

### A Feminist Movement for Shakespeare's Time

English and European women of the Renaissance wrote in a variety of genres and on many subjects, just like men. The women in **CASE 13** were considered the best examples of learned women in their time. For many of these writers, issues concerning the improvement of women through education and access to resources were most important. Anna Maria von Schurman defended women's education, while Hannah Wooley and Mary Astell wrote books detailing the skills they thought all women should learn. Christine de Pisan and Lucrezia Marinella defended women against the many attacks from men in an ongoing battle known as the "quarrel of women." Elizabeth Jane Weston was a well respected poet among her European male peers. At a time when most women had little education, these women were living examples of pioneers in the feminist movement.

**PLAY!** Based on information from the exhibition, can you match the title of the play with the woman who wrote it? For help, see the answers at the bottom of this page.

1. <i>The Lost Lover; or, the Jealous Husband</i>	Katherine Philips
2. <i>The Basset-table</i>	Delarivière Manley
3. <i>Pompey</i>	Catharine Trotter
4. <i>Agnes de Castro, a tragedy</i>	Anne Finch
5. <i>The Widdow Ranter or, The History of Bacon in Virginia</i>	Aphra Behn
6. <i>Aristomenes</i>	Susanna Centlivre



William Vincent (17th century) Anne Bracegirdle as the Indian Queen in *The Widow Ranter* by Aphra Behn, London. Mezzotint, Late 17th century. Folger Shakespeare Library.

**FIND!** What name did Virginia Woolf give to Shakespeare's Sister?

**IMAGINE!** What would you put in a room of your own? List up to five of your favorite books, and other items that help inspire you.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

### Making the Case for A Room of One's Own

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf looks back at the history of women writers and makes a case for women of her own time to gain an education and pursue professional lives. She believes female writers such as Emily Brönte and Jane Austen were diminished by their need to hide their writing from society. To be a great writer, Woolf contends, a woman must have money and a room of her own. Although Woolf underestimated the ability of "Shakespeare's Sisters" to create the fine work they did, her essay was a remarkable text that demonstrates an understanding of the value of education and professional advancement for women that continues to resonate with today's readers.

Play: 1. Delarivière Manley; 2. Susanna Centlivre; 3. Katherine Philips; 4. Catharine Trotter; 5. Aphra Behn; 6. Anne Finch; Find: Virginia Woolf; Judith Shakespeare

To learn more about the exhibition, visit [www.folger.edu/shakespeare SISTERS](http://www.folger.edu/shakespeare SISTERS). For more cool games and activities, visit our website at [www.folger.edu/kids](http://www.folger.edu/kids).



## Shakespeare's Sisters Voices of English and European Women Writers, 1500 - 1700 February 3 - May 20, 2012



This exhibition uses Virginia Woolf and Lady Anne Clifford as a framework to explore conversations of early women writers concerning their families, the Bible, spiritual and secular ideas and their male counterparts Petrarch, Ariosto, Montaigne, and Philippe de Mornay. Explore the wealth of information about the many women who were writing during Shakespeare's time and beyond!

### The Clifford Family

Lady Anne Clifford was a great reader and a powerful noblewoman who spent much of her life trying to gain ownership of the large properties that she was prevented from inheriting as a woman. She was aided by her mother, Margaret Clifford, countess of Cumberland. This religious and intelligent woman encouraged her daughter's education and hired poet and historian, Samuel Daniel, as Lady Anne's tutor. She also encouraged and gave support to family friend, Aemilia Lanyer, one of England's first published women poets.

Lady Anne kept a detailed diary through much of her life and collected a large library. Virginia Woolf's friend and colleague, Vita Sackville-West, was inspired by Lady Anne as a woman ahead of her time. Lady Anne and her mother were avid readers and generous patrons of writers.

### What's a Psalm?

A Psalm is a religious poem written in verse and taken from the Old Testament of the Bible. It was a very popular form of verse to readers from many countries. Many women were inspired to write their own version of the Psalms and even found that it gave them a chance to have a political voice.

**PLAY!** Early women writers often translated existing literary works. In **CASE 2**, locate the names of the women who translated the titles below.

*A Godly Meditation of the Christian Soul*

*Discourse of Life and Death*

*Reply . . . to the Answer of the most Excellent King of Great Britain*

Above Left: English School portrait of Lady Anne Clifford. Oil on panel, 17th-century. Courtesy of Skipton Castle, Yorkshire & Museum. Above Right: George Charles Beresford, Virginia Woolf, 1902. Courtesy of private collection.



Above: Esther Inglis. *Argumenta Psalmorum Davidis* Manuscript, 1608. Folger Shakespeare Library. Below: Lady Mary Wroth. *The Countesse of Mountgomeries Urania*. London: John Marriott and John Grismand, 1621. Folger Shakespeare Library.

### Everyone Loves A Romance

Italian romances featuring knights engaging in battle and rescuing ladies were popular stories written in prose or verse and primarily directed to a female audience. Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* had wide appeal at home and abroad. Influenced by historical figures like King Arthur, Charlemagne, and other historical heroes, these works inspired Italian women writers to create their own take on the romance tradition. Laura Terracina wrote a moral commentary on *Orlando Furioso*, while Moderata Fonte created a female knight in her own poetic romance. Inspired by Tasso, Margherita Sarrocchi and Lucrezia Marinella wrote heroic epics using historical figures from the Ottoman wars of the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.

**FIND!** For many women, faith was the inspiration for their writing. Can you find titles from the following women writers?

1. Katharine Parr \_\_\_\_\_

2. Vittoria Colonna \_\_\_\_\_

3. Marguerite de Navarre \_\_\_\_\_

### It's A Family Affair

The Clifford and Sidney families were not the only ones at the center of a literary circle. Most female writers were educated at home and had the support of their families, but they were expected to complete household chores before writing. On the death of Marguerite de Navarre, the Seymour Sisters in England wrote verses in Latin which were published in France. The Mancini sisters abandoned their husbands and travelled across Europe, writing memoirs about their experiences – a daring thing to do at the time.

**FIND!** Many mother-daughter pairs wrote poetry together and others hosted readings of women writers in their homes. In **CASE 8**, can you find the names of the two families that fit this description?

### Women as Professional Playwrights

In Italy, women performed in theatres and began writing and publishing plays in the late sixteenth century. The refined romantic comedy of this time created an opportunity for women playwrights. Valeria Miani's work is an example of an early love story set in a refined pastoral setting. At this time in England, women wrote and translated plays meant to be read aloud in homes or at private gatherings. In late 1660, a woman first appeared on the English stage, signaling a shift in the theatrical world. After the restoration of Charles II to the throne, the English stage became more welcoming to actresses and female playwrights. Aphra Behn was the first female playwright to be paid for producing plays. Her play *The Widow Ranter* was the first play set in Colonial America. She was followed by Susanna Centlivre, Delariviere Manley, Mary Pix, and Catherine Trotter.

### Sidney Family Ties

The Sidneys were one of the most literary families in Tudor and Stuart England. Unlike the Clifford family, the Sidneys were writers (not just readers and patrons!). Mary Dudley Sidney wrote letters and verses. Her son, Sir Philip Sidney, wrote a sonnet sequence and even composed a prose romance based on Ariosto for his sister, Lady Mary Sidney: *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*. In the next generation, their niece, Lady Mary Sidney Wroth, wrote her own sonnets and the prose romance, *Urania*.

The Sidneys carried on the Italian romance tradition in England, which inspired other women to do the same. There was no question that this writing style became very popular!



**IMAGINE!** If you were writing your own book, what would you write about? What adventures would you create for your reader?



### French Salons

The French Salons of the seventeenth century began as an experiment to encourage a cultivated way of thinking and behaving as a reaction against the coarse and barbaric behavior of the aristocracy, or ruling class. The women who encouraged such behavior were known as the *précieuses* (pronounced *prey-syoos*), a word used for the witty and educated intellectuals— male and female— who frequented the Salons. They emphasized the notion of the ideal person of culture, integrity, and wit. Each hostess of a French Salon would set the agenda for the evening. New work was always shared and new trends were developed. Though all of the women in **CASE 9** participated in the salons, Madame de la Fayette and Mademoiselle de Scudéry were known for being particularly outspoken in their opinions of other literary works. The women writers of the Salons were both admired and ridiculed in their time.



**FIND!** Look at the two large panels at the end of the hall. These are two parts of a triptych called the Great Picture (above). This image shows Lady Anne Clifford as a young girl on the left, and the one on the right shows her in her later years. Find the differences in her surroundings.



Above: Jan Van Belcamp. The Great Picture, 1646. Courtesy of Abbot Hall. Left: Abraham Bosse. *Les femmes a` table en l'absence de leurs maris*, 1636. Folger Shakespeare Library. Upper Right: Madeline de Scudéry. *Conversations Nouvelles sur Divers Sujets*. La Haye: Abraham Arondeus, 1685. Folger Shakespeare Library.

**FIND!** Can you find a portrait of each of these women in the exhibit? Put a check next to each name as you find them.

Virginia Woolf \_\_\_\_\_

Georgette de Montenay \_\_\_\_\_

Elizabeth Cary \_\_\_\_\_

Margaret Cavendish \_\_\_\_\_

Anne Finch \_\_\_\_\_

Hortense & Marie Mancini \_\_\_\_\_