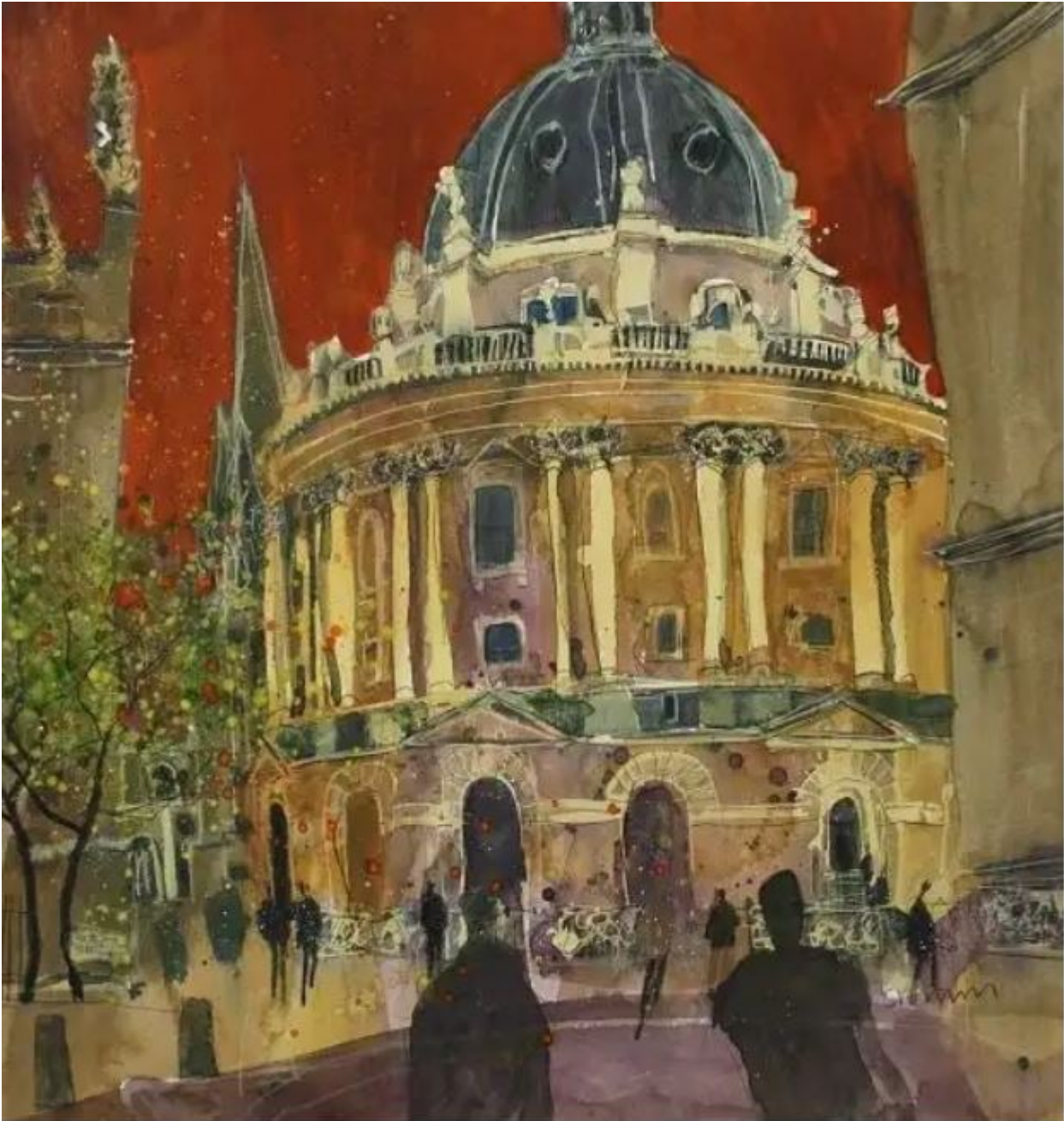


# Across the Sand of an Aquarium

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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