



The Feminist Thought in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*

الفكر النسوي في مقالي فيرجيني وولف مساحة لنفسي و ثلاث جنيهات

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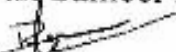
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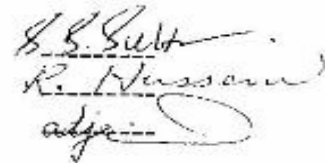
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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my lovely mother, father, and siblings: Rasha, Rabah, and Rakan who encouraged me to write about this subject, my close friends and to all persons who helped and encouraged me till I finished this work.

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# **The Feminist Thought in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas***

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## **Abstract**

It has been made clear that Woolf has dealt with particular personal issues that are closely related to woman's life and character. Her major views, which mostly concern the rights of woman, and revealed throughout her writings; fictional and non-fictional ones.

This study attempts to highlight the writer choice of themes and the kind of character that moves within the domain of this choice.

Woolf tackles themes related to feminism, financial independence, freedom of mind, and the pressures women may face during the course of her relationship with men as a husband or a friend. For instance in Woolf's essay 'A Room of One's Own', she examines the exclusion of women from educational institutions and the relations between this exclusion and the unequal distribution of wealth. In 'Three Guineas' Woolf advocates a form of radical political action in order to challenge the rise of fascism and the drift towards war. Besides the analysis, this study displays a careful presentation of the ideas of those critics who have already given their points of view concerning this subject matter.



## الفكر النسوي في مقالي فيرجينيا وولف مساحة لنفسي و ثلاث

جنيهات

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الملخص

يمكن القول بأن فيرجيني وولف قد تناولت مسائل شخصية محددة ترتبط ارتباطا وثيقا بحياة

المرأة و شخصيتها. و لقد اظهرت فرجينيا افكارها الرئيسية التي تهتم بحقوق المرأة و

احتياجاتها بشكل واضح في كتابتها.

ترمي هذه الدراسة الى تسليط الضوء على الفكر الأنثوي الذي يقف وراء اختيار الكاتبة

لموضوعاتها و نوع الشخصية التي تتحرك ضمن حدود هذا الاختيار. حيث ان وولف

تناولت موضوعات عن مسألة المساواة بين الجنسين و الاستقلال المادي و الحرية الفكرية

للمرأة, و الضغوطات التي قد تواجهها المرأة خلال علاقتها بالرجل باعتباره زوج لها او

مجرد صديق. فعلى سبيل المثال في مقال "مساحة لنفسي" تختبر وولف منع المرأة من

دخول المؤسسات التعليمية وعلاقته بالتوزيع الغير متساوي لخيرات المجتمع بين

الجنسين. في مقال "ثلاث جنهات" تؤيد فيرجينيا السلوك السياسي المتطرف للمرأة الذي

تعرف به عن نفسها كخارجة عن المجتمع و ذلك لتتحدى الحركة الفاشية و الميل نحو شن

الحرب. بالاضافة الى التحليلات ستقدم هذه الدراسة عرضا دقيقا لافكار العديد من النقاد

الذين طرحوا ارائهم فيما يخص هذا الموضوع

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction:

Feminism in general is a term that is used to describe political, cultural and economic movements. It aims at establishing more rights and legal protection for women. It does not have a single fundamental definition as the British author and critic Rebecca West remarks: "I only know that other people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or prostitute" (Marcus, 1989,p.219). Also, each writer establishes his/her own independent definition according to his/her experience. For example, in Estelle Freedman's view, the emphasis is on the intellectual background: "feminism is a social movement that tried to achieve political equality between women and men, with the understanding that gender always intersects with other social hierarchies" (Freedman, 2004, p.24).

Depending on her situation and political standpoint, Barbara Smith affirms that "feminism is the political theory and practice to free all women.

Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement" (Smith, 1986, p.188). Smith is a feminist. Who played a significant role in building and sustaining Black Feminism in the United States, which is an organization emphasizing the intersectionality of racial, gender, heterosexist, and class oppression in the lives of blacks and other women of color.

In literary criticism, feminism focuses on woman's position in literature, both as writer and character, subject and object, perceiver and perceived. In politics, feminism refers to the approach which aims at having equal rights with men in all the fields of life.

In order to achieve a cohesive and comprehensive definition of feminism and its manifestations, we have to explore its different aspects, such as the geographical and the historical ones .

### **1.1.1 Feminism and History:**

The term feminism first appeared in France in the 1880s (as feminism), Great Britain in the 1890s, and the United States in 1910. However, the real beginning of gender discrimination may have begun with the biblical narrative that places the blame for the fall of humanity on Eve, not Adam. This discrimination has continued throughout history. For example, the

ancient Greeks believed, as Aristotle asserted, that the male by nature is superior, the female inferior, the one rules, and the other is ruled.

Religious leaders also supported such gender discrimination.

St. Augustine, for instance, asserted that women are really imperfect men.

St. Thomas in his turn pronounced woman to be an “incidental being” (De

Beauvoir, 70). Roots of prejudice against women have long been embedded

in the Western culture until the early 1890s, when feminist criticism began to

grow. During this time, women gained the right to vote. Even before, Mary

Wollstonecraft had authored *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792).

She urged women to stand up for their rights and not allow their male-

dominated society to define what it means to be a woman. Women

themselves must take the lead and articulate who they are, and what role they

can and will play in society. Most importantly, they must reject the

patriarchal assumptions that women are inferior to men.

It is Eliane Showalter who divided women's modern literary development of feminism into three phases: the feminine phase (1840-1880), the feminist phase (1880-1920), and the female phase (1920-the present). In the first phase, women writers such as Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot imitated the dominant male

traditions and consequently, the definition of women. For example, Bronte's first novel used a first-person male narrator. Critics have tended to see this as both an artistic error and an elision of her feminine voice. Actually, whether she took a male or female narrator, Bronte was no less intent on examining the encoding of gender in the nineteenth-century discourse. Accordingly, these female authors wrote under male pseudonyms, hoping to be up to the intellectual and artistic achievements of their male counterparts. Female authors described the harsh and cruel treatment of female characters at the hands of their more powerful male creations. They did not even have their own way to write. The second phase "had seen the emergence of the so-called 'new woman' phenomenon, in which intelligent, liberated feminists were seen Taking up the strong roles in the public world" (Matthews,2008, p. 92). In the third phase, women began to discuss their own problems through their writings. Within this phase, Showalter also described four models of difference taken up by many feminists around the world: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural models.

The biological model is the most problematic, in which women writers relate the intimacies of the female experience of the female body. Showalter's linguistic model asserts that "women are speaking women's language as a foreign tongue" (Showalter, 1977, p.86).The third model, the psychoanalytic, identifies gender differences in the

psyche and also in the artistic process. Showalter's last model is the cultural one; this model places feminist concerns within social contexts, acknowledging class, racial, national and historical differences and determinants among women. It investigates how the society (in which female authors work and function) shapes women's goals, responses, and views. Rejecting both imitation and protest. Showalter advocates approaching feminist criticism from a cultural perspective in the current female phase, instead of views that are traditionally perceived from an andocentric perspective like psychoanalytic and biological theories. Feminists in the past have worked within these traditions by revising and criticizing female representations, or lack thereof, in the male traditions (i.e. in the Feminine and Feminist phases). In her essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", Showalter states:

A cultural theory acknowledges that there are important differences between women as writers: class, race nationality, and history are literary determinants as significant as gender. Nonetheless, women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space (Showalter, 1981, p. 260).

This argument is representative in that many feminists argue in similar lines and give more or less similar judgments.

### **1.1.2 Feminism and its Geographical Strains:**

Physical geography plays a great part in determining the proper definition

and the major interests of the various voices of feminist criticism. Three distinct geographical strains of feminism have emerged. The first strain has been set by the American feminist critic Anette Kolodny who has helped to set up the major concerns of American feminism. She asserts that the male voice has for too long been dominant in society; men have had the power of the pen and the press and have been able to define and create images of women as they choose in their male texts. Such male power has caused “anxiety of authorship” (Gilbert, 1977, p.30) in women, causing them to fear the act of literary creation itself. A potential solution has been suggested by Gilbert who argued that “women must develop a women sentence to encourage literary autonomy” (Gilbert, 1977,p.33). Indeed, that is what Mrs. Woolf and her followers have sought to establish in their creative and critical texts.

The second strain is French feminism, which is closely associated with the theoretical and practical application of psychoanalysis. One of the famous figures in this strain is Simone De Beauvoir, whose book, *The Second Sex*, is heralded as the foundation work of twentieth-century feminism. The title, *The Second Sex*, “sums up De Beauvoir’s argument that society sets up man as the positive and woman as a negative, second sex or other, an insight in some ways analogous to Virginia Woolf



concept ‘ Woman as Mirror’” (Humm,1994, p. 36). Judith Butler, for instance, declares that Beauvoir’s formulation that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (De Beauvoir, 1949, p.301), and distinguishes between the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’. Butler asserts that the book suggests that gender is an aspect of identity which is gradually acquired. Butler sees “*The Second Sex* as potentially providing a radical understanding of gender” (Butler,1980, p. 37).De Beauvoir declares that "both French and Western societies are patriarchal" (De Beauvoir, 1949, p. 82). She believes that the male in these societies defines what it means to be human and what it means to be female. She also argues that if a woman wishes to become a significant human being, she must define herself. “Woman? ... Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female. This word is sufficient to define her” (Woolf, 1929, p.65).

The third strain is British feminism. British feminists view reading, writing and publishing as facets of material reality. For them, the goal of criticism is to change social conventions and views about man-woman relationship. One of these critics is Virginia Woolf, who is distinguished by her daring and unprecedented feminist thoughts.

### 1.1.3 Virginia Woolf:

Adeline Virginia Woolf was born in London in 1882. She was an English novelist, essayist, diarist, epistler, publisher, feminist, and writer of short stories. She has been regarded as one of the foremost modernist literary figures of the twentieth century. Her mother is the famous beauty Julia Prinsep Stephen; her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, was a notable author, critic and mountaineer. From her father, she had inherited a sharp critical sense. Her parents had each been married previously and been widowed, and consequently the household contained the children of three marriages.

During war period, Woolf was a significant figure in London's literary society and a member of the Bloomsbury group (a group of writers, intellectuals, philosophers and artists who held informal discussions in Bloomsbury throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century). Their work deeply influenced literature, aesthetics, criticism, and economics as well as modern attitudes towards feminism, pacifism, and servility. Woolf's most famous work includes novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To The Light House* (1927) and *Orlando* (1928).

### 1.1.4 Woolf's Works

In most of her works, Woolf's female characters adapt themselves in order to satisfy the male-defined role of women as art objects. Barbara Hill Rigney agrees

that women in Woolf's novel split themselves into two selves: the male subject as surveyor and the female object as the surveyed. Because these characters maintain themselves to identify with the patriarchal society's image of a woman by assuming the position of a male spectator towards themselves as female spectacle, they become themselves artists and art-objects at the same time. Rigney rightly believes that "this situation leads to these characters' feelings of selflessness and loss of identity" (Rigney, 1978, p. 239). However, one can notice that Rigney is concerned about these characters, not as practical artists with practical artistic production, but simply as situating themselves in the traditional position which the male society has ordained for them, i.e. women as aesthetic objects or as the "other", devoid of critical consciousness.

Eileen Ann Barrett also examines Woolf's feminism in her novels *The Voyage Out*, and *To the Lighthouse* in relation to what she believes to be Woolf's radical critique of the patriarchal culture. She traces the development of the theme of the female artist in Woolf's two feminist works: *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. Barret states that when Woolf "intends the female artist to move outside the male culture, Woolf herself as artist celebrates femininity against the patriarchal system" (Barret E., 1987, p.49). Therefore, Barret is interested in the female artists as representing Virginia Woolf herself standing against the patriarchal society; she is

concerned with presenting the underlying network or relations between the female artist and the patriarchal society.

Allen MacLaurin, nonetheless, is interested in studying the patterns of consciousness in Woolf's works in his book *Virginia Woolf : The Echoes Enslaved*. Drawing upon the difficult circumstances that Woolf had gone through, MacLaurin's article presents several questions about the direct and indirect reasons that drive Woolf to be a feminist. Woolf had not a natural childhood. She lived in a house that contained the children of three marriages. She had three half-brothers from her mother, a half sister from her father, and four siblings. Woolf had "several breakdowns and subsequent recurring depressive periods" (Woodcock, 1983, p. 766), which were caused by the sexual abuse she and her sister had been subjected to by their half brothers. This sexual abuse was not the only factor that led to her breakdowns, also the death of her mother, and that of her half-sister Stella two years later. Throughout her life, Woolf had been plagued by periodic mood swings and associated illness. Though this instability often affected her social life, her literary productivity continued with few breaks until her suicide. MacLaurin talks deeply about the stream-of-consciousness as a technique in general and then investigates how this technique is put into practice in Virginia Woolf's novels. His argument can

be seen as an attempt at the recovery of the critical debate which has emerged in contemporary response to Woolf's creative writing. MacLaurin further studies the issue of group consciousness and states that "Woolf treats these issues in paradoxical manners, thus making its position debated and questioned"(MacLaurin, 2010, p. 53). In this book MacLaurin also deals with the dominant currents of thought in Virginia Woolf's own time. He relates his observations there to his consideration of the issue of consciousness in Woolf's fiction to gauge the extent to which such modes of thought are employed by Woolf in her work. Sigmund Freud in 1896 was the first to recognize the connection between adult survivors' mental health problems and their past histories of child sexual abuse, thus explaining the problem of hysteria. This led to his seduction theory. After much uproar by his contemporaries, Freud denounced the seduction theory and replaced it with the Oedipal theory. Consequently, in Freud's view, Woolf suffered from the sexual abuse that she was subjected to in her childhood. Likewise, Hermione Lee saw that: "Virginia Woolf was a sane woman who had an illness...Her illness is attributed to genetic, environmental and biological factors. It was periodic and recurrent" (Lee, 1999, p. 175). All these critical views stressed the idea that Woolf's standpoints concerning feminism and the female role stem from deep personal experiences. Indeed, her case has been exemplary in that she seeks to find a correspondence between the biographical and objective planes of

experience.

### **1.1.5 *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas:***

This study concentrates on two leading essays in which she developed an innovative and a politically-challenging analysis of the causes and effects of women's exclusion from the British cultural, political, and economical life. Mrs. Woolf searched for a history which belonged to women, and in so doing discovered that history was inseparable from the history of women's relation to language. Starting from consideration of the troubled relations between women and fiction in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), she moves on to a much broader analysis of the political and cultural implications of women's oppression in *Three Guineas* (1938). In both, woman is the centre and the target of the author's interest, particularly how society responds to and considers her position and rights.

*In A Room of One's Own*, Woolf develops the theory of the relation between gender and writing. She examines the exclusion of women from educational institutions and the relations between this exclusion and the unequal distribution of wealth. Her fictional narrator Mary Beton experienced this exclusion when she was in Oxbridge where she was prevented from entering the library of all men's college. In this work, Mrs. Woolf faced and experienced male dominance and she was forced by this dominance to raise the feminist goal of changing society or the world to a

place where the male and the female voices may have been equally valued. Despite her adamant persistence in this field, this dream of equality remained essentially inaccessible. It is for this reason that the tone of *A Room* and *Three Guineas* was full of resentment and discontent.

The result of ten years of research was Woolf's *Three Guineas* which built on the argument she developed in *A Room of One's Own*. In this essay, she advocated a form of radical political action in which women would form themselves into a society of outsiders in order to challenge the rise of Fascism and the drift towards war. She also analyzed women's position in a culture hastening towards war.

Woolf was conscious of her place in the tradition of women writers. Her determination to maintain the dignity of her sex could at times even tempt her into the inartistic faults of exaggeration, and overemphasis. "A *Room of One's Own*, which directly dealt with the problems of the woman writer, was interesting and occasionally amusing, but there was a sense of strain and even of viciousness in the attack on various types of masculine pomposity and self importance in *Three Guineas*" (Ford, 1990, p.344). Such judgments of *A Room of One's Own* overlook the idea that Woolf's book should have been read in its actual context as the product of a woman completely disillusioned with the patriarchal discourse and its cultural

implications.

## 1.2 Objectives of the study:

The aim of the study is to explore a link, if any, between the main themes of *A Room of One's Own* (i.e. financial independence) and those of *Three Guineas* (i.e. intellectual liberty). This study aims to clarify that *A Room of One's Own* is the foundation stone of *Three Guineas* in that both works develop the same themes. Both of them call for the intellectual freedom, and the liberty of women as their male counterparts.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf mingles her thoughts with her daily life. She highlights the strong need of women to take their rights and to be equal with men. The study also explores the fictional narrator's experience in *A Room of One's Own* with the patriarchal society in England in which males have all power and money. As a way of connecting herself with the problems that faced women in trying to get their rights, Woolf gives us many examples about how there was gender discrimination at that time in England. For example, when her imaginary narrator is not allowed to enter the library because she is a woman, the comment presented is laconic and expressive enough, "that a famous library has been cursed by woman is a matter of complete indifference to a famous library" (Woolf, 1929, p.8)

*A Room of One's Own* narrates the way that females lived through the Elizabethan period and how they were not able to obtain education with the exception of those of the upper class because females of this class were tutored at home. Elizabethan women were



subservient to men; they were dependent on their male relatives to support them. They could not even be heirs to their father's titles. All titles would have passed from father to son or brother to brother, depending on the circumstances. The only exception was the monarchy. The study also discusses "the poetry of several Elizabethan aristocratic ladies and how anger towards men and insecurity mar their writings and prevent their genius from shining through" (Woolf, 1929, p.88). Woolf's narrator (Mary Beton) mentions that the writer Aphara Behan marks a turning point. She is perhaps "the first female writer who has earned her own living without depending on any person, which made her an excellent writer" (Woolf, 1929, p.88). Mrs. Behan was forced by the death of her husband and some unfortunate adventures of her own to make her living by her wits. By implication, Mrs. Woolf suggests that Aphara Behan provides a good example of how literary creativity runs hand in hand with material self-sufficiency, a point very few people can question, let alone reject.

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf argues that if women are to function effectively as a political force, they must approach the questions of power and influence in a new way. They should have one "new weapon" (Woolf, 1938, p.72) which is mental freedom.

The theme of financial independence dominates the whole of *A Room of One's Own*, while in *Three Guineas* the central theme is that of intellectual liberty. Obviously, there is a link between the financial position and the intellectual one, since they are interrelated and in fact inseparable. Woolf shows how by achieving intellectual freedom, women can

prevent war. She declares “a woman must have money and a room of her money” (Woolf, 1929, p.4) Woolf declares that no one can earn mental freedom without owning his/her own money. She surveys the Elizabethan period to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and then to 19th century down to the 20th century. She also goes through the social and economic position of women and raises a political treatise against Fascism. Such political and social turmoils will inevitably leave their negative impact on woman and her aspirations.

### **1.3 Questions of the study:**

This study intends to answer the following questions:

- 1-What are the major themes in *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*?
- 2- What is the common denominator between these two works?
- 3-To what extent is Woolf’s opinion about the inseparability of freedom of thought and financial independence true?

These questions will be tackled in the light of a detailed discussion of *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study:**

The importance of this study lies in its intention to explore the possibility of establishing a connection between the two essays through a comprehensive analysis of their major themes. After all, the two essays share the same interest in woman and

how she is treated by society and its institutions.

Both essays elaborate on the woman-community relationship and how the other works force subverting women's aspirations and yearnings. Women's position in society, as the author keeps arguing, is indicative of the intellectual and cultural progress that may change society. Feminism as practiced and presented by Woolf betrays clear social and cultural implications about the extent of justice or injustice in dealing with its members; both men and women.

### **1.5 Limitations of the Study**

This study has covered only two works by Virginia Woolf (*A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*). Perhaps a discussion of her other works would have shed greater light on the main subjects referred to in the study. As an old approach, feminism has been widely used in critical studies. Consequently, this study has focused on Woolf's version of feminism as she understood it and perceived in her cultural arguments as well as in her creative works.

## 1.6 Definition of key terms:

**Bloomian:** a literary approach named after Harold Bloom who is known for his defense of the 19th-century Romantic poets, his construction of unique but controversial theories of poetic influence, and for advocating an aesthetic approach to literature against Marxism, and New Historicism.

**Fascism:** a nationalistic and anti-communist system of government where all aspects of society are controlled.

**Feminism:** In literary criticism, feminism focuses on woman's position in literature, both as writer and character, subject and object, perceiver and perceived. In politics it refers to the approach which aims to have equal rights with men in all fields of life

**Gender discrimination:** make a distinction between people based on the assigned social and cultural role.

**Gynocritics:** new model of literary criticism based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of the female culture.

**Patriarchal society:** the society in which females are dominated by males in

most aspects of life.

**Psychoanalysis:** a literary approach where critics see that the text represses its real content behind an obvious content .

**Stasis:** is the basis or the cause of the argument in question.

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## Chapter Two

### Review of Related Literature

This chapter studies the feminist theory and its different aspects and manifestations as viewed by its advocates. It chooses *A Room and Three Guineas* as representative examples to explore their implications and objectives.

The feminist views reveal that feminism attempts to reject the inferiority of women and her shaky position throughout different ages. It seeks to give women their rights just like their male counterparts. Feminism is a reaction to the stereotypical image of woman, i.e. angel of the house. As Showalter puts it, “all feminists are struggling to find a term that can rescue the feminine from its stereotypical associations within inferiority” (Showalter, 1981, p. 313). Whether in creative literature or criticism, this principle will be the cornerstone in the arguments of the feminists.

Woolf is one of the feminists who tried to help females to gain their rights. *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* are two essays written

to support the cause of women in one way or another . In both, she has sought to explore how woman has been unfairly represented in literature whether in the past or present.

Few critical studies have been written on these two essays. One of these studies is James Hafley's *Virginia Woolf's narrators and The Art of Life Itself*. Hafley studies the relations and interrelations between ideality and reality. Hafley asserts that Woolf's narrators "are not real or even suggested reporters but are creators of the worlds they refer to" (Hafley, 1980, p.33). He asserts that such worlds are revealed to the reader through the voice of the narrator. However, Hafley also points out the narrator's voice creates itself out of the world in which the narrator is the real object of narration . In this article, Hafley also believes that the imaginary world created by the narrator emphasizes created experience, individuality, and fixed order in contrast to all that life may refer to. However, as reflecting on Woolf's life and literary presence, Hafley sees that this status of the narrator in Woolf's fiction is a representation of her ideas and assertions in her critical essays.

Lyndall Gordon in *A Writer's Life* makes a thorough comparison between Woolf's and T.S. Eliot's ideas about the essential matters that lead and help the artists shape and develop their work of art. These biographical writings on Woolf help clarify those hidden points in Woolf's life as an artist. Gordon believes that "Woolf's best assertions about the artist

or the writer are included in her fiction to the extent that the writer's life becomes the source of his/her literary productions" (Gordon, 1985, p.62). In contrast to Hafley's emphasis on the narrative side, Gordon's lies elsewhere: disclosing the biographical elements in Woolf's writings which are crucial for appreciating her creative and critical views.

Elaine Showalter, in her book *A Literature of Their Own*, finds flaws in Woolf's assertions in *A Room of One's Own* that a woman writer should transcend her femaleness or experience as a woman. Showalter sees Woolf's treatment of androgyny as her retreat from expressing, and denial of, her own femaleness which enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition. Showalter considers Woolf to be a rebel against expressing her female identity so that she, becomes an outsider isolating herself from the female mainstream. Therefore, since Woolf asserts in *A Room of One's Own* that it is a fatal for a female writer to speak consciously as a woman, Showalter, conversely, believes that this impersonality of the female writer is a deadly flaw against womanhood. Showalter insists that "a woman's experience should be the origin of her creativity" (Showalter, 1977, p. 25). Following what she terms "gynocritics", she insists that female authors, characters, and readers should all identify with one coherent identity, which is that of the female.

In the introductory chapter "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"



Feminist Readings of Woolf” of her book *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Toril Moi identifies these flaws Showalter finds in Woolf’s texts. Particularly in *A Room of One’s Own*, there are the results of Showalter’s faulty manner of interpreting Woolf. Moi believes that the gynocritics approach which Showalter adopts can only be inadequate in reading Woolf. Moi suggests that it is the French Feminist theory -gynesis- based on the research of Derrida and Julia Kristiva that can best reveal. The power of Woolf’s texts as exposing “the duplicitous nature of discourse”(Moi, 1986, p.9)is what matters. Toril Moi’s concern, in her brief chapter on Woolf, is to rescue Woolf from those limited readings performed by Showalter and other feminists. This is achieved by suggesting that the French deconstructive feminist theory can provide an alternative for a positive reading of Woolf as a feminist though Moi does not herself apply such a theory to Woolf’s texts in any manner.

In *The Absent Father: Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater*, Perry Meisel investigates the influence of Walter Pater on Virginia Woolf. He applies Bloomian criticism to Woolf’s essays and to her two works *A Room* and *Three Guineas*. He suggests that Woolf has borrowed Pater’s critical ideas, rewritten them in her texts (particularly her essays) and then repressed his influence. He argues that “Woolf, like Pater, finds the self an extremely unstable category” (Meisel, 1980, p.288). Meisel is concerned with studying Woolf’s texts in relation to

her literary life by tracing her literary inheritance to Pater as a precursor. In other words, he treats Woolf, the author, as the center.

Rachel Bowlby's *Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destination* comes across most of Woolf's novels like *Mrs. Dalloway (1925)*, *The Waves (1931)* and other novels. In her critical study, Bowlby even passes through the two major essays of Woolf: *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. Bowlby starts her book by saying that "women are like trains which are never on time" (Bowlby, 1988, p.4) but the difference is that trains move from one station to another, to a known destination while we cannot find the final destination when we are talking about feminism or feminist theory and that's what also happened in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* as Bowlby believes. In her view, Woolf talks about women and fiction then she moves through the difficulties that faced her to reach mental freedom without answering the major question that the essay started with: what might the title women and fiction mean?

Mindie Kniss, in her review of *A Room of One's Own* suggests that Woolf's essay is a powerful proposition for women's independence in creative endeavors. She believes that Virginia Woolf challenges the patriarchal system that allows a man to choose any livelihood he desires, but often requires a woman to live her life in full support of his enterprise instead of deciding upon her own path. She divides her review into many major themes. She puts the first theme under the title of

money where she says that “*A Room of One’s Own* is more than just an essay on the correlation of women and fiction because in this work, Woolf calls for the independence of women” (Kniss, 1992, p. 6). In her review, Kniss also talks about the way in which Woolf represents women and finally she concludes that Woolf is writing to encourage women to write without boundaries on whatever topics they have in mind.

Anne Fernald in her article “*A Room of One’s Own*, Personal Criticism and the Essay” asserts that there is a paradox in *A Room of One’s Own*. She wonders how can a writer as private as Woolf be associated with personal criticism? Woolf wants to keep her life entirely private, as private as that her medium of a first person narrator, Mary Beton. She adds “that Woolf writes a personal criticism that does not compromise her privacy that in fact, conceals it, even as it enters into a conversation with the reader which seems very personal” (Fernald, 1994, p. 12). Through the personal, Woolf emphasizes what she is likely to have in common with any reader : mixed feelings about using libraries, for example. At the same time, through the generic persona of Mary Beton, she erases some of what separates her from all but a very few of her readers that she was, already in 1928, a famous writer with a knowledge of literature that was unsurpassed. Woolf’s use of a narrator inhibits us from being distracted by Woolf, the personality, and allows us to enter into a sympathetic relationship with the persona. The creation of Mary Beton allows Woolf to adopt for nonfiction the novelist and poet’s ability to move in and

out of character. Woolf through Mary Beton also reads the world around her; for example, when a Manx cat passes by the window after lunch at an Oxbridge men's college, she makes some suggestions about gender difference.

Morag Shiach concludes that “*Three Guineas*, is not written to deal with war and political changes that take place in England” (Shiach, 22), but Woolf writes this essay to focus on the role of women while these changes are happening and because it is based on Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

Eileen Ann Barrett studies Woolf's feminism in relation to what she believes is Woolf's radical critique of patriarchal culture. She traces the development of the theme of the female artist as an outsider in Woolf's two feminist essays: *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. Barret claims that when Woolf intends the female artist to move outside the male culture, “Woolf herself as an artist celebrates femininity against the patriarchal system” (Barret, 49). Barret is interested in the female artists as representing Virginia Woolf herself and her silent attitude towards the patriarchal society; she is concerned with presenting the underlying network of relations between the female artist and the patriarchal society.

Brigitte Bechtold in her paper ‘more than *A Room* and *Three Guineas*: Understanding Virginia Woolf's Social Thought’ suggests that Woolf often found herself dealing with her immediate personal surroundings in a rather more subconscious manner. As they take shape, her socioeconomics ideas are interwoven with the fiction of the novels and the stuff of her essays.

More importantly, as Bechtold demonstrates in her paper, both fiction and diaries help readers locate in Woolf's socioeconomic thought both a decidedly feminist theory of value and an underlying philosophy of social justice that transcends gender boundaries. Bechtold rightly believes that although *Three Guineas* follows *A Room of One's Own* chronologically and is more developed in many ways, it takes its ideas to greater societal implications. Woolf takes a major step in *A Room* that can be seen as a continuation of a theme pursued in *Three Guineas*. Indeed, in the chronologically earlier work, "she moves beyond the valuation of unpaid labor and into the realm of potential labor. In *Three Guineas*, the focus is more on the valuation of work done by women versus women's paid work" (Bechtold, 1996, p. 2). In other words, Bechtold's standpoint is dealing with Woolf's writing as a critic is sociological; it traces the economic and social influences on woman's position and her status in the community.

In *Persuasiveness of The Text: An Analysis of Virginia Woolf's Three Guineas*, Carl Lindner asserts that Woolf actually creates one of the most persuasive and rhetorical works of the last century. Lindner makes a link between *Three Guineas* and other works of Woolf such as *The Years*. He sheds light on the unjust treatment of the British society that is seen in Woolf's work. "Woolf raises accusations against the institutionalized injustice the British legal, education, and social systems of her day, which are so clear in *Three Guineas* and its immediate unpublished

predecessor *The Pargiters* or its connection to its sibling work *The Years*” (Linder, 2009, p.10).

In short, it is obvious that all critical studies chosen here about *A Room of One's Own* stress different themes in this book without establishing a link or a common denominator between all these themes. The main contribution that this study hopes to make is to emphasize the presence of a link between the major theme (money) which is the foundation stone of the essay and the other themes; it also seeks to establish a link between *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* as regards the intellectual foundation on which the two books hinge. Indeed, as will be shown in the following pages, *A Room* and *Three Guineas* develop one major underlying topic in Woolf's thinking: how a woman achieves her economic, social and cultural autonomy so that at the end, she can find herself on equal footing with man. Such arguments and hypotheses will form the main corpus of the following sections.

## Chapter Three

### *A Room of One's Own* and its Major Theme

#### 3.1 The Importance of *A Room*:

Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is a landmark in feminist literature. It is considered the first major work in feminist criticism since it has been viewed as the "first modern text of feminist criticism, the model in both theory and practically socialist feminist of a specifically socialist feminist criticism" (Marcus, 1988, p. 216). Woolf employs a number of methodologies, historical and sociological analysis, fictional hypothesis, and philosophy, notably to answer her initial question of why there have been so few female writers. As it has been described, "Woolf's *A Room* has become a project that houses us. In her power, failure and perplexities, she is a major architect and designer of feminist criticism" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 62). Many writers use this piece of work as a tool to represent their suffering .

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf suggests that the female writer is always "an inheritor as well as an originator" (Woolf, 1929, p. 113). Her own legacy has crossed color and class lines in the feminist community. Michele Barrett, writing from a Marxist-feminist perspective, praises Woolf's fruitful

and still largely unexplored insight in *A Room of One's Own* that “the conditions under which men and women produce literature are materially different” (Barrett M., 1993, p. 103). At that time, women were under the control of their male counterparts. They did not have their own work or even their own money. As a result, they did not have the mental freedom. And if they tried to write, they lacked the courage to sign their works. Tillie Olsen used *A Room* to meditate on the silences of women that were more marginalized than Shakespeare's sister, exploring not only gender as one of the “traditional silencers of humanity,” but also “class-economic circumstances-and color” (Olsen,1978, p. 24).

Woolf's point of view in *A Room* is that of a collective voice, of the literary influence on women writers and it has been explored in the works of some later feminist critics. For example, Jane Marcus in her essay “Thinking Back Through our Mothers”, emphasizes Woolf's reliance on the work of other women Woolf knew by experience, how women influence each other. “Far from Harlod Bloom's concept of the anxiety of influence, it is rather the opposite, affording the woman writer relief from anxiety, acting as a hideout in history where slide can lick her wounds between attacks on the patriarchy” ( Jensen, 2002, p. 92).

*A Room* derives its importance from the several themes it covers. Actually, they are the basic principles that women have to gain to be able to write as men. According to the present reading, all topics are



the outcomes of one major theme which is the financial independence as seen in Michelle Barrett's statement:

if we may prophesy, women in time to come will write fewer novels only but poetry and criticism and history. But to be sure, one is looking ahead to that golden, that perhaps fabulous age when women will have what has so long been denied them leisure, and money, and a room to themselves ( Barrett M.,1993, p. 52).

To be able to write, there women ought to cross many obstacles such as gaining the proper education, proper space, and most importantly, money. The material autonomy is of prime importance in determining the position of the female writers. Indeed, *A Room* as manifested in the very title does stress privacy, this freedom is to be independent.

### **3.2 The Importance of Financial Independence:**

The different themes in this essay represent Woolf's feminist thought. From the very beginning of the essay, Woolf asserts that "a woman must have a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf, 1929, p.4). This sentence reflects that women at that time did not have a space of their own or even money to control their lives or display their potentials and abilities. For the narrator of *A Room of One's Own*, money is the primary element that prevents women from owning a room of their own. Thus, having money is of the utmost importance. Because women do not have financial, social, and political power, their creativity has been systematically stifled throughout the ages. Woolf repeatedly stresses on the necessity of an inheritance that

requires no obligations and of the privacy of one's own room for the promotion of creative genius. She gives historical argument that lack of money and privacy prevented bright women in the past from writing effectively. For example Mary Beton asserts,

Indeed, I thought, slipping the silver into my purse, it is remarkable, remembering the bitterness of those days, what a change of temper a fixed income will bring about. No force in the world can take from me my five hundred pounds. Food, house and clothing are mine forever. Therefore not merely do effort and labor cease, but also hatred and bitterness. I need not hate any man; he cannot hurt me (Woolf, 1929, p.38).

The role of money in woman's life is self-evident in this statement and many others. Without money, women will remain slavishly dependent on men; without privacy, constant interruptions block their creativity, freedom of thought is hampered as women consume themselves with thoughts of gender. They write out of anger or insecurity, and such emotions make them think about themselves rather than about their subjects. As Mary Beton suggests,

one might say, I continued, laying the book down beside *Pride and Prejudice*, that the woman who wrote those pages had more genius in her than Jane Austen, but if one reads them over and marks that jerk in them, that indignation, one sees that she will never get her genius expressed whole and entire. Her books will be deformed and twisted. She will write in a rage where she should write calmly. She will write foolishly where she should write wisely. She will write of herself where

she should write of her characters. She is at war with her lot (Woolf, 1929, pp. 72-73).

Aphara Behan is the first female writer to earn her own money from writing. She paved the way for the 19<sup>th</sup> century novelists, like Jane Austen, who were able to write despite the lack of privacy in their family sitting rooms. Mrs. Woolf believes that contemporary female writers still generally operate out of anger or insecurity. In the future, however, with money and privacy, their minds will be freed and genius will blossom.

### **3.3 The Narrator:**

Mrs. Woolf fictionalizes an unnamed female narrator who is the only major character in *A Room of One's Own*. She tells the reader to call her “Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or any other name you please...” (Woolf, 1929, p. 5). Names do not count here. What is important is the content, the argument presented by the nameless narrator. “For now that Aphara Behan 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” (Woolf, 1929, p. 67)

Mrs. Woolf uses this unnamed narrator on purpose. Her shifting identity gives her a more universal voice. By taking different names and identities, she appears as a voice reflecting all women, not just herself. One would argue that the shifting nature of this fictionalized character reflects the different identity that woman adopts to satisfy her husband, her mother-in-law, and her

society. The tone of the narrator's discourse is marked by bitterness, dissatisfaction and anxiety. The individual woman is not the main point. Rather what she stands for is the central issue.

### **3.4 The Tragic Fate of Highly Intelligent Women and Judith Shakespeare:**

The other theme tackled in *A Room of One's Own* is the tragic fate of highly intelligent women that lived under the bad circumstances. Woolf hypothesizes the existence of Judith Shakespeare who is equally gifted as her brother, but receives no education except that which she can create for herself by her own personal effort. She writes some, in secret, but hides or burns her work for fear. She becomes engaged at a young age. Despite the idea that she is "the apple of her father's eye" (Woolf, 1929, p. 49), she is chastised and beaten by her father when she begs to be allowed not to marry. After that she runs away and is finally taken up by a theater manager, becomes pregnant by him, and commits suicide. Mrs. Woolf, then, uses Judith as a tool to clarify the position of woman endowed with Shakespeare's genius but lacking the material and social conditions. Woolf goes on to assert "for genius is not born among laboring, uneducated, servile people" (Woolf, 1929, p. 50). The argument stresses the reciprocal relation between the individual and the community, the intrinsic and extrinsic, the spiritual and material. Without setting a balance between these two poles, the situation will always be in a

state of disorder as seen in Judith's case. In Judith's example, this situation drives her to suicide. In this theme, Mrs. Woolf's feminist thought appear again; she mentions that even gifted women need education which was not offered at that time. One could argue that if women or Judith has a reasonable income, she will gain popularity as her brother William has. However, because of the lack of money and consequently the power of controlling her life, she loses her own life in addition to her creativity.

Mrs. Woolf confirms that,

reviewing the story of Shakespeare's sister as I had made it, is that any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at (Woolf, 1929, p.64).

Mrs. Woolf pursues her survey of the position of female writers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to Mrs. Woolf, the writer is the product of her / his circumstances and that material conditions are of crucial importance. This has already become evident in her argument about Shakespeare's sister and Aphara Behan. She also believes that these material circumstances have a profound effect on the psychological aspects of writing. Depending on the domestic isolation, and narrow experience of female writers, Woolf even hypothesizes about the possible effect of Jane Austen's fame out on her writings, had she lived long enough to benefit from it :

We must accept the fact that all these good novels, *Villette*, *Emma*, *Withering Heights*, *Middlemarch*, were written by women without more experience of life than could enter the house of a respectable clergyman (Woolf, 1929, p. 73).

Woolf's keen critical insight here stems from the fact that she perceives these novels from the perspective of circumscribing conditions under which they were written. Although written by different Victorian novelists, all these support Woolf's basic postulate which identifies their distinction as lying in their pursuit of representing woman's aspirations and frustrations.

This striking lack of practical experience and encounter with daily reality is supported by Barrett who gives the following hypothesis about Mrs. Woolf:

had she lived a few more years only...she would have stayed in London, dined out, lunched out, met famous people, made new friends, read, traveled, and carried back to the quiet country cottage a hoard of observations to feast upon at leisure... (Barrett E., 1988, p. 9).

Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* gained much of Woolf's attention; it makes Woolf wonder if it would have been a better novel if Jane Austen had not thought it necessary to hide her manuscript from visitors or intruders. This act also raises some doubts concerning the fate of this novel, if Austen had access to financial independence. As Mrs. Woolf rightly argues, "I wondered, would *Pride and Prejudice*

have been a better novel if Jane Austen had not thought it necessary to hide her manuscript from visitors?" (Woolf, 1929, p. 71)

### **3.5 The Social Life of Female Writers:**

The Other point raised in Mrs. Woolf's essays is the social life and its effect of narrow views of life imposed upon woman. She finds it convenient to draw a comparative argument between Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte. Mrs. Woolf mentions that Bronte desires more of practical experience than she possesses:

What were they blaming Charlotte Bronte for, I wondered? And I read how Jane Eyre used to go up on to the roof when Mrs. Fairfax was making jellies and looked over the fields at the distant view. And then she longed-and was for this that they blamed her-that then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen (Woolf, 1929, p.71).

Mrs. Woolf is an early name in showing the pathetic situation of both Jane Eyre and Rochester's first wife. Indeed, this point will be fully explored by Jean Rhys's *Wide Saragasso Sea* (1966), where that Creole woman Bertha is kept in the attic of Rochester's house.

With equal emphasis, Woolf deals with the other Victorian novelist, Jane Austen. Woolf considers Austen's disposition (not to want what she has not) as a gift that matches her circumstances. This runs in sharp contrast to Bronte's situation, which drives her to write of herself when

she is supposed to be writing of her characters.

Given Austen's narrow range of experience of life and how it could function as a gift, one may raise questions concerning the nature of many of Austen's writings if she possessed a social life as men did.

Austen lived with the minimum rights that she could gain, Woolf asserted “She never travelled, she never drove through London in an omnibus or had luncheon in a shop by herself” (Woolf, 1929, p.7). And because of that, her genius is felt in the way she writes. We can even imagine the several times that she has been interrupted and forced to hide her papers. That is clear in Woolf’s statement: “If Jane Austen suffered anyway from her circumstances it was in the narrowness of life that was imposed upon her. It was impossible for a woman to go about alone” (Woolf, 1929, p. 71). Here Woolf compares between the works of Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austen. Woolf believes that Austen’s work is better than Bronte’s because of the bitterness and anger prevalent throughout Bronte’s work. Mrs. Woolf concludes that Austen’s nature makes her work successful because of the lack of anger and bitterness towards men. This contrasts with Bronte’s work which is full of resentment and discontent. She asserts in her novel how Jane Eyre desired to have more freedom: “I desired more of practical experience than I possessed more of intercourse with my kind of acquaintance with variety of character than was here within my reach” (Woolf, 1929, p.p.71-72) She also wonders about the fate of Austen’s work if she gains the control of her own life.



### 3.6 Novel versus Poetry:

At that time, women preferred to write novels rather than poetry. They suffered much due to the bad circumstances which put them under the control of their male counterparts. Even the poems they wrote were full of anger as we realize in Lady Winchilsen's poem:

How we are fallen! Fallen by mistaken rules

And education's more the nature's fools (Woolf, 1929, p. 62)

Actually, few women did write successful poetry. Woolf believes that the reason behind that is the frequent interruptions which prevent women from writing poetry or prevent the train of thought to continue and present an appropriate idea. In *A Room* the narrator writes, "Intellectual freedom depends on material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom..." (Woolf, 1929, p.7). She believes that the writing of novel lends itself more easily to frequent starts and stops; so women more likely tend to write novels than poetry. Women must adapt with frequent interruptions because of the lack of room of their own in which they could write. Thus without money, women will be forever interrupted again and will remain in a second place in comparison with their creative male counterparts. Once again, the material factor is a key element in Mrs. Woolf's argument.

### **3.7 Interruptions:**

The preference of writing novels, because of the frequent starts and stops, leads inevitably to another theme which is the interruption. When the narrator is interrupted in *A Room of One's Own*, she generally fails to regain her original concentration, suggesting that women without private spaces of their own, free of interruptions, are doomed to face difficulties, if not sheer failure in their work. As the narrator describes Oxbridge University in Chapter One, she tells the reader that her attention is drawn to a cat without a tail. The oddly sight of a cat without a tail causes the narrator to completely lose her train of thought. It is an exercise in allowing the reader to experience what it might feel like to be a woman writer. "Certainly, as I watched the Manx cat pause in the middle of the lawn as if it too questioned the universe, something seemed lacking, something seemed different. But what was lacking, what was different, I asked myself, listening to the talk" (Woolf, 1929, p. 11).

Whether or not an interruption acts as a part of Woolf's feminist purpose, the interruptions of *A Room of One's Own* are not the highly controlled interruptions of a philosophical dialogue with oneself.

### **3.8 The Sympathizing Attitude towards Female Writers:**

Woolf draws attention to the attitude of male critics towards women

writers, and the accompanied effect this had on their work. Of course, many writers have tried to escape this prejudice by using male pseudonyms, but nonetheless it could not be avoided. The influence of using this male pseudonyms is obvious in their writings, as she notes in *A Room of One's*

*Own*:

one has only to skim those old forgotten novels and listen to the tone in which they were written to divine that the writer was meeting criticism; she was saying this by way of aggression, or that by way of conciliation (Woolf, 1929, p. 83).

The pathetic situation of female writers at that time drove some male critics to sympathize with them, which also gave those critics the upper hand to control their writings indirectly, "...that it is a mind that has any special sympathy with women, a mind that takes up their cause or devotes itself to their interpretations" (Woolf, 1928, p.102). Here, Woolf once again describes the obstacles that prevent females from pursuing their writing plans.

Woolf goes on in her essay to discuss how males at that time were responsible for the internal image of women characters in literature. She discovers that males were in a position that allowed them to define the role of women in society, and their works are a mirror-image of the position of women in real life. They portray women as "angel at home" where woman is portrayed by men as a person who has no mind or wish of her own. Rather she is there only to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others.

With regard to these two themes (the sympathetic attitude of male critics towards female writers, and the internal image of female characters in literature), Woolf finds it necessary or even inevitable to conclude that men allow themselves great freedom. The future of literature, indeed, depends upon the extent of this freedom. By implication, it is evident that the proper milieu of writing is not available for women. Hence, the failure to write properly and adequately.

Woolf points out in *A Room* that the language of female writers is different from male ones. In addition to the different observations of the characters in any literary work they write, the language itself is different. The male discourse is cliché-ridden and complacent. It also betrays a clear sense of power and hegemony. As already mentioned, many of females' texts are full of anger and bitterness. If we think of the tone and the style especially in sentences used to describe a woman's mind, we can come out with that difference. As Woolf comments on Mary Carmichael's novel *Life's Adventure* : " she broke the sentences; now she has broken the sequence" (Woolf, 1929, p.34). This leads us to the several times that women are interrupted while they write. This is because of harsh material circumstances that impede privacy and render women susceptible to interruptions and failure to embody what they have in mind.

### **3.9 Life of the Opposite Sex:**

In the sixth chapter which is the final one of *A Room*, Woolf pays attention to the unity and rhythm that has been absent from the relation between women and men. She believes that each mind has male and female elements, and to be genius, the harmonious balance between these elements is required. In her view, Shakespeare gained all the popularity and success because of the possession of these elements “in fact one goes back to Shakespeare’s mind as the type of the androgynous, of the man-womanly mind...” (Woolf, 1929, p.102).

Woolf writes *A Room of One's Own* as an attempt to describe the relation between women and fiction, but she ends up with the demanding of women's rights. She passes from one chapter to another as a journey. She calls for the most important features of feminist thought by comparing between the lives of the opposite sexes. For example, she tries in her work to answer these questions “ why did men drink wine and women water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor?” (Woolf, 1938, p.25). Such questions have much to do with the social conventions and norms of conduct that foster and encourage such modes of thinking and behaving. Any sociological book about the Victorian life enhances Woolf’s questioning.

### **3.10 A Room and Critics:**

*A Room* is a landmark in feminist literature whose basic subject is

to evaluate the position of woman from different angles. For example, Jane Marcus declares that varied readings illustrate historical and biographical sources. They offer exciting tools for the reader by providing a context in which to interpret difficult passages and possible literary allusions in a given text. Indeed, in Woolf's *A Room*, it is the narrator's attempt to seek out "the manuscript of one of Milton's poems" (Woolf, 1929, p. 7) that leads her to be dissatisfied with the Oxbridge library. Woolf's critique of Milton's power continues as *A Room* concludes. The narrator calls for the woman here to "look past Milton's bogey in order to ensure that the women poet can be born" (Jensen, 2002, p. 141). Here Marcus focuses on the various readings and their effect on understanding Woolf's text. Milton provides man's first disobedience especially in his poem *Paradise Lost*: "... Of man's first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree" (Milton, 1996, p. 6).

While Hermione Lee declares that *A Room* "has emerged from a story which is itself an exploratory refusal to choose between different species fantasy or fact, realism or romance, essay or fiction" (Roe & Sellers, 2000, p. 89)., he criticizes *A Room* as a whole or as its literary kind as an essay.

On the other hand, Alex Zwerdling criticizes *A Room* as "a twisted and deformed work" (Pawlowski, 2000, p. 13). Zwerdling in his *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* tells us that Virginia Woolf was full of anger and

bitterness while she was writing *A Room*. Indeed, this is a good example of the patriarchal discourse that seeks to separate the text from the context, to see the phenomenon in isolation from the circumstances that led to its emergence.

Throughout her work, Woolf has argued that the position of woman, which is socially and historically determined, has important psychological consequences. Woolf in each chapter mentions the different impediments against women's intellectual work and the obstacles they encountered in trying to resist the conventional feminine role. In *A Room*, she looks back a hundred years and goes on until the present moment of her discourse. Starting from the library at Oxbridge she discusses the necessity of owning female's own money clarifying that the theme of financial independence is the core of the whole essay. Indeed the other themes are simply manifestations of this underlying theme. To own a special room, the fate of highly intelligent woman, the historical circumstances, even the identity of woman could be changed if she gains her right of earning her own money. Woolf sums up her argument by stating that :

intellectual freedom depends on 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...women, then, have not had a dog's chance of writing poetry. That is why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one's own. (Woolf, 1929, p.11)

Finally, to talk about women and fiction, women must first call for their rights and the priority must be given to financial freedom, which is related to their intellectual independence, and that leads us to the profession of writing. At least, this is how Mrs. Woolf sees in her influential essays about feminist literature.

*A Room of One's Own* is certainly one of the seminal texts where the emphasis is laid on the inextricable relation between the financial and intellectual. Woman's position as a writer or, to be more specific, a novelist can only be achieved when her freedom and intellectual position are guaranteed. Indeed many arguments of the 20th century feminists are no more than variations on Mrs. Woolf's influential and pioneering postulate about woman and her inalienable rights.



## Chapter Four

### *Three Guineas*

#### 4.1 Historical Background:

While Woolf's life is full of sadness and despair; the world is bracing for other, more detrimental events. Already, within the preceding decade, fascism had taken a firm hold in Italy. Benito Mussolini who considered himself an "authoritarian and aristocratic socialist" (Payne, 1995, p. 99) had been elected to the Italian parliament under Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti along with thirty eight other fascists in May of 1921. Mussolini's ambitions for expansion and imperialism had not diminished during his extended time in office. During the electoral campaigns of 1932, the Nazi party membership staggered 450,000 more than any other political party, with women accounting for nearly eight percent of the party members" (Payne, 1995, p. 168). Such events outside Great Britain had a decisive impact inside the country as well.

On January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1933 Adolf Hitler "became chancellor of the German

government as the leader of the legal parliamentary coalition" (Payne, 1995, p. 174), and by August 2nd, Hitler was both president and chancellor of the German government, asserting complete control over every facet of politics. Woolf collected quite a few newspaper clippings about Hitler, ranging from comments on Nazi Blood-Race theory to women within the Nazi party. Both of these played a crucial role the way that Woolf shaped her argument and explained why she desperately wanted women in Britain to have a sense of distance and indifference.

With the turn of 1935, the revision process was clarified when her original motive to write a sequel to *A Room of One's Own* was dropped from her initial essay-novel into scheme for a separate book.

By October of 1935, her sequel to *A Room of One's Own* underwent another transformation. The text increases in its scope from strictly focusing on the sexual lives of women into a new entity about "the next war as a result of the Labour Party at Brighton" (Woolf, 1978, p. 346). She moved to the results of gaining women's mentally freedom. Possibly due to her own concern and outrage, Woolf feels her thought on *Three Guineas* "at any moment becomes absolutely wild, like being harnessed by a shark" (Woolf, 1978, p.348). Unfortunately, she had not yet resolved the novel part

of her original conception in *The Years*, which has become “as an inaccessible Rocky Island” and she knew that her “next book, professions, the next war, will need some courage” (Woolf, 1978, p. 354) if it was completed. Another year had passed before Woolf finally overcame the crisis of *The Years* and was able to turn her attention to *Three Guineas* again.

During this year (1935), Virginia Woolf traveled extensively and often was gone from her usual places of residence in England. Of a particular note is Leonard’s and Virginia's trip to Germany in May, which started with their crossing into Holland. They spent a week there before continuing to Germany. In addition to this trip, a smaller trip to Bristol in July 1935 to deliver the opening address for The Roger Fry Memorial Exhibition at the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, left Woolf with “a curious sense of complete failure” (Woolf, 1978, p. 331) . Both trips solidified Woolf's growing disgust with fascism. Even though her diaries indicated no lasting ill effects from the trip, the experience with the German protesters surely remained in the back of her mind.

In response, the League of Nations brands Italy as an aggressor and imposed economic sanctions on the state with little effect. In Germany,

propaganda was already having an effect on the “present and future mothers of the race” (Payne, 1995, p. 195). Although women played a significant role in the Nazi party's rise to power, most fascists were as contemptuous of women as they were of homosexuals and felt that women should have remained in their “proper place” (Passmore, 2002, p. 125). Here, the feminist thought of Woolf unfurled explicitly. In addition, “one of the major goals of Nazi party is to increase the Aryan birth rate and they release propaganda that largely succeeded in both enforcing the subordinate status of women while increasing births” (Payne, 1995, p. 195). Obviously, Woolf’s argument took a political turn as the social and cultural scene was heavily affected by the political events. Feminism, one can say, did not rule out the detrimental role of politics in woman’s career.

## **4.2 What is *Three Guineas*?**

After reading Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* for the first time, the first question which often comes to our minds is: what exactly is this text about? An answer should readily come to mind. *Three Guineas* is an innovative work that, if it may boldly be said, is singular in its conception and there is no other work with which it can be compared. To

answer such a question, one could argue whether it is right to raise the relevant question: Is *Three Guineas* a fictional or non fictional work.

Julia Briggs notes, as other critics have done, "*Three Guineas* is further from fiction than most of her work, yet at the same time, is a more consciously contrived creation than anything she had previously done" (Briggs, 2005, p. 318). However, Mrs. Woolf's view runs in contrast to this statement. She notes in her diary:

that's the end of six years floundering, striving, much agony, some ecstasy : lumping *The Years* and *Three Guineas* together as one book- as indeed they are...well I was thinking of it at Delphi I think. And then I forced myself to put it into fiction first. *The Years* (Woolf, 1953, p.276)

The notebooks of *Three Guineas* found in the Virginia Woolf's Manuscript from the Monks House Papers at the University of Sussex exemplify the amount of research and the entire historical documentation about the position of women within the British society during the 1930s. Woolf shifts the focus of the notebooks from the relationship between men and women to other aspects. She concentrates on the lack of university education for women, shifting to the eventual focal point centering on the politics of fascism. Not only does she show how her original conception gradually transforms, but

also how consciously she sets about providing evidence.

For this reason, the text is not only historically grounded, but the historical ground covers the course of nearly a decade, while Woolf works on *Three Guineas* until its publication on June 2, 1938 as the accumulation of fifty six years of experience in life. The result is a work that covers a duration of lifetime of Woolf and the circumstances of the 1930s in Great Britain. Unfortunately, even though the evidence of this expansive undertaking is readily apparent, the reader is not in a position to answer the original question: What is *Three Guineas*? To answer it effectively, we have to trace both the history of the work itself and the historical events that led to its creation. Only in recognizing where the text comes from can we truly understand what *Three Guineas* is as a text.

The idea of *Three Guineas* came into being on January 20, 1931 as "Woolf was taking a bath, with a single thought: to create a sequel to *A Room of One's Own* about the sexual life of women: to be called professions for women" ( Woolf, 1978, p.6). This assessment by Woolf is evidence that *Three Guineas* is based on *A Room*, and it called for the same principles that

*A Room* calls for.

During the next year and a half, Woolf worked occasionally on its sequel while working on other projects such as *Common Reader: Second Series*, which were completed in the late 1932, and *Flush: A Biography*, which Woolf published in 1933.

Even as she worked on all these things, the sequel Woolf first was thinking about in the bath continued to expand and matured in her mind. While she has “collected enough powder to blow up St. Pauls and even had the idea of incorporating pictures into the text as early as February 16, 1932, she did not begin writing in earnest until the middle of October” (Woolf, 1978, p. 77). According to Woolf's diary, it was on November 2nd when the conception of the complete work based on her ideas finally took shape: “I have entirely remolded my essay. It's to take in everything, sex, education, and life with the most powerful & agile leaps, like a chamois, across the precipices from 1880 to here & now” (Woolf, 1978, p. 129).

By December 19, 1932, she had written some 60,320 words in what she considered to be “by far the quickest going of any of her books. Even though she felt intensely excited about the work, for a time after

this stream of writing, in which Woolf has nearly "written herself to the verge of total extinction" (Woolf, 1978, p.132). She focused again on her other works. Much like *The Waves*, what would become *Three Guineas* is rewritten at least four times and the multiple rewritings and the revisions continuous into 1935 due to numerous events in her own life as well as the complexity of the work.

During 1931 and throughout the early years of working on *Three Guineas*, Woolf suffered from repeated fits of sickness, both mental and physical, where she spent more than "a few days of bed & headache & overpowering sleep descending inexorable" (Woolf, 1978, p. 43). The death of her good friend, Lytton Strachey, obviously had a significant impact on Woolf's mental state. In 1932, Woolf dealt with the suicide of Dora Carrington on March 11th who chose not to face life without Lytton Strachey.

On August 4, 1932, Woolf lost another associate when Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson died along with his "fine charming spirit" (Woolf, 1978, p. 120). The repeated instances of losing consciousness and heart trouble grew worse. Near the end of 1932, Dr. Rendel advised Woolf to rest and restrict her activity because she was "putting a strain on her heart, which of course



gives out, at the Ivy, or in the garden, though there's nothing wrong" (Woolf, 1978, p. 129) since she was actually exhausting herself with writing. The repeated deaths of her close friends hit her hard and were one of the many reasons that *Three Guineas* took so long to be written and eventually published. Woolf's attempt to work on multiple projects at once did not help matters and was often cited as the reason why Woolf's works of this period were of a poorer quality than her previous works, such as *To The Lighthouse* and *The Waves*.

### **4.3 *Three Guineas* and Some Facts:**

In *Three Guineas* and *The Years*, Woolf's focuses on the themes of money, family, patriarchy, education, and mental. In addition, she manages between the two works, to provide some interaction of fact and fiction. She remains true to the historical facts in *Three Guineas* as she continues illustrating her scenes in *The Years*. This association with history, along with their connected past, allows the two works to function together.

*Three Guineas* evolves and flourishes beyond its roots. Woolf remains truthful, at least in part to the original design: "an essay-novel" which means : "to take in everything, sex, education, life" ( Woolf, 1978,

p. 129). However, *Three Guineas* is hardly a short formal piece of writing to which the common definition of essay usually refers, especially it that ranges into the hundreds of pages. What is originally an essay about the sexual life of women expands to become an anti fascist pamphlet about the situation and the role of women in the war. It eventually becomes one of the most systematic and thought out exploration of the ties between Fascism and Patriarchy that has ever been coherently voiced. *Three Guineas* no longer functions as an inter-chapter interluding between narrative points, commenting on the fiction with fact, but functions as “statement of fact addressed to the eye” (Woolf, 1938, p.14). The text brings forth the historical, social, and economic facts of life to comment on the illustrated fictions which patriarchy puts forth. It talks about the mental freedom that women must gain to prevent war, in addition to the education, the money, and finally the equality which must all take place to attain peace.

Woolf, by her division of two works, seemed to realize that she no longer needed her fiction creations to demonstrate her postulate. The proof is all around her. The fact that "war is an abomination" and the certainty of the " photographs of more dead bodies, of more ruined houses “no longer needed to be figuratively demonstrated, but

simply stated” (Woolf, 1938, p. 50). The text of *Three Guineas* changes its form, and its focus. But the footnote to society itself that *Three Guineas* represents never changes. And a footnote to *Three Guineas* is "if it provides three things to the reader: justification for the positions adopted in the work, a demonstration of the novelty of the results, and an indication of how these findings will solve a problem that arises from other works " (Gilbert, 1977, p. 116). If we are to accept these three primary purposes of providing footnotes, then *Three Guineas* has not changed much since its birth in 1931. After all, *Three Guineas* not only justifies the work it is originally a part of in *A Room*, and later *The Years*, but justifies Woolf’s own belief that war is inextricably linked to patriotism, patriarchy and feminism.

*Three Guineas* reflects nearly all aspects of society and to its original text. Historically speaking, Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* is more of a transformation or mutation of her original idea through permutations that grow closer and closer to the truth of the situation that Woolf herself is really trying to express. Woolf seeks to expose the facts about patriarchal society, and the role of women in preventing war if they own the freedom of thinking.

## 4.4 Different Themes:

*Three Guineas*, is a book inspired by private considerations and public events. Its evolution is in part the evolution of Woolf's progress on *The Years*, and also an evolution determined by the changing climate in Europe during the 1930's and Woolf's growing politicization. A chronological list of the essay's provisional titles indicates the direction in which it evolved. These included: "Professions for Women", "Professions, the next War", "Answers to Correspondents", "Two Guineas", "Three Guineas" (Woolf, 1953, p. 174).

Woolf's original intent was to expose the atmosphere of repression still surrounding women in the public life ten years after they had won the vote. Her argument was partly inspired by Wells' indictment of women in *Wells on Women*, which she summarized angrily in her diary: "how she must be ancillary and decorative in the world of the future, because she has been tried, in 10 years and has not proved anything" (Woolf, 1953, p. 174).

### 4.4.1 Women and Fascism:

By 1935, however, she had begun considering the question of

Women and fascism. Woolf had become involved in a campaign against fascism headed by the intellectual left. Yet, she could not fail to see the irony of supporting an antifascist cause in a country still ruled by patriarchy. When asked to join one antifascist committee, Woolf wanted to know why the woman question was ignored. The response she received reflected the general sentiment of the time: "I am afraid that it had not occurred to me that in matters of ultimate importance even feminists could wish to segregate and label the sexes", to which Woolf replied: "What about Hitler?" (Woolf, 1953, p. 183). Perhaps her talk with Ruth Gruber, a German feminist who was writing a book on German fascism and the woman's movement at the time, had made her aware of the move in Nazi Germany to dismantle the powerful feminist movement there. In any case, Woolf recognised, as did others such as Wilhelm Reich, in his *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, that fascist ideology was modeled on patriarchal principles, the celebration of masculine values and the segregation and subjugation of women. She could not fail to draw parallels between the attitudes towards women in Nazi Germany and growing attitude towards women in her own country. Indeed, what happened in Germany accelerated her

attitudes towards women in Britain and their rights.

#### **4.4.2 The Role of Women in Society:**

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf exposed the parallels by juxtaposing quotations from current English and German newspapers concerning the role of women in society. “Homes” she quotes from *The Daily Telegraph*, “are the real places for the women who are now compelling men to be idle. It is time the government insisted upon employers giving work to more men, thus enabling them to marry the women cannot now approach” (Woolf, 1953, p. 119). Alongside this quotation, she places one from a German newspaper: “there are two worlds in the life of the nation, the world of men and the world of women. Nature had done well to entrust the men with the care of his family and the nation. The Woman’s world is her family, her husband, her children, and her home” (Woolf, 1953, p. 121). In those quotations, Woolf continues, “is the egg of the very worm that we know under other names in other countries. There we have in embryo the creature, Dictator as we call him when he is Italian or German. What right have we...to turnout our ideals of freedom and justice to other countries when we can shake out from our

most respectable newspapers any day of the week eggs like these?” (Woolf, 1953, p. 123)

### **4.4.3 War**

As conditions continued to worsen in Europe and the possibility of war grew more pronounced, the essay began to shift its focus to the question of war and its prevention. “Professions, the next war” became the title of the essay as Woolf expanded her argument on fascism to include the conditions that led to war. The immediate cause of this new focus on war appeared to have been the Labour Party debate that took place in October, 1935, in Brighton. This debate provided Woolf with an unanswerable questions about the significance of her own writing, the relationship between politics and art, and her own pacifist stance. Her account of the event was worth quoting in full for the light it threw on political sympathies she translated into *Three Guineas*.

## **4.5 The Relation between *A Room* and *Three Guineas*:**

In contrast to *A Room*, Woolf’s *Three Guineas* betrays her anger and opposition to patriarchal institutions and practices which are

forthright and undisguised. Her extensive footnoting in *Three Guineas* suggests a desire to be grounded in contemporary political and historical reality, in contrast to the fictive storytelling strategy of *A Room*. In *Three Guineas* Woolf refuses "the complacency of the graveled walk" (Showalter, 1977, p. 285).

In addition to the rejecting strategy, Woolf replaces the spatial metaphor of "the room an emblem of the private, the centered, the delimited with a conception which embraces non-ownership, the peripheral, the unbounded her vision of the society of outsiders" (Woolf, 1938, p. 106).

Though women as outsiders have been subject to the structures of patriarchal power, they have lived on the periphery of, been excluded from participation in. As Woolf comments, the label outsider coincides with "the facts of history, of law, of biography, even it may be, with the still hidden facts of still unknown psychology" (Woolf, 1938, p. 106).

Against the possessing of property, Woolf poses the necessity of poverty:

by poverty is meant not enough money to live upon. That is you must earn enough to be independent of any other human being and to buy that modicum of health, leisure, knowledge on, that is needed and so on, that is needed for the full development of body and mind. But no more, not a penny more (Woolf, 1938, p. 80).



So, in order to possess mental freedom, women must have their own money as the financial and intellectual run hand in hand.

That leads us to ask how one accounts for such a change in political and rhetorical strategy. In the nine years separating the publication of *A Room* and *Three Guineas*, Mrs. Woolf has grown stronger, angrier, and less dependent upon the external. The only satisfactory answer is the political changes and events that had taken place in England. Those events motivated Woolf to enhance her stronger determination. However, this did not create the same impression as her earlier work. As Jane Marcus concludes:

but *Three Guineas* is not the same kind of propaganda as *A Room of One's Own*. *Three Guineas* is not the least amusing. Her friends who did not share her views could not single out passages of wit and fine writing while ignoring or deprecating her arguments, as E.M. Foster had done with *A Room of One's Own*... *Three Guineas* was to be her last work as civilization destroyed itself, it was a moth over a bonfire" (Marcus, 1988, p. 277).

If as Marcus argues, *Three Guineas* represents Woolf's propaganda of despair, one can conclude that Woolf's despair is, in part, a consequence of her recognition that the feminist strategy which she outlined in *A Room* were proved inadequate, if not futile, for dealing with

the political problems of women.

## **2.6 Woolf's Argument in *Three Guineas*:**

After showing the essence of Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* is, and its relationship to history and *A Room*, one must move to examining how well it expresses Mrs. Woolf's art of persuasion or rhetoric. The line of argument here turns toward the more fundamental aspects of the work.

*Three Guineas* gives Woolf a unique opportunity to use her knowledge of and skill in Greek writing and language in a way that is not typically open to her when composing her other works. In the classical tradition, rhetoric as an art, is divided into five distinct categories or "canons" that provide both an analytical outline for critical examination and a generative pattern for the construction of an argument. We have to look no farther than Cicero from whom Woolf obviously cites a description of these rhetorical canons. These are the divisions of it, as numerous writers have laid them down: invention, arrangement, elocution, memory, and delivery.

These categories are long standing as rhetorical treatise of all

centuries using them in some shape or form and to a lesser or greater degree. If it can be determined critically that *Three Guineas* has the basic canons of rhetoric, then it must be rhetoric and it will show how Woolf intentionally formulates this work to be a rhetorically persuasive argument. More importantly, such an inquiry also sheds light on why Woolf constructs the argument this way and what she is essentially arguing.

The primary way for finding an argument is through the process of determining the stasis. Stasis is defined as the basis or cause of the argument in question. Generally, one would ask certain questions in order to arrive at the point at issue in the debate "since every cause, then, has a certain essential basis and the basis is the first conflict of the causes" ( Quintilian, 1933, p. 3) in a particular case. By determining the original cause, the argument can be thoroughly grounded. In classical thought, there are four general kinds of conflict: "conjunctural, definitional, qualitative, and translative" (Quintilian, 1933, p. 6). Of particular interest for us is which of these kinds of stasis Virginia Woolf uses as the basis of her argument and the conflict that it causes between the two

sides of the discourse.

The purpose of the work, though not necessarily providing the grounds for argument, is the attempt to answer, "How in her opinion war can be prevented" (Woolf, 1938, p. 5). However, there is the obvious conflict between the narrator and the recipient who is "a little grey on the temples" (Woolf, 1938, p. 6). This argument is "a precipice, a gulf so deeply cut between them that for three years and more the narrator has been sitting on her side wondering whether it is any use to speak across it" (Woolf, 1938, p. 6). The disagreement laid out by the narrator seems to be definitional, since "we look at the same things, we see them differently" (Woolf, 1938, p. 7). This statement is particularly illuminating, defining a term or a phrase that is correctly achieved only through successful and correct communicating of ideas. Within the first section of *Three Guineas*, what war is and the causes of war are debated beyond "the result of impersonal forces" and the narrator goes so far as to consider defining war as "a profession, a source of happiness and excitement" (Woolf, 1938, p. 10). However she does not limit herself to one concept only. She questions all terms socially ascribed to war including the definition of patriotism. Even though "what patriotism means to an educated man and what duties it imposes on him" (Woolf, 1938, p. 9) are

easily defined. This is viewed by women as something wholly different. According to the speaker, even "the world influence then has changed" (Woolf, 1938, p. 12) when considering the changes in the state of women and their abilities in public and private spheres.

Within the second chapter of *Three Guineas*, the basis for the argument seems to take on a more qualitative stasis as it moves from problematic designation to the more intangible issue of value as the basis of the argument. The narrator is arguing quite plainly that, "sex distinction seems...possessed of a curious leaden quality, liable to keep any name to which it is fastened circling in the lower spheres" (Woolf, 1938, p. 59). Now, the question under debate is whether women are "untrustworthy, unsatisfactory, so lacking in the necessary ability that it is to the public interest to keep them to the lower grades" (Woolf, 1938, p. 59). Keeping women away from the public sphere grounds itself on the contradiction that women are both incapable of obtaining offices and at the same time constitute the best skilled and valuable workers in the workforce. The quality of women's work is questioned as well as the compensation received for that work both inside and outside the home. Clearly within the second chapter at very least, Woolf sets up a qualitative

stasis for her argument.

In the final chapter of *Three Guineas*, the appropriateness of the request made by the letter is finally called into question. The requests made by pacifist society are:

that we should sign a manifesto pledging ourselves to protect culture and intellectual liberty; that we should join a certain society devoted to certain measures whose aim is to preserve peace, and finally that we should subscribe to that society (Woolf, 1938, p. 102).

However, while the narrator agrees with some of the conditions, she refuses others. In particular, she refuses to "fill up a form and become members of anti fascist society" (Woolf, 1938, p. 123). The basis of the argument here seems to be a translative stasis since the discord rests on the appropriateness of the venue rather than the request itself. The narrator concludes, "different we are as facts have proved both in sex and in education" (Woolf, 1938, p. 123). To join the pacifist society as requested would be to sacrifice "that difference, as we have already said, that our help can come, if we can help, to protect liberty, to prevent war" (Woolf, 1938, p. 123). To do what the treasurer asks is impossible given the understanding of the situation already established.

This movement from definitional to qualitative and finally to

translative stasis mirrors the complexity of the argument at hand, and also reflects the scale of complexity of stasis as well. Definitional is by far the easiest form of stasis to use and identify, whereas translative is much more difficult to recognize and formulate an argument around.

#### **4.7 *Three Guineas* and Critics:**

Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* is extremely complex and is provocatively persuasive. It becomes a footnote to the text of society, an artful commentary on the perceived understanding of British society in Woolf's day. The purpose of the text is to reveal patriarchal dominance in society, while its format is designed to undermine the power structure on which that dominance stands.

If the critical acceptance of this work is any judge, *Three Guineas* never achieves what it sets out to do. As it has been pointed out, "Woolf's controversial critique of her culture set off a series of rhetorical attacks and counterattacks that left the text near obscurity for over fifty years until it experienced a renewed interest in the later part of the twentieth century". (Silver, 1991, p. 340)

Modern critics, such as Jane Marcus and others believe that Virginia

Woolf should be forgiven for her apparent hypocrisy because she feels that her cause is just and her point of view remains unheard in the daily press" (Marcus, 1988, p. 103). Moreover, Marcus and others argue that Woolf is supposedly uncertain of the proper relations between art and propaganda or "truth of fact" and "truth of fiction" (Marcus, 1988, p.102). This critical conclusion is highly suspect, given her skill and recognition both as an essayist and an artist.

To assume that her point of view is singular and unheard of in the press is disconcerting. Her entire purpose in *Three Guineas* is not to create something out of nothing, or spontaneously generate facts, but to bring what is already been seen, but marginalized; it is to foreground and show the inherent connections tying the lesser concern to the greater situation. Furthermore, her information, which is entirely based upon press clippings and secondary sources such as biographies, hardly seems biased and misleading in nature. It presents an accurate assessment of a situation connected to a serious problem. If anything, she attempts to fight against the propaganda of patriarchy in order to reveal the false truth that the hierarchical nature of the British society constructs. For this reason, her work is viewed unfavorably by the



society of the time. "the issue that disturbed the critics of Woolf's day is not that *Three Guineas* is propaganda or hypocritical, but the timing of its publication" (Marcus, 1988, p. 106). At a time when women had supposedly won the right to vote and were entering the professions, what needs were there for a feminist text like *Three Guineas*? Moreover, a text speaking of peace, when war was impending, surely upset more than a few in the establishment.

The men of her time perceived her tone in *Three Guineas* as hostile to them personally, because the dominating patriarchal discourse of the last century constructed truths that condemned anger, particularly women's anger as the overflow of powerful emotions without reason (Silver, 1991, p. 340). Based on Woolf's diaries and letters, Silver feels that Woolf "sought with ever greater urgency, to confront the self-destructive tendencies of her culture head-on by documenting its persuasiveness and source within the ideological precepts held so dearly by society" (Silver, 1991, p. 345). Not surprisingly then, Woolf does not expect many people, either men or women, to view her work in a favorable light and "expected some very angry reviews from men" and

"from women too" not to mention the comments from "the clergy" (Woolf, 1978, p. 146). Her suspicions are not far off the mark as critics begin assaulting the work's source and information soon after publication in an attempt to deny the argument in *Three Guineas* any valid authority.

While the angry tone, pervasive throughout the work, can be ascribed to Woolf's own mounting anger, it can also be a result of her struggle to find a strong voice with which to speak in public. What is viewed as an arrogant and egotistical quality, may truly reflect women's limited authoritative power in the public sphere. *Three Guineas* inscribes Woolf's passionate desire to speak out in response to the events occurring around her, but without a true position from which to speak effectively. This explains why she forms her argument around classical traditions. At the time, writing letters was often the only approved mode of expression for women of Woolf's class. By providing and writing a series of letters to various representatives and societies, Marcus explains that "Woolf was able to respond freely from a relatively safe position without direct disapproval against her inclusion of her own opinions, as she might be if *Three Guineas* were more formal ( Marcus, 1988, p. 110). Letters are informal, and they do not

have the same stylistically strict guidelines and expository forms of presentation required by such essays. Thus, Woolf has made use of all stylistic and argumentative skills at her disposal to substantiate the cause of woman. The title of the book, *Three Guineas*, is certainly indicative of the orientation of a work entirely devoted to exploring the intrinsic needs and aspirations of woman. Shocking in its effects, this work expresses Woolf's discontent and resentment concerning the unfavorable position of woman as viewed by one of the most adamant feminists.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

Having given the various manifestations and dimensions of Woolf's *A Room* and *Three Guineas*, the following pages will be no more than a synopsis of what has already been shown. Both undertake to explore the forces and factors that impede woman's full expression of her potentiality and aspirations. One of these is the financial security and the influence that it carries with it, as the governing force behind their respective theses. However, these two works go further to demonstrate that the accomplishment of the economic independence that they endorse are a means and not an end, a starting-point rather than a satisfactory conclusion. The investigations that Woolf sets in motion at the beginning of each of these books purport to have as their goal the appropriate distribution of material resources for the maximum benefit of all those concerned, men and women. But such mundane affairs are quickly left behind, in both cases for more speculative lines of thought. Both works have been used to support nearly every assertion about Woolf's ideology; each of them is judged by turns too feminist and not

feminist enough, too angry and not angry enough to express it, too materialist and too abstract, etc. However it becomes clear when one turns to the texts themselves that they are rather very different , and essayistic meditations on form.

Neither *A Room of One's Own* nor *Three Guineas* is interested ultimately in making a case for the importance of monetary resources to an individual or a cause. Rather, Woolf assumes that this is a position that ought not to generate much in the way of controversy. The equality of financial wealth, the attendant privileges of formal education, travel, leisure, and other general advantages, with life successes, are axiomatic and self-evident in Woolf's conception. It is taken for granted that only willful blindness could prevent a reader's concurrence in this premise. In both *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, it is the marginalization of the writer, both formally and professionally, that Woolf is truly engaged with, and not as one might expect the social or political implications of such marginalization, except in so far as they influence the work produced.

### **5.1 A Room of One's Own:**

The explicit and central argument of *A Room of One's Own* that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (Woolf, 1929, p. 4), is immediately complicated by the hybrid nature of the book itself. Though clearly intended by Woolf to be taken quite seriously, A

*Room of One's Own* is largely playful in structure and progression. It delights in imaginative sketches of people and institutions, as well as in its ability to manipulate various aspects of narrative construction. Its blend of fiction, biography, history, polemic, satire, and other aspects, all brought together in a loose but complicated essayistic format, is unique to *A Room of One's Own*. While the structure of the work is generally recognized by critics as unusual, it is not fully investigated with the seriousness that it merits. However, recent feminist writings rely heavily in their arguments on Woolf's view as paving the way for their claims and judgments.

As we have already seen, the prefatory note informs the reader that the book is based upon two papers read to the Arts Society at Newnham and the Odtaa at Girton in October 1928. The speaker's thoughts are well underway as she anticipates objections and attempts to justify herself in advance against charges of having strayed from her assigned topic. The desire to be understood and to remain on good terms with its readers infuses *A Room of One's Own* with a quality of reassurance that is notably absent when we turn to *Three Guineas*. The reader has the sense here that the narrator presented by Woolf as a nonspecific speaker, only loosely identified with the author herself, is subject to many of the insecurities that she details and exposes over the course of the work. And she is both frightened and satisfied by the responsibility that has been laid upon her, to say something true and meaningful on a

topic that has been addressed endlessly, but never adequately defined, let alone resolved:

Here then was I (call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael, or by any name you please, it is not a matter of any importance) sitting on the banks of a river a week or two ago in fine October weather, lost in thought. That collar I have spoken of, women and fiction, the need of coming to some conclusion on a subject that raises all sorts of prejudices and passions, bowed my head to the ground. (Woolf, 1929, p.5)

This early moment, and other similar moments in the text, are striking, because the speaker is not putting forward an argument with which the reader is asked to agree or disagree, but instead is placing the reader in a more intimate relation to herself. The reader is asked to pay attention to the progression of Woolf's writing, to the movement of the ideas and their stylization within the work. The process of representation is highlighted here rather than in some isolated manner the content of the argument.

As a result, *A Room of One's Own* is a multilayered and unsettled text. Woolf asks for a degree of trust from her audience that they should follow along as she examines the relation of women to fiction and implicitly, of an author to her writing without any real certainty as to where she, or they, will end up.

The larger problem that pervades *A Room of One's Own* is that of determining probability, but here, we have almost the reverse of the

novel. This is fiction put to serious and pragmatic use. The probability quotient of the fictions being produced in this text is significant because the speaker is working backwards; she is writing fiction in order to demonstrate what might have happened in reality or might yet happen under appropriate conditions. Woolf's goal is not merely to produce an accurate representation of life as the reader knows it of things one easily believes might happen around one, but to persuade the reader to take an imaginative leap along with her, to think about the ways in which circumstances have determined the people who occupy them.

Fiction here is used to test propositions, to see whether a given set of circumstances will lead naturally to a particular outcome, and what the possibilities are or might be there when elements of those circumstances( legal, social, or economic) are changed, for better or worse. It also allows for the testing of two or more separate courses of action in one situation, something that cannot, of course, be done in reality. In other words, we know of the frustrations of the women whose disappointments are chronicled here, but if we can look with any kind of plausibility into what might have been under different conditions, then we can perhaps judge more effectively the objective situation before us and what it results in and from.

Woolf refers to the claim of one of the bishops who believes a woman could not have written Shakespeare's plays and who justifies it by



emphasizing the material and social impediments facing even the woman who has the potential ability. The narrator acknowledges that such is the case, one can't test the theory of women's equality in a systematic way, but only fictionally, or probably. Because equal conditions have not existed in any general way under recorded circumstances, the evidence is largely hypothetical.

Neither reality nor fiction then supplies an adequate context; both are necessary. Thus, Woolf creates the figure of Judith Shakespeare, a character who is both wholly fictional and plausible, and who might just as well have existed as not: "Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say "(Woolf, 1929, p.4).

The moral of Judith Shakespeare's story is not merely that a lack of money and opportunities frustrates creative genius and easily defeats youthful ambition. Rather, it is that such stories can be recovered and must be. Without the positive evidence to support the theoretical case that increased income and education would produce an increase in qualified female writers, Woolf can only construct her argument from speculations based upon the information she has.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf gestures towards a type of imaginative biography, one that is not fictional or nonfictional, but an investigation of the possible lives that real individuals might have led

under different conditions. It is a type of biography that is put together from pieces of the historical fact, but that acknowledges the gaps and splits present as the result of both unrecorded and unknowable aspects of individual lives. This kind of biography makes it possible to assert the presence of possibilities for which hard evidence does not exist and to do so in a way that suggests more than simple speculation as it is the carefully-determined result of a logical reasoning process. As already indicated, she refers to authors like Jane Austen and Emily Bronte as evidence of her arguments about the absence of equal rights and opportunities. Because there is no systematic way to evaluate how conditions have affected women in the past, it is only a biography combined with fiction that can lead to a plausible assessment.

The fact that economic security and a measure of personal freedom must become facts of life for women if they are to succeed as authors is relatively uninteresting to Woolf, who takes this position as a given for which there exist any number of instances and proofs.

Whether in memories, reminiscences, or free speculations, Woolf chooses the cases of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, and Emily Bronte as an indication of the social communications in presenting female authors from full experiences.

It is only through an act of imaginative transformation that what might truly have been is brought into focus. The placement of property

upfront declares an autonomy for both *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. Property doesn't govern these texts as a goal toward which plot and characters are implicitly aimed. The importance of property and its attendant rights and privileges is accepted as a non-negotiable truth, and the author is then free to move to more theoretical or high minded lines of inquiry.

It is not only the financial and other practice difficulties that have hindered female authors, but also the emotional and psychological cost that a literary career entails. *A Room of One's Own* emphasizes that authors of both sexes have to grapple with the lack of encouragement that society affords aspiring writers in most cases. The general population is uninterested in writers, as practical considerations do not require more poets and novelists, or the sustenance of those already launched upon careers and this situation must be dealt with by would-be authors as she laconically puts it,

One gathers from the enormous modern literature of confession and self analysis that to write a work of genius is almost always a feat of prodigious difficulty. Everything is against the likelihood that it will come from the writer's mind whole and entire. (Woolf, 1929,p.p 53-54)

Yet, the women to whom Woolf is appealing experience are not only indifferent, but rooted in hostility. It is this atmosphere, according to Woolf with its particular prohibitions and restrictions that ultimately prevents women from accomplishing real successes: "The world did

not say to the female author as it said to Keats and Flaubert and other men of genius, write if you choose, it makes no difference to me. The world said a guffaw, Write? What's the good of your writing?"

(Woolf, 1929, p. 54). Generations of unremarkable successes that provide the conditions under which a real success may flourish are not a luxury but an elementary requirement for the perpetuation of great minds: "Genius like Shakespeare's is not born among laboring, uneducated, servile people" (Woolf, 1929, p. 50). This suggests most obviously that change will not be immediate, even when or if conditions are made as ideal as possible for women. This difficult situation of woman can only be changed with time and more patience. It also suggests that a different kind of project is not the result of deprivation, but of life upon which the women involved may fall back. Instead, Woolf is looking toward a mode of writing that will be characterized by all the excitement and anxiety of writers who are in the process of discovering new, untried voices, voices that belong neither to the oppressed nor to the powerful, but to those who are best classed as members of what she will later called social outsiders.

The essay serves as an intermediary and effective form especially in the moment that Woolf is speaking to transitional figures, it is important for women's own sake and for the sake of their predecessors and descendants that they understand and believe the validity and

significance of Woolf's argument.

All in all, *A Room* remains one of the most influential records of woman's successes and defeats, achievements and fiascos. It is a book that reveals both the subjective and speculative sides of the female author as well as her profound and objective analyses of the important figures in fiction. It is a creative and critical work at the same time. It will be quotable in any serious discussion of woman's predicament when she finds herself in the grips of the verbal art.

## ***5.2 Three Guineas:***

This work is linked to *A Room* in that both undertake to present the difficulties that stand in the female authors' way, whether financial, social, or psychological. The titles of both (room and money) do suggest the centers of struggle and orientation. The real project of *Three Guineas*, whatever its centralized concerns, is not to arrive at a plan for eliminating war, but to offer a model for, and an instance of protecting individual thought. It is assumed implicitly and explicitly throughout the text: it must be sustained and encouraged at all costs. The true line of inquiry motivating Woolf's text is that of how we are to justify the intellectual practice for female authors. *Three Guineas* does not follow a straight line of analysis as it tackles the subject it has chosen. It rather presents the same argument three times over, in a progressively tighter and tighter circle.

From its opening lines, *Three Guineas* implies that the author is undertaking a decidedly unpleasant task. It is the three years delay which is not an indication of neglecting, but it is a painful reminder of how fatal the failure to answer this question satisfactorily has proven, and how high the risks have become in politics. The year 1938 marked the Anschluss in Austria and Hitler's successful procuring, by threat and appeal, the surrender of Czechoslovakia; the previous year had brought the death of Woolf's own nephew in the Spanish Civil War. Her delay in responding had put a pressure on the work that Woolf had not anticipated.

Yet, the seriousness of the topic, while never neglected by the author, is temporarily put aside on the very first page, in order that Woolf may engage herself in a consideration of the genre she has chosen to work in, a form that is intimate and entirely public.

Woolf's concern with formulating and insisting upon particular audiences is evident in much of her writing, yet is especially striking here, because she has picked not the sympathetic readership of female students or professional women that she portrays in *A Room of One's Own*, but exactly the correspondents that she finds the most challenging to address. It is the difficulty of communication that is then the focus of this experiment.

Fact and fiction are not matters for unthinking experimentation in

this text, but a gloomy affair, and one not entirely under the author's governance. There is none of the joyfulness of *A Room of One's Own*, the sense that the author is pushing the reader to see and do things of which she herself has not yet conceived. Rather, there is a closed atmosphere and a feeling that there is no way out, not even by refusing to deal with the text at all. Writing is not a path to freedom here, but a dangerous act with consequences that are quite serious, and not always evident to the creator or the audience.

*Three Guineas* stretches the notion of the practical implications of writing fictional, factual, or somewhere in between to its extremes, raising the stakes of the generic game to address life and death questions. The main question in *Three Guineas* is that of how we may prevent war and its catastrophic outcomes and repercussions. While the work is superficially divided along lines of sex, women being represented as unable through education or temperament to understand the masculine predilection for war, or to take positive actions to prevent its effects.

Woolf advises women in *Three Guineas* that they must not concern themselves with matters of war, but should remain firmly separated from any such considerations, and refuse to discuss the matter with their brothers. The reason of this attitude is obvious enough. War can be destructive and aggravating to woman's cause and her dream of both

life and fairer opportunity. It is also a force which devours women's lovers or dearest people, sweetheart, fathers, brothers, fiancés, relatives, or friends.

Finally, *A Room* and *Three Guineas* have shaped the way in which creative achievement is viewed by men and women. They also provided a point of reference for generations of female writers to follow and enhance. Woolf uses the 'room' as a symbol for privacy, leisure time, and financial independence, all of which have been historically lacking for women. The expression 'a room of one's own' has become a metaphor for the time and space that a woman needs for her creativity. And *Three Guineas* gives some characteristics and aspects of the role of what educated, professional women can and should have to confront war and its drastic consequences. *Three Guineas* is more direct, gloomy and to the point. In this text along with *A Room*, the author has adopted and expounded the actual aspirations and worries of female authors in very hectic times as the present age.



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