



VIRGINIA WOOLF & FEMINISM



FEMINISM



- Feminism coincides with the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes.
- 1st wave of Feminism: late 19th century/early 20th century
- 2nd wave of Feminism: 1960s – 1980s
- 3rd wave of Feminism: mid 1990s
- 4th wave of Feminism: 2010s



1st WAVE of FEMINISM

- Focus: women's legal rights → the RIGHT TO VOTE
- Key figure in the UK: Emmeline PANKHURST (1858-1928), leader of the Suffragettes.
- These women militants protested in very un-ladylike ways that challenged the cult of 'domesticity'.



1st WAVE of FEMINISM

□ Women's enfranchisement was speeded up by WWI

UK

1918: women over 30 gained the right to vote.

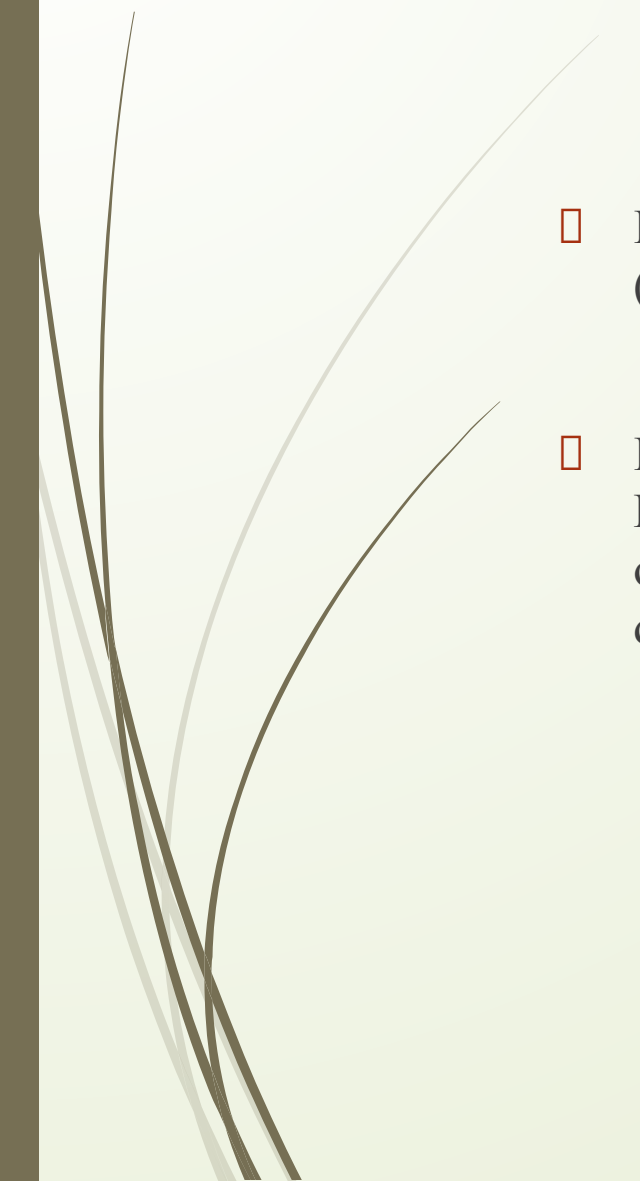
1928: suffrage to women over 21.

US

1919: The 19th amendment was added to the American constitution in 1919 and ratified in 1920.



2nd WAVE of FEMINISM

- It coincided with the women's lib movement and touched every area of experience (politics, work, family, sexuality).
 - It started with the protests against the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City in 1968. Feminists parodied what they held to be a degrading "cattle parade" that reduced women to objects of beauty dominated by a patriarchy that sought to keep them in the home or in dull, low-paid jobs.
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2nd WAVE of FEMINISM

- Many goals of the second wave were met:
 - greater access to education;
 - more women in positions of leadership in higher education, business and politics;
 - financial independence;
 - abortion rights;
 - more expression and acceptance of female sexuality;
 - organisations for the protection of women and public forums for the discussion of women's rights;
 - discourse at the popular level about women's rights.



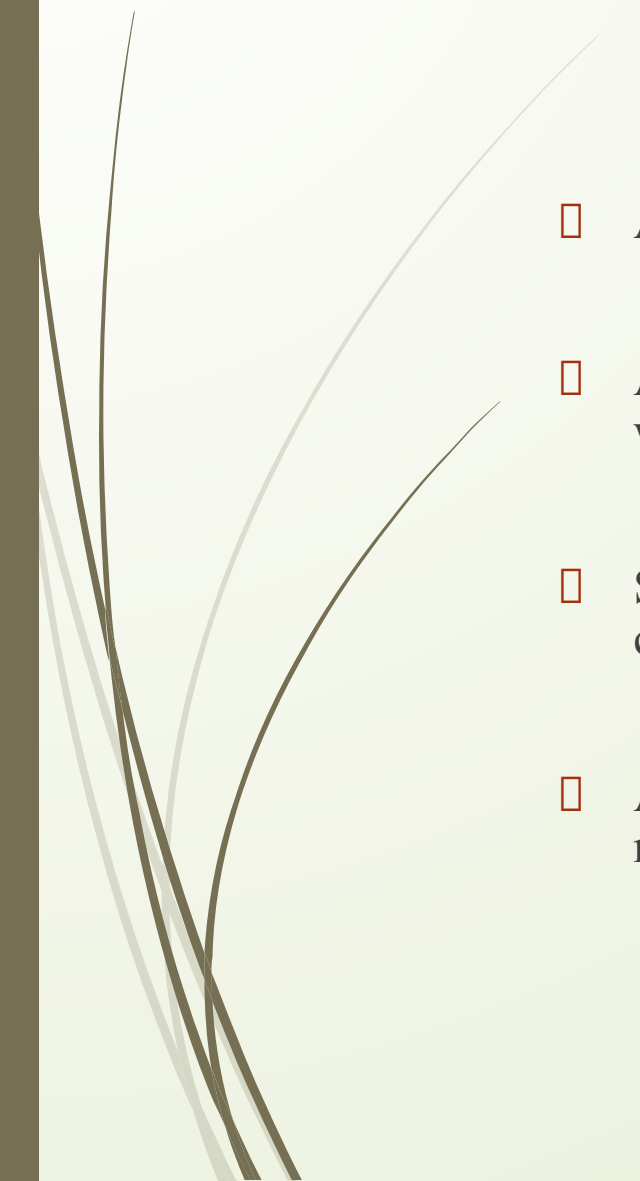
3rd WAVE of FEMINISM

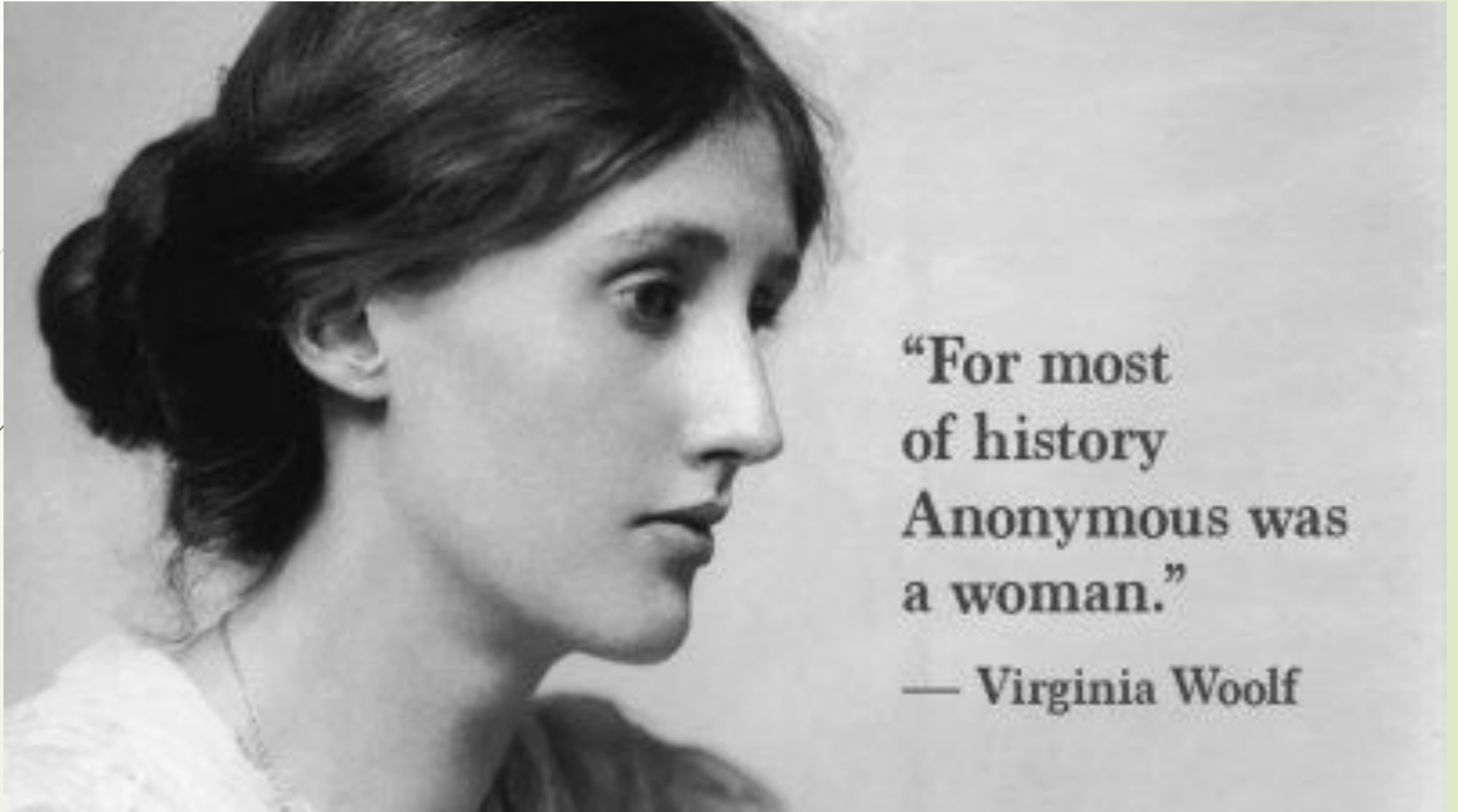


- It's hard to thematise the vision of the 3rd wave of feminism ← a characteristic of that wave is the rejection of standardized objectives.
- Most third-wavers also refused to identify as "feminists" and rejected the word that they found limiting and exclusionary.
- This 3rd phase of feminism tends to be global, multi-cultural, and it shuns simple answers or artificial categories of identity, gender, and sexuality.
- Many constructs were destabilized, including the notion of "universal womanhood".
- The feminists of the third wave stepped onto the stage as strong and empowered, eschewing victimization and defining feminine beauty for themselves as subjects, not as objects of a sexist patriarchy.
- Readoption by young feminists of the very lip-stick, high-heels, and cleavage proudly exposed by low cut necklines that the first two phases of the movement identified with male oppression.



4th WAVE of FEMINISM

- Although debated by some, many claim that a fourth wave of feminism began after 2010.
 - A key component of the 4th wave of feminism is the use of social media → feminism on the web.
 - Social media cultivate collectiveness: women all over the world are able to support common causes (local stories can be narrated globally).
 - After having historically lacked inclusivity, thanks to the digital revolution, women are now offered a new space where they can draw attention on gender inequalities.
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**“For most
of history
Anonymous was
a woman.”**

— Virginia Woolf

VIRGINIA WOOLF and FEMINISM

- ❑ Critical towards patriarchal authority, Virginia Woolf denounced the subordinate role of women in the family and in society and she sought to affirm women's emancipation in literature as well.
- ❑ VW became a veritable heroine to many feminists: she was considered a model since she gave women writers the impetus to express themselves with the freedom to write exactly what they thought.





VIRGINIA WOOLF and FEMINISM - timeline



1st
wave

VIRGINIA
WOOLF

2nd wave



A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN (1929)

- *A Room of One's Own* is a classic of 'feminist movement', an essay based on two lectures that VW gave at university on Women and Fiction.
- Describing the sexual prejudices and the social, financial and educational disadvantages against which women have struggled throughout history, this essay stated that women would be able to write well and freely only when they have their privacy and independence, represented by a room of one's own.
- Rarely a woman writer has had this room to write, that is the possibility to write.
- Even though the book is based on lectures that Woolf gave to women students at Cambridge, its innovative style makes it similar to a novel, blurring boundaries between criticism and fiction.
- Through the fictionalised character of 'Mary' – who visits the British Museum to find out about everything that has ever been written about women – Woolf builds the argument that literature (and history) is a male construct that has traditionally marginalised women. Woolf rejects the widely held assumption that women are inferior writers, or inferior subjects, instead locating their silence in their material and social circumstances.



WOMEN'S CONDITION



- ❑ Women have been barred from attending school and university, or excluded by law for inheritance, or expected to get married and then spend their lives housekeeping and child rearing.
- ❑ These are the reasons why there have been so few female writers. → She ties their minority status largely to socioeconomic factors, specifically their poverty and lack of privacy. Her mantra throughout the essay is that a woman must have 500 pounds a year and a room of her own if she is to write creatively.
- ❑ Tracing the history of women's contributions to English literature, Virginia Woolf celebrates those women who have overcome prejudices and have been able to become writers, such as Jane Austen, George Eliot, and the Brontë sisters, Anne, Charlotte and Emily.



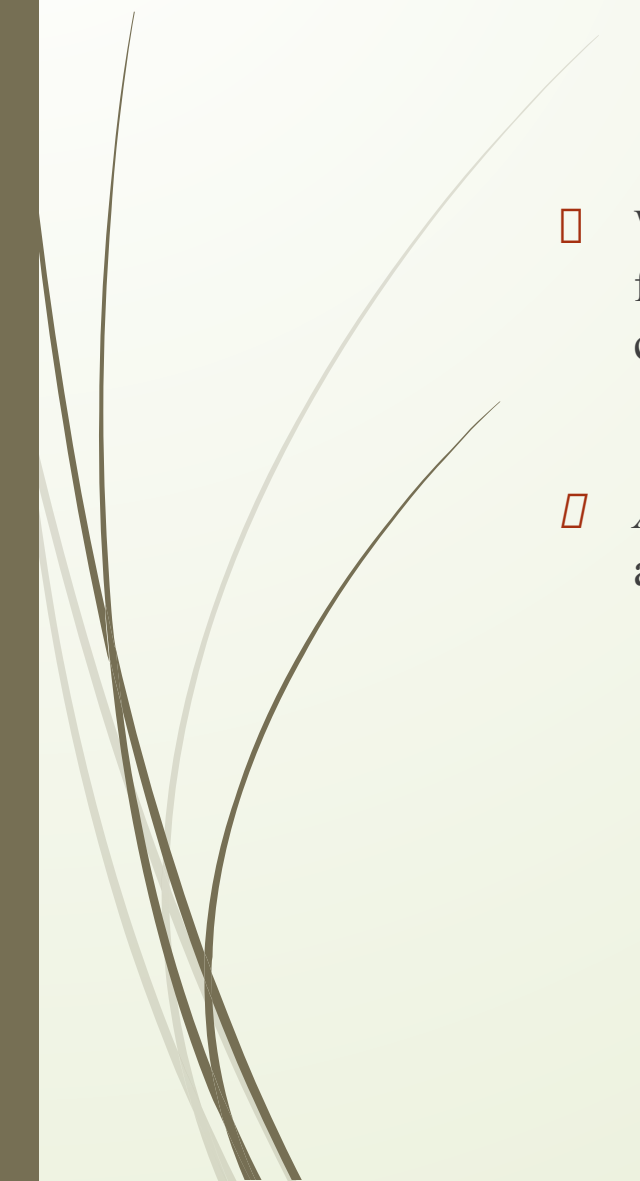
WOMEN'S CREATIVITY



- According to Woolf, centuries of prejudice have even inhibited women's creativity. To illustrate this, she offers the example of a hypothetical gifted but uneducated sister of William Shakespeare, who, totally discouraged, eventually kills herself.
- Woolf imagines what kind of life 'Judith Shakespeare' – a brilliant, talented sister of Shakespeare – might have lived, concluding that she, 'would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity'.
- With her imaginary character Judith (Shakespeare's fictional sister), Virginia Woolf proved able to illustrate that a woman with Shakespeare's faculties would have been denied the opportunities that Shakespeare enjoyed.



METAPHOR OF THE ROOM

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- Woolf's room metaphor not only signifies the declaration of political and cultural space for women, private and public, but the intrusion of women into spaces previously considered the spheres of men.
 - *A Room of One's Own* is not so much about retreating into a private feminine space as about **TRESPASSING AND BREACHING** the **BOUNDARIES**.