



International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

A Pre-Feministic and Post-Feministic View of Virginia Woolf in A Room of One's Own

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ABSTRACT

'A Room of One's Own' by Virginia Woolf is considered to be one of the major works of the 20th century feminist literature. This book is an extended essay based on a series of lectures delivered by Virginia Woolf at two women's colleges titled as "Women and Fiction." This book mainly deals with the difficulties faced by women especially in writing fiction and also other works of literature as well. In this book Woolf describes about the factors such as money and a room for a woman as the essential things required and showcases it to the readers and also about the difficulties and restrictions faced by the women in acquiring it.

Keywords: A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf, Modern Age, Feminism, Women's Writing

Introduction

The Modern Age of English literature is a period which extends with the longest timeline and our area of interest now is upon the works of Virginia Woolf, so let us consider 'The Inter-War Years' which starts from 1918-39. This period was almost completely overshadowed by the two World Wars- the after-effects of the first and the forebodings of the second.

Spiritually the period saw the immediate post-War mood of desperate gaiety and determined frivolity give way to doubt, uncertainty of aim, and a deeper self-questioning on ethical, social, and political problems, until the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, followed by the critical situation after the evacuation of Dunkirk, enabled the nation to achieve a new unanimity of purpose.

Virginia Woolf And Her Works

She was born as Adeline Virginia Stephen in Kensington, London, in 1882. Virginia Woolf was the daughter of the eminent Victorian critic and founding editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography* who is Leslie Stephen and her mother was Julia Prinsep Duckworth Stephen. She was raised by her parents in their literate and well-connected household, she was influenced by the Victorian literary society and the prominent British intellectuals of her time.

Virginia had begun writing in her teens. Her reviews were published anonymously in the *Times Literary Supplement* and other journals. *The Voyage Out*, originally titled *Melymbrosia*, was her first novel published in 1915 by Duckworth. She developed her art and went on to publish a number of novels including *Night and Day* (1919), *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), *The Waves* (1931) and *The Years* (1937) and finally to mention some of her famous non-fiction books, they are, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938).

Oscillation From Pre-Feminism to Post-Feminism

There is a line which can be seen to echo all throughout this work and this is an echo of a woman who wants freedom during the time when feminism was budding as a movement,

"Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind."

Now let us get into some of the striking points mentioned about by Virginia Woolf in her work.

Poverty of Sex

Firstly, Woolf mentions about 'poverty of sex' which describes the importance of male companionship and is seen that it is one among the mandatory things for a woman to enter even into the public places such as the libraries as well as into the religious places or the places of worship such as the churches during her time.

Art – An Outcome of Creativity or an Expression of Anger

Next, she describes about how women viewed art. The term 'art' refers to all forms of art which includes writing and drawing. It is a well-known and a well witnessed fact that any work of art in either created out of one's creativity or it is being dominated by one's feelings. It can be seen that women at first created any works of art which were mostly or almost entirely dominated by their feelings and especially anger because it was a time when they were suppressed by the men of their society.

Elizabethan Women and Wife Beating

It is seen that Woolf describes her desire to know about the status and condition of women in the society and especially that of the women of the Elizabethan era. She mentions about the terrible state of women and how they were either harmed physically, mentally or emotionally. It is seen that she comes to know all this through Professor Trevelyan's book on the Social History of England. It is seen that women were beaten by their husbands and there were laws that allowed wife-beating and termed it as a legal right of a husband to beat his wife.

Anonymity and Secrecy – Traits of Women

Then, it is seen that Virginia Woolf mentions the two terms, namely, 'anonymity' and 'secrecy' as something which flows in the blood of a woman. She describes the anonymity in women's works of art because women usually do not like to reveal their identity in their works and it is seen that not even their names are used in the books written by them because women were looked down upon by men during those times and Woolf presents to us the example of the Bronte sisters who wrote their works under their pen names. Then, when it comes to secrecy it is seen in the case of Jane Austen writing her novel '*Pride and Prejudice*' as it can be seen that Miss Austen wrote her work in secrecy and she hid the manuscript of her first book even from the members of her own household.

Women as Writers and Translators

There is a mention about how there was a shift in profession taken up by women. It is seen that women took up the profession of translation and writing once they were educated and were given the freedom of expression of their thoughts and feelings through writing.

Androgynous Mind – An Unbiased Creator of Art

There are two most significant things mentioned in this book and the first one is about an 'androgynous mind' and it is seen that Shakespeare wrote with an androgynous mind and an androgynous mind is a mind which is not dominated either by masculine thoughts alone or by feminine thoughts alone, but it is a mixture of both. An androgynous mind is one of the best type of mind which is said to create best of all works as it does not pave its way towards biases and it does not let one see the world only as a man or as a woman but it gives one a view which is unbiased and neutral.

Judith Shakespeare is Alive

The last, but one of the most important and interesting information conveyed by Woolf to her readers is about Shakespeare's imaginary sister named 'Judith' who is described as someone who has the same temperament of Shakespeare and is interested to enter the world of theatre and just because she is a woman she is mocked at and looked down upon by the men of her society. It is seen that a woman with such a driving force within her to create great works of art instantaneously kills herself. It is also mentioned that 'Judith Shakespeare' is someone who is still alive and lives inside every woman who has the skill of creating fascinating works of art or is blessed with such skills and faculties like Shakespeare but is unable to express it out because of the obstacles and hindrances faced upon in one's life, it is not just restricted just to women but also to men who are blessed with such a gift from the creator of this universe.

Conclusion

Thus, '*A Room of One's Own*' is a good place to start for those who are interested to dive into the concept of feminism as Virginia Woolf explains it well and also in a sensible manner for those who are introduced to the topic of feminism for the first time.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. S. Samuel Rufus sir for encouraging me in utilising my faculty of writing which has remained dormant inside me. I would like to thank Dr. Mekala Rajan ma'am, Former Head of the Department, Department of English (Aided), Madras Christian College (Autonomous) for being a constant support for all my writings published so far. I would also like to thank Dr. S. Franklin Daniel sir, Head of the Department, Department of English (Aided), Madras Christian College (Autonomous) for encouraging me to publish my first journal article in the year 2024.

I would also like to thank the Department of English (Aided), Madras Christian College (Autonomous), Chennai which has helped me structure my thoughts and express them in a systematic manner.

Lastly, I would like to thank my mother, relatives and friends who has been a constant support throughout the years gone and the years to come.

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