

Cette nouvelle classe ouvrière assurera le passage du capitalisme à une démocratie complète. « (...) Car il s'agit à la fois des ouvriers qualifiés et des techniciens et des spécialistes dont le nombre s'accroît et qui seront amenés par l'évolution économique et sociale à refuser le capitalisme d'organisation et à demander une démocratie économique réelle dont la seule réalisation effective sera l'autogestion des entreprises et des institutions sociales. »<sup>16</sup>

Ce caractère de la force révolutionnaire change celui de la révolution que Marx avait prévue. « Un passage à la gestion ouvrière... peut se faire par secteurs et..., tout en impliquant plus nécessairement ni une guerre civile antérieure aux transformations économiques ni une transformation synchrone de la société dans son ensemble... »<sup>17</sup>

Pour Goldmann, cette transformation peut se faire par une stratégie globale. Grâce à cette transformation se réalisera, dans un sens la prévision de Marx, la révolution prolétaire, et aboutira à une collectivité et à une communauté authentique. « (...) Il n'y a de nous, que là où Il y a communauté authentique. »<sup>18</sup>

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Goldmann, Lucien, *Recherches Dialectiques*, Gallimard, Paris, 1959, p.46.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.47.
- <sup>3</sup> Goldmann, *Le dieu caché*, Gallimard, Paris, 1956, p.26.
- <sup>4</sup> Goldmann, *Sciences humaines et philosophie*, Gonthier, Paris, 1966, p.109.
- <sup>5</sup> Encyclopaedia Universalis de France, « Sociologie de la littérature », 1995, p.4.
- <sup>6</sup> Goldmann, Lucien, *Sciences humaines et philosophie*, p.104.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp.104,105.
- <sup>8</sup> Sorokin, Pitirim, *Qu'est-ce qu'une classe sociale?* Cahiers internationaux de sociologie, II, vol.2, 1947, p.66.
- <sup>9</sup> Gurvitch, Georges, *La vocation actuelle de la sociologie*, (P.U.F.), Paris, p.345.
- <sup>10</sup> Sorokin, p.78.
- <sup>11</sup> Goldmann, *Sciences humaines et philosophie*, p.117.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.109.
- <sup>13</sup> Goldmann, *Recherches Dialectiques*, p.18.
- <sup>14</sup> Goldmann, *Pour une sociologie du roman*, Gallimard, Paris, 1964, p.44.
- <sup>15</sup> Zima, Pierre V., *Dialectique de l'immanence*, Ed. Universitaires, Paris, 1973, p.30.
- <sup>16</sup> Goldmann, *Marxisme et sciences Humaines*, p.227.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.298.
- <sup>18</sup> Goldmann, *Sciences humaines et philosophie*, p.25.



### Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" in a Feminist Context

Virginia Woolf'un "Kendine Ait Bir Oda" Adlı Romanına Feminist Bir Yaklaşım

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#### Özet

*Kendine Ait Bir Oda*, temelde, Avrupa uygarlıklarında çok eski dönemlerden günümüze değin süren kadının ikincil statüsüyle ilgili konularına yönelik bir polemiktir. Burada Virginia Woolf, kadına uygulanan eşitsizlik ve önyargının kendi zamanında göreceli olarak azaldığını kabul etmekle birlikte, bu konuda daha çok yol alınması gerektiğini söyler. Kadının aşağı görülmesi düşüncesinin de aslında, erkeğin kafasındaki derin şartlanmalardan kaynaklandığını sürekli vurgular. Özellikle, "bir kadının kurmaca yazınla uğraşabilmesi için kendine ait bir odası ve parası olmalıdır" iddiasını ele aldığı bu romanında Woolf, bu fikrini en anlaşılır betimleyici örneklerle ve en çarpıcı bir güçle savunur. Bu roman sadece kadınların konumu hakkında değil, aynı zamanda bir dehanın yaratıcı zekası ve mizahı, doğası hakkındadır. Canlı, akli başında, inandırıcı ve üstelik eğlendirici bir romandır; aslında feminist görüşlerin ele alındığı bir baş yapıttır.

#### Abstract

*A Room of One's Own* is basically a polemic novel on the inferior status of women that has persisted in European civilization from the earliest times to the present day. Virginia Woolf admits the gradual erosion of inequality and prejudice in her own time, but insists that it still has a very long way to go, and that the idea of the inferiority of women is still deeply rooted in men's minds. Specifically, it is a claim that a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction, and it is argued with the most remarkable force and the most telling illustrative examples. And it is not only about the status of women, but also about the creative intelligence and the nature of genius. It is spirited, lucid, cogent, amusing; it is, in fact, a masterpiece of feminist views.

In October 1928, Virginia Woolf was invited to deliver lectures at Newnham College and Gorton College, then the only women's colleges at Cambridge University. These lectures were then subsequently expanded and revised into *A Room of One's Own*, which was printed in 1929. The book is a landmark of twentieth-century feminist thought because it challenged the traditional social conventions regarding women's issues. The composition of this work coincides with the year in which the women in

England finally won the right to vote. In essence, it explores the history of women in literature through an unconventional and highly provocative investigation of the social and material conditions required for the writing of literature. Perhaps as a unique and most important work of feminist literary criticism of its time, *A Room of One's Own* explores the historical and contextual contingencies of literary achievement, where Woolf gives a number of methodologies--historical and sociological analysis, fictional hypothesis, and philosophy, seeking an answer to her initial question of why there were so few female writers and why women writers were holding a minority status in her life time. *A Room of One's Own* begins with a question: "But you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction--what has that to do with a room of one's own?"<sup>1</sup> This sentence may sound queer for the reader but it suggests that what is to come next is likely to be unconventional, contrary to expectation of a great many intellectuals. Rachel Bowley points out that "the unconventional opening represents a provocative interruption of the discourse in progress."<sup>2</sup> But, Woolf is straightforward in her intention, since she seems to have set out to engage a topic that had received little serious attention in 1928: women and writing. As she explains, the subject is too vast for her to sum up in a short space, so she proposes a highly controversial idea that women must have the security and privacy of their own room and their own money. The narrator of the story unravels the reasons behind this basic premise throughout the rest of the essay. Woolf's technique is to create a fictional narrator who will relate how she came to have certain views on women and women's status in the society. She chooses a female character (Mary Beton or whatever-the name is of no importance who speaks her views) purposely. Woolf's initial interpretation is straightforward. As Woolf's alter ego, the narrator in the story shares her distinctive voice; witty and incisive. Much of the essay's power lies in this character's ability to form elegant metaphors for Woolf's abstract ideas. Woolf takes over the speaking voice and responds to two anticipated criticisms against the narrator. First, she says she purposely did not express an opinion on the relative merits of the two genders--especially as writers--since she does not believe that such a judgment is possible or desirable. Second, her audience may believe the narrator has laid too much emphasis on material things, and that the mind should be able to overcome poverty and lack of privacy.

Considered as a kind of cultural odyssey, where the reader experiences someone moving past different landmarks toward a settled place or a settled opinion, *A Room of One's Own* is also social and literary criticism with irony and satire woven into an essay that is an intermixture of fantasy and

historical fact. Following the narrator through her journey may be the best way to understanding the novel. In the beginning of the first chapter, Woolf addresses her thoughts on women and fiction while trying to answer the question as to whether women can produce works of art as meaningful as those created by men. She shares the opinion that women's values are naturally different from those that men have. To accomplish this, she examines women's historical experience along with the unique struggle of the female artist over time. She simply classifies this question by dividing it into three parts; women who write fiction, women and what they are like in general, and finally the way women are portrayed in fiction.

The first point to be made about this classification is that the all three of these ways of looking at the subject are interrelated. The second is to address the question as to what kind of environment and circumstances is necessary so that women could be able to write fiction. Or what are the economics of women writing fiction? The main idea among these classifications is: What sort of fiction is created about women? And might there be a difference between the way women create fiction and men create it? Along with the sentences in the text, we also note that Woolf often considers these themes "inextricably mixed together."<sup>3</sup> In Chapter One, she does so successfully through the lens of fictional personal experience, most memorably with the description of two imaginary meals, one at a women's college and the other at a men's. The situation at the men's college is quite different. In men's college, the excellent food and relaxing atmosphere make for good conversation. Back at Fernham, the women's college, where she is staying as a guest, she has a poor dinner, while at the men's college, there are soles and partridges.

During a dinner in the great dining-hall, everybody gets together around the table. "Here was the soup. It was a plain gravy soup. One could have seen through the transparent liquid any pattern that there might have been on the plate itself. But there was no pattern. The plate was plain."<sup>4</sup> Then comes the rest of the meal: beef, cabbages, and potatoes, followed by prunes and custard. For Woolf, good meal and drink are appropriately the indications of rational intercourse and they are also symbolic of the material conditions that support education. There are noticeable differences between the two meals, which represent also the difference between the educational opportunities given to men and women, which have a notable effect on the capacity to produce fiction. Again for Woolf, a formal education is almost a way of the possession of great writers, from which women were almost excluded. She also points out that women would have naturally been



expected to concentrate on the educations of their children and sisters as in the Victorian Age. Because, being a superwoman was out of question since they were plunged into their daily activities "making a fortune and bearing thirteen children-no human being could stand it."<sup>5</sup> However, women were unable to produce works of art since they lacked the independent means to carry on. What was remarkable was that most men did not care about the situation of disenfranchised women at all. The money made by husbands went to support men's colleges. She and Seton denounce their mothers, and their sex for being so impoverished and leaving their daughters so little. Had they been independently wealthy, perhaps they could have founded fellowships and secured similar luxuries for women. The narrator contemplates on the effects of wealth and poverty on the mind, on the prosperity of males and the poverty of females, and on the effects of tradition or lack of tradition on the writer.

In the second chapter, the scene changes to London, where the narrator sits in a room attempting to continue her research into women and fiction at the British Museum and there she searches for answers to the questions she posed about men, women, wealth, and creativity in the British Museum, where in a wonderful image, "one stood under the vast dome as if one were a thought in the huge bald forehead."<sup>6</sup> There, she soon realizes that there are so many books written about women (almost all by men). On the other hand, there are hardly any books by women on men. She wonders why there is such a great discrepancy and why men write the sorts of books that they do about women. She finds men's thinking about women to be full of prejudices and contradictions. She asks herself whether women are capable/incapable of education, for example?

*"Napoleon thought them incapable. Dr Johnson thought the opposite.... Have they souls or have they not souls? Some savages say they have none. Others, on the contrary, maintain that women are half divine and worship them on that account. Some sage's hold that they are shallower in the brain; others that they are deeper in the consciousness. Goethe honoured them; Mussolini despises them. Wherever one looked men thought about women and thought differently."<sup>7</sup>*

Eating her lunch near the British Museum, she scans the headlines of the evening paper and notes their testimony to the fact that "England is under the rule of a patriarchy. Nobody in their senses could fail to detect the dominance of the professor. His was the power and the money and the

*influence. He was the proprietor of the paper and its editor and sub-editor."<sup>8</sup> Woolf comes up with the idea that men are angry with women because they realise that women provide an essential psychological function, which they are afraid of losing. The function is the insurance of self-confidence. For Woolf, everyone needs self-confidence to face the "arduous, difficult, perpetual struggle."<sup>9</sup> in life and one can gain this self-confidence by believing that one is superior to others. That's why professors are not worried about women's inferiority. Instead, what worries them is their own superiority, which has been kept continuing throughout time by the viewpoint of the other sex.*

As Woolf points out, women "have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting man as twice his natural size."<sup>10</sup> Feminist theologian, Catherine Keller, refers to Woolf's trope of woman as a mirror to criticize patriarchal religion by saying that "Woman's support of his ego sustains his good-likeness, which together they amplify into Indefinite, thus assuring an endless return of the same cycle."<sup>11</sup> Andrea Dworkin also uses the mirror trope in her analysis of pornography: "Male sexual power is the substance of culture... As Woolf wrote, (women) is (man's) mirror; by diminishing her in his use of her he becomes twice his size. In the culture he is a giant, enlarged by his conquest of her, implied or explicit. She remains his mirror and... mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action"<sup>12</sup> She sarcastically observes that without that power the earth probably "would still be swamp and jungle. The glories of all our wars would be unknown. We should still be scratching the outlines of deer on the remains of mutton bones. ... That is why Napoleon and Mussolini both insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge."<sup>13</sup>

This contemporary fact of life explains why a man experiences criticism from a woman as so much more injurious than the same would be if it came from a man. As Woolf points out, if women tell the truth the figure in the looking glass shrinks.

In the first two chapters of *A Room of One's Own*, primarily focuses on ways in which women have been exposed to the patriarchal world and treated unjustly, either in access to benefits, such as having no education; or in the way in which they have been presented. It is very implicit in this viewing that liberation of women from such injustice is treated in much the same manner as men are treated. Since freed themselves from all injustices, women will get the same sort of goods that men get and they will also face with equal accuracy. What is more important is to note that the standards of



liberation of women here are essentially those that are pre-established by men. If men enjoy the luxury of good food and drink in their education, women should earn the right to enjoy much the same pleasure. If men are not portrayed as inferior by the books in the British Museum, women shouldn't be either. If men can think, as they like, women need to be freed from the economic dependence that keeps them from being able to think, as they like. In the cultural perspective of liberation, the concern is to be freed from restraints that keep one from enjoying what others enjoy.

In the third chapter, the narrator turns to the witness of history, to 'facts'. To her disappointment, the narrator is not able to discover a positive statement on why women are poorer than men. Therefore, she travels back to the depth of the history to investigate women-especially the women of Elizabethan England. For the narrator, there is a close connection between living conditions and creative works. As the narrator suggests, this period is interesting "for it is a perennial puzzle why no women wrote a word of that extraordinary literature, when every other man, it seemed, was capable of a song or a sonnet."<sup>14</sup> What the narrator discovers from history is bewildering. She reads G. M. Trevelyan's recently published *History of England* (1926), she finds in here the stories of women's oppression in the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries (being beaten without recourse; daughters being sold into marriage) and they had few rights in the eras, despite having strong personalities, especially in works of art. The narrator finds no material about middle-class women in the history book and her questions remain unanswered. What she observes is that while men is of highest importance, practically women is completely insignificant; "she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger."<sup>15</sup> Women's history, the narrator suggests, might be a worthwhile pursuit for "some brilliant student at Newnham or Girton,"<sup>16</sup> because virtually nothing is known of women's lives before the eighteenth century.

She suddenly remembers a bishop who declared that a woman never possess the genius of William Shakespeare and begins to imagine what would have been the likely biography of Shakespeare's sister, Judith, had she too been as possessed as her brother's genius but not his opportunities. However, she agrees with the bishop that no women of the time would have had such genius. She is not sent to school or encouraged to read at home. She is allowed little experience of the world and had no way out for her talent. Finally threatened with a forced marriage, she runs away to London, desiring to be in an acting career but there, her ambition is ridiculed and she

is forced to become a man's mistress. Finding herself pregnant, she commits suicide herself. At this point narrator imagines that this or something like it could have been the fate of any woman who had Shakespeare's genius. Woolf's basic view with this image is somewhat straightforward. Creativity, she contends, requires certain conditions that have typically been absent from women. Undoubtedly, some kind of genius must have existed among women, as it exists among working class but lacked a mode of expression. Even if a woman overcame with various obstacles and wrote something, it would have been anonymous. Moreover, the difficulties of creating a work of genius are great enough for anyone, male or female, she observes but the narrator tries to question what state of mind is most amenable to creativity. It is hard enough for anyone to have the courage to create but how much it has to lower the vitality to be continually told: "You cannot do this, you are incapable of doing that."<sup>17</sup>

In the book, Woolf challenges the common assumption that women are intellectually or artistically inferior to men, incapable of producing great literature. She argues that women of genius have always existed, but unlike their male contemporaries, few women have been awarded the basic material and spiritual conditions; not to mention an independent income and privacy to develop their own artistic capability and part of the discussion and talent. Woolf's main point in this book is related to the effect of material conditions on women's creativity. She also notes that opposition has halted women's creativity, because the mind of the artist must be 'incandescent' without any obstacle, as Shakespeare's mind was. Incandescence, the narrator restates, is a state of mind that simply would have been impossible for a woman in the sixteenth century. She continues her history by outlining the gradual emergences of women writers out of that blank past. In order to achieve 'incandescence', the intensity of art must burn away "all desire to protest, to preach, to proclaim an injury, to pay off a score, to make the world the witness of some hardship or grievance."<sup>18</sup> For her, obstacles are poison to a writer's mind and there must be no external obstacles, nor can there be personal grievances within the work either.

In the fourth chapter of the book, the focus of *Women and Fiction* changes to a consideration of women writers, both actual writers and ultimately one of the author's own creation. The effect of tradition on women's writing is the special interest raised earlier in the work. For Woolf, women are different from men both in their social history as well as inherently and each of these differences has played an important role in the development of women's writing. Again, the cultural perspective begins to



appear with what is called a "liberationist" viewpoint with the focus especially on women's not being able to write with the freedom that men have had. Women's lack of men's freedom to experience the breadth of the world, for instance, provides the standard for recognising the restraints on women's ability to create. The focus here is based on women's development independently of men and expressing their own voices and capacities that are inherently different from those of men. A feminist perspective might be thought to have grown out of one that is liberationist. Its impulse and direction are quite different. In other words, it moves toward feminist standards. What is good for women becomes an ultimate issue. Therefore, the narrator begins this chapter by considering a series of women who wrote in the seventeenth century. These writers are important because they are the first women to write. However, as being the first, they were twisted, to a greater or less degree, because their attempts to write were regarded as highly eccentric.

Fearing to be ridiculed by society, the narrator observes that they were unable to accomplish the impersonality that she believes is all-important to great fiction. They could not stop being aware of the fact that the world thought ill of what they were doing. As an example of the obstructions to be found in the consciousness of a poet, the narrator takes down from her bookshelf the poems of Lady Winchilsea, which she finds embittered. Her work, however, is far from incandescent. "One has only to open her poetry to find her bursting out her indignation against the position of women."<sup>19</sup> Her mind can be seen to be torn by emotion and downhearted when she writes: "so strong the opposing faction still appears- the hope to thrive can ne'er outweigh the fears."<sup>20</sup> Men are seen as the main obstacles, which have the power to bar her from what she wants to do-to write. She is again sure that despite the fact that she has to encourage herself to write, "what she writes will never be published."<sup>21</sup> Against all the bitterness and resentment, she keeps the fire hot within her. Had she not been so consumed with these negative, imprisoning emotions, the narrator believes, she would have written brilliant verse.

The narrator turns her attention to the Duchess Margaret of Newcastle, who was driven into eccentric behaviours by ridiculing a contemporary of Lady Winchilsea. Both women were noble, married to good men and childless. The narrator reads her verse and feels she suffers from the same personal grievances. Admittedly, "hare-brained and fantastical in her writings," the narrator says, but also, clearly, a "... generous, untutored intelligence."<sup>22</sup> Then comes the Dorothy Osborne, a woman with a real zeal

for writing. The narrator contemplates her as a more sensitive, a melancholic Elizabethan figure who wrote only letters, as a proper woman did, and not poetry. Her letters reveal her gift as a writer, but letters do not count as literature. Because her letters betray Dorothy's insecurity over her writing. But with the model of the Duchess before her, she could only believe that it was absurd for a woman to write books. Therefore, she wrote only admirable letters.

For the narrator, these writers were all unsuccessful writers. Their talent was somewhat wasted by its depreciation by 'the opposition faction'. Aphra Behn, the first Englishwoman to support herself as a professional writer, followed them, however, and a landmark is reached with the work of her, which means the ability of a woman to earn her living by writing in defiance of conventions of 'chastity'. The narrator's selection of Behn as the most important female writer shows that Woolf is not, as her previous remarks may have implied, classist. Behn is middle-class, whereas the other women who wrote less significant works were all aristocratic. More important is that Behn has mostly fit the narrator's criteria for freedom of thought. She is not dependent on men for money. She earns her life by writing. With Behn, we meet not a woman "who was shut up in their parks among their folios, those solitary great ladies who wrote without an audience or criticism," but one who "rubs shoulders with ordinary people in the streets"<sup>23</sup> - what Shakespeare's sister was unable to do without coming to ruin-who shows the ability, through writing to make a living by her wits on equal terms with men. For the narrator, Aphra Behn marks a turning point. Her triumph over circumstances goes by even her excellent writing. For women, the writer argues, "here begins the freedom of the mind, or rather the possibility that in the course of time the mind will be free to write what it likes."<sup>24</sup>

These women became the necessary precursors of the successful women writers of the early nineteenth century; Jane Austen, The Brontë sisters and George Eliot. With them, one can consider women's writing in a more elaborated manner that it has its own nature based on what it is to be a woman. In this regard, the narrator begins to wonder why the early nineteenth century writers were all novelists despite their differences in temperament, being childless and having had very little in common. The narrator focuses on women's common social role and offers several reasons why they all might have been attracted to the novel form. For one thing, these women wrote in the shared space of the sitting room and perhaps the novel proved a hardier form the poetry in this climate of distraction. The



narrator remarks that the involvement of middle-class women in writing business at the end of the eighteenth century is more important historically than "*Crusades or the Wars of the Roses*."<sup>25</sup> Jane Austen, Brontës and George Eliot must be grateful to Aphra Behn for her first attempt to prepare them the way to making women's voice heard.

Functioning at the heart of the family, the narrator finds, women's training necessarily includes the observation of character and the analysis of characters' emotion. These are the faculties women acquire unconsciously in their daily activities, which are more easily put to good use in a novel than elsewhere. However, she goes on to consider that women's domestic role seriously narrowed their range of experience, which could also devalue their creativity. This was not a problem for Jane Austen in that she may well have been quite content to write only about social life despite the fact that she was in the narrowness of life that was imposed upon her. Charlotte Brontë who longed for wider horizons and creations suffered because she could not find them in such a way as Austen did. "*I longed for a power of vision*", Brontë wrote, "*which might reach the busy world full of life that I have heard of but never seen... I desired more of practical experience than possessed*."<sup>26</sup> Although Charlotte Brontë may have had more genius than Austen, she could not write with that same incandescence, but her writing carries the scars of her personal wounds. Then, the narrator turns to 'integrity in the novel' which rings true when it corresponds in the some indirect way with reality. Only Jane Austen and Emily Brontë managed to eradicate the notion that main fault to maintain integrity in the face of criticism, opposition and misunderstanding. Their achievements were miraculous under these circumstances.

The fiction of women diminished as result of social restrictions also limited their experiences. They were unable to go out or kept ignorant of certain gender issues. Therefore, they were unable to convey the range of human life. For the narrator, the lack of an existing literary tradition is the greatest obstacle for these heroic nineteenth century writers. The writings of the greatest literary men were of no help to the female author against the problem "*that there was no common sentence ready for her use*."<sup>27</sup> These motherless women had a great work before them but had no tradition behind them. This may be another good explanation for the turn to the novel, which forms "*alone was young enough to be soft in her hands*."<sup>28</sup>

The statement that there is a uniquely female way of writing-a woman's sentence- is one of Woolf's most provocative claims. She argues that women see and feel and value differently from men. Because of this,

they must also write differently if they are to be true to themselves and their experiences.

In the fifth chapter, the narrator moves on to "*to the shelves which hold books by the living*"<sup>29</sup> and finds that women are presently writing nearly as many books as men do and that they are not only novels, but all kinds of books. "*There are books on all sorts of subjects which a generation ago no woman could have touched*."<sup>30</sup> She feels the female writer, now given a broader education, no longer needs the novel as the only means of self-expression. The change has occurred in women's writing in her own generation, the narrator pulls down a recent entry novel called *Life's Adventure* by Mary Carmichael as an example. Though this novel is not of good quality compared to Jane Austen's: "*the smooth gliding of sentence after sentence was interrupted. Something tore, something scratched*."<sup>31</sup> The most striking point is that it is the first attempt for a woman writer to be quite different from the precursors: She, first, finds the prose style uneven, perhaps as a reaction to the reputation of women's writing. The narrator considers that maybe Mary Carmichael is purposely deceiving the reader with unexpected stylistic shifts. At this moment, the critical moment in Mary Carmichael's innovation comes with words, "*Chloe liked Olivia*."<sup>32</sup> The narrator realizes how rarely literature has presented real, amicable friendship between women. At least until the nineteenth century, women were always considered in their relationship to men and this has resulted in a huge and grave omission both from literary history. In *Life's Adventure*, the narrator, again, points out that women have interests and quests outside the home. Chloe and Olivia work together in a laboratory, a fact, which greatly changes the kind of friends, they can be. The narrator begins to realize that an important transition has occurred, "*For if Chloe likes Olivia and Mary Carmichael knows how to express it she will light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been*."<sup>33</sup>

The narrator still admits that if Mary Carmichael wrote with some genius, then her book would be very important. She reads another scene with the two women in it and thinks that it is a "*sight that has never been seen since the world began*."<sup>34</sup> Her high hopes for Carmichael's description of the intricacies of female mind make the narrator realize that she has betrayed her original aim: not to praise her own sex. She recognizes that for whatever mental greatness they have, women have not yet made much of a mark in the world compared to men. But, she still believes that the great men in history often depended on women for providing them with "*some stimulus, some renewal of creative power which is the gift of the opposite sex to bestow*."<sup>35</sup>



She also argues that the creativity of men and women is different and that "it would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only?"<sup>36</sup> The real, unrecorded experience of women in solitude has been so little handled that its expression will extend the existing resources of the English language. Carmichael discovers her own mind but she will have to do so without anger against men. Moreover, since every one has a blind spot about them, only a woman such as herself can fill out the portrait of men in literature. However, upon reading more of Carmichael's novel, the narrator feels that the author is no more than a clever girl, even though she bears no traces of anger or fear. "Fear and hatred were almost gone, or traces of them showed only in a slight exaggeration of the joy of freedom, a tendency to the caustic and satirical, rather than to the romantic, in her treatment of the other sex."<sup>37</sup> In a hundred years' time, the narrator concludes putting the book back on the shelf, with five hundred pounds and a room of her own; this Mary Carmichael will be a better writer.

For Woolf, Carmichael is the descendant of the tradition she outlined in the previous chapter and she represents an enormous change in the state of writing. An average female writer is finally able to stand on her own feet by writing without anger or hatred, without a stifling awareness of her gender, with a standard feminine sentence as a model. Carmichael's treatment of the relationship between Chloe and Olivia is noteworthy. Because, female friendship seems to be the only possible subject she might endorse. Her novel compensates for the blind spot men have in describing humanity, especially since she writes without anger. But the narrator does not see this blind spot as a mockery; rather, it means the sexes are different and can complement each other in their attempt to understand themselves. Similarly, each gender has a blind spot about itself and only through the observations of the opposite sex can it gain full enlightenment.

Woolf continues her metaphors for genius as light and possibly adds a sexual twist in this chapter. Mary Carmichael writes, at first, as if she is "striking a match that will not light."<sup>38</sup> Later, when Carmichael has proved herself more able, the narrator wonders if she will "light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been."<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, Carmichael is a decent writer and what is more important to Woolf is that her writing does not suffer from anger or fear, but from a simple lack of genius and craft. In some time, given more socio-economic opportunities, Carmichael and all contemporary female writers, Woolf seems to imply, will blossom.

In this chapter, Woolf also dwells upon two main striking points: First, the ability of women to portray themselves in an expanded manner, which goes beyond the way in which they are portrayed by men; second, the ability to present characteristics of men that men are unable to see about themselves. Women have a creative power, which substantially differs from that of men, one that has found expression in non-literary ways. Education, she argues, should bring out those differences rather than enforcing similarity and so acknowledge and raise the richness and variety of human culture.

The final chapter of *A Room of One's Own* appropriately begins and ends with images, such as the sight of London, people on the street and meeting of two different sexes at the corner. At the outset, the narrator awakens and looks out of the window and sees a very ordinary London sight, in the hustle and bustle, 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."<sup>40</sup> Two persons, a man and a woman, come down the street, meet at the corner and get into a cab. The sight of two persons gives her a suspicious unity and rhythm that had been absent from her strained thinking over the last two days. It is a common image, but one that the narrator finds herself investing with a rhythmical order. For her, it is a picture of cooperation, even fusion, and seemed somehow to sooth her mind. She begins to think over one sex as distinct from the other. It interferes with the unity of mind. There are certain states of mind that seem, even if adopted spontaneously, to be less comfortable than others.

The narrator begins with a theory of the unification of the sexes—one akin to Coleridge's theory of the androgynous mind. Coleridge does not mean that the androgynous mind favours women in any way; in fact it, it does this less than the single-sexed mind. Rather, the "androgynous mind" transmits emotion without any obstruction. It is "naturally creative, incandescent, and undivided."<sup>41</sup> Shakespeare is a fine model of this androgynous mind, though it is harder to find current examples in this "stridently sex-conscious"<sup>42</sup> age. The narrator proposes:

*"In each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man's brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating."<sup>43</sup>*



This, the narrator suggests, may be what Coleridge means when he said that a great mind is androgynous. Only the androgynous mind can encourage perpetual life in its reader's mind. The narrator blames both sexes for bringing about this self-consciousness of gender. She judges the androgyny of various famous writers. She restates her idea that if a writer's mind is purely male or female, if there is not total freedom of thought, then the writing will not be fertilised.

The narrator argues that rather some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before creation can be accomplished. Having made this statement, Woolf leaves the narrative voice returning to her own character. She says she will respond to two expected criticisms of the narrator. First, she says she purposely did not express an opinion on the relative merit of the two genders -especially as writers - since she does not believe such a judgement is possible or desirable. Second, her audience may believe that the narrator may have laid too much emphasis on material things. *"Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time"*<sup>44</sup> and that the mind should be able to overcome poverty and lack of privacy. She urges her audience to remember their current advantages as well as the forms 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 to come. She concludes the book with a return to her most famous image, suggesting that Shakespeare's sister lives in the person of modern woman and that she can flourish if women face reality and work to make an environment contributory to such a genius Woolf indicates the novels end.

*"I told you in the course of this paper that Shakespeare had a sister; but do not look for her in Sir Sidney Lee's life of the poet. She died young - alas, she never wrote a word. She lies buried where the omnibuses now stop, opposite the Elephant and Castle. Now my belief is that this poet who never wrote a word and was buried at the crossroads still lives. She lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here tonight, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed. But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh. This opportunity, as I think, it is now coming within your power to give her. For my belief is that if we live*

*another century or so - I am talking of the common life which is the real life and not of the little separate lives which we live as individuals - and have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own; if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves."*<sup>45</sup>

Woolf closes the door on her fictional narrator with the essay on "Women and Fiction" still unwritten. Her point in this essay is to show the thought process behind her theory that fiction writing requires a private income and a private room. The process has become the substance of the essay itself. It is a story that promises to continue in her novel **Three Guineas**.

Woolf moves beyond the scope of women in fiction and attacks the issue of a woman trying to succeed in society on her own choosing a career of her own will. She not only addresses the issue of women finding educations and careers, but she also takes a look at creativity in writing. She was convinced that every great work was not only the genius of its creator, but also the genius of all writers preceding him or her. This is what made it so difficult for women writers to get started, because they had not precedented work to rely upon. She is of the opinion that Women's roles in literature did not develop nearly as rapidly as women's changing roles in society. While these changes were reflected somewhat in what was written, female characters in most classic literature written by both men and women seem to remain stereotypes. She wrote during an era in which impersonal criticism was virtually the only way for a woman to maintain objectivity and authority. However, the imaginative use of drama and character development to get her point across can be evidenced in numerous areas of this essentially non-fiction work.

In *A Room of One's Own* people, particularly women, are empowered with all kinds of potential, some of which will be expressed and much never to be expressed. Yet, those whose potential cannot be expressed are just as valuable socially or maybe more so than the fortunate ones. Therefore, social justice requires that people should be valued for their potential and for their work they have actually performed. But, Woolf's main aim is to expose the fate of women of genius, not that of ordinary women. Her conviction is that society should create a world in which Shakespeare's sister might survive



her gift, not one in which a miner's wife can have her rights to property.

As Laura Marcus points out, "*the feminism of A Room of One's Own lies less in its concern with what is to be done than with how identities and states of affairs are to be conceptualised.*"<sup>46</sup> Woolf's claim "*we think back through our mothers if we are women*"<sup>47</sup> is immensely a powerful support for a feminism seeking to construct a distinct women's history and literary tradition. Again for Laura Marcus, this assertion is "*a more ambiguous claim than it would at first appear, but it has proved an immensely powerful model of literary matrilinearity none the less*"<sup>48</sup> Still, Woolf is hardly at odds with later feminists. She believes each gender can only know so much about the other one (and about itself), and that women should, indeed, write about women--so long as it is done without anger or insecurity. She gives convincing evidence for why genius has so infrequently flowered among women. And, most important, she provides a strong remedy: 500 pound a year and a room of one's own. In John Mepham's views, "*Woolf's strongly felt need for 'a room of one's own', in which she could escape the interference of men and hope to overcome her own training in deference to men, and reflects her history of uncertainty and irresolution in relation to her own identity.*"<sup>49</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, Penguin Books, London, 1945, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Rachel Bowly, *Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations*, Basil Blackwell Ltd., Oxford, 1988, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Woolf, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted from Mark Hussey, *Virginia Woolf A to Z: A Comprehensive Reference for Students, Teachers, and Common Readers to Her Life, Work, & Critical Reception*, Oxford University Press., New York, 1996, p. 245.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 245.

<sup>13</sup> Woolf, p. 37.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>46</sup> Sue Roe and Susan Sellers, *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, Cambridge University Press., Cambridge, 2000, p. 218.

<sup>47</sup> Woolf, p. 76.

<sup>48</sup> Laura Marcus, *Virginia Woolf*, Northcote House Publishers Ltd., Plymouth, 1997, p. 44.

<sup>49</sup> John Mepham, *Criticism in Focus Virginia Woolf*, St. Martin's Press, Inc., New York, p. 62.