

Virginia Woolf

Instructor: Sean Hughes, sean.chris.hughes@gmail.com

Course Meets on Zoom

6:00-7:30pm EST, March 13, March 27, April 10, April 24

Virginia Woolf once asserted that “on or about December 1910 human character changed.” It’s a joke, but it’s a serious joke. With ironic overstatement, Woolf is identifying one of her central preoccupations. Surely there *was* something different about being a person in 1924 as opposed to 1896. But if we are creatures of our times, then can we hope to sort out the subtle forces that influence our character? And how can a writer represent those fleeting moments when we were impressionable—before we settled into whoever we are now?

In this course, we’ll explore Woolf’s wisdom about human character and history while enjoying her glorious prose. We’ll read *A Room of One’s Own*, a selection of her shorter writings, and *To the Lighthouse*, one of the greatest novels of the twentieth century.

Each session will include some relevant background, but our discussions will be guided by the interests of our participants. Likely topics will include memory, gender, literary history, food, psychology, power, sexuality, family, artistic ambition, and loss.

Discussion and Reading Schedule:

March 13	<i>A Room of One’s Own</i>
March 27	“Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” “Kew Gardens,” “On Being Ill,” “The Mark on the Wall”
April 10	<i>To the Lighthouse</i> , “Part I: The Window”
April 24	<i>To the Lighthouse</i> , “Part II: Time Passes,” “Part III: The Lighthouse”

Optional Supplemental Readings:

Elizabeth Abel, “(En)gendering History,” *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* (U of Chicago P, 1992), 1-29.

Erich Auerbach, “The Brown Stocking,” *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* [1946], trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton UP, 2003), 525-53.

Rachel Bowlby, “‘We’re Getting There’: Woolf, Trains, and the Destinations of Feminist Criticism” and “The Trained Mind,” *Feminist Destinations and Further Readings on Virginia Woolf* (Blackwell, 1988) 1-48.

Melba Cuddy-Keane, “Democratic highbrow,” *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge UP, 2009), 13-58.

Maria Di Battista, “*To the Lighthouse*: Virginia Woolf’s Winter’s Tale,” *Virginia Woolf’s Major Novels: The Fables of Anon* (Yale UP, 1980), 64-110.

Kate Flint, "Virginia Woolf and the General Strike," *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 4, (October 1, 1986), 319–34.

Chirstine Froula, "Civilization and 'my civilisation,'" *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-garde: War, Civilization, Modernity* (Columbia UP, 2007), 1-32.

An episode that reveals some formative rifts in the reception history of Virginia Woolf

Quentin Bell, "A 'Radiant' Friendship," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (June, 1984), 557-66.

Jane Marcus, "Quentin's Bogey," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (March, 1985), 486-97.

Quentin Bell, "Reply to Jane Marcus" *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (March, 1985), 498-501.

For those interested in a biography

Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (Vintage, 1996).

Sean Hughes is a Philly-based writer and editor who has taught at Bryn Mawr College and Rutgers University – New Brunswick, where he completed a PhD in English Literature in 2020. His research interests include nineteenth-century literature, the relationship between literature and philosophy, historicism, and poetics. His article "George Eliot, Typology, and the Moral Psychology of Historicism" was published in the Spring 2022 issue of *English Literary History*.