

“There was a small looking glass in the hall at Talland House. It had, I remember, a ledge with a brush on it. By standing on tiptoe I could see my face in the glass. When I was six or seven perhaps, I got into the habit of looking at my face in the glass. But I only did this if I was sure that I was alone. I was ashamed of it. A strong feeling of guilt seemed naturally attached to it. But why was this so?”

— Virginia Woolf in *A Sketch of the Past*

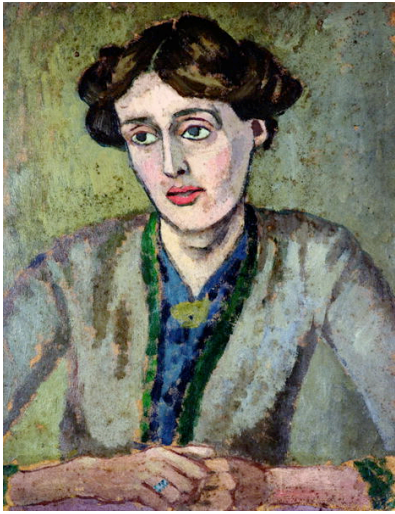
Virginia Stephen Woolf (1882–1941) was one of four children of Sir Leslie Stephen and Julia Duckworth Stephen. Leslie Stephen was a notable historian, author, critic and mountaineer. Julia Stephen was a renowned beauty, born in British India, and was a model for Pre-Raphaelite painters. They lived at 22 Hyde Park Gate, Kensington. The children were raised in an environment filled with the influences of Victorian literary society. Between the World Wars, Woolf was a central figure in the influential Bloomsbury Group of intellectuals. She married Leonard Woolf in 1912, and together they founded Hogarth Press. Her most famous works include *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) *Orlando* (1928), and *A Room of One's Own* (1929) with its famous dictum, "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." She experimented with stream of consciousness and the underlying psychological as well as emotional motives of characters. Woolf suffered from severe bouts of mental illness throughout her life, thought to have been the result of what is now termed bipolar disorder, and committed suicide by drowning in 1941 at the age of 59. She is now recognized as one of the foremost modernists of the twentieth century.



The Bloomsbury Group
painting by Vanessa Bell, 1943

Modernist writers proclaimed a new “subject matter” for literature, and they felt that their new way of looking at life required a new form. Writers of this period tended to pursue more experimental and highly individualistic forms of writing. The sense of a changing world was stimulated by radical new developments, such as:

- the emerging fields of psychology and sociology
- anthropological studies of comparative religion
- theories of electromagnetism and quantum physics
- a growing critique of British imperialism and the ideology of empire
- the escalation of warfare to a global level
- shifting power structures, particularly as women enter the work force
- the emergence of a new "city consciousness"
- new technologies such as radio and cinema



Portrait of Virginia Woolf
by Roger Fry, 1917

Some manifestations of the new approaches in modernist writing:

- **Character:** a disappearance of discrete well-demarkated characters; the representation of the self as diverse, contradictory, ambiguous, multiple.
- **Plot:** scepticism about linear plots with sudden climactic turning points and clear resolutions; the use instead of discontinuous fragments, “moment time,” a-chronological leaps in time, contrapuntal multiple plots, open unresolved endings.
- **Style:** “stream of consciousness” which traces non-linear thought processes; imagistic rather than logical connections.
- **Point of view:** a rejection of the single, authoritative, omniscient point of view in favor of a narrative focused through the consciousness of one character whose point of view is limited—or through several characters who establish multiple, relative points of view.

Moments of being are described in Woolf’s writing as those moments when we are fully alive, fully conscious. “Every day,” she writes, “includes more non-being than being. As a child then, my days, just as they do now, contained a large proportion of this cotton wool, this non-being . . . Then, for no reason that I know about, there was a sudden, violent shock . . . a revelation of some order; a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words.”

The Lady in the Looking Glass is adapted from seven short stories by Virginia Woolf, all published posthumously by Leonard Woolf in a collection of eighteen stories: *A Haunted House and Other Stories*. The selected stories include *Monday or Tuesday* (1921), *The Lady in the Looking Glass* (1929), *Slater’s Pins Have No Points* (1928), *The Mark on the Wall* (1921), *The New Dress* (1927), *The Duchess and the Jeweller* (1938), and *The Searchlight* (1944). These stories were chosen for their thematic resonances as well as for their ability to showcase the variety of Woolf’s writing, extending from her imagistic prose-poems to her more conventional character-driven short stories. Like the great poets before her, Woolf creates language that begs to be sounded by the human voice. We feel that these stories not only deserve a reading, but they also deserve a *hearing*. For this reason, we have included them on The Rogue stage.



Rogue cast members of
The Lady in the Looking Glass

“Now and then, there did come to her delicious moments, reading the other night in bed, for instance, or down by the sea on the sand in the sun, at Easter—let her recall it—a great tuft of pale sand-grass standing all twisted like a shock of spears against the sky, which was blue like a smooth china egg, so firm, so hard, and then the melody of the waves—“Hush, hush,” they said, and the children’s shouts paddling—yes, it was a divine moment, and there she lay, she felt, in the hand of the Goddess who was the world . . .”
—from *The New Dress*