

QUESTIONS FOR VIRGINIA WOOLF QUIZ, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929

[First of all, take 3 or 4 minutes, if you don't know her already, to scan the biography of VW somewhere.]

p. 3: [What is good teaching?] VW says: "The first duty of a lecturer [is] to hand you [the student] after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece forever." VW is being ironic here, and implicit is the idea that VW

- a. thinks lecture format (crystalized learning) is the ideal form of education
- b. suggests something else, seminar format (fluid learning) is the ideal form of education

p. 4: Money and a room constitute what? _____ what's another word for it beginning with "o"? And note the use of irony here. "All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point." Obviously this is *not* a minor point but the key to understanding why there have been so few female geniuses, and how it came to be that the game was rigged.

p. 4: It is possible that in place of "write fiction," VW might accept the more general notion of
a) "write history." or b) "be creative."

p. 4 bottom: [What is it that makes good learning (and what is one of the enablers of genius)?] as VW suggests here

- a. dutifully embracing the hoary wisdom of the master
- b. learning to effectively multitask
- c. looking critically and skeptically of at received opinion

Now move on to Chapter Three for the meat of the argument:

p. 43: Writing creative fiction (and presumably engaging in almost every creative active act of genius) requires what mundane things?

- a. a house (with a room of one's own), money, and good health
- b. convenient lines of transportation to a major, creative metropolis
- c. access to an Oxbridge library

pp. 43-45: What is the irony that VW sets forth here:

- a. Women played a vibrant role, judging from Trevelyan's *History of England*, in the formation of England, but appear only as a faint shadow in English literature
- b. Woman play a vibrant role in English literature, but only appear as a faint shadow in the formation of England, judging from Trevelyan's *History of England*
- c. Judging from Trevelyan's *History of England*, women appear only dimly in English history and literature

pp. 43-44: (Using your general knowledge): Before the 18th century all the great writers in English literature were

- a. Men
- b. Women
- c. Persons of both genders

pp. 43- 44: What cheery fate befell women in pre-modern Europe if they didn't conform to societal norms?

[Are there cultures in the world today in which women by custom are treated in a similar fashion?]

p. 45-47: In truth, judging from written histories--as opposed to plays, poems, and novels created by men--we know about the Elizabethan woman

- a. a great deal
- b. enough for her to appear prominently in literature
- c. almost nothing

p. 46-47: Again, what role did the woman play in English history, judging from the surviving written documents and the histories written upon them? Would "nothing but brains and character" suffice?

pp. 46-47: Although it may not be clear, the hypothetical students urged to get into the parish archives and unearth the material allowing a history of women to be written are

- a. Men at Newnham or Girton Colleges
 - b. Women at Newnham or Girton Colleges
- (At what university are these colleges located?)

p. 47: Women writers (in England) only begin to surface in literature during which century, if we are to begin with Jane Austen? _____

pp. 47 bottom: But here is an irony that VW doesn't seem to recognize (or at least comment on). What one hugely important female figure during the Elizabethan age do we in fact have a great deal of information about—indeed we name the age after her? _____

p. 48: Note the use of irony here again regarding the wisdom proffered by male authority figures. What the "the old bishop" says:

- a. Woman cannot have the genius of (write the plays) of Shakespeare.
- b. Cats cannot go to Heaven.
- c. Both of the above.

p. 48: Who is Judith and what purpose does she serve for VW?

p. 48: Was Shakespeare well educated by the standards of the day? Yes or No

p. 49: In what ways did Judith *not* enjoy the same opportunity as brother William.? Identify two

p. 50: Despite her "genius for fiction" what happened to her?

p. 50: VW is not only concerned with gender and genius, but also _____ (reference to Saxons and the Britons) and _____ (uneducated and servile). (This is ironic, because VW herself is reported to have treated her servants poorly.)

pp. 50-51 top: According to VW, many women may well have written poetry under what (abbreviated) name? _____

p. 51: The trust of this is not entirely clear, but it seems to suggest that in order to preserve her mental stability and not have works appear that were “twisted and deformed” the works by women would have gone _____.

a. unread b. unwritten c. unsigned

p. 52: toward top. To get a “level playing field” (be on equal footing in the commercial market), what did women do in the nineteenth century, women such as George Eliot to avoid the perception that “publicity in women is detestable.”

p. 52: Here VW makes a rather sexist remark about a seeming male proclivity to carve one’s name or initials on a tree, signpost or tombstone. What is she suggesting here?

a. men are more likely to carry knives

b. men are more likely to be egotists and self-promoters

c. men, although, very good at directions, still need markers to follow their way back home
Is the above true, do you think?

pp. 53 (bottom) – 54 (top): “To write a work of genius is almost always a feat of prodigious difficulty.” What gets in the way and makes this difficult?

a. the interruptions and distractions and hardships of life (including indifference)

b. there are so many competing domains in which to work that a choice is difficult

c. prior to modern times, rapid dissemination (fast and quick publication) of ideas was not possible

p. 54: Thus in addition to the lack of opportunity, as represented by a room in which to work and money to support herself, a women also had to overcome which of the following?

a. notoriety

b. anonymity

c. indifference

d. hostility

p. 56-57; “A very interesting and obscure masculine complex” [which VW elsewhere calls the “male magnifying glass” complex] which works its magic by

a. allowing him to look larger so that she appears relatively smaller

b. allowing her to look larger so that he appears relatively smaller

c. allowing both male and female to look the same size.

p. 57-58: True or False Woolf says that an enabler of genius (as possessed by Keats and Tennyson, for example) is the capacity to rise above what society (critics and naysayers) think of them and enter into a higher realm of sublime self-confidence.

a. true b. false

p. 58: [Interesting thought] Who is the one genius that VW holds up as someone who, unlike Keats and Tennyson, was able to stay above the fray of public criticism? And finally, what is it that might allow someone to stay above the fray of public criticism. That's for each of us to think about.