



Virginia Woolf and Feminism

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Abstract

Virginia Woolf wrote a lot of works, and essays about feminism and patriarchal society. She was a very influential writer for her term's women. Virginia Woolf is considered a feminist and modernist figure in 20th-century literature. Her works touch on many important aspects of her time. Woolf's ideas on gender equality have been expressed in her works. Her writing style and use of 'woman's language' provide an insight into the woman's life in her time. Her representation of women relies heavily on feminist perspectives, homosexuality, and gender inequality. Nevertheless, a feminist criticism of her works can't be easily done. 'A Room of One's Own' and 'Three Guineas' are considered Virginia Woolf's most powerful writings. Virginia shows us the place of women and how we can live with a patriarchal system. These two works are about her feminism and her real life because she used these characters to represent her real life. The study shows how Mrs. Woolf employed her novels to show women the way to obtain meaning in life and realize their identities. Virginia Woolf established herself as a distinguished feminist woman writer in her treatment of women's helpless situations. She unveiled the causes of women's oppression and provided us with a comprehensive answer to the women's question. This paper will scrutinize thoroughly her writing from a feminist perspective taking some of her books.

Keywords: *Feminism, Virginia Woolf, Feminist Criticism, A Room of One's Own, Three Guineas*

Introduction

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was the most important female English novelist, essayist, biographer, and feminist of her time (from the Victorian age to the Edwardian age). Eliot (1941) says that “without Virginia Woolf at the center of art, it would have remained formless or marginal. With the death of Virginia Woolf, a whole pattern of culture is broken”. Until the age of fifty-five, Virginia wrote and published several novels, feminist essays, and letters about her private life. Virginia Woolf is an influential author because of her unique style, incorporation of symbolism, and use of similes and metaphor in her literature”.

In this paper, Virginia Woolf’s life, the effect of feminism on her life, the female identity, the position of women in a patriarchal society, her marriage, and her husband will be studied according to a lot of researchers. Feminism is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. It seeks the equality of women in society and every aspect of life which is male-dominated. To create equality, women have to find and fight inequality. So, literature has also to be criticized and developed to cease its sexist language. Feminist criticism is a way of doing this. According to Cambridge Dictionary ‘Feminism’ is a collection of movements and ideologies aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, and social rights for women. Also, it is the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way or the set of activities intended to achieve this state. Feminism can be roughly defined as a movement that seeks to enhance the quality of women's lives by defying the norms of society based on male dominance and subsequent females which implies the emancipation of women from the shackles, restrictions, norms, and customs of society. It demands that women should be treated as autonomous subjects, and not as passive objects. It seeks to achieve equality between men and women in moral, social, economic, and political fields. The objective of that movement is the creation of a new identity for women and making them aware of their rights. Virginia Woolf is a writer who lived in the 20th century. In the first decade of the twentieth century, England was a scene of the bitterest criticism of the Victorian way of life. Victorian conceptions, particularly of the family, education, and political rights, were now indicted and the call for change was loud. Nonetheless, this change was also growing in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and especially the position of women was concerned. In the Edwardian era, she announced, human character had changed, marking new beginnings and rejections of the past. (Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown, 1924)

Woolf earned money and fame during this time. She was able to see changes but she also knew it'd take so much to change a society. She observed the lives of women who suffered in a male-dominated world and she wrote them in a way that anyone can feel their pain. Woolf's feminism does not only include her explicit feminist politics, but it also involves her concern and fascination with gender identities and with women's lives and their histories and fiction, which is also present in her works (Roe and Sellars 209)

Feminism in Mrs. Dalloway

Mrs Dalloway is one of the most important works of Virginia Woolf. The novel's basic issue is time, actually the roles of women of the period. Clarissa Dalloway represents the power of women. According to Woolf, she is very strong but alone. But she never said this situation loudly. She is not Clarissa; she is Mrs. Dalloway, the surname of his husband, her name anymore. Clarissa and Peter's situation is the main topic in the novel. Peter is a friend of Clarissa and he loves Clarissa. But Clarissa married with Mr. Dalloway. Love was complex for Clarissa. When we look at Clarissa's situation, we can see the situation of society and patriarchal system of term. Mrs. Dalloway is about a day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway. She is married to a member of Parliament. She has money and a good husband which is seen as the fundamentals of a good marriage. Although she is married to Richard she loves Peter. She can't provide the kind of romance that is expected in a heterosexual relationship to Richard. She feels lonely and imprisoned in this life but can't fight it. In this novel there are two social scopes identified— one is public and another is private. Usually, we can find that men belong to the public. At the same time, most of the women belong to private circles, as they're the ones to take care of the family. Prisoned lives of women are stressed and Clarissa is the symbol of feminine power. "Power was hers, position, income. She had lived in the forefront of her time. "She had had good friends; known the ablest men of her day" (Mrs. Dalloway 82). Even though she has this creativity and power she can't control her own life. This is the tragedy of women in her time.

A Room of One's Own

A Room of One's Own is generally seen as a feminist text. The title of the work comes from as Woolf mentioned in *A Room of One's Own* a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction' (p.4). Virginia says that in book women have been kept from writing because of their relative poverty, and financial freedom will bring women the freedom to write; "In the first place, to have a room of her own... was out of the

question, unless her parents were exceptionally rich or very noble" (p.52). According to Woolf every woman should success in both writing and reading.

In addition, Virginia invented a fictional character whose name is Judith Shakespeare. Virginia is mentioned as Shakespeare's sister. Judith represents every woman in her term. Like Virginia Woolf, she stayed at home but her brothers went off to school. Woolf shows us Judith's situation in the book. Judith stays at home while William goes off to school. Judith is trapped in the home: "She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. (p.47) At the end of this section, Judith killed herself, unlike Shakespeare. The life of Shakespeare was very successful rather than Judith.

This essay by Woolf is considered the first major work in feminist criticism. Woolf wanted to understand the professional women who suffered in a male-dominated society. She desired to see why women write less than men. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia suggests that the female writer is always 'an inheritor as well as an originator' (Woolf, 1929, p.113) Woolf thought that there were main obstacles to women's writing. One was the importance of financial independence. She asserts that a woman must have a room of her own if she is to write fiction. She repeatedly stresses the necessity of financial power. Woolf suggests that without money women write out of anger and insecurity and it prevents them from writing effectively.

Woolf's argument is further promoted when she asks why there hasn't been a female Shakespeare and she answers herself: 'Had she survived, whatever she had written would have been twisted and deformed, issuing from a strained and morbid imagination. And undoubtedly, I thought, looking at the shelf where there are no plays by women, her work would have gone unsigned.'

To the Lighthouse

In 'To the Lighthouse', Virginia Woolf created two women: Mrs. Ramsay and her daughter Lily. Mrs. Ramsay is the heroine of the novel and the woman painter Lily is the supporting heroine. Analysis of the two women is the key to understanding the whole text. The two women are quite different in many respects but also, they do have something in common.

Mrs. Ramsay is the perfect mother and wife of the family. As Virginia wants to stress a woman is only seen if she is beautiful. She repeatedly uses beautiful to describe her in others' eyes. She always tries to show special

respect to her husband who is described as a rude and selfish man. Mrs.Ramsay is a victim of patriarchy and the worst part is she chooses it.

Lily is everything opposite of her mother. Mrs.Ramsay doesn't find her beautiful enough and Lily pities men like her father. He is not afraid of expressing her thoughts about men and she rejects marriage. The most important part of her story is that she paints and finds peace in painting. For a long time, women couldn't paint or never felt enough as they were always told otherwise. "There was Mr. Tansley whispering in her ear, Women can't paint, women can't write..." (Woolf, 1994, p.35) Perhaps she is lonely because no one understands her paintings and her ideas but she is also the bravest since she chooses to be herself and not her mother.

Three Guineas

Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* is a thought-provoking work that weaves feminism, war, and societal critique into its fabric. Originally conceived as a "novel essay," *Three Guineas* emerged from Woolf's desire to address loose ends left in her earlier work, *A Room of One's Own*. The book was meant to alternate between fictive narrative chapters and non-fiction essay chapters, allowing Woolf to express her views on war and women simultaneously. However, when the "novel-essay" approach didn't work, she separated the two parts. The non-fiction portion became *Three Guineas*, while the fictional part became her popular novel, *The Waves*. *Three Guineas* is an eloquent attack on patriarchal structures. Woolf argues that men's power under patriarchy dovetails with militarism. She advocates for women's education and financial independence as essential tools for achieving peace. Woolf's radical articulation of pacifist politics investigates the causes of gender inequalities. By positioning women as crucial in preventing war, she challenges societal norms and calls for active resistance.

Conclusion

In this study, I emphasize that Woolf wrote about women and their struggles. She wanted to tell the world how she and other women felt and so she created many women characters to achieve it. These characters are mostly victims of the patriarchal system and Victorian ethnic ideas. Yet Woolf created them so that women could be not the victims but the owners of their own lives. So that they could see what was going on.

As she states in *A Room of One's Own*, women must have the financial power to be free to write whatever they want to write. Feminism was main the topic in her life. She wrote about feminism because she could not find

any identity in society. She wrote the situation of women in novels. She used real characters like the sister of Shakespeare. She wrote If Shakespeare had any sister how could be her end. Women were locked and imprisoned in their homes for centuries and they didn't have the chance to write or publish what they wrote. Now we have the opportunity and we must use it to achieve our goals like gender inequality. Because language and literature have the power to change ideas and people. And Virginia quite changed the world by her words.

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