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# When misery is the muse

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The arts and the Great Depression

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Julia Keller | CULTURAL CRITIC November 2, 2008

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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

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



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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 orking from ead vice?

Hemingway's "A Farey and Thomas Wolfe's Homeward, Angel" The first of Katheria great short stories Judas," came out the But it wasn't all brooding

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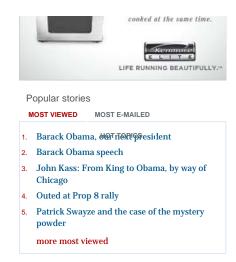
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The 1930s would see the rise of big bands and, at the movies, those clever cut-ups known as the Marx Brothers. In the same decade, plays such as Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" (1938) appeared.

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

The federal government, rocked back on its heels by the plight of be eaguer nearly a third of whom were unemployed, realized that art still had a crucial role to play MANY MEALS, ONE DINNER DISCOVER HOW two different dishes can be









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