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THE FEMINIST THOUGHT IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *A ROOM ONE'S OWN*

A Paper

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Dedication

To my family and to Asst. Prof. Dr. Hadeel Aziz Mohammed And all teacher staff

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Gratitude goes to Almighty Allah the source of all knowledge,

Understanding and wisdom.

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ABSTRACT

It has been stated that Woolf has dealt with specific personal issues that are closely related to the life and character of a woman. Her main points of view, which mostly concern women's rights, are revealed in her fictional and non-fictional writings. This study aims to highlight the writer's choice of themes as well as the type of character who moves within the domain of this choice. Woolf addresses feminism, financial independence, mental freedom, and the pressures that women may face in their relationships with men, whether as a husband or a friend. In Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own*, for example, she investigates the exclusion of women from educational institutions, as well as the links between this exclusion and the unequal distribution of wealth.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Virginia Woolf's Life and works

Adeline Virginia Woolf was born in 1882 in London. She was a novelist, essayist, diarist, epistler, publisher, feminist, and short story writer from England. She is widely considered as one of the twentieth century's most important modernist literary characters. Her mother is the well-known actress Julia Prinsep Stephen, and her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, was a well-known novelist, critic, and mountaineer. Her father had instilled in her a keen sense of skepticism. Her parents had previously been married and widowed, thus the home had children from three marriages. (Abel, 1989,P. 25) During war period, Woolf was a significant figure in London's literary society and a member of the Bloomsbury group (a group of writers, intellectuals, philosophers and artists who held informal discussions in Bloomsbury throughout the 20th century). Their work deeply influenced literature, aesthetics, criticism, and economics as well as modern attitudes towards feminism, pacifism, and servility. Woolf's most famous work includes novels Mrs. Dalloway (1925), To The Light House (1927) and Orlando(1928).

Encouraged by her father, Woolf began writing professionally in 1900. After her father's death in 1904, the Stephen family moved from Kensington to the more bohemian Bloomsbury, where, in conjunction with the brothers' intellectual friends, (Abel, 1989,P. 28) they formed the artistic and literary Bloomsbury Group. In 1912, she married Leonard Woolf, and in 1917, the couple founded the Hogarth Press, which

published much of her work. They rented a home in Sussex and moved there permanently in 1940. Woolf had romantic relationships with women, including Vita Sackville-West, who also published her books through Hogarth Press. Both women's literature became inspired by their relationship, which lasted until Woolf's death.

During the inter-war period, Woolf was an important part of London's literary and artistic society. In 1915, she had published her first novel, The Voyage Out, (Albee, 1995,P .56) through her half-brother's publishing house, Gerald Duckworth and Company. Her best-known works include the novels Mrs Dalloway (1925), To the Lighthouse (1927) and Orlando (1928). She is also known for her essays, including A Room of One's Own (1929). Woolf became one of the central subjects of the 1970s movement of feminist criticism and her works have since attracted much attention and widespread commentary for "inspiring feminism". Her works have been translated into more than 50 languages. A large body of literature is dedicated to her life and work, and she has been the subject of plays, novels and films. Woolf is commemorated today by statues, societies dedicated to her work and a building at the University of London.

Throughout her life, Woolf was troubled by mental illness. She was institutionalised several times and attempted suicide at least twice. According to Dalsimer (2004) her illness was characterized by symptoms that today would be diagnosed as bipolar disorder, (Albee, for which there was no effective intervention during her lifetime. In 1941, at age 59, Woolf died by drowning herself in the River Ouse at Lewes.

Although Virginia expressed the opinion her father was her favourite parent, and although she had only turned thirteen when her mother died, she was profoundly influenced by her mother throughout her life. It was

Virginia who famously stated that "for we think back through our mothers if we are women", and invoked the image of her mother repeatedly throughout her life in her diaries, her letters and a number of her autobiographical essays, frequently evoking her memories with the words "I see her ...". She also alludes to her childhood in her fictional writing. In To the Lighthouse (1927), the artist, Lily Briscoe, attempts to paint Mrs. Ramsay, a complex character based on Julia Stephen, and repeatedly comments on the fact that she was "astonishingly beautiful". (Barrett , 1987, P. 54) Her depiction of the life of the Ramsays in the Hebrides is an only thinly disguised account of the Stephens in Cornwall and the Godrevy Lighthouse they would visit there. However, Woolf's understanding of her mother and family evolved considerably between 1907 and 1940, in which the somewhat distant, yet revered figure becomes more nuanced and complete.

After World War II began, Woolf's diary indicates that she was obsessed with death, which figured more and more as her mood darkened. On 28 March 1941, Woolf drowned herself by filling her overcoat pockets with stones and walking into the River Ouse near her home. Her body was not found until 18 April. Her husband buried her cremated remains beneath an elm tree in the garden of Monk's House, their home in Rodmell, Sussex.

In her suicide note, addressed to her husband, she wrote: (Hafley, 1980, P. 44)

Dearest, I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I don't think two

people could have been happier till this terrible disease came. I can't fight it any longer. I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I can't even write this properly. I can't read. What I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that—everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can't go on spoiling your life any longer. I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been.

1.2 Feminism

Woolf found a literary muse in Sackville-West, the inspiration for Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando*, which follows an English nobleman who mysteriously becomes a woman at the age of 30 and lives on for over three centuries of English history. (J. Goldman, 2006:39) The novel was a breakthrough for Woolf who received critical praise for the groundbreaking work, as well as a newfound level of popularity.

In 1929, Woolf published *A Room of One's Own*, a feminist essay based on lectures she had given at women's colleges, in which she examines women's role in literature. In the work, she sets forth the idea that "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." Woolf pushed narrative boundaries in her next work, *The Waves* (1931), which she described as "a play-poem" written in the voices of six different characters. (Freedman, 2004, p.24) Woolf published *The Years*, the final novel published in her lifetime in 1937, about a family's history over the course of a generation. The following year she published *Three Guineas*, an essay which continued the feminist themes of *A Room of One's Own* and addressed fascism and war.

Throughout her career, Woolf spoke regularly at colleges and universities, penned dramatic letters, wrote moving essays and self-published a long list of short stories. By her mid-forties, she had established herself as an intellectual, an innovative and influential writer and pioneering feminist. (Smith, 1986, p.188) Her ability to balance dream-like scenes with deeply tense plot lines earned her incredible respect from peers and the public alike. Despite her outward success, she continued to regularly suffer from debilitating bouts of depression and dramatic mood swings.

1.2.1 First-Wave Feminism (1848-1918) – 19. cent.

in the 19th century women were still **dependent** on their parents and husbands financially, they were **not free** concerning their property, body and consciousness with limited options in life they mainly **study** at home (tutors), could not get a university degree (or at some colleges from 1830s in England; no sciences; first degree after the War) **political fight** for their rights (e.g. Mary Wollstonecraft for the franchise, +John Stuart Mill) small victories: in 1857 the Matrimonial Course Bill (Divorce Act) was passed *suffragettes*: militant and violent protesters with marching and hungerstrikes, fighting for political rights in London (e.g. Emmeline Pankhurst) – in 1918: the right to vote was granted to women *suffragists*: more pacifists calling for reforms in education, divorce, birth control, and fashion women worked in factories after men were enlisted during First World War image of the ‘New Woman’: independent and threatening (see also in Late Victorian Age - the vamp, and Ibsen’s Nora) (J. Goldman,2006:129)

2.1.2 Dark Age' of Feminism (1920s-30s) and Woolf

in 1918 the first election was a disappointment women's awareness should be developed moving from the political-social to the **critical phase** / wave Virginia Woolf as a forerunner, questioning woman's place in culture and arts *A Room of One's Own*: symbol of artistic, spiritual and financial independence Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women" (1942) CP107-109.

She delivered it as a lecture to a working women's group her "profession is literature" (other female writers before her: Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, George Eliot) writing is "reputable and harmless", cheap writing a review of a man's book, she encountered **a phantom**: "The Angel in the House" she killed **the phantom** of male stereotypes in self-defence in order to be able to become a critic and a writer ("what is a woman?") other difficulty for a female writer is to find the right words describing womanhood – "telling the truth about my own experience **as a body**" and as **a passionate being** it is **a rock** for female imagination that it dashes itself against "rooms of your own" are still bare, they should be **decorated** and shared (question of language and true relationship) (J. Goldman,2006:90)

1.2.3 Second-Wave Feminism (1960s-1980s)

running parallelly with Women's Liberation Movement (students' protests for civil rights) in **criticism**, the forerunner is Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949, tr. 1960): "One is not born but rather becomes a woman." concerned with critical theories, terms and the canon; with images of women have in literary works. (J. Goldman,2006:129)

studied categories:

feminist (political) vs. anti-feminist

female (biological) vs. male – **SEXES**

feminine (cultural and social) vs. masculine – **GENDERS**

in 1960s the role models, the socially and culturally acceptable versions of the feminine **are shown and collected -- GENDER STUDIES.**

in 1970s the collected images are **analysed and criticised** (rather attacked).

in 1980s new critical theories are applied ('eclectic') and the new canon is constructed to explore the lost and suppressed records of female experience shift from studying women as readers to writers.

female theory is needed – **"gynocriticism"** puts emphasis on pluralisms and differences(ibid)

she differentiates 3 phases of **"gynotexts"**:

feminine phase (1840-1880): women writers imitated dominant male artistic norms

feminist phase (1880-1920): radical and separatist positions are maintained

female phase (1920- present): concentrating on female writing and experience

1.2.4 Third-Wave Feminism

from the 1990s returning to the radicalism of the first wave calling for actions against violence, child abuse and rape for motherhood support

(welfare, child care), criticising maternity leave policies. Organising protests, commemorating days, awareness and alliance days (e.g. V-Day – Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* (1996)).

In the 1990s **Gender Studies** of ”academic feminism” got criticised as it became institutionalised (‘white, middle-class, heterosexual, urban women’) ‘classic’ feminism marginalised and ignored the differences of race, class and sexual orientation. (J. Goldman,2006:130)

Given the era she comes from, women were always taught to be submissive in nature. They were taught to be at home and make peace with the fact that the breadwinner will always be the man in her family. In all stages of her life, she is, by default, under control of first her father and brothers and then, her husband.

But writers like Woolf had the guts to question the society 'norms' - the norms which had already decided a girl's fate in her life. The norms, so to say, pointed that women will not be allowed to work and even in most cases, pursue education. (J. Goldman,2006:132)

The first problem regarded the position of women in the realm of fiction. Woolf declared this a double-faced problem, as women were absent both in the process of writing, leading to an abundance of male writers and almost no female ones, and in the stories themselves. In the few instances women were referred to in writing, they were mostly shown in a distorted and simple way, addressing only their reproductive skills or their nature-given inferiority (Woolf, 2001). Both sides of the problem led to the fact that the representation of women in literature was rather one-sided, making it hard and almost impossible for women to change their status in real life (Woolf, 2001:51). By not giving them a powerful

voice in the stories, women struggled to let their voices be heard outside of these stories as well.

With that, Woolf (2001) urged women to start writing more and about any topic, even about matters which might seem trivial at first. By doing so, she believed that the world would finally see the multiplicity that lies within women.

In her non-fiction extended essay, *A Room's of One's Own*, written in 1929, she writes, "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." The quote directly points to how a woman who is chained to the societal norms urges to break open and live independently. (J. Goldman,2006:80) The writer dared the society by saying that even though a woman was obliged to follow the norms she has the freedom to think. In the essay, she writes, "Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind."

Her belief in the oppressive nature of the society on women, did not stop with just one book. Almost every book of hers, puts her women characters to be in a moral dilemma between 'what is right' and what she desires. Even though her book, *Mrs Dalloway*, is more about dwelling into the psychology of a human, (J. Goldman,2006:84) the protagonist is shown to be bold enough to question the choice of her husband in contrast to how women were compelled to think nothing against the choice what was made by the head of the family.

Her other books, *To the lighthouse* and *Waves*, make the readers ponder on aspects such as human relationships and how mistakes made in the past, can shape one's life in the future. Woolf was known to give a human and personal touch in her writings, which is one among the

many reasons why she is being remembered by Google today on her 136th birth anniversary. The writer, however, suffered from depression. At the age of 59, the writer is believed to have committed suicide by filling up stones in the pockets of her clothing and walked into the sea, making up her mind to drown herself. The writer's body had been missing for three weeks after. Her suicide note had read, "I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. (J. Goldman,2006:110)

CHAPTER TWO

THE POEMS

2.1 Plot

A Room of One's Own by Virginia Woolf is a feminist literary classic. It is considered the "first current text of feminist critique, the paradigm in both theoretically and practically socialist feminism of an uniquely socialist feminist criticism" and the "first notable work in feminist criticism" (Marcus,1988, p. 216). To address her initial question, "Why have there been so few female writers?" Woolf used a range of methodologies, including historical and social study, fictional premise, and philosophy. "A Room by Virginia Woolf has become a project that houses us," as previously said. In her power, failure, and bewilderment, she is a crucial builder and developer of feminist critique." Many authors use this work to express their anguish. In A Room of One's Own, Woolf observes that the female writer is always "an inheritor as well as a creator" (Woolf,1929, p. 113). Her legacy has transcended race and class in the feminist world. From a Marxist-feminist perspective, she praises Woolf's fruitful 30 and much-overlooked finding in A Room of One's Own that "the conditions under which men and women make fiction are drastically different" (Marcus,1988, p. 103). At the period, women were subjugated to their male counterparts. They didn't have a job or any money of their own. As a result, they lacked mental liberties. And if they did try to write, they lacked the confidence to sign their work. Woolf's point of view in A Room is that of a collective voice, of literary influence on female authors, and it has been explored by a number of later feminist researchers. Jane Marcus, for example, emphasizes Woolf's reliance on

the work of other women in her piece "Thinking Back Through Our Mothers." Woolf has firsthand knowledge of how women influence one another. "Far from Harlod Bloom's concept of influence anxiety, it is rather the opposite, giving the woman writer with reprieve from stress, acting as a historical sanctuary where one may lick her wounds between strikes against the patriarchy" (Jensen, 2002, p. 92).

A Room's significance stems from the variety of topics it addresses. Actually, these are the fundamental ideas that women must learn in order to write as males. According to the current reading, all themes are the result of one primary theme, financial freedom (Woolf, 1929, p. 113). Women must overcome various obstacles to be able to write, including gaining the requisite education, enough living space, and, most importantly, financial means. Female authors' material autonomy is critical in determining their status. The title of A Room, in fact, stresses isolation; this freedom is to be autonomous.

2.2 Theme

Feminism has made great use of literary works in developing and disseminating its meanings, both as a theoretical study of gender inequality and oppression and as a political movement. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, literary and literary-critical texts were crucial to 'second-wave' feminist politics and the drive for 'women's liberation,' providing much of the framework for innovations in feminist and gender criticism and theory that have fundamentally reshaped literary studies. Showalter (1977, p. 61) Because of the centrality of literature in feminism, authors whose work include feminist discourse as well as fiction or poetry are in a unique position.

As the title of my chapter implies, the link between Virginia Woolf and feminism, and feminism and Virginia Woolf, is symbiotic. On the one hand, (Woolf, 1929, P. 11) Woolf's feminism affected her work significantly, including not just her explicit feminist politics but also her interest and fascination with gender identities and women's lives, histories, and fictions. On the other hand, feminist criticism and theory from the second half of the twentieth century radically transformed the perception and reception of a writer who, at least in Anglo-American contexts, had gone out of favor by the 1950s and 1960s. Woolf's sensibility was perceived as fundamentally pre-war by the immediate

post-war age. In the decades that followed, women critics and academics developing new feminist approaches discovered Woolf speaking directly to their concerns, either in the first-person address (albeit one in which the 'I' is diffuse and multiple) of *A Room of One's Own* or in the voice or voices that seemed to speak out from Woolf's newly available essays, letters, diaries, and memoirs (Woolf, 1929, p. 20).

Woolf has tackled personal issues that are inextricably linked to a woman's life and character. Showalter (1977, p. 64) Her main points of view, which mostly concern women's rights, are presented in her fictional and factual writings.

Since Woolf has been invited to speak on the theme of Women and Fiction, the dramatic setting of *A Room of One's Own* is stressed in this research. She argues that "if a woman is to produce fiction, she must have money and her own room." Her piece takes the shape of a slightly contrived tale about her thought process that led her to accept this viewpoint.

2.3 Feminism in A Room of One's Own

Woolf has been requested to lecture about Women and Fiction. Her premise is that "in order to create fiction, a woman must have money and a room of her own." She concedes that her theory has a restricted scope, one that "leaves unanswered the huge dilemma of the genuine character of woman and the true nature of fiction." Nonetheless, she hopes that her views would throw some light on those topics as well. (Abel, 1989, p. 55) The article is intended to explain how Woolf arrived at her thesis. "I propose making use of all the freedoms and permissions of a writer, to tell you the narrative of the two days that preceding my coming here—how, bent down by the weight of the topic which you have set upon my shoulders, I pondered it, and made it work in and out of my daily life," she adds. The narrative component of the essay begins with this introduction.

The narrator sits on the banks of a river at "Oxbridge" (a fictitious institution supposed to evoke Oxford and Cambridge), contemplating the issue of women and fiction. She figuratively describes her reflections as fishing: "thinking... had let its line down into the stream" of the mind, where it wanders in the current and awaits the tug of an idea. However, as soon as she takes a mouthful, she is halted by the approach of the Beadle, a campus security guard who enforces the rule that women are not

permitted to step onto the grass. (Abel, 1989, p. 59) She dashes back to her appropriate spot on the gravel walk, noting that while "no really big harm" had been done, she had lost her "little fish" of an idea.

Woolf highlights the function of pauses in the reflective process as she discusses her narrator's ideas on women and fiction. Woolf strengthens her thesis that a private space is a basic prerequisite for creative work by dramatizing the repercussions of frequent disruptions. Woolf believes that the fact that women have traditionally been denied room or leisure for uninterrupted thought is a decisive element in the history of their creative achievements. Intelligence, at least in the paradigm of Charles Lamb, operates through "wild flash[es] of imagination" or the "lightning crack of genius"—thoughts that take time to develop. (Abel, 1989, p. 60) Yet, again and again, just when our narrator appears to be on the cusp of such an understanding, her thoughts are cut off—usually by an authority figure attempting to keep her in her place. The narrator is constrained to a short walkway on the Oxbridge campus, where a male would have been permitted free range. She is also not authorized to visit the campus library. These impediments are the consequences of an educational culture that severely limits a woman's intellectual exposure. Another sort of infringement on the independence of the female intellect, according to Woolf, is being refused access—whether to structures or ideas. This exclusion is a more severe type of interruption, disrupting not just a single idea or daydream, but an individual's life-long growth or the historical development of an intellectual tradition.

The setting shifts from Oxbridge to London, where the narrator sits in a room, trying to write about Women and Fiction. She goes over the questions presented the day before at Oxbridge ("Why did men drink wine while women drank water? Why was one sex so affluent while the other was so impoverished? What impact does poverty have on fiction? What circumstances must exist in order for works of art to be created? "() He then decides to visit the British Museum in order to "strain off what was personal and incidental in all these sensations and so achieve the pure fluid, the essential oil of truth" (Abel, 1989, P. 65). She searches the British Library's catalogue for works about women and is astounded by how many have been published in so many different areas. She checks the "M" listings and discovers that no such archive exists.

She discovers a wide range of ideas and themes after arbitrarily picking a few of these books, and she ultimately pauses resentfully with one professor's remark of "the mental, moral, and physical inferiority of women." She concludes that, whatever their variations, these studies have all "been written in the crimson light of passion and not in the white light of fact." They have an underlying rage that hinders them from approaching their issue objectively. (Roe, 2000, p. 77) "Why are they angry?" the narrator wonders as she takes a break for lunch. She believes that if the author of the research on women's inferiority had reasoned objectively, she would not have gotten enraged: "I had been upset because he was angry." The narrator senses a depth of purpose and response behind this topic, and she concludes that male professors have been more concerned in protecting and confirming their feeling of male supremacy than in the inferiority of women. For millennia, women have functioned as mirrors to males in this way.

The narrative is stopped here by the need to pay the bill. She takes the opportunity, while discussing her personal circumstances, to inform us that her aunt, Mary Beton, gave her a bequest of £500 every year. (Roe, 2000, p. 81) She recalls receiving the letter around the same time that women were awarded the right to vote, and she remarks that the bequest was more essential in preserving her independence. It freed her not only from the necessity of working for a living, but also from hate and bitterness of character. It enabled her to forgive men for their collective crimes against women, as well as to view men as victims of their education and society in certain respects. Finally, financial independence provided her with the "freedom to think of things in themselves".

When the narrator returns home, she finds herself in a stunningly homey scene. She considers it virtually hard to evaluate whether the types of labor historically undertaken by women are more or less useful than the (typically more quantitative) work performed by males. The question is unanswerable: not only does domestic work lie outside of any economic value indices, but its cultural worth shifts "from decade to decade." She sees a world without gendered divisions of labor. "But what does all of this have to do with the topic of my thesis, *Women and Fiction?*" she thinks as she walks into the home.

Woolf is cautious not to blame males for the centuries of uneven treatment of women. Or, if she does blame them, she blames patriarchal violence to universal human flaws. "Life is laborious, demanding, and a constant fight for both sexes—and I look at them, shouldering their way along the pavement." It needs enormous bravery and strength. Perhaps more than anything, being creatures of illusion that we are, it begs for faith in oneself." Women have long acted as a tool for males in strengthening the required self-confidence. Women have been the mirrors in which man desired to see only his own magnificence reflected. Moi (2001, p. 90) Even though this has proven harmful to women, the narrators conclude that "mirrors are essential"—both to "heroic action" and to violence. Nonetheless, despite her refusal to pass personal or angry judgment, she takes a societal position against this sexist method of functioning, citing fascist and totalitarian political regimes as extreme versions of this type of thought.

The narrator's capacity to analyze gender inequity objectively originates in great part from her financial freedom. She earns £500 a year, and the consequence of that income is to dissolve the frustration and vulnerability that would otherwise color her thoughts and writing negatively. Moi (2001, p. 71) Woolf believes that the writer of literature must have the luxury of financial independence for the same reason. Artistic expression, maybe more than rational debate, necessitates the distillation of all traces of the specific self in the "white light of truth." The narrator comes home dejected since she did not find any valuable information during her investigation at the British Library. At this juncture, she turns to history, which, she believes, "recorded not views but facts." As a starting point, she chose to investigate the lives of English women during the Elizabethan period—a period of unparalleled literary achievement, but exclusively among males. Shakespeare's plays, she notes, have the appearance of charmed spider-webs (Snaith, 2000, P.53) "to dangle there all by themselves In actuality, however, even his creations "are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal entities, but are the true product of suffering human beings, and are tied to very tangible objects, such as health, money, and the places we dwell in."

History yields just a few short assertions regarding women's legal rights in the early modern period (which were virtually non-existent). This reluctance to discuss women, as well as her complete weakness, contrasts with the predominance of nuanced and strong female characters

in literature from ancient times to the present. "A really strange, composite entity develops as a result." (Snaith, P.90, 2000) In her imagination, she is of the utmost significance; in reality, she is absolutely unimportant. Some of the most creative phrases, some of the most deep ideas in literature have fallen from her lips; in real life, she could not read, spell, and was the property of her husband. " In view of this paradox, the solution to the difficulty of attempting to comprehend the Elizabethan lady appears to be to combine historical and fictional elements.

"It would have been utterly and entirely impossible for any woman to have authored the plays of Shakespeare in the period of Shakespeare," the narrator concludes from this thought exercise. She creates up the fictitious figure of Judith Shakespeare to demonstrate this point. Judith is arguably as bright as her brother, but she receives no schooling other than what she can produce for herself in her spare time. Despite the fact that she is "the apple of her father's eye," her family wants her to adhere to a social position that gives little place for her skill to grow. (Kniss 1992, p. 22) She writes some in private, but hides or burns her work out of dread of repercussions. She gets married at an early age. When she begs her father not to marry her, he chastises and beats her. She then flees, propelled alone by "the power of her own talent." She aspires to be an actress but is met with rejection and derision. Finally, she is taken up by a theater manager, becomes pregnant by him, and commits suicide.

The narrator claims that this is how a lady of Shakespeare's brilliance may have lived at the time. But she goes on to say that "it is impossible that any woman in Shakespeare's day should have possessed Shakespeare's brilliance" - or even the first seed of genius, let alone the type that would have turned into magnificent writing. (Kniss 1992, p. 22) "For genius is not born among laboring, illiterate, subservient people," save in the rarest of cases—and even then, that social situation shows as a limitation of the art. Genius produced witches and lunatics among women in that era, and "Anonymous," she contends, was most likely a woman as well.

The narrator expands on the idea that brilliance is dependent on particular conditions—conditions that, at their most fundamental, are material and social. (Kniss, P. 39, 1992) Shakespeare's age and his sister serve excellent prototypes for Woolf's thesis since Shakespeare is so

often consecrated as the pure genius who transcends all circumstances of environment and surroundings. There are two key concepts at work here. The first is that all art, including Shakespeare's, is enabled by historical, social, and economic realities, whether or not they are articulated in the art itself. The disparities in the outcomes of William and Judith Shakespeare help to emphasize this point, as well as to account for the reality that women were just not composing literature at the time. The second reason is an aesthetic one: excellent work should not reveal the personal circumstances that led to its creation. To accomplish "incandescence," the intensity of the art must burn away "any urge to protest, preach, declare an injury, settle a score, or make the world witness to some pain or grievance." Shakespeare's plays reach their pinnacle of greatness during their incandescence. But that trait is a luxury, the result of social and monetary privilege (just how the narrator's five hundred pounds per year permits her to ponder about her contentious issue with charity and serenity).

The narrator begins by outlining (with much reverence) the women's literary legacy to which she is heir, and which was glaringly lacking for those early female writers. Wellek (1986, p.29) Even the "innumerable poor books" written by women in the years following Behn established literature as a profession are an important part of this legacy. The fact that writing might earn revenue laid the groundwork for all that followed; "money dignifies what is frivolous if unpaid for."

Woolf has returned to the point where she refused to begin it: a discussion of notable female authors. After everything that has been said about the circumstances for brilliance and its manifestation, the classic literary women's careers take on new significance. We are invited to assess what they accomplished and did not accomplish in terms of the radiance and purity of their work. Wellek (1986, p.33) This aesthetic standard is a hard-won luxury; Woolf wants us to recognize that it couldn't have been applied a generation ago, and that its sheer relevance reflects the strides these women have achieved. Charlotte Bronte had axes to grind; the fact that they show up in her writing is a flaw, but it doesn't make her grievances any less real or her place in the history Woolf is tracing any less vital. Austen's ability to write as plainly as she did appears to be a near-miracle in view of the absolute absence of tradition or precedent.

Woolf's essay's structure enacts the changes it outlines. As the speaker becomes fully engaged with her thoughts, the narrative elements that littered the early chapters begin to drift away. The imaginary narrator's everyday comings and goings fade into the background, and the argument—the ideas themselves—come to the fore. However, getting to this position required some hard effort. Wellek (1986, p.39) Even though the lead-up and preparation are not obvious in the heat of the moment, they constitute the invisible basis of the argument. These underpinnings, like the five hundred pounds or the early, awful novels by women, vanish in the bright light of what they permit. Woolf wanted us to see this bedrock for the purposes of her essay, yet it is precisely what a work of art should not show.

One of Woolf's most striking statements is that there is a particularly feminine manner of writing—a woman's phrase. She contends that women see, feel, and value differently than males, and that as a result, they must write differently in order to be authentic to themselves and their experiences. Meisel (1980, p.31) She lauds Jane Austen for "devising a wonderfully natural, shapely phrase appropriate for her own purpose and never veered from it".

Moving on to "the shelves that store books written by the living," the narrator discovers that women are now authoring almost as many books as males, and they are not all novels. "There are books on all kinds of things that no woman could have touched a decade ago." In examining the evolution of women's literature in her own generation, the narrator selects *Life's Adventure* by Mary Carmichael. It's her first book. Meisel (1980, p.53) Looking at what this young writer has inherited from earlier women—both authors and non-writers, both "their qualities and restrictions"—she initially concludes that the writing is not as excellent as Jane Austen's. "The seamless glide of sentence after phrase was cut off. Something tore and scraped." She immediately changes her mind, recognizing that Miss Carmichael's writing has little in common with Austen's; it is attempting something quite distinct. "She broke the sentence first, and now she has broken the sequence. She has the right to do both of these things if she does them for the cause of creating rather than breaking".

The phrase "Chloe liked Olivia" mark the turning point in Mary Carmichael's creativity. The storyteller has a loose jaw. How seldom, she realizes, has literature shown genuine, friendly female relationships!

Women were always considered in their connection to males, at least until the nineteenth century, and this has resulted in a massive and terrible absence from literary history, and all history. Shiach (1998), p.90 "Perhaps this explains the strange nature of woman in literature; the amazing extremes of her beauty and horror; her alternations between heavenly kindness and hellish depravity—for thus a lover would perceive her as his love soared or fell, prospered or suffered." In Carmichael's novel, women have hobbies and pursuits outside the house as well. Chloe and Olivia work together in a laboratory, which drastically alters the type of friends they can be. "For if Chloe likes Olivia and Mary Carmichael knows how to express it, she will kindle a torch in that huge room where nobody has yet been," the narrator begins to believe. "The genuine, unrecorded experience of women in solitary has been so infrequently addressed that its expression will exceed the available resources of the English language" (Shiach, 1998, P.93.)

The narrator realizes that Mary Carmichael will have her work cut out for her. She does not represent the pinnacle of Woolf's creative evolution, since "she will still be saddled with that self-consciousness" that keeps her in the world of "the nature-novelist" rather than the thoughtful artist. She will have to learn not only to tell the truth about women, but also to convey the truth about men that has gone unreported because it is what they cannot recognize in themselves, softly and without venom. Shiach (1998), p.100 But, even if Miss Carmichael lacks the talent of Austen or Eliot, the narrator notes, she has some advantages—not only as a person but also as a writer—that they are unaware of. Her poetry demonstrates neither animosity against males or bitterness toward her living circumstances. "Fear and hatred were nearly gone, or vestiges of them could be seen only in a tiny exaggeration of freedom's delight."

"The natural simplicity, the epic age of women's writing may have passed," the narrator observes as she surveys the spectrum of issues on which women in her own day have established themselves as authors. This follows on from Woolf's historical identification of "a woman's sentence." Although she emphasizes the concept that there is a natural manner for women to write, such as a distinct "woman's sentence," she is also open to the possibility that even that naturalness is historically dependent. (Abel 1989, p.98) What is "natural" to women will probably alter as they change, as their societal roles and circumstances change. Such a change will indeed be for the better: "She may begin to use writing as an art, not as a method of self-expression." When this happens,

will there still be such a thing as a "woman's sentence"? Woolf imagines so, for she wants to preserve the richness of difference between men and women. But it must be as flexible and evolving as women themselves.

Women have a creative power that differs substantially from that of men, one that has found expression, even in bygone ages, in non-literary ways. Education, she argues, should bring out those differences rather than enforcing similarity, and so acknowledge and enhance the richness and variety of human culture. "For we have too much likeness as it is." The next morning, the narrator awakes and looks out over a London utterly indifferent to "the future of fiction, the death of poetry, or the development by the average woman of a prose style completely expressive of her mind. (Abel, 1989, P.99) " The sight of two people meeting, getting in a cab, and being swept off into the flow of the city gives her an intuition of unity and rhythm that had been absent from her strained thinking over the last two days. There are certain states of mind that "seem, even if adopted spontaneously, to be less comfortable than others. In order to keep oneself continuing in them one is unconsciously holding something back, and gradually the repression becomes an effort." Emerging from her unnatural essayistic mode, the narrator begins to toy with a theory of the unification of the sexes—one, akin to Coleridge's theory of the androgynous mind, in which each mind has male and female elements. The harmonious balance of these elements is the hallmark of genius. (Abel, 1989, P.101) This theory refers to no special sympathy with or the opposite sex, she clarifies, but with the nature of the mind's very working. Such a mind, she imagines, would be "naturally creative, incandescent, and undivided"—like Shakespeare's.

In contrast to this ideal, she sees her own age as more explicitly sex-conscious than any other in history. This fact has, she speculates, "roused in men an extraordinary desire for self-assertion," as exemplified in the novel of Mr. A. "Virility has become self-conscious," she notes, in part as a result of the burgeoning (and threatening) self-consciousness of women. (Briggs, 2005, P.30) This is the dominant characteristic of fascism as well, yet neither sex is to blame. The narrator returns to her writing-table and looks at the page titled "Women and Fiction. "It is fatal," she concludes, "for anyone who writes to think of their sex."

At this point, Virginia Woolf takes over for her narrator and begins to anticipate her audience's reactions to the character's "failings and foibles." She hasn't said anything about the relative merits of the two sexes as writers, for example. This jockeying for position, she explains, is exactly what the artist must avoid. "I have made too much of the importance of material things," she admits, when we expect great minds and great art to rise above their circumstances. Briggs (Briggs, 2005, p.62) Nonetheless, she claims that the facts demonstrate unequivocally that the odds are stacked against any aspiring poet who lacks funds or education. "Intellectual freedom is dependent on material things," she concludes. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time. . . . Women, then, have not had a dog's chance of writing poetry. That is why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one's own." Good writing is good for society, Woolf asserts. She urges her audience to write—not only fiction, but books of all kinds, "for books have a way of influencing each other." She urges them to remember their current advantages as well as the contours of their unwritten history, and to see their own work not only as worthwhile in itself, but as part of the crucial preparation for women writers to come.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCLUSION

It has been stated that Woolf has dealt with specific personal issues that are closely related to the life and character of a woman. Her major points of view, which primarily concern women's rights, are expressed in her fictional and nonfictional works.

The dramatic setting of *A Room of One's Own* is highlighted in this study because Woolf has been invited to lecture on the topic of *Women and Fiction*. She makes the case that "a woman must have money and her own room if she is to write fiction." Her essay is written in the form of a partially fictionalized narrative of her thought process that led her to adopt this thesis.

Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own* is regarded as a watershed moment in twentieth-century feminist thought. It investigates the history of women in literature through an unconventional and highly provocative investigation of the social and material conditions required for literary writing. These conditions—leisure time, privacy, and financial independence—underpin all literary production, but they are especially relevant to understanding women's positions in the literary tradition because women have historically been uniformly denied those basic prerequisites.

Woolf launches a number of provocative sociological and aesthetic critiques in her exploration of this idea. She examines not only the state of women's literature, but also the state of women's scholarship, both theoretical and historical. She also develops an aesthetics based on the

principle of "incandescence," or the ideal state in which all that is merely personal is consumed by the intensity and truth of one's art.

In the same way that Woolf speaks out against traditional hierarchies in the content of her essay, she also rejects standard logical argumentation in the form of her essay. Woolf ingeniously uses fiction's resources to compensate for gaps in the historical record about women and to counter the biases that pervade more traditional scholarship. She writes a history of a woman's thinking about the history of thinking women: her essay is a reconstruction, reenactment, and argument all rolled into one.

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