to Shakespeare in talent, equal in genius, but whose legacy is radically different. This imaginary woman never writes a word and dies by her own hand, her genius unexpressed. But if only she had found the means to create, urges Woolf, she would have reached the same heights as her immortal sibling. In this classic essay, Virginia Woolf takes on the establishment, using her gift of language to dissect the world around her and give a voice to those who have none. Her message is simple: A woman must have a fixed income and a room of her own in order to have the freedom to create. Annotated and with an introduction by Susan Gubar

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Customer Reviews

VIRGINIA WOOLF (1882–1941) was one of the major literary figures of the twentieth century. An admired literary critic, she authored many essays, letters, journals, and short stories in addition to her groundbreaking novels.

CHAPTER ONE BUT, YOU MAY say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction—what has that got to do with a room of one's own? I will try to explain. When you asked me to speak about women and fiction I sat down on the banks of a river and began to wonder what the words meant. They might mean simply a few remarks about Fanny Burney; a few more about Jane Austen; a tribute to the Brontës and a sketch of Haworth Parsonage under snow; some witticisms if

possible about Miss Mitford; a respectful allusion to George Eliot; a reference to Mrs. Gaskell and one would have done. But at second sight the words seemed not so simple. The title women and fiction might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, women and what they are like; or it might mean women and the fiction that they write; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them; or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together and you want me to consider them in that light. But when I began to consider the subject in this last way, which seemed the most interesting, I soon saw that it had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to come to a conclusion. I should never be able to fulfil what is, I understand, the first duty of a lecturer-to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantel-piece for ever. All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point-a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved. I have shirked the duty of coming to a conclusion upon these two questions-women and fiction remain, so far as I am concerned, unsolved problems. But in order to make some amends I am going to do what I can to show you how I arrived at this opinion about the room and the money. I am going to develop in your presence as fully and freely as I can the train of thought which led me to think this. Perhaps if I lay bare the ideas, the prejudices, that lie behind this statement you will find that they have some bearing upon women and some upon fiction. At any rate, when a subject is highly controversial-and any question about sex is that-one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker. Fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact. Therefore I propose, making use of all the liberties and licences of a novelist, to tell you the story of the two days that preceded my coming here-how, bowed down by the weight of the subject which you have laid upon my shoulders, I pondered it, and made it work in and out of my daily life. I need not say that what I am about to describe has no existence; Oxbridge is an invention; so is Fernham; "I" is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being. Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping. If not, you will of course throw the whole of it into the wastepaper basket and forget all about it. Here then was I (call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please-it is not a matter of any importance) sitting on the banks of a river a week or two ago in fine October weather, lost in thought. That collar I have spoken of, women and fiction, the need of coming to some conclusion on a subject that raises all

sorts of prejudices and passions, bowed my head to the ground. To the right and left bushes of some sort, golden and crimson, glowed with the colour, even it seemed burnt with the heat, of fire. On the further bank the willows wept in perpetual lamentation, their hair about their shoulders. The river reflected whatever it chose of sky and bridge and burning tree, and when the undergraduate had oared his boat through the reflections they closed again, completely, as if he had never been. There one might have sat the clock round lost in thought. Thought-to call it by a prouder name than it deserved-had let its line down into the stream. It swayed, minute after minute, hither and thither among the reflections and the weeds, letting the water lift it and sink it, until-you know the little tug-the sudden conglomeration of an idea at the end of one's line: and then the cautious hauling of it in, and the careful laying of it out? Alas, laid on the grass how small, how insignificant this thought of mine looked; the sort of fish that a good fisherman puts back into the water so that it may grow fatter and be one day worth cooking and eating. I will not trouble you with that thought now, though if you look carefully you may find it for yourselves in the course of what I am going to say. But however small it was, it had, nevertheless, the mysterious property of its kind-put back into the mind, it became at once very exciting, and important; and as it darted and sank, and flashed hither and thither, set up such a wash and tumult of ideas that it was impossible to sit still. It was thus that I found myself walking with extreme rapidity across a grass plot. Instantly a man's figure rose to intercept me. Nor did I at first understand that the gesticulations of a curious-looking object, in a cut-away coat and evening shirt, were aimed at me. His face expressed horror and indignation. Instinct rather than reason came to my help; he was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me. Such thoughts were the work of a moment. As I regained the path the arms of the Beadle sank, his face assumed its usual repose, and though turf is better walking than gravel, no very great harm was done. The only charge I could bring against the Fellows and Scholars of whatever the college might happen to be was that in protection of their turf, which has been rolled for 300 years in succession, they had sent my little fish into hiding. What idea it had been that had sent me so audaciously trespassing I could not now remember. The spirit of peace descended like a cloud from heaven, for if the spirit of peace dwells anywhere, it is in the courts and quadrangles of Oxbridge on a fine October morning. Strolling through those colleges past those ancient halls the roughness of the present seemed smoothed away; the body seemed contained in a miraculous glass cabinet through which no sound could penetrate, and the mind, freed from any contact with facts (unless one trespassed on the turf again), was at liberty to settle down upon whatever meditation was in harmony with the moment. As chance would have it, some stray memory of some old essay about

revisiting Oxbridge in the long vacation brought Charles Lamb to mind-Saint Charles, said Thackeray, putting a letter of Lamb's to his forehead. Indeed, among all the dead (I give you my thoughts as they came to me), Lamb is one of the most congenial; one to whom one would have liked to say, Tell me then how you wrote your essays? For his essays are superior even to Max Beerbohm's, I thought, with all their perfection, because of that wild flash of imagination, that lightning crack of genius in the middle of them which leaves them flawed and imperfect, but starred with poetry. Lamb then came to Oxbridge perhaps a hundred years ago. Certainly he wrote an essay-the name escapes me- about the manuscript of one of Milton's poems which he saw here. It was Lycidas perhaps, and Lamb wrote how it shocked him to think it possible that any word in Lycidas could have been different from what it is. To think of Milton changing the words in that poem seemed to him a sort of sacrilege. This led me to remember what I could of Lycidas and to amuse myself with guessing which word it could have been that Milton had altered, and why. It then occurred to me that the very manuscript itself which Lamb had looked at was only a few hundred yards away, so that one could follow Lamb's footsteps across the quadrangle to that famous library where the treasure is kept. Moreover, I recollected, as I put this plan into execution, it is in this famous library that the manuscript of Thackeray's Esmond is also preserved. The critics often say that Esmond is Thackeray's most perfect novel. But the affectation of the style, with its imitation of the eighteenth century, hampers one, so far as I can remember; unless indeed the eighteenth-century style was natural to Thackeray-a fact that one might prove by looking at the manuscript and seeing whether the alterations were for the benefit of the style or of the sense. But then one would have to decide what is style and what is meaning, a question which-but here I was actually at the door which leads into the library itself. I must have opened it, for instantly there issued, like a guardian angel barring the way with a flutter of black gown instead of white wings, a deprecating, silvery, kindly gentleman, who regretted in a low voice as he waved me back that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction. Copyright 1929 by Harcourt, Inc. Copyright renewed 1957 by Leonard Woolf Annotated Edition copyright © 2005 by Harcourt, Inc. Introduction copyright © 2005 by Susan Gubar All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission to make copies of any part of the work should be mailed to the following address: Permissions Department, Harcourt, Inc., 6277 Sea Harbor Drive, Orlando, Florida 32887-6777.

This book is not only an enjoyable and fairly quick read, but it is also an important milestone in not only feminist literature, but literature as a whole. Woolf's amusing and sharp assessments of the way men view women to be inferior, particularly in skill and intelligence, is (at least somewhat) relevant even today. She rightfully stresses the importance of every woman having both a room and money of her own. Without those two things, she can not be truly independent. A must for any lover of feminism or for anyone with a taste for short, smart books.

An essay written in the late 1920s about women's writing. Why wasn't Shakespeare a woman? Why did Jane Austen hide her manuscripts from guests? What makes good writing? What makes women's writing? Are a woman's sentences different from a man's sentences? This book is witty, from the first moment when the author tries to cross the lawn of an Oxbridge college and is stopped by a beadle because only the fellows and scholars (all male) are allowed here. Later she notes wryly that the few women's colleges have no such beadle, and none of the endowments of the men's colleges. What a woman needs in order to write is a room of one's own and five hundred pounds a year. When she wrote, women had only had the vote in Britain for less than a decade, and married women had only been allowed to own their own property for a bare forty years. Women's education is no longer the issue it was when the book was written and it is much easier today for a woman to be independent. Still, *A Room of One's Own* remains an entertaining read and the issues it raises are by no means resolved.

Extremely well written. Reflections of a woman writer about the limitations of women to write: too many elements against which she has to fight, maybe without being conscious in the first place that she lives in a world of male dominance and her role is very limited. Certainly Simone de Beauvoir read this book.

I lost my original copy of this and wanted a replacement. The print of this one, though, is so tiny it makes it VERY difficult to read. I love this essay, though, so that alone earned 4 stars out of what should have been 5.

One of the best books I read in 2016. She should be one of the most humorous women in Britain at her time. It was supposed to be a speech. Putting a lot of discursive aside, her speech started with *Women and Fiction* and what she had experienced and what had inspired her about the topic she supposedly gave speech to Newham Girls College. Here main theme, "numerous generations of

unsung unnoticed unjust women paved the way for what women at her era could attain was remarkable, and the girls should fight and stand on their corpses' and souls' behalf", was so strong and so well versed.

Every woman should read this book, a lot of change from the time she wrote it, but still we live in a world dominated by men ..sometimes is difficult to read all the opinions and writing of men at her time and on history but it helps to realize that at least here in America and other countries women are helping each other to reach equality .

A stunning book - Woolf's logic is so solid and so consistent - she puts forward one excellent argument after another to explain the lopsided representation of female authors (and, by extension, all artists) in history. Crystal clear.

A classic...the mind of Virginia Woolf sees her world and its attitude toward women for the farce that it was. Her observations and reactions written in clever, often tongue in cheek, and deeply pensive ways give us thought for any time.

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