

November 5, 2008

LOGIN or REGISTER

HOME DELIVERY

Text size:

ADVERTISE WITH US



CHICAGO WEATHER

TRAFFIC/COMMUTE

LOCAL NEWS

NATION/WORLD

SPORTS

BUSINESS

POLITICS/ELECTIONS

REPORTS & DATA

DEATHS

OPINIONS

COLUMNISTS

BLOGS

ENTERTAINMENT

TRAVEL

LIVING

LIGHTER SIDE

VIDEO/PHOTOS

SHOPPING

CARS

JOBS

REAL ESTATE

APARTMENTS

MORE CLASSIFIEDS

NEWSLETTER/ALERTS

NEWS TOOLS

CONTACT US

ABOUT US

# When misery is the muse

## The arts and the Great Depression

Julia Keller | CULTURAL CRITIC  
November 2, 2008

Virginia Woolf is often depicted as a dreamy, effete snob, agonizing all day over a single adjective while sipping tea—but her tough-minded view of art would make her right at home with the shot-and-a-beer crowd.

To create art, she knew, you need more than inspiration. More than drive. More than talent.

You need cash. Lots of it. Cash for things such as food and fuel, brushes and paint, shelter and shoes. "Money and a room of one's own" was how Woolf phrased it in a 1928 lecture series that later became a classic book and foundational text of feminism.

The harsh practicality of her words, though, goes for male as well as female creators, and is especially relevant as the world economy circles the drain. With credit markets drying up faster than a Jackson Pollock canvas, with the international economic picture as murky and incomprehensible as a passage from "Finnegans Wake," the question arises:



Julia Keller  
Bio | E-mail | Recent columns

Ads by Google

Can bad times bring good art?

Judging from the last economic catastrophe that shook the nation to its core, the Great Depression that began in 1929 and lingered through the 1930s, the answer is "Yes."

While it was a time of hardship and suffering on a massive scale, the Great Depression also was the crucible for many exquisite works of American art, from masterful novels to incomparable documentary photographs to stimulating architecture to sprightly music to provocative paintings and sculpture—works that are still read and studied and appreciated today, some three-quarters of a century after their creation. It was a time of anxiety and dread, but also a time of vision and innovation.

In 1929, the year the stock market crashed and burned, acclaimed novels such as William Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury," Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms" and Thomas Wolfe's "Look Homeward, Angel" were published. The first of Katherine Ann Porter's great short stories, "Flowering Judas," came out that year as well. But it wasn't all brooding darkness:



- Ask Amy
- Dear Abby
- Horoscopes

The 1930s would see the rise of big bands and, at the movies, those clever cut-ups known as the Marx Brothers. In the same decade, plays such as Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" (1938) appeared.

"The dramatic upheaval of life in the '30s opened up new areas of subject matter for young writers," notes William Solomon, author of "Literature, Amusement and Technology in the Great Depression" (2002) and an English professor at the University of Buffalo.

The federal government, rocked back on its heels by the plight of beleaguered citizens, nearly a third of whom were unemployed, realized that art still had a crucial role to play.

Digg

submit

MANY MEALS,  
ONE DINNER

DISCOVER HOW

two different dishes can be

Some do it  
for the money.  
You do it for:

**YOU.**

[Click Here](#)  
to go back to school



Popular stories

**MOST VIEWED** MOST E-MAILED

1. [Barack Obama, out text president](#)
2. [Barack Obama speech](#)
3. [John Kass: From King to Obama, by way of Chicago](#)
4. [Outed at Prop 8 rally](#)
5. [Patrick Swayze and the case of the mystery powder](#)

[more most viewed](#)

**CHICAGO**  
top jobs

Flat Roofers  
[roofing co](#)

Mechanical  
Engr./Machine  
Design  
[Scheffer Web](#)  
Finishing

Q.A. Technician  
[GRACE DAVISON](#)

Receptionist / Dog  
Salon  
[Dog Salon](#)

Bilingual Case  
Manager  
[Catholic Charities](#)

[View all Top Jobs](#)

Search Chicago jobs

[All Chicago jobs](#)  
[Post resume](#)  
[Post a job](#)  
powered by  
**careerbuilder**

Name

Comments

Please note by clicking on "Post Comment" you acknowledge that you have read the [Terms of Service](#) and the comment you are posting is in compliance with such terms. **Be polite.** Inappropriate posts may be removed by the moderator. [Send us your feedback](#).

**PARTNERS:** | Triblocal | metromix.com | ChicagoLive | Chicago Magazine | Hoy  
Chicago Tribune | WGN-TV | WGN-AM  
amNY | Baltimore Sun | Daily Press | Hartford Courant | LA Times | Newsday |  
Orlando Sentinel | Sun-Sentinel | The Morning Call | The Virginia Gazette  
Jobs | Autos | Homes | Apartments | Grocery Coupons | FSBO | Open Houses |  
Houses for Rent | Home Auctions

[Home](#) -> [Living](#) -> [Live/Smart](#)

**SITE POLICIES:** | [Terms of service](#) | [Privacy](#)

[Related News from the Web](#)

Powered by Topix.net

### Your chicagotribune.com Diggs

Upcoming Popular

- 246 [Photos Of The Obama Rally In Chicago's Grant Park](#)
- 62 [Barack Obama's Acceptance Speech](#)
- 37 [360-degree view of the Grant Park rally](#)



Halloween costumes and decorations  
[Upload your own photo](#)

