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Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*: Issues of Social Class and Gender

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ABSTRACT

This project analyses Virginia Woolf's perception of women and literature in her essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929). And it does so from the dual perspective of class and gender. Woolf's essay foregrounds the critical role of material conditions in making possible the success of any writer. However, women writers have traditionally confronted more difficulties in achieving the same recognition as their male counterparts. Woolf is known for being a pioneer of literary feminism, but this claim involves several complexities that need to be explored. Issues like social class and social prejudice are also important parts of the equation. That is why this thesis outlines the writer's views on women's literature in the course of history against social and economic factors. Ultimately, I intend to highlight the groundbreaking nature of Virginia Woolf's diachronic exploration of the discrimination suffered by women as writers: an exploration involving literary and social statements.

Key words: Women's writing, Class, Gender, Virginia Woolf

Este trabajo analiza la percepción de las mujeres y la literatura en el ensayo *Una habitación propia* (1929) escrito por Virginia Woolf, y lo hace desde la doble perspectiva de clase y género. El ensayo de Woolf subraya el papel crítico de las condiciones materiales que hacen posible el éxito de cualquier escritor. Sin embargo, las escritoras tradicionalmente han enfrentado más vicisitudes para lograr el mismo reconocimiento que sus homólogos masculinos. Woolf es célebre por ser una pionera del feminismo literario, pero esta afirmación implica varias complejidades que deben explorarse. Cuestiones como la clase o el prejuicio sociales también son partes importantes de la ecuación. Por ese motivo, este trabajo de fin de grado esboza la perspectiva de la escritora en la literatura femenina a lo largo de la historia en contraste con los factores sociales y económicos. En última instancia, pretendo destacar el carácter innovador de la exploración diacrónica de Woolf sobre la discriminación que sufren las mujeres como escritoras: una exploración que implica posicionamientos literarios y sociales.

Palabras clave: escritura femenina, clase, género, Virginia Woolf

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1. Introduction

Historically women's writing as such has not been acknowledged or discussed by literary critics and scholars to any extent similar to that of their male counterparts. Women writers have always been curtailed by harder and poorer material conditions in the exercise of their calling and indeed in the very access to the intellectual environments than their male fellow writers. Moreover, until relatively recent times, social groups who did not meet certain economic standards were barred from mainstream formal education. The combination of both factors is determinant in explaining the nearly unsurmountable barriers that working-class women had to overcome in order to write, publish, and be recognized as writers. This situation made a clear difference as regards the contents and the public impact of literature written by women. Yet in the 19th and 20th centuries, significant social and economic changes (particularly in the case of Britain) improved access to education for both men and women. Even so, it was still a long way before real equality could be reached in terms of both, women-as-writers and women-as-readers: two central concerns of what would become second wave literary feminism under the inspiration of Virginia Woolf among others.

This Bachelor's Thesis puts the focus on the key issues that traditionally cemented the gap between men and women, but also between the members of different social classes, in the arena of literary creation: one of the main topics explored by Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929). My discussion will particularly highlight Woolf's reflections, analyses, and creative approach to literary and social questions, which constitute the core content of the author's best-known feminist essay. My inquiry begins by a brief analysis of the author's biography since it undoubtedly helps evaluate the direction taken by her literary endeavor. Indeed, I will argue that certain aspects of the life of Virginia Woolf can critically enlighten our understanding of the feminist proposal put forward by *A Room of One's Own*, and that a number of parallelisms can be drawn between her intimate life and the situations which she critically exposes in this fictional essay through several narrative voices. Although Woolf still uses the term *sex* to refer to the imbalance between the social and creative opportunities available to men and women, I will rather rely on our modern understanding of the term

*gender*¹ as a cultural, integral conception of masculinity and femininity and other related concepts.

The main objective of this paper is to measure the revolutionary character of this work in literary and social terms. Woolf questions herself about the recognition women have not received in society, but also about their lack of acknowledgement as writers. This absence of recognition is underpinned by several factors which will be discussed throughout our sequential commentary of the several chapters that make up *A Room of One's Own*. In parallel, however, Woolf also questions the place that has been assigned by posterity to working-class writers, both men and women, since class restrictions also played a major role in excluding the socially underprivileged from literary history. Despite claims about Woolf's alleged elitism², her concern with education and class, and her keenness to provide a diachronic perspective concerning the century-old oppression experienced by women in history, anticipates somehow today's emphasis on intersectional discrimination within feminism.

2. General background

Before addressing the discussion of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* in the central section of this Bachelor's Thesis, it is important to briefly discuss the biographical, historical, political, economic, and social context of the period when the author wrote her anthological essay. The emphasis laid by this work on the material conditions required for women to devote themselves to literary creation demands a special focus on the connection between the reality which surrounded Virginia Woolf's life and literary career and the content of *A Room of One's Own*, where she uses multiple fictional narrators to challenge a patriarchal society where discrimination and inequality are legitimized.

¹ Psychologist John Money is often credited as the first to introduce the distinction between biological sex and gender identity in the 1950s

² Blair, Rami. "Writing with a Cause: Virginia Woolf, Elitism, and *A Room of One's Own*". Accessed July 1, 2022.
https://www.academia.edu/10798638/Writing_with_a_Cause_Virginia_Woolf_Elitism_and_A_Room_of_One's_Own

2.1. Exploring the life of Virginia Woolf

When studying the nature of a literary work, it is not only crucial to take intraliterary aspects into account. The analysis of extraliterary information, such as an overview of the author's biography, is always relevant in order to understand the specific intent of any text, and this is especially true of *A Room of One's Own*, where the first-person voice is used as the common thread that steers the whole essay and where the authorial voice of Woolf herself is inextricable from the essay's fictional narrative from the very beginning.

Virginia Woolf was born as Adeline Virginia Stephen in London on January 25, 1882. Her mother, Julia Prinsep Stephen, was a philanthropist, and her father, Leslie Stephen, was a biographer and an eminent Victorian. The socioeconomic position of Woolf's family allowed her to be a self-taught person, which was very salient at the time. In the words of Schwarz, "Woolf was intensely conscious of her self-education. [...] Her father, one of England's most learned men, had guided that education. [...] Woolf was rigorously trained in Greek and had read widely and deeply in the English and American classics and in history" (para. 5). In this regard, Woolf's intense self-awareness, which is remarkably evidenced by her diaries, made her reflect upon her own *ethos* and contrast it with that of others in *A Room of One's Own*, especially with women's. The influence of Woolf's social and educative background on her literary works is pointed out by authors like Doolittle, who reminds us that "Her father was an author and historian, and Woolf and her siblings were fortunate enough to be self-educated with access to their father's library when they were young." (3). She also points out Woolf's perception of the contradictions between the education she had access to (she was largely self-taught) and the one received by the majority of her own sex as well as other opportunities she enjoyed in the public and private spheres. Even though she was from this point of view a privileged person, she suggests:

A Room of One's Own explores this claim: in order for women to lead fulfilling and self-actualizing lives, they must have equal access to the same quality education that men receive. Education was very important to Woolf, and she was very aware of how privileged she was to be educated (3).

Also, her siblings benefitted from the social and cultural status of the Stephens and became high achievers. Vanessa ended up being an acclaimed painter who designed the covers of her sister's novels published by the Hogarth Press. Julian Thoby entered Trinity College, in Cambridge, and Adrian became a psychoanalyst. The fact that all the family members devoted their lives to professions with a high intellectual component is one of the keys to understanding Woolf's naturally internalized demand for gender equality: the members of her close family circle achieved recognition regardless of whether they were men or women, both in private and in public life. In fact, Woolf began to study Greek privately at home, and she continued learning this language as well as History at King's College London Ladies' Department in November 1897. The liberal environment which Woolf grew up in (the Stephen's house was the center of debates on London's politics) and defended firmly for the rest of her life is remarkable, and even more so when one realizes that they were an upper middle-class family in the late Victorian period, where conservatism and the survival of tradition almost constituted the social norm in those decades.

These sole facts could partly explain why Virginia Woolf wrote her works, especially *A Room of One's Own*, in such a revolutionary and groundbreaking style, but there are many more aspects to consider. The constant sexual abuses she suffered from her half-brothers had a serious impact both on her life and on her writings. Toni A. H. McNaron describes this traumatic experience as a decisive factor for Woolf's realistic view about women's suffering in works like *A Room of One's Own*, which is defined as "the lasting effects of Virginia Stephen Woolf's molestation by her two half-brothers, George and Gerald Duckworth" [...] These nightmare experiences from childhood and early adulthood are replayed not only in her psyche but in her writing" (1992). Furthermore, the ordeal that she endured as a consequence of successive mental breakdowns due to genetic causes and boosted by the death of both of her parents while Woolf was still very young (she was 13 at her mother's death and 22 at her father's) was decisive for her to develop a special state of consciousness, as well as to empathize intensely with people who suffered, especially with women and the historical discrimination they always carried as a heavy and painful burden.

The possible genetic causes of Virginia Woolf's mental problems were proved by a psychiatric study published in the *BJP (Brazilian Journal of Psychiatry)*. According to Boeira et al, "Mental illness in Virginia Woolf's family can be traced back to James Stephen, her grandfather on her father's side. James was allegedly cyclothymic and (...) also given to self-mortification and depression. He was eventually institutionalized, after running naked through Cambridge" (69). These conditions were also inherited by Leslie Stephen, her father: "Sir George Savage, a prominent psychiatrist in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, diagnosed Virginia's father Leslie with "neurasthenia," a common medical term used in the late 19th to early 20th centuries" (2017). These facts may explain the writer's life-long struggle with mental problems and even the complex character of her novels. As Kenny notes, "This is how her writing may have replaced the severer manifestation of her mental illness; it gave her another way of controlling and redirecting her past, but without actually losing touch with the reality of everyday life" (22).

Furthermore, it is striking to see how she began her career as a writer soon after her father's death by helping F. W. Maitland with her father's biography and writing reviews. These correlated facts could be understood as her own way to channel all those negative feelings into her great literary genius and liberate herself from the trauma of loss. Such a literary "therapy" can be aligned with contemporary, novel treatments prescribed during World War I by doctors to combatants who were affected by the consequences of war in the form of mental disorders, particularly war neurosis, in mental hospitals like Craiglockhart Hospital, where war poets like Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen were encouraged to remain as actively involved as they could in activities like writing, among others. This can also be confirmed in Woolf's journal when correcting *A Room of One's Own*, where she reports: "The only way I keep afloat is by working. A note for the summer-I must take more work than I can possibly get done. No, I don't know what it comes from. Directly I stop working I feel that I am sinking down, down" (Bell & McNeil, 235).

In addition, as neuroscientist Maxwell Bennett claims, "the appalling consequences for reasonable happiness following childhood abuse could not be more vividly spelt out than

in the diaries and other writings of one with such great narrative gifts as Virginia Woolf” (2013). The latter claim can also explain the empirical and slightly mother-to-child voice that pervades the narrative style of *A Room of One’s Own*, especially towards the end, where she describes her experiences and addresses women in a caring attitude by encouraging them to remain strong in whatever they do.

Regarding these vital experiences as a whole, their effects on Woolf’s sensitivity in *A Room of One’s Own* are even more visible. When Woolf was correcting the essay, she expressed in her journal her struggle with a persistent melancholy that invaded her life and her work by making her hopeless and psychologically devastated. As she tells in her own diary,

One must correct *A Room of One’s Own* very carefully before printing. And so I pitched into my great lake of melancholy. Lord how deep it is! What a born melancholic I am! The only way I keep afloat is by working” (139).

In the words of McNaron, this is a direct cause of a trauma inhibition: “though Woolf sees her “melancholy” as a matter of birth, most contemporary scholars would shun such deterministic pronouncements in favor of an argument based on the influence of environmental forces most likely from infancy or early childhood” (259). These abuses increased the implicit depressive nature of Woolf’s mental health. If they had not taken place, this depressive nature would not have probably had such a big influence: “since generalized depression is a primary symptom in adults who have been sexually abused as children, I would attribute Woolf’s melancholy to her shameful, suppressed feelings about her body brought on by her abuse” (259).

In 1910, Woolf started her work for the women’s suffrage movement. This was yet another sign of Woolf’s active involvement in the long path towards women’s liberation. However, suffrage was not the final purpose for her, but one of several means to attain a full social conscience around an important cause. She used literature as a way to express her nuanced position on suffrage without alienating herself altogether from the suffragist

movement or being considered a kind of antifeminist writer. As Park notes, “In principle, she was in favor, and famously worked in a suffrage office [...], but at the same time, she continually expressed private reservations about both the individuals involved in the movement and the larger ethos behind it” (120). Woolf knew that there was much more than male supremacy in politics to be wiped off from society if women were meant to liberate themselves. All economic and social structures had to be revised in order to reach liberation and equality. As Anderson claims:

Woolf’s attitude toward suffrage was one of great caution and hopefulness. For Woolf, the first priority for women was economic independence. A secondary consideration was suffrage (...). Because of the long history of suffrage, which was full of struggle, debate, and disappointment, Woolf was muted in her public response, but she invented ways to integrate her hopes for suffrage into her writing, both fiction and nonfiction (8).

Two years later, Virginia Woolf married Leonard Woolf, whom she got her universally known surname from. Her relationship with Leonard Woolf meant a very fruitful period in Woolf’s literary career, since she was part of many interesting and promising literary and social projects with her husband, like the widely known Bloomsbury Group or the foundation of the Hogarth Press. During the subsequent years, Virginia Woolf published some of her works, including some of the most famous ones like *The Mark on the Wall* (1917), *Kew Gardens* (1919), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) or *Three Guineas* (1938), some of them written in moments of depression and mental breakdowns. One must highlight the inner strength and decisive revolutionary character that envelops works like *Three Guineas*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando: A Biography*, which protest against Victorian society and vindicate the importance of the normalization of feminine sexuality, homosexuality and the role of female writers; or novels with social analyses like *Between the Acts*, her ninth and last novel, in which she portrays her huge fears and voices her sociopolitical stance, including her opposition to wars and fascism, sexual and class discrimination or her ideas about human communication.

On March 28, 1941, Virginia Woolf committed suicide by drowning in the River Ouse, East Sussex, as a result of her mental problems.

2.2. Historical context

In the United Kingdom, the late 19th century and the early 20th century were marked by a prime transitional period between Victorianism and Modernism. Furthermore, socioeconomic events such as the growing prosperity of the so-called “middle classes”, the progress on the labor movement or the consequences of World War I constituted some key factors to acknowledge the influence of a real interdisciplinary change on contemporary literature.

Although the new prosperous middle class in the 19th century could be interpreted as general progress, it was not a progress achieved by all social classes. There still existed an exclusion to the most vulnerable social sphere, the other so-called “lower classes”, who remained stuck in poverty and isolated despite the middle-class economic improvement. However, each social class was not composed of people with homogeneous and vital situations. Unlike the middle classes, the “so called” lower classes, also referred as “working classes”, still carried the weight of stigma. In mid-19th century, it was registered a high number of workers in prison at that time. As Richmond states, “The occupational tables of the 1851 census show that the largest occupational group for males in all three types of institution was ‘Labourer (branch undefined)’, followed by agricultural labourer” (262). This situation even extends until the early 20th century: “Similarly, in 1901, 14,636 of the 17,480 persons detained in the civil prisons of England and Wales were male. [...] The poor formed the majority of both prison and asylum populations” (262). Workers representing most prisoners has a structural origin. Most crimes like robbery or burglary involved scarcity, not malicious interests. Also suggested by Richmond, “The preponderance of labouring men and women in prisons reflected their disproportionate representation in the populace generally, and the very needs borne of poverty could lead to criminal activity” (262).

From a gender perspective, this inequality is significantly unambiguous. Although both middle class and working-class men and women were highly patterned by gender roles at

that epoch, the latter ones were significantly more affected. These gender roles were a result of a permanent hegemonical hierarchy where the masculine figure represented the public, economic and social power archetype. Women were assigned the private sphere, with household liabilities as the few labors to accomplish. It involved no further intellectual or professional ambitions. Male majority of working-class prisoners is explained by this intersectional gender role. Paradoxically, working men occupied the public sphere like the middle-class men, but they worked in questionable conditions and had to make a living outside, so the risk of stealing out of necessity was higher. Women occupied the private sphere, i.e., they worked at home with household chores, so the risk of stealing out of necessity was lower. As a matter of fact, working women who had a paid work also had jobs related to domesticity. As Scott and Tilly note:

In England in 1841 and still in 1911 most working women were engaged in domestic or other personal service occupations. In 1911, 35 percent were servants (including laundresses), 19.5 percent were textile workers and 15.6 percent were engaged in the dressmaking trades (1975).

Education displayed differences between both social classes as well. Unlike a working-class woman, an average middle-class woman received an elitist education, but it was different model of education from their male counterparts. Its exclusive purpose was to raise submissive women in the “privileged” position. This situation is substantiated by Rat, who states that “middle class women in British society were raised within a cult of domesticity, meaning that they were seen primarily as taking care of the private life of the family and had little to do with the public sphere” (3). Women were trained to be yielding towards a patriarchal and economic hegemony. This was common in 19th and the early 20th century, and this gender dichotomy spread into other social classes, influenced by previous Victorian stages. As Rat continues, “As unbelievable as it may nowadays seem, many people in mid-Victorian society believed an educated woman would lose on femininity, be impaired mentally and physically, and inhibited in reproductive development” (4). This fact is not casual: it is a sign of the necessity of power sectors to survive and keep a privileged position

in society and in the world. In the words of Hexter, “spokesmen for the middle classes demanded for it a sort of hegemony over English society” (114).

At the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, the increasing participation of women in politics changed society. Education access had expanded to a wider range of social classes, such the working classes, but there were substantial differences among them. Working-class women still lacked academic resources to reach the same level as middle-class women. In the literary panorama, to think about a working-class woman writer was an entelechy. Culture was still monopolized by the economic power. Langland sums up this fact into the question of the woman writer in the 19th century: “Although their working-class sisters still lacked the leisure and resources that could support sustained literary efforts, bourgeois women enjoyed increasing access to the conditions and means supporting writing and publication” (119).

However, literature was not an exception to the changes that took place in the transition from Victorianism to modernity. Even though there still were reactionary behaviors against social transformation and revolutions, the literary medium became a crucial tool in order to showcase and explain the historical period and its central issues. It included the question of discrimination and violence against women across social and economic classes, as Virginia Woolf did throughout her works.

The Labor movement advanced in Britain and all over Europe. Even in this movement, women were set out of it until the 20th century. Miller Jacoby states that working class women were widely excluded from trade union activities until the late 20th century. The only way to collaborate and succeed in this fight was to form feminine work organizations, such as the Women’s Protective and Provident League (WPPL), founded in 1874, later known as the socialist trade union Women’s Trade Union Association (1976). Victorian realism written by veteran writers was already eroded. It was not able to portray social reality in a whole. Woolf criticizes this situation in *Modern Fiction* and questions the literary performance by authors like H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennet and John Galsworthy:

Mr Wells, Mr Bennet and Mr Galsworthy have excited so many hopes and disappointed them so persistently that our gratitude largely takes the form of thanking them for having shown us what they might have done but have not done(158).

Authors like Virginia Woolf renewed the concept of literary work to turn it into a social representation of facts unrepresented until then, as it happened with *A Room of One's Own*.

3. Gender and class in *A Room of One's Own*

Virginia Woolf establishes a contrastive dichotomy between a defense of women's liberation from what we would today call a gender perspective and her analysis of feminist issues from a class perspective. This dichotomy is used throughout the essay as an essential tool to understand the historical discrimination towards women as human beings and as writers. On the whole, both approaches convey an unequivocally feminist stance, but within the feminist framework, they represent distinctly different positions and agendas. The most remarkable characteristic of this text is that combining both angles Woolf contributes an integral analysis.

3.1. Chapter one

In chapter one, Woolf enumerates several women authors like Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, or George Eliot. All of them were very different as women and writers and belonged to different periods, but they share two characteristics in common: their relatively well-off economic position and their consequent middle class social status. Both things enabled them to access education, and therefore, to be writers. For Woolf, a woman writer needs privacy to do her job, so she requires a private room to do her job properly: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (4)³. A room symbolizes privacy,

³ For this and subsequent quotes of *A Room of One's Own* (1929) I have used the following online edition: <https://onemorelibrary.com/index.php/es/idiomas/ingles/book/english-literature-172/a-room-of-one-s-own-2167> (Last accessed July 2021)

intimacy, and power. This can be considered the first and most memorable feminist dictum in this work, one which I would argue is compatible with a liberal strain of feminism in so far as it embodies a reformist rather than radical stance. According to Lorber, “liberal feminism claims that gender differences are not based in biology, and therefore that women and men are not all that different -- their common humanity supersedes their procreative differentiation” (9). This definition matches fits Woolf’s statement, since she apparently does not call into question other factors for women’s success that may be associated with biological determinism. While Woolf here advocates the integration of women writers into the mainstream literary scene, her focus is on middle class women writers and there is no straightforward questioning of the mainstream social system as we often find in the second wave Anglo-Saxon feminist critique. However, the correlation that she establishes between economic resources and the recognition of women’s professional writing leaves at this point an unanswered question: What about the ones who do not possess the required economic independence? ⁴

And yet Woolf thinks about these women as well in this essay. In the following pages, she mentions the difficulties borne by their fictional representation, Mary Seaton’s foremothers: “to earn money was impossible for them, and (...), had it been possible, the law denied them the right to possess what money they earned” (18). As Mambrol states, “in *A Room of One’s Own* Woolf proposes that women be understood as a separate class altogether, equating their plight with the working classes because of their material poverty, even among the middle and upper classes” (6). Woolf further develops her vindication of women with scarce economic resources and insists on the need to foreground their reality. The following statement corroborates Mambrol’s observations. It is crucial to understand her opposition to the initial liberal feminism she presented in the first paragraphs of this chapter:

⁴ It is worth noting that Virginia Woolf’s feminist thinking experienced an evolution towards a more insightful and perhaps radical perspective. Woolf’s ideology can be traced in other works such as *Three Guineas* (1938), where, probably as a result of the grim pre-war climate, “she debunks more seriously the egotism and antagonism [of male chauvinism]” (Middleton, 417) and adopts a more radical stance as she delves into the question of patriarchy as one of the social and economic causes of militarism.

At the thought of all those women working year after year and finding it hard to get two thousand pounds together, and as much as they could do to get thirty thousand pounds, we burst out in scorn at the reprehensible poverty of our sex (17).

Woolf acknowledges the disadvantage of those women whose names do not belong to queens, aristocrats or bourgeois with literary talent. At the same time, she recognizes the difficulties experienced by the latter to succeed in their current profession as writers. This presentation of a more radically feminist take is the prelude to the groundbreaking perspective on literature, class and gender voiced by narrators like Mary Beton or Mary Seton.

From a literary point of view, Woolf's fictional strategy is complex. Her narrative voice shifts into many narrative personae in order to reinforce her central argument. These women express their own personal and literary experiences via the stream of consciousness technique. Woolf creates fluctuations in the concepts of fact and fiction to keep the reader engaged in her essay. The literary and visual resources channeled through these characters show another social intent. According to Bishop in this kind of narrative strategies, ellipses are intended "to make a spectator use his or her critical sense" and to ensure that "the process of showing must itself be shown" (157). Woolf's critical sense is targeted at what we may call literary patriarchy. Again, from a gender perspective, it can be observed that the disjointed testimonies of *A Room's* fictional personae evidence the absence of literary recognition as women writers. This happens because, among other reasons, women have no real models to identify with in linguistic terms. The only standards are masculine. In this regard, Mambrol suggests that "the woman author, having no other language at her command, is forced to use the sexist/ masculine language" (2): a problem which Virginia Woolf diagnosed in the preliminary version of *A Room of One's Own*, a short piece titled "Women and Fiction" (1928) where she anticipated later feminist ideas about *écriture féminine*:

But it is still true that before a woman can write exactly as she wishes to write, she has many difficulties to face. To begin with, there is the technical difficulty-- so simple, apparently; in reality, so baffling-- that the very form of the sentence does not fit her. It is a sentence made by men; it is too loose, too

heavy, too pompous for a woman's use. Yet in a novel, which covers so wide a stretch of ground, an ordinary and usual type of sentence has to be found to carry the reader on easily and naturally from one end of the book to the other. And this a woman must make for herself, altering and adapting the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it (Woolf *Collected Essays* 145)

Interestingly, Woolf begins and finishes her essay with the word “but”. This plain adversative conjunction has a great significance from a gender perspective. It is a nearly visual device used by the author to evince the interruptions experimented by women in their ordinary lives. As Allen notes,

The varied definitions of ‘but’ – including ‘except’, ‘outside’ and ‘on the contrary’, to name just a few– seem to echo the marginal position of women in our culture” [...] “With the constant intrusion of ‘but’, the text simultaneously resonates with the multiple interruptions in women’s lives and the resultant openness created by these breaks (3).

The same leitmotiv reappears several times throughout the essay, like for example in the passage from chapter one, where the female narrative voice describes the uncomfortable glance by the college beadle as he spots her lying on the lawn, where she was not supposed to be: “He was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me” (6). The same sense of intrusion is conveyed, albeit by different means: the narrator is trying to find for herself a moment of reflection to organize her thoughts in a gesture of intellectual independence. She has been asked to prepare her lecture on women and fiction, and so needs a pocket of freedom to exercise her creative thinking.

3.2. Chapter two

In chapter two, Woolf begins by exposing the male gaze on women as objects rather than subjects, both in the world at large and, more particularly in the literary realm. This section provides a comprehensive debunking of paternalism and objectification:

Have you any notion of how many books are written about women in the course of one year? Have you any notion how many are written by men? Are you aware that you are, perhaps, the most discussed animal in the universe? (21).

With the above questions, Woolf discloses two observations: the huge numerical inferiority of women's literary output by comparison with men's and the fact that women are seen as brilliant sources of inspiration by men writers, but not as creative equals. Her use of the word "animal" reiterates the old familiar stereotype of woman as a wild creature ruled by natural, not rational laws (Morris et al, 2018).

In this chapter, Woolf also reflects upon the impoverished lives led by women, which she already anticipated in chapter one. This time she deploys a list of "reasons" argued by men to justify this gender inferiority: a series of items that can be classified into three categories: physical traits, psychological features and views on women particularly expressed by male writers. The most striking elements in this list are the ones which dehumanize women — phrases like "weaker in moral sense", "offered as sacrifice to", "mental, moral and physical inferiority", and, even more so, the last six items, which refer to opinions by remarkable male writers. It is striking that the text foregrounds the fact that women's success in life, especially in writing, has been consistently conditioned by men's opinions. As a matter of fact, this list becomes a graphic representation of what Woolf already stated in chapter one, where she explored the effects of professional recognition on both those who benefit from it and those who are excluded — a difference which in turn betrays a gender divide: "the safety and prosperity of the one sex and of the poverty and insecurity of the other and [...] the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer" (19).

Woolf plays with words here in order to highlight the fact that women have been traditionally judged and analyzed through the lens of male objectification and paternalism, which is a central feature of an androcentric society. Moreover, the lack of a fully closed syntactic structure in her writing, consistent with her ideas about the feminine sentence, encouraged the reader to complete her open-ended sentences. Ultimately, Woolf denounces the impact of these patriarchal judgements on women, insofar as women look at themselves

through a mirror that does not reflect their true selves, but the essence artificially created by the masculine gender. As Deppman claims, “the looking-glass is the tool of a societal sexism reflecting, as we will see, what Woolf considers to be diminutive images of women” (31). Moreover, these gender-based biases have powerful effects on the material and economic conditions that curtail women’s potential. Woolf believes, as she hinted in chapter one, that women could have always been economically and socially successful if their real personality had not been adulterated by male supremacy.

Violence against women is also discussed in this chapter, where Woolf conveys a visually powerful message by putting the focus on a cursory glance at a newspaper’s front page. The most highlighted headlines are not as relevant news as the ones that are less prominent, and furthermore, there is a derogatory remark about women as a general class:

A ribbon of very large letters ran across the page. Somebody had made a big score in South Africa. Lesser ribbons announced that Sir Austen Chamberlain was at Geneva. A meat axe with human hair on it had been found in a cellar. Mr justice —— commented in the Divorce Courts upon the Shamelessness of Women” (27).

The passage both showcases the inconsistent attitude of the press towards grave issues (there is an emphasis on irrelevant news whereas relevant stories are banalized) and the trivialization of everything feminine. “Sprinkled about the paper were other pieces of news. A film actress had been lowered from a peak in California and hung suspended in mid-air” (27). Even the participle *sprinkled* reminds the reader the lesser, anecdotal importance given to women in the larger picture of current affairs. Underneath these apparently light-hearted comments, there runs an indictment of gender violence in all its forms. The literary medium provides Woolf with a vehicle for the expression of her inspiring critical thinking. This section puts the focus on the neglect and trivialization of violence against women by English society, which is “under the rule of a patriarchy”, as the author herself explicitly notes (27).

There is another important detail about this passage. In addition to the physical and moral violence inflicted on women, Woolf points at the intrinsic relation between male supremacy and economic power relations. According to the author of *A Room of One’s Own*, he who

has money, has power. Therefore, he can manage the world as he pleases. This also includes controlling the way women are treated: a point which she exemplifies with the case of the furious man. The furious man is the archetype of the powerful man who decides over everything. Women are also under his rule. He is a misogynistic man who possesses astronomical amounts of money. His chances of mistreating women and influencing other people so that they do the same are very high. Woolf picks up the news story about the actress whom he suspended in the air. It was him who was responsible for putting her at risk. He did not see her as a human being in distress, but as a mere instrument that can be replaced if it fails, like an factory owner who replaces a machine if it breaks down. Woolf concludes that the truth may not come to light with individuals like this one. They have the power to silence people with unorthodox methods. According to Donaldson, “Sexual violence is not unknown, but ruling-class men often avoid sanctions for this through the deployment of their class and patriarchal power” (2007). If these types of man have the power needed to manage important issues at will with unrestrained economic, social, and moral freedom, he can exert his influence to write about women, and thus, to exploit them. According to Woolf, these overbearing male figures are omnipresent:

He was the proprietor of the paper and its editor and sub-editor. He was the Foreign Secretary and the judge [...]. He was the director of the company that pays two hundred per cent to its shareholders. He left millions to charities and colleges that were ruled by himself. He suspended the film actress in mid-air. He will decide if the hair on the meat axe is human; he it is who will acquit or convict the murderer, and hang him, or let him go free (27).

Moreover, gender domination has its counterpart in the literary environment, which the author discusses in this chapter as well. Woolf goes a step further and establishes a parallelism between the jealous attitude of one who possesses incalculable wealth and experiences the fear of losing it and the overall functioning of patriarchy. She considers that the fury and hatred with which some male writers write against their female colleagues is nothing more than fear. She quotes canonical authors like Samuel Butler (“Wise men never say what they think of women”) and Alexander Pope (“Most women have no character at all”). Woolf’s intention is to unmask the way some male writers authoritatively discuss

women and employs irony to this purpose. Patriarchal authors hold that women writers cannot stand on the same level as them. Such writers, spurred by misogyny, make those claims because they fear the loss of the male intellectual monopoly and the social prestige they have been hoarding for centuries, exactly like the immeasurable wealth of a rich man. To illustrate this fact, she recalls the figure of the “angry professor”:

Possibly when the professor insisted a little too emphatically upon the inferiority of women, he was concerned not with their inferiority, but with his own superiority. That was what he was protecting rather hot-headedly and with too much emphasis, because it was a jewel to him of the rarest price (28).

Women’s education and critical thinking are also threatened by the vicious circle of money and power that surrounds them. Woolf insists that it is important to remember that basic economic needs such as food, bed and board depend on money. These needs can become a priority, especially when money is hard to come by. The pressure of material needs historically hampered the education of women writers. If women are assigned household tasks, do they really have time to access education? In the case of women writers, basic priorities, moreover, constantly interrupted their literary work. Pressing economic needs hinder involvement with the larger human issues. The narrative voice exemplifies it with her own experience on being notified of an inheritance:

A solicitor's letter fell into the post-box and when I opened it I found that she had left me five hundred pounds a year for ever. Of the two—the vote and the money—the money, I own, seemed infinitely the more important” (30).

Woolf’s intention here is to underline that women with a stable income can break the ties that bind her to men. Economic independence makes them invulnerable: “I need not hate any man; he cannot hurt me. I need not flatter any man; he has nothing to give me” (31). Woolf finishes chapter two on a social note concerning labor and gender which becomes one of the most revolutionary statements in the essay:

Is it better to be a coal-heaver or a nursemaid; is the charwoman who has brought up eight children of less value to the world than, the barrister who has made a hundred thousand pounds? it is useless to ask such questions; for nobody can answer them. [...] We have no rods with which to measure them even as they are at the moment (32).

Her feminism is pervaded here by the combined criticism of male chauvinism and class discrimination. Her interrogative questions readers to consider issues not commonly discussed. Her comparisons attack conservative beliefs that assign value to occupations according to criteria like social class and gender. And there is recognition the working classes and the credit they deserve, regardless of their sex. Despite common charges of snobbery and elitism which she would have shared with the Bloomsbury circle (Bas 2008), Woolf argues here that no profession should be less valued than. A statement, therefore, against social and gender exclusion as well as a prophecy of a future of equality whose fulfilment can be assessed now from our own contemporary perspective:

Moreover, in a hundred years, I thought, reaching my own doorstep, women will have ceased to be the protected sex. Logically they will take part in all the activities and exertions that were once denied them. The nursemaid will heave coal. The shopwoman will drive an engine (32).

3.3. Chapter three

In this chapter, Woolf further explores the effects of social class in women's writing. First, she discusses the position of women as writers. She challenges the existence of equal opportunities for women and men in the arena of literary creation. To do so, she uses a spider web as a metaphor. This web is transparent, and sometimes thin, but this does not mean that it does not exist. As Woolf states, "these webs are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in" (33). With this statement, she eschews any idealism as may surround the process of making literary works, i.e., the assumption that literature is only the product of sheer talent. By placing the spotlight on the material conditions of writing, she reaches an evident conclusion: notwithstanding the

importance of literary skills, success and recognition heavily depend on economic and social factors. Women writers and working-class writers have a rough deal when it comes to having their works published. Rough not just in terms of gender, but also in terms of social status. As Landry states, “It is a truth now universally acknowledged that there were English women writers before Jane Austen. Less well known is that there were laboring class writers before John Clare” (17). We can imagine that aspiring women writers participating from both categories were historically confronted with a double penalty in this regard.

Furthermore, if writing as a profession is not easy, talent and hard work are not so visible when writers are women. Let alone if economic resources are scarce. In Woolf’s own words:

Everything is against the likelihood that it will come from the writer's mind whole and entire. Generally material circumstances are against it. Dogs will bark; people will interrupt; money must be made; health will break down. Further, accentuating all these difficulties and making them harder to bear is the world's notorious indifference (40).

Skills and great efforts are not enough for a writer to succeed. The readership’s recognition is just as necessary if not more. This recognition needs economic resources that cannot be afforded by all writers. As long as only middle-class or upper-class authors are visible to the readership, there are no equal opportunities for all writers. Landry confirms this invisibility: “The place of working class writing in British literary history has always been marginal” (17). If women writers and working-class writers have been historically marginalized, it is understood that working-class women writers have suffered a double marginalization. Landry suggests that “to read their writing is to experience the silent majority suddenly finding a voice, the shepherd or washerwoman or haymaker stepping forward out of the “dark side of the landscape” toward us with tremendous energy” (17).

The question about women as the content of literature (e.g. as characters in fiction or theatre) is likewise addressed by Woolf in this chapter. As she puts it:

Women have burnt like beacons in all the works of all the poets from the beginning of time—Clytemnestra, Antigone, Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, [...], among the dramatists; then among the prose writers: Millamant, Clarissa, Becky Sharp, Anna Karenina, Emma Bovary, Madame de Guermantes (34).

Yet these characters are quite different from real women. Interestingly, women described in literary works are typically strong, powerful, and self-confident, but they end up overwhelmed by the suffering inflicted on them by men. As Woolf states:

If woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater (34).

This suggests that patriarchy somehow rejects women who raise their own voice and disobey the rule of female silence. At the same time, it can be observed that this difference between women in fiction and women in reality constitutes one of the trademarks of patriarchal literature. Patriarchal literature embodies a warning that women who dare defy a submissive role will pay a high price for their infringement of the rules. Another interesting point about this chapter, which is also linked with the question of characters, is the violence against women inflicted by women themselves. Woolf encapsulates this issue in the historical character of Lady Bessborough (1761-1821). She was the daughter of John Spencer, the 1st Earl Spencer. She had an affair with Granville Leveson-Gower, 1st Earl Granville. They had two children.⁵ According to Woolf, she humiliated herself and “agreed” with Lord Granville Leveson-Gower on women’s incompetence as politicians. Woolf notes:

Even Lady Bessborough, I remembered, with all her passion for politics, must humbly bow herself and write to Lord Granville Leveson-Gower: '... notwithstanding all my violence in politics and talking so much on that subject, I perfectly agree with you that no woman has any business to meddle with that or any other serious business, farther than giving her opinion (if she is ask'd) (43).

⁵ Source: <https://www.scss.tcd.ie/SCSSTreasuresCatalog/literature/TCD-SCSS-V.20121208.641/LadyHenriettaFrancesSpencer-1761-1821.pdf>

This is the result of a constant pressure exerted on women and which is fostered by a biased education moored to stereotypical gender roles. Politics and literature as intellectual free activities have traditionally been blocked to women. As Woolf herself claims, “The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself” (43). According to Woolf, women’s intellectual freedom is the path to a complete emancipation. This would end with all kinds of cultural prohibitions imposed on women, including women writers’ sabotage of their female colleagues. Woolf’s claims here require acquaintance with highly specific aspects of the Victorian literary scene. The emerging struggle of women for freedom at a time when Victorianism was ruled by a strongly patriarchal system brought about changes in antifeminist novelists. In the words of Sanders,

In their nonfictional writing on marriage, the antifeminist women novelists had to confront the fact of sweeping changes in public opinion between the 1850s and 1890s. It was impossible for them to remain entirely untouched by the storm: instead, they made grudging concessions, in favor of easier divorce laws, or in recognition of bad husbands (26).

This fact is crucial to understand the little victories of women’s opposition to their own discrimination in a patriarchal society. The Victorian age is an interesting period to understand this internal fight between writers who embraced women’s liberation and the ones who defended the traditional position of women in society. On the one hand, the emerging feminist concepts of writing or the concept of *The New Woman* and, on the other hand, the persistent conservative arguments that justified sexist gender roles, is perfectly portrayed in essays like *The Girl of the Period* (1868), by Eliza Lynn. The essay accounts for the apology of the traditional ideal of women. In the meanwhile, throughout those decades, authors like Sarah Grand or Thomas Hardy questioned themselves about what a woman should be and portrayed them as possessors of an intelligent and independent personality. One example of this is *Ideala* (1888) or the character of Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure* (1896). As Nsaidzedze notes:

As far back as the 1860s, changing ideas about women had gained sufficient currency that writers began to represent the modern woman as a new type. In 1868 *The Saturday Review* published an attack on the modern woman by Eliza Lynn Linton called “The Girl of the Period”. She was a novelist and a journalist well known for her anti-feminism. Novelist began representing the “New-Woman” as a character type. The term as we said earlier was coined in 1894 by the novelist Sarah Grand and the literary type emerged about the same time. The most famous example is Sue Bridehead in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1896) and Mary Barfoot in George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893). “The Odd Women” means women without husbands. There are five of them in this novel (9).

3.4. Chapter four

In this chapter, Woolf focuses her analysis on the great difficulties held by women writers to write and publish their works in the past. Firstly, she refers to working-class women in the 16th century. At that time, it was common for a marriage to raise many children. In the case of working-class women, they themselves had to look after them. In addition, they were busy with their daily duties as well. They could not hire any person to look after their children, nor did they have a big nor comfortable house to write without interruptions. As they had no time or money, they could not invest either on studying and widening their cultural background. Lack of economic resources also caused children to die at an early age. Unhealthy conditions encouraged a faster spreading of diseases. Regarding this situation, Woolf notes: “One has only to think of the Elizabethan tombstones with all those children kneeling with clasped hands; and their early deaths; and to see their houses with their dark, cramped rooms, to realize that no woman could have written poetry then” (45). MaZixin corroborates this fact: “In fact, until the late 18th century, only half of the newborns could make it to adulthood” (569). Unlike middle-class and upper-class women, they could not afford resources which could free them from the excess of work. Woolf continues her analysis:

What one would expect to find would be that rather later perhaps some great lady would take advantage of her comparative freedom and comfort to publish something with her name to it and risk being thought a monster (45).

At that time, according to the author, it was predictable that women with certain social authority like religious women or exclusively middle-class or upper-class women should be able to write poetry at least. They were the only ones who could publish without the fear of being excluded. As Coles states, “if the figure of the religious woman confers authority to the writing of women in this period, how women use this authority in their own writing performance is heavily inflected by class and/or commercial concerns” (11). The same scholar also recognizes the judgments inflicted on women as writers. Those women who belonged to groups invested with authority, such as religious institutions or wealthy classes, could write and publish literary works. They had money and time to do it.

Woolf moves on to discuss the 18th century and explains another difficulty experienced by women who wanted to write. As common in other periods, in the 18th and the 19th centuries, literature was not conceived of as an intellectual task for women. However, in those centuries, the change of the economic scene, controlled by the middle-class, had an enormous influence on this belief. As Harrington suggests, “the triumph of middle-class domestic ideology at the end of the eighteenth century illustrates how the values and beliefs associated with a specific class can become the standard for the rest of society” (45). The traditional gender roles positioned women into the space of public oblivion. Woolf illustrates this situation with a quote on the English poet Lady Winchelsea (1661-1720), whose poetry elaborates on the concept of women’s virtue: “To write, or read, or think, or to enquire, /Would cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time” (45). Again, the paternalist view of virtue was a tool to bar women from an enriching education. However, not all women were educated under the same standards. In this period, differences in the education received by the upper classes and the lower classes was highly noticeable, especially in the case of women. As MaZixin notes, “In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte combines two different ways for a woman to get an education from the middle and lower classes. There are mainly two ways for a woman to be educated” (570). Literature in the 18th and 19th centuries testifies to this situation. The question of gender roles in education is reinforced by MaZixin, who states:

As for the upper-class families, the boys were usually raised by governess when they were young, then sent to a public school when they were older. The girls mostly stayed at home, the education they received is all about the skills they are going to need after they got married (569).

This lack of equality in access to resources across different classes was intended by the upper classes (especially by their male members) to avoid losing their power (MaZixin 2020, 569).

In this chapter, Woolf uses Aphra Behn as the most important reference to illustrate the hard path for women writers to be fully recognized. Behn was the first professional woman writer in the English language. As Woolf notes,

For now that Aphra Behn had done it, girls could go to their parents and say, You need not give me an allowance; I can make money by my pen. Of course, the answer for many years to come was, Yes, by living the life of Aphra Behn! Death would be better! and the door was slammed faster than ever” (1929).

According to Woolf, Aphra Behn could have been a good source of inspiration for women who wanted to be writers at her time, but she was still judged and censored for her unconventional life. Within the a literary context, patriarchy has always found an excuse to continue judging women who strive to live and work with freedom (including free access to information). Just as male writers generally felt free to sign their works with their own names and to write with unrestrained freedom, women should possess the same level of independence. Yet the fact that historically this was not the case is responsible for the significant absence of women authors from the literary. As Woolf states, “masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice” (51). This lack of a continuous female literary tradition underlies Woolf’s vindication of a literary environment where both men and women authors can enjoy the same level of experience and the same opportunities. According to her, this would help women writers create more successful literary works, since their vital experience would be richer.

As with male writers, a successful female writer does not appear spontaneously. There must be a brave and a pioneer artist who paves the way so that future generations have a reference to lean on and be inspired by. Men writers have had an easier access to success due to their educational and social backgrounds. According to Woolf, women should have this opportunity as well. The correlation between vital wealth and literary wealth is closely intertwined. Woolf claims that a man is allowed to have the life he wants with the people he wants (girlfriends and lovers included), which gives him the opportunity to gain exposure to all kinds of experiences. It allows him to write without impediments. However, women are not allowed to do the same, so there is a risk that their wealth of life lessons will be lesser because they cannot enjoy the same amount vital freedom. Woolf uses another example to illustrate her position: "Had Tolstoi lived at the Priory in seclusion with a married lady 'cut off from what is called the world', however edifying the moral lesson, he could scarcely, I thought, have written WAR AND PEACE" (55). Ultimately, women writers historically feared being judged negatively for their attempts, and these negative judgments also hampered their literary creation. Their sources of inspiration, moreover, were more limited than men's.

3.5. Chapter five

In this chapter, Woolf reflects upon the big steps taken by women in the field of literature. Women have evolved as writers. They do not only write as a pastime, but also in order to make a living. Professional writing by women meant a positive change which extended from fiction to other types of literature:

For there are almost as many books written by women now as by men. Or if that is not yet quite true, if the male is still the voluble sex, it is certainly true that women no longer write novels solely (61).

Until that time, Woolf argues, women used writing as a homemade procedure to express their feelings. They transmitted what was going on in their heads. Woolf's contemporary scene as far as women's writing was concerned involved a deeper scope, as more self-aware way of making art and delving into intellectual abysses until then reserved

for men. Woolf prophesizes a new era in literature written by women, who had already taken a step forward and demonstrated a talent for the poetic and the philosophical.

Woolf exemplifies the prototype of the new woman writer in the character of Mary Carmichael. An imaginary author created by Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*, Carmichael writes stories about women as never told before. She even portrays lesbian relationships:

If Mary Carmichael knows how to write, and I was beginning to enjoy some quality in her style; if she has a room to herself, of which I am not quite sure; if she has five hundred a year of her own—but that remains to be proved—then I think that something of great importance has happened (64).

Mary Carmichael's embodiment of the new woman writer includes the promise of new female characters and experiences: of true female protagonists instead mere accessories to the male protagonists. As Crépy-Banfin suggests, “Mary Carmichael breaks away from the usual sequence of the novel, she drifts the focus from the usual man / woman relationships to relationships between women” (19). Until this forthcoming revolution, women were only given a certain prominence as the content of literature insofar as they were used to incarnate very limited and superficial roles, without really focusing on any depth of detail about them. From now on, very subtle and profound details are observed — details concerning not only emotions, but also relationships between women, like friendships, interactions at work or even on a sentimental level. Mary Carmichael is the epitome of a literature devoted to femininity that breaks away from the androcentric literary rule that pushed the talent of women under the carpet.

3.6. Chapter six

In this chapter, Woolf closes the essay by creating a scenario of total equality between men and women writers. The narrative voice describes the image of a man and a woman getting into the same cab to represent the concept of an androgynous unity of the mind. This unity is made to symbolize the positive effects of men and women partnering for a common

objective: “the fact that the ordinary sight of two people getting into a cab had the power to communicate something of their own seeming satisfaction” (74). The cab is a symbol of that union, which in turn is the starting point towards a new conception of literature where minds are neither masculine nor feminine. They are a lot more complex than such a binarism may suggest and involve a combination of both principles. Regarding this complexity, Woolf notes: “It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly” (75). This concept of the androgynous mind is one of the most innovative gender proposals in *A Room of One’s Own*. According to Popova, “Woolf argues that the most fertile mental and spiritual landscape is one where there is ample cross-pollination between the two” (7). We may conclude that this androgynous mind is the ideal medium to produce the kind of free and innovative artform espoused by Virginia Woolf’s best-known feminist essay.

4. Conclusions

The previous discussion supports several conclusions. The first one is that *A Room of One’s Own* is a complex literary work where material and social issues share a central role with a historicist perspective, a gender-driven analysis of women’s writing and even the construction of an original —half essayistic, half fictional— literary voice.

A Room of One’s Own is a revolutionary literary work, if only because it spotlights the hardships undergone by a large population of (female) writers who were mostly absent from the mainstream literary tradition. It is true that Virginia Woolf’s Bloomsbury Group background and her own social milieu may have left traces of elitism in her writings, but this does not impede this essay from being highly critical with power abuse. Furthermore, Woolf’s arguments are pervaded by a strong materialistic perspective which leads her to delve into the material conditions of living in past and present times, for women in general and women writers more particularly.

A Room of One’s Own is also revolutionary from a literary point of view, since Woolf uses original literary resources (which she had brought to full fruition in her strictly fictional

output from the 1920s —*Jacob’s Room, Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse*) in order to portray a social reality through a mode of expression that was heavily marked by literary style.

Finally, mention must be made of the huge and pioneering influence of this work on later feminism and indeed on many writers who have dealt with issues of gender, women’s literature and women and social class. All in all, it constitutes a humanist and a feminist vindication, robust and credible, of women’s historical struggle against gender and social oppression.

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