



# Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life

*By Julia Briggs*

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In this fresh, absorbing book, Julia Briggs puts the writing back at the center of Woolf's life, reads that life through her work, and mines the novels themselves to create a compelling new form of biography. Analyzing Woolf's own commentary on the creative process through her letters, diaries, and essays, Julia Briggs has produced a book that is a convincing, moving portrait of an artist, as well as a profound meditation on the nature of creativity.

Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life-a brilliant new insight into a literary genius.

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## Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life By Julia Briggs Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. [Signature]Reviewed by *Daphne Merkin*The famous question, surely, needs amending by now: who isn't afraid of Virginia Woolf—of writing about her, at least? Ever since this most singularly gifted of women, whose genius is as protean as it is profound, committed suicide at the age of 58 in 1941 at the height of her creative powers, her life and work has engendered an unrelenting flow of books. These have included massively researched tomes and slender impressionistic volumes on every aspect of Woolf, from her pedigreed background and difficult Victorian childhood to her unconventional marriage to Leonard, the "penniless Jew," her Sapphic inclinations and the modernist Bloomsbury circle in which she moved. Certain subsets of questions—what was the particular nature of her mental illness? Did she or did she not suffer sexual abuse as an adolescent at the hands of her two half-brothers?—have inspired whole bookshelves of answers. In the more than half-century since Woolf put a large stone in her pocket late one March morning and walked into the Ouse River near her house in Sussex, the documentation and speculation have not ceased. Enough has been said, or so one would think. I might add, with all due lack of humility, that I am in a particularly good position to think thusly, since it would not be stretching things too far to say that I have read the vast majority of these books, including Hermione Lee's magisterial biography, which appeared in 1997. So it is the more surprising to find Julia Briggs's new intellectual biography of Woolf not only a mesmerizing read but one that adds fresh dabs of paint to what I had otherwise assumed to be a finished portrait. The emphasis on Woolf's "inner life"—on her ongoing creative process and on her response to the critical reception of her work—is especially suited to a writer who was in the rapt habit of watching herself think, keeping track of the quicksilver movements of her own mind like a fisherman on the lookout for the sudden tug on his pole, the flash of a fin. (Woolf was drawn to water imagery throughout her life as a metaphor for the process of intellection.) And Briggs has done an extraordinarily skillful job of interweaving Woolf's experience as a writer with her experience as a woman in the world, one who pondered the "life of frocks" and who had arguments with her cook. "How I interest myself!" Woolf wrote in a diary entry. And how she continues to interest us, not least because of the fascination she exerts on other talented readers and writers, like Julia Briggs. That this book is a must for Woolf fans goes without saying, but it is also a must for anyone interested in the nature of female consciousness at its most self-aware and the workings of artistic sensibility at their most illuminating. B&w photos. (Nov.)*Daphne Merkin is the author of Enchantment, a novel, and Dreaming of Hitler, a collection of essays. She writes a book column for Elle.*

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From [Booklist](#)

Yes, another Woolf biography, but a unique one given that Briggs concentrates on Woolf's paradigm-altering work, and on Woolf's fascination with the workings of the mind. Briggs tracks the creation of each book, beginning with Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*, published in 1915 when she was 33, and concluding with *Between the Acts* (1941). By lacing her supple, revelatory readings of each book with relevant, judiciously analyzed biographical information, Briggs creates a vital portrait of a perfectionist who endured "rewriting madness," a questing woman who relished life when she was free of the depression that stalked her, and a visionary determined to combat misogyny and invent a new type of novel that would "give the feeling of the vast tumult of life." Happily, the vastly gifted writer who takes shape on these pages is the very genius readers intuit when reading Woolf's work. Woolf believed that women writers could "make the connection between literature and life," and Briggs has done just that in her sterling interpretation. *Donna Seaman*

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## Review

"Briggs masterfully uses Virginia Woolf's own thoughts and words to gain entrance into the layered world of her life and work." (*Biloxi Sun Herald*)

"Briggs pulls together a high-wire act; biographer and subject seem to commingle on the page, the result being a joint effort of imaginative force." (Elaine Margolin *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.)

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