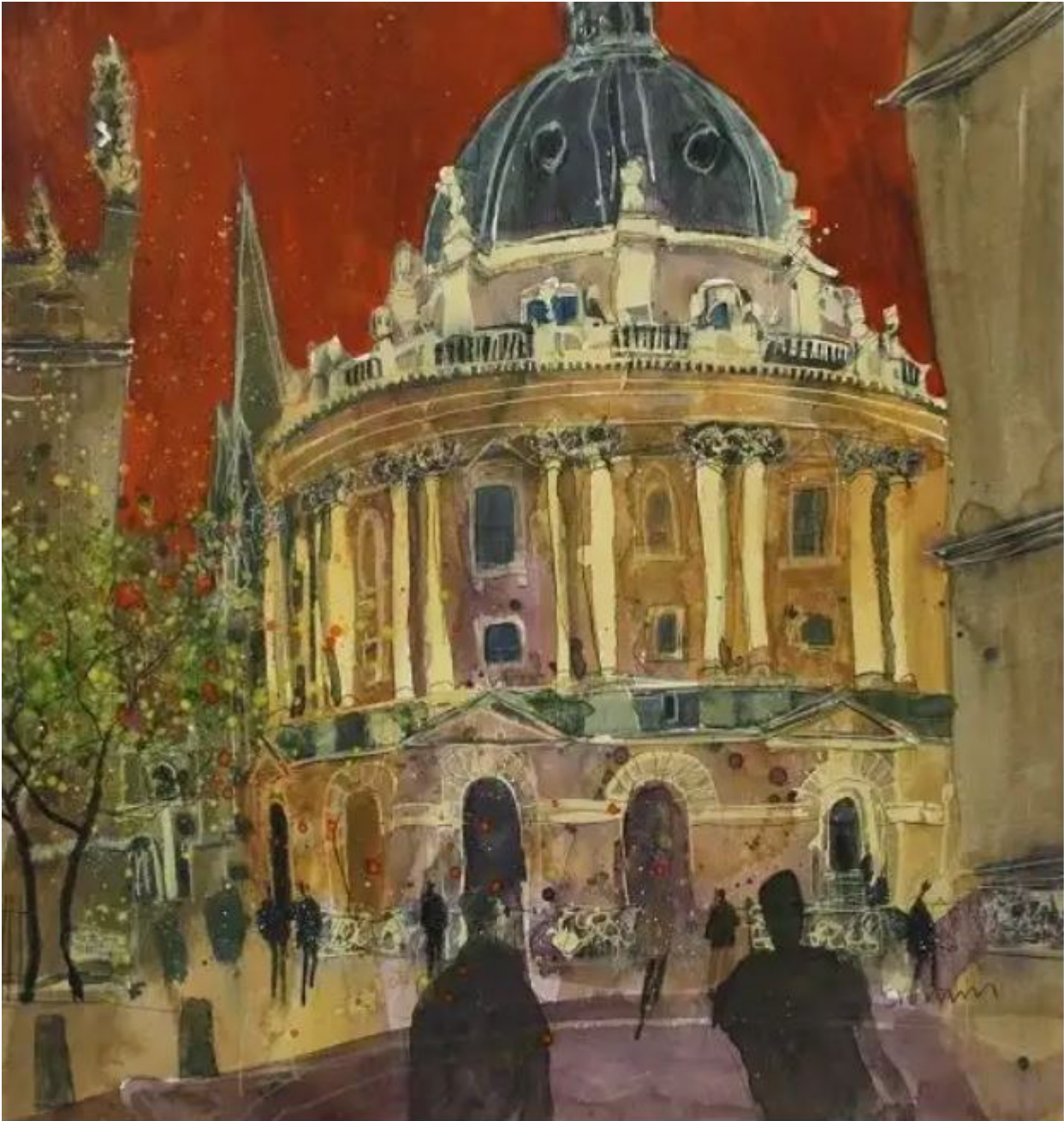


Across the Sand of an Aquarium

by [Susie Gharib](#) (November 2023)



Radcliffe Camera, Oxford, Susan Brown

*Across the Sand of an Aquarium:
Virginia Woolf at Oxbridge*

Walking across a grass plot,
Virginia Woolf was once intercepted
by a gesticulating and indignant Beadle
who forbade her from strolling on turf,
a right exclusively reserved
for Fellows and Scholars at Oxbridge.
Only to the gravel her feet belonged,
she was informed.

Opening the door which leads to the library,
where she can examine the manuscript of *Esmond*,
Thackeray's most perfect novel,
she was barred from entrance
by a deprecating gentleman
who graciously intimated that ladies
are only admitted when accompanied
by a Fellow of the College
or when armed with a letter of introduction.

As she passed the chapel door,
she heard the organ magnificently complain
with *groanings* that seemed so *lapped in peace*.
She had no wish to enter
but had she attempted to,
the verger would have probably demanded
to look at her baptismal certificate
or another written permission.
Viewing some of the congregation,
Virginia Woolf was reminded of
those giant crabs and crayfish
who heave with difficulty
across the sand of an aquarium.

[The words in Italics are Woolf's, from *A Room of One's Own*.]

Initiation

His novices excel
over any visitants to a spacious imagination,
a qualitative cult that intrigues the mind,
the stimuli of a timid and tepid regeneration.

A citadel of books dwells in his mind
whose portals are open to a lost generation.
On purebred stallions each acolyte rides
into a liberal realm of initiation.

His academic fledglings seek his light,
the quintessence of selfless dedication.
I hail in him his adamantine strife
to banish the staleness of cob-webbed dissertations.

Spring

The sky has blown many heartless daisies
to deck a grieving and naked lass
whose breasts and hair look quite sepulchral
now entwined with sheets of pearly white.

She lies so still for warmth to creep in
for the Sun to claim a shivering bride
for snowdrops to herald the nuptial meeting
for bluebells to declare them husband and wife.

There are no Miracles

There are no miracles, he said
with which to save thy planet earth,

its blazing torches,
its bluish oxygen,
its amorphous waters,
its daffodils.

You are abandoned by the multi-winged angels,
by Gabriel's host,
by the Lady in Blue whose perennial tears
have in vain cleansed your war-bred stains,
by every saint whose blood had been shed
to redeem.

I woke up with a fear-furrowed face,
with eyes that have grown so double-glazed,
my voice tainted with disdain
for the inaptitude of the human species.

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Dr. Susie Gharib, a university lecturer, is the author of *To Dance on the Ugly* (a collection of English poetry) and *Classical Adaptations*, three film scripts adapted from D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*. Her poetry, fiction, and literary essays have appeared in numerous journals and magazines.

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