



Feminism and Fantasy by Virginia Woolf: *A Room of One's Own* and *Orlando*

Start date Friday 22 October 2021 **End date** Sunday 24 October 2021

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge
CB23 8AQ

Tutor Dr Claire Nicholson **Course code** 2122NRX065

Director of ISP and LL Sarah Ormrod

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Tutor biography

Dr Claire Nicholson is a Course Director for Cambridge University ICE and also lectures for Literature Cambridge. She was a lecturer at Anglia Ruskin University where she specialised in Modernist literature and women's history, with a particular interest in Virginia Woolf. She is Chair of the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain and has contributed many articles on Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group to publications in the UK and the USA. She is co-author of *The Women Aesthetes* volume 1 and *The Voyage Out: Centenary Perspectives* and her doctoral thesis *In Woolf's Clothing* is currently being prepared for publication.

Course programme

Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00	Dinner
20:30 – 22:00	Context: Virginia Woolf in the 1920s
22:00	Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

Saturday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	<i>Orlando</i>: Woolf and Biography
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Vita Sackville West as Orlando
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free time
16:00	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	<i>Orlando</i> as a feminist text? Introduction to <i>A Room of One's Own</i>
18:00 – 18:30	Free time
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	Cambridge and <i>A Room of One's Own</i>
21:30	Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

Sunday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Shakespeare's Sister. Is she here yet?
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Conclusions: Feminism and Fantasy in Woolf's writing
12:45	Lunch

The course will disperse after lunch

Course syllabus

Aims:

The course will introduce students to:

- 1) The two main texts, *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own*, and the major themes raised within them.
- 2) The social, historical and political context of these texts and their significance within Woolf's fiction and non-fiction writing.

Content:

Virginia Woolf's early experiments with Modernist writing came to full fruition in the 1920s with the publication of her acclaimed novels *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). At the same time she developed her feminist perspectives which found expression in two lectures given to women undergraduates at Cambridge in the autumn of 1928, later to be expanded and published as the celebrated feminist polemic *A Room of One's Own* the following year. In her personal life the 1920s saw Woolf experience a lesbian love affair with another writer, Vita Sackville West, though both women remained happily married to their respective spouses. As the affair came to its end Woolf wrote *Orlando*, a historical fantasy biography of Vita, addressing themes of gender, sexuality, history and the sociology of women. Woolf described the novel as her "writer's holiday" and it has often been seen as what today would be termed 'magic realism'. But an examination of these two texts, one an extended essay and the other a flight of fictional fancy, reveals a common thread of authentic feminist principles and a questioning of society's norms in the first half of the twentieth century.

Presentation of the course:

The course will involve illustrated lectures, group/paired discussion and full debate about issues arising in the two literary texts.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

- 1) Recognise and discuss the main themes within *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own*.
- 2) Discuss with insight the context of these two texts.
- 3) Appreciate the position of the two chosen texts within the full course of Woolf's writing life.

Reading and resources list

Listed below are texts which are recommended, but not essential, should you wish to supplement your learning on the course. Essential reading are the two set texts which appear at the start of the list.

Virginia Woolf *Orlando* Oxford World Classics 1998 (ed. Rachel Bowlby)

Virginia Woolf *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* Oxford World Classics 1998 (ed. Morag Shiach)

Hermione Lee *Virginia Woolf* London: Vintage, 1997
A definitive biography.

Alexandra Harris *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* Thames & Hudson, 2011
A more concise, very accessible biography.

Jane Goldman *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf* Cambridge University Press, 2006
An excellent comprehensive overview of Woolf's life and writing.

Susan Sellers (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* Cambridge University Press, 2010
A comprehensive collection of essays addressing a variety of themes in Woolf's work.

Julia Briggs *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* London: Allen Lane, 2005
Working through Woolf's main texts in chronological order, Briggs examines Woolf's life at the time she wrote each text and assesses its reception.

Further recommendations for follow-up reading will be given during the course.

Website addresses:

www.virginiawoolfsociety.org.uk

<https://v-woolf-society.com>