

Virginia Woolf and a Room of One's Own

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Abstract - Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was born in London. She is one of the greatest modernist writer, essayist and critic. Woolf is a productive writer. Women are always at the center of Virginia's works. She is in favor of women's independence, and she is one of the forerunners of female literature. Her well-known works of feminism is *A Room of One's Own*.

A Room of One's Own is a classic female literature writing, which was published in 1929. Its original name is *Women and Fiction*. The book argues passionately in favor of women's personal and independence in life from men, which allow Virginia to find fulfillment and fame in her life as a writer. As a well-known works of feminism, *A Room of One's Own* gives me such enlightenment that female independence depends on their own career; women's independence in life brings about the intellectual freedom and equal right with men.

Index Terms – women. literature. independence.

1. The Root of Women's Poor Social Condition

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* becomes a classic of feminist writing, yet it also stands alone as a superb example of essay. Two college lectures Woolf gave in 1928 after she had been asked to speak on the topic "Women and Fiction" had contributed to the essay..

It seems to be a bit trouble for Woolf in defining the topic "Women and Fiction" as being "women and what they are like... women and the fiction they write... or women and the fiction that is written about them; or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together...". *A Room of One's Own* addresses a single theme: how an author's circumstances are reflected in his or her work. Woolf considered the question "Why are there no female Shakespeares?", and came to the same conclusion of so many men before her: It was, or had been, impossible for women to write the plays of Shakespeare.

Woolf's imaginary history of "Shakespeare's sister" is another example who was as wonderfully gifted as her brother, but ended tragically. "For it needs little skill in psychology," Woolf wrote, "to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty."

Although the essay touches upon many facts, themes and circumstances, they all pertain to her main point: "Intellectual freedom depends on material things. Poetry depends on intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor... Women have had less intellectual freedom than the sons of Athenian slaves. Women, then, have not had a dog's chance of writing poetry." Woolf's thesis in a nutshell.

2. The Female Literature's Impact on Women's Independence

In the last part of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf abandons her narrator and speaks directly to us. Women should acquire money and a room of their own in which to write, and they should write. By their writing, they will pave the way for Shakespeare's long-lost sister, and she will come among us again. This is a logical assumption, if writers are products of their times: Chaucer paved the way for Marlowe, and Marlowe for Shakespeare; and when the intellectual and social climate is right for our female Shakespeares, they will appear.

Woolf discloses the extent of patriarchal power in this book, "he was the power and the money and the influence. He was the proprietor of the paper and its editor and sub-editor. He was the Foreign Secretary and the Judge. He was the cricketer; he owned the racehorses and the yachts. He was the director of the company that pays two hundred percent to its shareholders" and so on. This being the case, Woolf comes to her central argument: the woman writer needs £500 a year and a room of her own. Creativity depends on certain concrete factors, the absence of which has hindered women writers over the centuries. The income guarantees independent living, the woman will be reliant on no one. The room guarantees freedom of space, both literal and metaphorical, in which the woman can work. Through the lock on the door woman to control her solitude and her company.

Woolf's aunt Caroline Emilia Stephen had left her a legacy. She did not earn £500 (roughly equivalent to £25,000 today) a year from her writing until twenty-one years into her writing career in 1926. After the death of their father, Leslie Stephen, in 1904, the Stephen siblings moved from Kensington into a house in Gordon Square, Bloomsbury. Here, Woolf, then Virginia Stephen, had a room of her own, and here, an independent woman, she launched her public writing career as a journalist. The foundation for the income and the room, then, is both literal and autobiographical. Women need to write truthfully and freely about their experiences and lives, but men control the access to time, materials, education and publication. Thus, this will not occur.

The theatre manager's pity results in her pregnancy and her life ends in suicide. Woolf also writes women back into literary history, by evoking those many women who did overcome obstacles and become writers. She simultaneously argues that the lack of a recognized tradition of women writers is a discouragement to prospective women authors and remedies the situation by beginning to create such a line. A central image for *A Room of One's Own* is Shakespeare's sister, Judith. Woolf fills in one of the gaps of literary history.

Judith's interest in the stage, unlike her brother's, is beset by obstacles in the form of men who refuse to allow her access into the world of theatre. Women have to start to "think back through their mothers", a key concept to 1970s feminist literary critics in their recovery of "lost", out of print, or unpublished women authors. Throughout her life, from her earliest short stories and essays, Woolf was interested in the "lives of the obscure", the lives of women hidden from official histories or narratives. Woolf ends this essay in a utopian vein, by looking forward to Judith Shakespeare's second coming. This will be a communal effort, reinforcing her arguments about the importance of a tradition of women writers.

3. The Meaning Woolf Wants to Express by "A Room"

Early feminist critics who sought to establish a legitimate "place" for women writers in a literary tradition which had historically excluded them on the basis that women were considered incapable of sustained, intellectual achievement were defeated as Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* was adopted as a manifesto less than forty years ago. Although certainly concerned with the politics of such a tradition, Woolf points out that the issue of merit is less about a woman's capacity for achievement than it is about the asymmetry of her position within a system of patriarchal capitalism. In this influential work, it is concluded that "it is far more important to know how much money women had and how many rooms than to theorize about their capacities".

Today, for its class and race bias, Woolf's 1929 publication is still frequently criticized. As Alice Walker points out in her "In Search of Our Mother's Garden," the dream of creative freedom and financial independence espoused by Woolf was, as history shows us, impossible for most women of color who had to contend not only with "chains, guns, the lash, the ownership of one's body by someone else and submission to an alien religion" but also enforced labor and malnutrition. Although drawing attention to the limitations of Woolf's manifesto with respect to issues of race and class, Walker builds upon the premises of Woolf's text regarding women's anonymity and creativity to include black women in a feminist literary and cultural history that had excluded them. As matter of fact, Walker shows that if the spatial metaphor of Woolf's "room" offered a cognitive "space" for certain 1970s and 1980s feminists, the mothers' "gardens" would also provide an organic "place" from which to derive "the dynamics of empowerment" through "matrilineage".

One American feminist literary critic, for example, uses Woolf's text to set up an opposition between the "domestic or private sphere" and "the public realm of history"(Donovan "Towards a Women's Poetics"). In fact, Josephine Donovan

argues for what she says is a "woman-centered epistemology", a notion which, to post-industrial feminism, often describes an anti-science metaphysics. Similarly, in "Women's Time, Women's Place," Elaine Showalter's assertion that "female space is the alternative linguistic and imaginative place from which women can speak" demonstrates how the metaphor of Woolf's "room" has acted as a phenomenological coordinate on a feminist cognitive map indicating not only the discursive dimensions of "women's space" but also of women's subjectivity. Thus, it seems that the discursive structural apparatus of Woolf's "room" has enabled feminists to map and to theorize links between the material and psychological conditions of women's lives in spatial terms. In cyber feminism, this strategy has not changed, for as Nina Wakeford says in "Gender and the Landscapes of Computing," her field study of an Internet?-which "explores how gender operates in a 'real' place where the Internet is both produced and consumed borrows metaphors of spatiality from cultural geography to explain gender in terms of its production as part of landscapes of computing" which can be thought of as an "overlapping set of material and imaginary geographies" including on-line experience as well as discourse about it. This gestalt of interior/exterior spaces provided by the spatial metaphor of Woolf's room has also allowed feminists to derive a metonymic network of emancipatory meanings and values.

As far as Woolf is concerned, if women want to change the poor social condition they face, they should write. In modern society, maybe what they should do is to find a job. Then they can earn money and own a room of their own. So "A Room" refers to women's independence in life, which also leads to women's independence in mind and equal right with men.

Acknowledgment

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