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**Virginia Woolf – Lobbyist for  
Intellectual Freedom, Creativity, and Individuality in  
*A Room of One's Own* and Other Works of Non-Fiction**

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## Introduction

Up to the publication of Virginia Woolf's non-fiction *A Room of One's Own* in 1929, she was best known for her novels although she had written a number of essays and works of non-fiction. Having already published five fictions – for example, the widely read *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927) – Woolf took a totally different approach with *A Room of One's Own*. Recognised as a self-conscious modern writer who attempted to break with nineteenth-century literary conventions, Woolf wrote what was to become one of the most significant texts of the twentieth century. With *A Room of One's Own*, regarded as one of Woolf's two major political works (the other being *Three Guineas* from 1938), she wrote herself into the female literary canon.<sup>1</sup> The avant-garde approach to writing fiction, using modernist and innovative methods of fractured narrative and chronology and experimenting with stream-of-consciousness in order to explain the psychological and emotional motives of characters, awarded Woolf a place in the mainline canon as well.

*A Room of One's Own* has really had two periods of major critical reception, one when it was first published and a second some forty years later when it was rediscovered by feminist critics. That *A Room of One's Own* is now referred to as a “masterpiece” tells us not only what we think of the work today, but also about the prevailing values in our society. Ellen Bayuk Rosenman points out that, when it was first published, the work was subsumed by readers “as a work of secondary interest . . . not directly related to her more important projects as an experimental writer of fiction” (18). Woolf's contemporary critics did not know how to decode her polemic. Some even missed her argument altogether, since they focused on the fiction in *A Room of One's Own* instead. It was not until second-wave feminism that Woolf's radical polemic was decoded and her obstinate questioning understood.

As a first-wave feminist, armed with her most powerful weapon – a pen – Woolf took on a battle against patriarchy to favour women's financial independence as well as their freedom of mind. This ambition, central in *A Room of One's Own*, is only touched upon in her

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<sup>1</sup> John Guillory writes in “Canon,” published in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, that the word *canon* descends from ancient Greek and means “rule” or “law.” The canon suggests to its users a “principle of selection by which some authors or texts were deemed worthier of preservation than others” (233). Guillory acknowledges that if one were to examine the list of “great” Western European authors one would find few women. Stating that “the process of canon-formation has always been determined by the interests of the more powerful,” Guillory points out that this is why “works by women, blacks, or other subject groups do not appear in the canon” (234-35). However, there is an argument commonly known as the “opening of the canon” where minority-studies such as “Women's Studies or Afro-American Studies” open up to new branches of the canon because other “social groups participate in the process of selection,” which makes the canon “truly representative” of all groups (235). Therefore, Guillory's chapter on the canon suggests that there is a mainline canon dictated by white, upper-class men as well as a canon derived from the liberal critique of the canon where minority groups or women have a place (their own branch) in the canon as well.

earlier literary essays or reviews. Woolf's polemic is a call to empower the women who would come after her. Denied a formal education herself, self-educated as a young woman in her father's library, Woolf felt at an early age that she was placed at a disadvantage compared to her brothers.<sup>2</sup> Invited to the women's colleges at Cambridge, Newnham and Girton, in October 1928 to speak to women students on the topic of "Woman and Literature," Woolf took the lead in arguing for education, freedom, and professionalism. With the aim of inspiring women students to write, she was adamant that, if women took to writing, they would eventually change their oppressed position in society. Woolf also wanted to encourage women students to be professionals and financially independent and in that way stand up to the patriarchy that she found repugnant. This talk was the initial version of the essay that a year later was to become *A Room of One's Own*, consisting of six chapters.

The aim of this essay is not only to analyse why Woolf wrote *A Room of One's Own*, but also to analyse what she tries to achieve. I will claim that Woolf wrote *A Room of One's Own* to improve women's position in society. Analysing what Woolf wants for women, I will claim that she wants them to be critical and creative. Exploring this further, I will suggest that Woolf, the promoter of new qualities in women, trains her like-minded contemporaries to challenge patriarchy with a critical and creative mind. As a writer, Woolf knew the importance of an independent mind with no physical or mental restraints. There are impediments that Woolf and women at large have to deal with if they are to create freely. Woolf's ambition was to urge women to write, which she viewed as one step towards women's emancipation. I will examine how Woolf inspires women to write and how she intends to promote the professional, financial independence, and self-sufficiency of women. Furthermore, writers need predecessors: Woolf came to realise that she was a forerunner for women writers and an inspiration to female creativity. Thus, I will explore the need of predecessors.

Woolf wrote voluminous amounts of essays and reviews. Judging by this, Woolf is her own best critic. Having strong opinions on most matters in life, Woolf's multifaceted polemic stands out. Her most outspoken work is *A Room of One's Own* (1929), in which she attacks patriarchy, which hampers women's creativity and restricts their intellectual as well as their social freedom. Her topics vary from the requirements of a room, money, and space to

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<sup>2</sup> Woolf's father, Sir Leslie Stephen, was a well-known literary critic and the editor of the prestigious *Cornhill Magazine*.

support women's creativity; the need of predecessors; and to the fact that women are regarded as the sex with lower intellectual capacity. However, for a fuller understanding of Woolf's polemics, one needs to look at her other writings as well. A couple of Woolf's shorter essays with tangential approaches to these topics are relevant to an analysis of her polemic. For example, in "Professions for Women," first published in *The Death of the Moth* in 1942 but read as a lecture in 1931, Woolf argues that there is an Angel who offers false protection to women and who, subsequently, needs to be killed to save their creativity.<sup>3</sup> In "The Intellectual Status for Women," originally a series of open letters published in the *New Statesman* in 1920 and later compiled as an essay, Woolf attacks the reviewer's and the author's adverse view of women. Taking offence, Woolf claims that women do not want to be dominated and that women are not inferior to men in intellectual capacity.

Contemporary critics of *A Room of One's Own* tend not only to support Woolf's claims, but also to continue her polemic. Sally Alexander proceeds with Woolf's polemic on patriarchy in "Room of One's Own: 1920s Feminist Utopias" (2000). Detecting the umbilical cord that attaches women to the private and to the public despots, Alexander discusses extensively women's wish to break with the past, defining the mandatory needs – room, money, and space – as concepts borrowed from and developed by Woolf. Continuing with Woolf's polemic in "Literary Allusions as Feminist Criticism in *A Room of One's Own*" (1984), Alice Fox asserts that Woolf's ambition was to train her audience in criticism. Fox continues as well the discussion of predecessors. Agreeing with Woolf on the need of predecessors, Fox, however, does not agree with Woolf on the importance of predecessors of the same sex. Margaret J. M. Ezell discusses predecessors as well in "The Myth of Judith Shakespeare: Creating the Canon of Women's Literature" (1999). Ezell holds that Woolf was not a great historian and that she somewhat distorted literary history by inventing "Judith Shakespeare" as an important person in the canon.<sup>4</sup> Continuing the discourse on the canon, Ezell claims that there is a female canon but that the male canon sets the rules. Sandra M.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* is a collection of twenty-eight essays, sketches, and short stories presenting nearly every facet of Woolf's work. Woolf's husband, Leonard Woolf, wrote the editorial note and published it a year after her suicide.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Shakespeare, the sister of William Shakespeare, is a character that Woolf fabricated to suit her purposes. Woolf's fictive Judith Shakespeare is a means of showing how female creativity was thwarted already in the sixteenth century. Furthermore, with Judith Shakespeare, Woolf invents a predecessor that she believed women need. Judith Shakespeare was a literary genius like her brother, but she is not met with the favourable conditions he was met with. Since Judith Shakespeare finds no outlet for her literary talents, she eventually commits suicide.

Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (1985) attests to the existence of a female canon by quoting Woolf: "books continue each other."<sup>5</sup>

For my purposes, one of the most important and valued readings of Woolf and her polemic has proven to be Ellen Bayuk Rosenman's *A Room of One's Own: Women Writers and the Politics of Creativity* (1995).<sup>6</sup> The analysis Rosenman gives of the critical reception of *A Room of One's Own* shows that Woolf's contemporary critics did not understand Woolf's polemic; they chose to review the fiction in it instead. Because of Rosenman's intriguing analysis, one can read Woolf's works with two sets of eyes: with the eyes of someone contemporary to Woolf and with the eyes of the twenty-first century reader. Michèle Barrett looks at the critical reception as well. Barrett continues Woolf's discourse on freedom of mind and expression and independence in her introduction to *A Room of One's Own* (1993). Ezell elaborates too on the independence discourse and supports the arguments that a paid professional writer is the turning point for women's independence, both financially and intellectually.

All the critics that I have introduced here analyse Woolf's polemic for female emancipation, to a greater or lesser extent. Some also explore the critical reception Woolf's works received, as well as its status in the canon. I will continue building on these critics' arguments. However, I am also inclined to the view that Woolf, as a lobbyist and a promoter for female creativity, wanted women to write as a way of battling patriarchy. None of the critics I present above discusses this. Nor do they show how Woolf trains women to be critical, which I intend to do in my analysis. Woolf's polemic for freedom of mind and the killing of the Angel tie in with her motif of battling patriarchy. No other critic has focused on this aspect of Woolf's challenge to patriarchy. I will agree with Ezell that Woolf was not a great historian, at least if one talks about history before the seventeenth century; however, more importantly, I will disagree with Ezell's contention that Judith Shakespeare, as a predecessor, is a bad fabrication for literary history. On the subject of predecessors, Fox and Woolf disagree on the issue of same-sex predecessors, which I intend to point out. Furthermore, I will agree with Alexander that women have to take possession of public and private space if the same rules are to apply to all participants in the social and economical game. I will as well agree with Fox on the idea that Woolf trains her readers in the art of

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<sup>5</sup> Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 72, and Gilbert and Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* xxvii.

<sup>6</sup> Rosenman also gives an account of Woolf's literary and historical context as well as a chronology of her life and works. Although, I am not incorporating this account in my analysis, it has proven valuable in understanding Woolf and her works. Moreover, Rosenman has as well edited *Virginia Woolf and the Essay* in cooperation with Jeanne Dubino (1997). They give an account on the topics Woolf discusses in her essays and the number of essays that she produced.

feminist polemic. Hence, I will argue that the training Woolf provides her readers with will reward them with a critical mind.

### **Why Did Virginia Woolf Write *A Room of One's Own*?**

Virginia Woolf was a prime mover in encouraging women to take part in changing the power structure in society. When *A Room of One's Own* was published in October 1929, a year after women over the age of twenty-one won the right to vote, Woolf was one of the first-wave feminists to promote gender equality.<sup>7</sup> Although *gender* is not a term she would have been aware of, not being in use at her time, Woolf was aware of the socially constructed differences between men and women and the unequal power relationship they result in. Striving for women's emancipation, she found her forum in *A Room of One's Own*, not intending to represent the final word on the issue, but wanting to elicit a debate. With a sharp and critical pen, Woolf deliberately set her essay up as the beginning of an ongoing discussion that still has not ceased.

Looking for explanations as to why Woolf wrote this set of six essays, which divert a great deal of attention from her previous writings, one finds two kinds of reasons: factual and ideological. Let us look at two factual ones.

One factual reason is a seed sown already in 1920 that was to become *A Room of One's Own* nine years later. At that time, Woolf was working on *Jacob's Room* (1922) when her mind was disturbed by the Edwardian novelist Arnold Bennett and Desmond MacCarthy, a columnist in the *New Statesman* writing under the pseudonym Affable Hawk.<sup>8</sup> Bennett had published a collection of essays entitled *Our Women: Chapters on the Sex-Discord*, which Affable Hawk discusses in the *New Statesman*. A note in Woolf's diary from the 26th of September 1920 points out her reaction as she finds herself "making up a paper upon Women, as a counterblast to Mr Bennett's adverse views reported in the papers" (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 69). Affable Hawk discusses Bennett's book in terms that Woolf finds "too provocative to ignore" (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 339). The discussion resulted in a series of open letters published in the *New Statesman*, where Woolf retorts on Affable Hawk's review. These letters were later compiled in "The Intellectual Statues of Women."

Knowing Woolf's interest in women's rights, it is easy to see why Bennett's and Affable Hawk's comments on women made her see red. Some issues in the open debate

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<sup>7</sup> With the Great Reform Bill of 1918, all men over the age of twenty-one and practically all women over thirty won the right to vote. However, women did not win full voting rights until 1928.

<sup>8</sup> Desmond MacCarthy was a member in the intellectual circle of friends constituting the Bloomsbury Group. The *New Statesman* was one of the most prestigious intellectual papers of the time.

between Woolf and Affable Hawk indicate a few sparks of concern that are later found as heated topics addressed in *A Room of One's Own*. For instance, citing Bennett, Affable Hawk agrees that “‘the literature of the world can show at least fifty male poets greater than any woman poet . . .’ (Yes; unless you believe with Samuel Butler that a woman wrote the *Odyssey*),” which gives fuel to Woolf’s search for preceding women writers (qtd. in Woolf, “The Intellectual Status of Women” 31).<sup>9</sup> In her reply, she declares, “you will not get a big Newton until you have produced a considerable number of lesser Newtons,” which shows her view that a great many women have to write if some of them are going to excel (“The Intellectual Status of Women” 38). In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf realises that she had to encourage women to write what they “wish to write” if they were to become skilled writers (96).

The fact that women were denied access to universities and therefore were at a scholarly disadvantage compared to men is a major theme in *A Room of One's Own*. This theme also derives from the *New Statesman* letters. With a better education, Woolf argues, women would be as intellectual and as creative as men. A parallel could here be drawn to Woolf’s regret that she did not get the same education as her brothers, who went to university while Woolf studied by herself at home. Protesting against Affable Hawk’s and Bennett’s opinions that women would not benefit from education, that it is in everybody’s best interest if women remain dominated, Woolf’s tone is indignant:

My difference with Affable Hawk is not that he denies the present intellectual equality of men and women. It is that he, with Mr Bennet, asserts that the mind of women is not sensibly affected by education and liberty; that it is incapable of the highest achievements; and that it must remain for ever in the condition in which it now is. (“The Intellectual Status of Women” 38)

Protesting against Bennett’s and Affable Hawk’s view of women, and in particular the view that women’s intellectual capacity is static and of lower status to men’s, Woolf criticises their underrated view of women. Their opinions – that women are incapable of developing their intellect and that it is a waste of money to educate women since they are not capable of high achievements – offend her. Woolf, being a part of the intellectual Bloomsbury group, sees how important the intellectual freedom she experiences of the group is to her and wants the

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<sup>9</sup> In *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (1897), Samuel Butler had suggested that the epic had been written by a woman on the grounds that it featured so many and such interesting women characters. For more see Woolf, *A Woman's Essays*, page 182.

same for women. Of the opinion that everyone has a right to an education, that it should not be a privilege that only men enjoy, Woolf, the revolutionary who battles patriarchy, is born.

Aired in the letters are as well the topics of superiority, inferiority, and power. Again, citing Bennett, Affable Hawk states that “‘women as a sex love to be dominated . . . . This desire to be dominated is in itself a proof of intellectual inferiority’” (qtd. in Woolf, “The Intellectual Status of Women” 32). Affable Hawk continues to agree with Bennett that “on the whole intellect is a masculine speciality” (qtd. in Woolf, “The Intellectual Status of Women” 31). These statements rouse Woolf; she clearly disagrees with the novelist and the reviewer. She replies,

All activity of the mind should be so encouraged that there will always be in existence a nucleus of women who think, invent, imagine, and create as freely as men do, and with as little fear of ridicule and condescension. These conditions, in my view of great importance, are impeded by such statements as those of Affable Hawk and Mr Bennett, for a man has still much greater facilities than a woman for making his views known and respected. (sic “The Intellectual Status of Women” 38)

Here, again, one sees how Woolf argues her case that she wants women to have the same right to intellectual stimulation as men do so that they can create “as freely as men do” (“The Intellectual Status of Women” 38). The equal conditions between men and women that Woolf strives for are, as she declares in the passage cited above, impeded by men. Consequently, women do not have the same facilities for intellectual stimulation, which makes them the suppressed sex in Woolf’s eyes.

Realising that women are thwarted and will never get any help from men to climb the ladder, Woolf understands that women have to do the work themselves if they are not satisfied with being second-rate or the dominated sex. Aspirations of creativity and of women’s intellectual freedom – not only for Woolf herself, but also for women at large – are recurring themes in Woolf’s essay. Since Rosenman argues that “there is no doubt that she [Woolf] was a political thinker and that her most fervent political commitment was to women and their rights,” Woolf’s and Affable Hawk’s discussion can be seen as the seed of the polemics that were to constitute *A Room of One’s Own* (Rosenman 9). In her mind, Woolf continued to cultivate the polemic that she was later to explore in the talks at Girton and Newnham and, eventually, in *A Room of One’s Own*.

The commission to give talks is the other factual reason for Woolf compiling the material for the talk and for what was to become the essay. Invited to Girton and Newnham,

Woolf was asked to give a talk to women students on the topic “Woman and Fiction.” With mixed feelings and sceptical about the lecture form itself, Woolf accepted the invitation: “I should never be able to fulfil what is, I understand, the first duty of a lecturer – to hand you after an hour’s discourse a nugget of pure truth” (*A Room of One’s Own* 3). Being a writer rather than an orator, Woolf prefers a medium in which she can give a broad analysis. *A Room of One’s Own* is exactly that, a channel where she “fully and freely” develops her “train of thought” (4). One of the students at Girton, Kathleen Raine, recalls Woolf’s talk:

From her famous paper I learned for the first time, and with surprise, that the problems of “a women writer” were supposed do be different from the problems of a man who writes; that the problem is not one of writing but of living in such a way as to be able to write. (Raine 16)<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, Woolf’s message of the important requirements for intellectual freedom, a room, and money, was communicated. However, Raine recalls as well that she thought the lifestyle luxurious and unimaginable, indicating that it was perhaps not possible for all women to lead a privileged life like Woolf’s, made possible by a legacy of £500 a year. The symbolic value of the legacy will be discussed later in this essay.

In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf describes a scene in which she ponders the implications of the topic assigned to her. While sitting down on a riverbank, Woolf reflects on the connotation of the words *woman* and *fiction* as she is unsure of what to address in the talks. The title, “Women and Fiction,” thrills and puzzles her at the same time, since she is not sure what it means to the college management or to herself:

The title woman and fiction might mean . . . women and what they are like; or it might mean women and the fiction that they write; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them; or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together and you want me to consider them in that light. (Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* 3)

Here, one follows Woolf’s train of thought. She twists and turns the words to see what different connotations she finds. Juxtaposing the words *women* and *fiction* makes her see the words in a new light, and she is later able to define her topic.

Analysing her ideological reasons – what she has to say, the messages she puts across, and the topics she raises – gives one a clearer picture of why she said what she did in the lectures and later in the published form. Being a child of the Victorian era, which she revolted

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<sup>10</sup> Kathleen Jessie Raine (1908-2003) was a poet and autobiographer. In 1972, Raine won the W. H. Smith award for a book on poetry.

against, Woolf pursues her ideology to change women's position in society. With passion and commitment, Woolf battles the presumed superiority of men of the public and private spheres in her writings. Sally Alexander confirms this, arguing that "the brilliance of Woolf's later polemic lies in the recognition of the umbilical cord she [Woolf] discerned between public and the private despotism" (281). Alexander is right; if women are to play the social and economical game by the same rules as men do, women have to occupy both public and private spaces in society where they traditionally have not been accepted. Nothing hits men of power harder between the eyes than strong and successful women. Woolf wants to do her share in promoting freedom of mind and thought and, not least, self-esteem to "break with the past," in which despots treat women unjustly (Alexander 287). I will now discuss how Woolf goes about this quest.

### **Killing the Angel**

In the very early days of her career, Woolf realised that she had to do something drastic if her creativity was not to be tamed. The thought of being boxed in by rules and conventions horrified the artist she was. To save her creative soul from being institutionalised, she knew she would have to kill a part of herself that she called the Angel.

On January 21st 1931, Woolf gave a lecture to the National Society for Women's Service titled "Professions for Women." Woolf was asked to talk about the employment of women and to give some professional experiences of her own. Clearly, there is a link between "Professions for Women" and *A Room of One's Own*. In the lecture, Woolf continues urging women to be professionals and to refuse being controlled or ruled, topics she discusses in *A Room of One's Own*. Offering herself as an example, Woolf tells the audience how she became a journalist and how rewarding it was when she got the first paycheck. In the introduction of this lecture (later published as an essay), she acknowledges that

The road was cut many years ago – by Fanny Burney, by Aphra Behn, by Harriet Martineau, by Jane Austen, by George Eliot – many famous women, and many more unknown and forgotten, have been before me, making the path smooth, and regulating my steps. ("Professions for Women" 101)

Professional women writers represent the formation of the female canon, where forerunners had paved the literary path in some ways and taken out material obstacles for Woolf and other women writers who would come after her. Margaret J. M. Ezell claims that

The majority of twentieth-century feminist literary historians, like Woolf, see the transition from a system of patronage to that of the paid professional writer as the turning point in women's literary history. . . . This is why Aphra Behn has assumed such importance in the canon – she was supposedly the first “professional” women writer. (585)

This argument supports Woolf's idea that once women are independent they can create. This, however, is a Catch-22 situation, since women need independence to create, and it is creative women that are independent. Furthermore, not until there are plenty of women writers to choose from, a female canon can be formed. So far, the “literary hierarchies found in the male canon” set the rules for canon formation, which implies that women have to form their own canon (Ezell 583).

In “Professions for Women,” Woolf points out how “little I deserve to be called a professional woman” as she says she used the earnings from her first job to buy a Persian cat rather than to spend it on rent, or bread and butter (102). More importantly, Woolf discovers that, if she is going to pursue a writing career, she needs to “battle with a certain phantom” which prevents her from using her creative mind to its full potential (“Professions for Women” 102). The kind of phantom that Woolf is alluding to here is the figure of a woman derived from a poem by Coventry Patmore.<sup>11</sup> Woolf writes, “when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, *The Angel in the House*” (“Professions for Women” 102). The phantom is the Angel who lurks in the shadows of her studio or mocks her mind.

Who, or what, is this Angel? It could be virtually anything that mocks who women are or want to be. It could be disguised as the patriarchal society with its norms and rules, the ideals of how a woman should be, asserted by one's conscience or one's mother's or father's demands. Woolf's description eloquently conveys the Angel as a woman who “excelled in the difficult arts of family life . . . sacrificed herself daily . . .” and is “intensely sympathetic . . . immensely charming . . . utterly unselfish . . . in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own” (“Professions for Women” 102). In essence, this is the kind of woman that Woolf does not want to become. She recognises the Angel very well because she sees it everywhere. In the last days of Queen Victoria, when Woolf was young, “every house had its Angel” (“Professions for Women” 102). For example, Woolf's mother, Julia Duckworth Stephen, a traditional and good Victorian, and the eponymous character Mrs.

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<sup>11</sup> Coventry Patmore wrote the poem in 1854, which is often criticised for its tame subject, marriage, and its idolisation of women as goddesses. See the poem on <<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/patmore/angel/>>.

Dalloway are Victorian Angles who excelled in giving dinner parties and never had a wish or a mind of their own.

Describing how “the shadow of her [the angel’s] wings fell on my page” when it tries to persuade her to give up dreams and yield to the role of a woman, illustrates the feeling Woolf has when the Angel is around (“Professions for Women” 102). The shadow is a metaphor for the burden that she experiences together with other women, which weighs her down to tradition rather than letting her explore her own mind. It is difficult to escape the shadow, Woolf argues in “Profession for Women”, but when one finally escapes it, light comes into one’s life as the possibility of “expressing what you think to be the truth about human relations, morality, [and] sex” (103). Moreover, the wings offer false protection in Woolf’s eyes. She does not want to be protected like a duckling is protected by the duck. What Woolf wants for herself and her kind is the freedom to explore and express their minds. Hence, she does not want an alter-ego Angel, hiding in her room and telling her what she can or cannot write. The image of the wings and the shadow is one of oppression, which Woolf tries to resist and encourages other women to do as well.

What Woolf wants to do, she tells the audience at the National Society for Women’s Service, is to write, but the Angel comes between her and the papers, bothering her, wasting her time and tormenting her, so, at last, she kills the Angel to save her creativity. Urging all women to do likewise, she states that “killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a women writer” and “it was an experience that was bound to befall all women writers” (“Professions for Women” 103). Therefore, it is out of basic instinct of self-preservation that Woolf kills the Angel and is free to use her pen as she wishes. Woolf emphasises, “had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing” (“Professions for Women” 103). The killing shows how strong the need for any kind of freedom is, whether it be intellectual, creative, or financial.

## **Anger**

Once the Angle is no more, Woolf is free to let her creativity and mind take her in any direction. Since she does not have to be the nice woman that the Angel would have wanted her to be, Woolf’s old Mrs. Immensely Charming is replaced by Mrs. Confident, who gives herself up to her true feelings. An example of Woolf’s devotion to self-exploration is the discovery of her anger. With the abundant use of the word “angry” or “anger” (used twenty-seven times on pages 28-31 in *A Room of One’s Own*), the reader follows Woolf in her anger.

Like a cauldron boiling over, with fury and irritation saturating the fumes, Woolf's anger pervades on these four pages. Once her anger has surfaced, Woolf finds it difficult to bridle her fury. Woolf's anger battles against the fictive Professor von X's anger, who represents scholars writing on women. Woolf is angry, and so is Professor von X. But why are they angry? And what are they angry about?

While sketching a conclusion to her book, Woolf's mind wanders off, and, instead of writing, she finds herself drawing a caricature of Professor von X writing his monumental work, *The Mental, Moral, and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex*, a title fabricated by Woolf.<sup>12</sup> Commenting on her drifting mind, Woolf suggests that "it is in our idleness, in our dreams, that the submerged truth sometimes comes to the top" (*A Room of One's Own* 28). Thus, in this idle scribbling, Woolf's true feelings about the professor surface. Professor von X's expression in Woolf's sketch suggests that he is under strain. He jabs his pen on the paper as if he were "killing some noxious insect," and "even when he had killed it [the insect] that did not satisfy him; he must go on killing it; and even so, some cause for anger and irritation remained" (*A Room of One's Own* 28). With the professor looking "very angry and very ugly" in her drawing, her subconscious finds its own way, revealing the truth of her mind – she, Woolf, is angry (*A Room of One's Own* 28). Offended at being the oppressed sex in a social organisation in which men "monopolize power" and "do so on the basis of some alleged natural right or capacity that women are said to lack," as Rosenman argues, Woolf interprets the killing of the insect as a symbolic killing of *woman* (Rosenman 30). As a result, Woolf projects her anger on the professor who symbolises the patriarchy that she resents.

Something has triggered Woolf to draw an unflattering sketch and to experience a build-up of anger that she can neither understand nor stop. Asking herself what anger is doing in the sketch, she admits it has been made in a fit of anger. Woolf describes anger as a "black snake" wriggling among her emotions, possibly a symbol of an angry woman attacking the patriarchs with venom (*A Room of One's Own* 29). However, sometimes little is needed for a snake to bite. The phrase that rouses the black snake in her is the professor's statement about the mental, moral and physical inferiority of women. She projects her feelings of anger onto the professor as "one does not like to be told that one is naturally the inferior of a little man"

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<sup>12</sup> In the article "Female Objects of Semantic Dehumanization and Violence" in *Feminism and Nonviolence Studies*, William Brennan points out several books with titles or contents similar to Professor von X's scientific book. For example, female mental inferiority is the theme of an article written by evolutionist-physiologist George J. Romanes in the British monthly *The Nineteenth Century* (May 1887). Romanes argues that "the general physique of women is less robust than that of men" (qtd. in Brennan, <<http://www.fnsa.org/v1n3/brennan.html>>). Furthermore, according to German psychologist P. Moebius in *Concerning the Physiological, Intellectual Feebleness of Women* (1907), even the woman's spirituality suffered due to lack of brainpower.

(*A Room of One's Own* 29). Nevertheless, Woolf finds her anger explained. She knows why she is angry, but one question remains: how to explain the anger of the professor?

Finding the professor's anger disguised and complex, she asks herself "what is the real nature of what I call for the moment their [professors symbolising patriarchy] anger?" (*A Room of One's Own* 30). Fear is the real nature of the patriarchs' anger. They fear for having to share power, money, or status, or, perhaps even worse, losing it to women. Woolf argues in *A Room of One's Own* that

England is under the rule of patriarchy. Nobody in their senses could fail to detect the dominance of the professor [the patriarch]. His was the power and the money and the influence. He was the proprietor of the paper and its editor and its sub-editor. He was the Foreign Secretary and the Judge. He was the cricketer; he owned the racehorses and the yachts . . . . (30)

The form and content in this passage is remarkable because they differ from Woolf's usual language. The sentences are shorter than usual in her wordy writing style, which has many commas and semicolons. A sign of her strong emotions on the subject is its heated tone that punches patriarchy. Furthermore, the structure of the passage is imbalanced and sprawls, indicating another mode of writing. She is so eager to put across her notion of the subject that, for a while, she sets aside her usual style. However, her punchy rhetoric comes across effectively and the reader cannot misinterpret her opinion. Achieving order in the heated speech through the effect of parallelism balances the arrangement of pairs and similarly constructed sentences, even though written in a non-Woolfian style.

In another example of parallelism, Woolf asserts "I need not hate any man; he cannot hurt me. I need not flatter any man; he has nothing to give me" (*A Room of One's Own* 34). These short repetitive sentences can be repeated infinitely as a means of toughening one up in harsh times. Kept short for clarity and efficiency, Woolf's proclamation that she can stand on her own feet is explicit. With these words echoing, Woolf finds an inner strength to promote her creativity. What makes it grow is the next topic.

## **Creativity – Intellectual Freedom**

Creativity is a personal quality that we all have and that we experience differently. Woolf gives her opinion to the reader of *A Room of One's Own* of what makes it grow and what one needs for it to flow freely. Returning to the riverbank scene, Woolf illustrates, with the symbol of a fish, how she experiences inspiration and creativity:

Thought . . . had let its line down into the stream. It swayed, minute after minute, hither and thither among the reflections and the weeds, letting the water lift it and sink it, until – you know the little tug – the sudden conglomeration of an idea at the end of one’s line: and then the cautious hauling of it in, and the careful laying of it out? Alas, laid on the grass how small, how insignificant this thought of mine looked; the sort of fish that a good fisherman puts back into the water so that it may grow fatter and be one day worth of cooking and eating. (*A Room of One’s Own* 5)

The metaphor comports a fish with an idea. They have similar characteristics: they both dash here and there. Sometimes one sees the reflection or a glimpse of it – the fish or the idea – and sometimes one even gets a chance to consume it. Woolf elaborates further on the fish metaphor in “Professions for Women,” where she writes,

The [fishing] line raced through the girl’s fingers. Her imagination had rushed away. It had sought the pools, the depths, the dark places where the largest fish slumber. And then there was a smash. There was an explosion. There was foam and confusion. The imagination had dashed itself against something hard. (104-05)

High on endorphins and creative zest, the idea dashes against something hard that it cannot get past. With a smash and an explosion, this hard resistance is Woolf’s picture of patriarchy’s impediment to female creativity.

It is this figurative idea of creativity that Woolf wants to pass on to her women readers. Showing her readers what she has accomplished so far in life in terms of literary success, earnings, and independence, she wants to encourage the women around her to aim for such things as well. Using her creativity to its full potential has given Woolf exactly that: an independent life. But, where does creativity come from, and what makes it grow?

Defining some mandatory conditions for creativity to exist, Woolf clearly sees what is required. Repeated like a mantra throughout the six essays, the central symbols of *A Room of One’s Own* – the importance of a room (independence) with a lock (privacy) and of money (freedom) – cannot be emphasised enough. Without these, creativity cannot flow: “It is necessary to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry” (94).<sup>13</sup> In particular, female creativity depends on a room and money since

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<sup>13</sup> Virginia Woolf had been left with a legacy of £2500 in 1909 by her aunt, Caroline Emelia Stephen. The interest gave her considerably less than £500 a year but none the less a significant amount. For more see Barrett, page xx. Furthermore, C. E. Stephen wanted her niece to abandon journalism and devote her attention solely to

“from the beginning of time . . . women have had less intellectual freedom than the sons of Athenian slaves” (Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* 97). Alexander develops Woolf’s basic conditions further and claims that imagination and thinking depend on “time, chance, strength and skill” as well a room and money (278). This, however, Alexander claims, is the ideal genesis for “an individual Utopia,” which would generate “self-centredness rare for women” (275). The Utopia would be a perfect society in which everyone is free to lead their lives as they wish, and women would be independent of the Angel and of all men of power and wealth – fathers, husbands, professors, and judges – whom Woolf comes back to again and again in her polemic.

However, once the basic requirements are met, intellectual freedom pervades. Woolf acknowledges that “intellectual freedom depends upon material things,” which is, perhaps, a statement not readily accepted by intellectuals or artists (*A Room of One’s Own* 97). In addition, the room represents “a transitional space, a place to think – a remove to uncertainty and to the unknown” (Alexander 287). It is this kind of place that makes creativity flow. Many of the concepts that Woolf works with – freedom of mind, freedom of expression, integrity, vision and so on – carry connotations of creativity. Woolf understood she was a forerunner and took every possibility to promote literature as a way of making a living, offering herself as a prime example. With the symbolism of five hundred pounds a year and a room, Woolf maintains adamantly that it is these material things that women need to boost their intellectual freedom.

Furthermore, Woolf saw it as her responsibility to do her best to inspire female creativity. The fact that “we think back through our mothers if we are women,” and Woolf’s search for women predecessors, made her realise that she is also a part of the female canon (*A Room of One’s Own* 69). However, Fox questions if women cannot “learn technique, irrespective of content . . . to profit from all the writers preceding them, and not merely from predecessors who were women” (153). One finds that Woolf’s response in *A Room of One’s Own* would be “no” because Woolf finds “no common sentence ready for her use” (69). Here, Fox and Woolf disagree. Fox claims that one does not need predecessors of the same sex while that is exactly Woolf’s point.

Ezell claims that an anthology such as *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* is a “means of ‘documenting’ Woolf’s thesis” of the importance of predecessors (581). The anthology by Gilbert and Gubar begins with Woolf’s words from *A Room of One’s Own* that

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other, more glorious writing pursuits, which Dubino discusses in “Virginia Woolf: From Book Reviewer to Literary Critic, 1904-1918,” page 33.

women's "books continue each other" (72).<sup>14</sup> Woolf sees the need for predecessors if women's creativity is to flourish as the creativity of men had done for centuries. Ezell points out that Woolf is a "great novelist" and "an inspired analyst of the process of literary creation – but she is not a great historian" (587). Ezell is not altogether right. It is true that Woolf did not know a lot about the canon from the sixteenth-century. However, Woolf was an expert on women writers from the seventeenth- and eighteenth century, which is evidenced by the many essays on authors such as Jane Austen, George Eliot, and the Brontës. This Ezell has missed out on. Woolf did not know much about the earlier writers, which is one reason why she invents Judith Shakespeare: she saw the need for predecessors. Ezell, who is opposed to this fabrication of Judith Shakespeare, argues that "we should not cling to a literary creation, the myth of Judith Shakespeare" (587). Again, Ezell is wrong. On the contrary, the fictive Judith Shakespeare shows how a creative mind as Woolf's can pursue her polemic and her purpose by lying in this tale. To Woolf, an imaginative predecessor is as good as a real one when none is readily found. Therefore, by telling us about the predecessors she knows of, Woolf indicates that forerunners are crucial if women's literature, imagination, and creativity are to grow:

For if *Pride and Prejudice* matters, and *Middlemarch* and *Villette* and *Wuthering Heights* matter, then it matters far more than I can prove in an hour's discourse that women generally, and not merely the lonely aristocrat shut up in her country house among her folios and her flatterers, took to writing. Without those forerunners, Jane Austen and the Brontës and George Eliot could no more have written than Shakespeare could have written without Marlowe, or Marlowe without Chaucer, or Chaucer without those forgotten poets who paved the ways and tamed the natural savagery of the tongue. (*A Room of One's Own* 59)

This passage shows that Woolf knew her history. Pointing to the importance of predecessors, Woolf makes the distinction between female *and* male predecessors, which is an argument that Woolf believes in the importance of predecessors of her own sex. Woolf holds that women do not relate to men's writings, and, therefore, they do not write in the same literary language.

### **(Truth or Fact) Woolf's Purpose in Lying**

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<sup>14</sup> For more on the canon see Ezell, page 580-83. Gilbert and Gubar quote Woolf on page xxvii. However, all of Gilbert's and Gubar's anthology is a testimony to the female canon.

In fiction, a great many issues, ideas, histories, stories, memories, emotions, et cetera are intermingled so that life is mixed with fiction, resulting in a fictive story with some real life in it. Authors usually claim that persons, places, and plots are fictive. Some, like Woolf, who feel they are writers with missions, want to educate their readers. Therefore, Woolf argues her point that “fiction . . . is likely to contain more truth than fact” and blends arguments in her fiction (*A Room of One's Own* 4).

The definition of *fact* in *Cambridge Dictionaries Online* is “something which is known to have happened or to exist, especially something for which proof exists, or about which there is information.” *Truth*, on the other hand, as defined in the same dictionary, is “a principle which is thought to be true by most people.” To Woolf, this implies that she aims to tell the truth. Although she may not have proof for her thesis at all times, she and her like-minded writers write what they believe to be true. This is why Woolf holds that her writings contain truth. However, the common notion of the terms *fact* or *truth* is generally that they are similar; to some they are equivalent. The difference of the terms becomes clear with the precise definitions. Fact needs proof; and truth is that which one thinks to be true.

To argue that fiction contains truth is to warn us not to read literature just as flimsy anecdotes, but to read literature with an analytical and critical eye. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf often returns to the freedom and individuality theme, where a critical mind will favour creativity. Woolf urges writers to make use of “all the liberties and licences of a novelist,” which Woolf herself practises in her writing, from novels and essays to short stories and reviews (*A Room of One's Own* 4). In other words, it is the duty of the author, but also his or her freedom, to speak out, and Woolf, fighting for women's independence, finds a great challenge in interweaving her opinions in her writings. It is Woolf's liberty, as it is the liberty of other writers, to write about issues she is passionate about, and she uses this liberty with full vigour. The opinions she puts across and the statements she makes, both in her fiction and in her non-fiction, is the truth in Woolf's view. However, Woolf can twist the plot or the argument to suit her purposes if she sees a justification for lying. Since Woolf contradicts herself from time to time in her writings, it is a challenge for the reader to follow Woolf closely in her argumentation here. When least expected, she overturns what she has stated, and comes up with its antithesis. However, this is exactly Woolf's aim in lying – to challenge the reader's critical mind.

As a writer, one of Woolf's main missions with *A Room of One's Own* is inspiring readers to be critical, to question, and re-question what they read at all times. Turning her address mainly to her female readers in her polemic, she says, “lies will flow from my lips,

but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping” (Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* 4). Woolf lies in her writings as a means of training, in particular, women’s critical thinking. Hence, it is not until readers have improved their critical eye that they can start being critical in everyday life too. Therefore, Fox is right when she suggests that Woolf “hoped to train her audience in the art of feminist polemic” (156). However, Fox does not say how Woolf trains her audience. Is not Woolf’s use of a lie a way of training a critical mind, as discussed above? Equipped with a critical mind, women are better prepared in battling patriarchy and other socially constructed injustices. In addition, Woolf mixes fiction and non-fiction in *A Room of One’s Own* to be able to lie, to tell tales, and to deliver her opinion and thoughts, a technique that is often not detected by her contemporary critics.

One of the critics who does not see her polemic is Desmond MacCarthy. When reviewing *A Room of One’s Own* in the *Sunday Times*, MacCarthy likens Woolf’s polemic to an “almond-tree in blossom” (qtd. in Barrett x). When looking at the critical reception of *A Room of One’s Own*, Rosenman draws attention to critics contemporary with Woolf. Rosenman’s findings show that critics do not know what to do with Woolf’s polemic. One critic says that the essay is “composed of delightful *causeries* [chats] on other people’s books” and that Woolf uses her knowledge “so artfully that it seems but a decoration” (qtd. in Rosenman, 16).<sup>15</sup> Other reviewers call *A Room of One’s Own* a “delightfully peripatetic [peripatetic] essay,” displaying “inherent taste.” It is characterized as “gay” and “delicious . . . [and] delicately whimsical” (sic qtd. in Rosenman 16). Clearly, this is not the usual vocabulary to describe political arguments. The words such as *delicious* and *delightful* suit a piece on entertainment or trivial matters better than a piece on literary values and social critique.

Missing the anger and irony in Woolf’s essay, the reviewers highlight the less political passages in favour of the fictional style they were familiar with from *Jacob’s Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse*, all three successful novels published before *A Room of One’s Own*.<sup>16</sup> Rosenman points out that it is in the fiction that Woolf tells her tales, and it is also the fiction that her critics felt most at ease reviewing:

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<sup>15</sup> Rosenman’s sources are Orlo Williams, “Books of the Quarter” (review of the *Uniform Edition of the Works of Virginia Woolf and A Room of One’s Own*), *Criterion: A Literary Review* 9 (1930), *Times of London Literary Supplement*, 31 October 1929, *New York Herald-Tribune Literary Supplement*, 27 October 1929, Elisabeth Woodbridge, “Speaking for Women,” *Yale Review* 19 (1929). For more see Rosenman page, 118.

<sup>16</sup> *Jacob’s Room* was published 1922, *Mrs Dalloway* 1925, *To the Lighthouse* 1927, and *A Room of One’s Own* 1929.

Woolf's image as an experimental, apolitical writer was hard to square with the ideas in *A Room of One's Own*, and may have led critics to concentrate on style, beauty, and tone as more familiar features of her works. Perhaps, too, some critics simply did not want to hear Woolf's passionate indictment of manmade literary history and so heard something else instead. (15)

As Rosenman argues, the topics Woolf addresses in her essays are uncomfortable or not interesting to her contemporary critics, who seem to diminish them, whereas in her experimental novels, the critics' reception operates at another level, praising her style and tone. Perhaps, her contemporary critics were not ready for Woolf's truth of the social structure that hampers women and promotes the male dominated literary tradition. Perhaps they were deliberately blind to Woolf's criticism and saw only what they wanted to see. The critics preferred her telling tales in the experimental manner she mastered in her fictions rather than being criticised themselves in her essays. However, before publishing *Jacob's Room* in 1922, Woolf published 205 essays during fourteen years (1904-1918).<sup>17</sup> It was not until the publication of *A Room of One's Own* in 1929 that her essays became canonised. The title of *A Room of One's Own*, suggesting "autonomy and independence, has become part of our modern cultural vocabulary, testifying to the essay's widespread influence" (Rosenman 10). Furthermore, by the late 1970's, Woolf was one of the most written-about authors in the United States, and the emergence of feminist criticism in the 1970's redefined Woolf as an essayist and novelist whose works are infused with concerns about the social world.

Women thirsty for the polemic of power and knowledge turned to Woolf's writings for "grains of truth," as nobody prior to her had approached the subject in such an outspoken manner (*A Room of One's Own* 24). The fact that women still turn to Woolf indicates that her voice is still loud and clear even though it is sixty-three years since she died. This shows how canonised her works are: readers still find an "essential oil of truth" in her writings (*A Room of One's Own* 23). Even today, her polemic is widely read, giving women confidence to write and to challenge the power structure. Woolf's polemic also gives voice to the utopia that men and women should live side by side, that "the union of man and woman makes for the greatest satisfaction, the most complete happiness" (*A Room of One's Own* 88). Woolf raised her voice and encourages women to raise theirs as well in her wish for men and women to live in harmony.

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<sup>17</sup> For an extensive list of the kinds of essays Woolf published, divided into areas such as life-writing, literary-critical essays, and contemporary popular writers, see Dubino, page 35.

## The Beadle and the Cat

There are two symbols in *A Room of One's Own* that deal with creativity. Firstly, there is the Beadle who hampers it, and secondly, the cat, which symbolises individuality and the freedom to create. I will now look at these two symbols, starting with the Beadle.

When Woolf is sitting on the riverbank fishing for ideas in Oxbridge, her stream of ideas is interrupted by the approach of the Beadle, a university security guard.<sup>18</sup> Enforcing the rule by which only fellows and scholars are permitted on the turf, the Beadle tells Woolf that women must remain on the gravel path. She scurries back to her proper place on the gravel, remarking that while “no very great harm” was done, she had lost her “little fish” of an idea (*A Room of One's Room* 5). Nevertheless, something was done. The Beadle makes Woolf aware of the difference between her rights and those of the fellows and scholars. In two short and similarly constructed sentences, Woolf shows how the Beadle restricts space: “He was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path (*A Room of One's Own* 5). Woolf writes in this manner to draw attention to what she says. The opposites are the Beadle and the woman, and the turf and the path. The Beadle tells the woman, any woman, that you are not permitted into our area, into the space of men. You have to stay on the gravel while we are permitted onto the soft turf. Here, Woolf experiences an injustice, running into an invisible fence, which she should know is the line of demarcation between what she as a woman can or cannot do. Hampered women cannot explore their creativity or critical mind, which is one reason why the Beadle does not allow women to move freely. Furthermore, the Beadle is a symbol of patriarchy and the symbol of any man in society who sees it as his right to dominate women. The fellows and the scholars had been protecting their turf for “300 years in succession” (Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 5). No wonder the Beadle takes such pride in keeping off any women who are “trespassing” into the space of men (Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 6).

When Woolf discusses liberty and freedom of mind, asking herself where all the women writers and novelists are, as the lack of them frustrates her, she argues powerfully that “literature is open to everybody” (*A Room of One's Own* 68-69). Again, the Beadle interferes when Woolf is at the British Museum. She speaks out, “I refuse to allow you, Beadle though you are, to turn me off the grass. 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” (*A Room of One's Own* 69).

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<sup>18</sup> Oxbridge is a fictional university meant to suggest both Oxford and Cambridge. Woolf refers to the Beadle both at Oxbridge as a university security guard and as an official at the British Museum. Both Beadles refuse Woolf to enter into the space of men. Therefore, the Beadle is a symbol of dominance in Woolf's writings.

Woolf's tone is strong as she drives her message home, repetitively alluding to the theme – freedom of mind. Therefore, the Beadle comes to symbolise that which hampers both intellectual freedom and women's status.

Looking for Woolf's symbol of freedom, one finds a cat. Fox argues that the cat, an animal with integrity and independence, is one of Woolf's "favourite devices . . . for feminist polemic" (148). Referring to cats when discussing feminist polemics is a significant choice; that Woolf herself identifies with a cat makes the choice even more remarkable.

On several occasions in *A Room of One's Own*, a cat without a tail is trespassing into areas where it is not welcome, just as Woolf does. She sees the cat both in the library and on the grass. The parallel between cats and women is obvious. Woolf uses the cat to show that women are not allowed on the grass (synonymous with men's area in society) and that women are not welcome in libraries where literature in abundance inspires creativeness. In essence, the cat tries out new territory to see what is in it for her. Similarly, a woman with the behaviour of a cat has all the opportunities of exploring creativity. This is what Woolf wants women to do – to behave like cats, marking out new preserves where creativity can flourish, since men have always protected theirs. Therefore, the cat is a symbol of freedom and the possibility of defining one's creativity or of transgressing boundaries unobserved.

Woolf uses the cat as a substitute for a human character in some passages. The use of the cat makes her polemic come out differently. For instance, the critique she fires off with the help of the cat is an even more hidden critique, but just as powerful. When having lunch at Oxbridge, Woolf looks out of the window and sees a cat treading on the turf (the forbidden space). She watches it pause "as if it too questioned the universe" (*A Room of One's Own* 10). Woolf, like the cat, has a questioning mind. Comparing the present with the past, Woolf finds that the present is not any better than it was before the war, claiming that "nothing was changed; nothing was different" (*A Room of One's Own* 11). Criticising society and those who hold the power to actually implement changes, Woolf realises that they will never give away power or any kind of freedom they are in possession of. On another encounter with the tailless cat in *A Room of One's Own*, the cat is nearby Woolf when she examines literature. Mr. A has written a book, which Woolf reads.<sup>19</sup> To her dismay, Mr. A uses the letter "I" abundantly in his book, representing the male character, Alan, whose "shadow . . . obliterated Phoebe [the female character]" (*A Room of One's Own* 90). This shadow is Mr. A's way of showing Alan's dominance, restricting Phoebe's space. Using his power, "he [Alan] is

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<sup>19</sup> Mr A is an unnamed writer, who Woolf describes as "in the prime of life and very well thought of, apparently, by reviewers" (*A Room of One's Own* 89).

protesting against the equality of the other sex by asserting his own superiority” (Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* 91). However, Alan is not alone: what “Shakespeare does for pleasure; Mr. A . . . does . . . on purpose” (Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* 91). This, however, shows that the men do not want women to be their equals. Drawing a parallel to cats and their masters, the cats would presume that all masters want to keep them on a lead, restricting their freedom.

Moreover, men never see the cat in *A Room of One’s Own* being busy with their own dealings; neither did Woolf’s contemporary critics see the cat as a polemic device in her writings as they chose to concentrate on the fiction in the essay. Cleverly, Woolf’s polemics come out in different shapes and sizes and when least expected to ensure results. Therefore, Fox’s likening of Woolf to a predator pinpoints Woolf’s traits as “a predatory cat, a lupine Manx that appropriated the tale of patriarchal literature for her own purposes” (Fox 158). To liken Woolf to a lupine animal that shares some of the characteristics of wolves, as Fox does in her pun, is witty because her surname is Woolf.

## **Conclusion**

In this essay, I have not only analysed why Woolf wrote *A Room of One’s Own* and where her motivation for the polemic comes from, but also how the essay was received. In doing so, my findings show that in striving for women’s emancipation and everyone’s right to education, Woolf’s aim in *A Room of One’s Own* and other essays is to promote a society where men and women are equally valued. Woolf’s way of doing this is to campaign her message to women students at Cambridge and at women’s societies. Her message is that women’s intellect is dominated by men. Since Woolf wants women to liberate themselves (men will not do it for them), she has the solution to women’s emancipation from patriarchy: women are to write, to explore their creativity, and their critical mind. Once women have taken to writing, spin-offs such as self-confidence, self-worth, and self-sufficiency will make women sufficiently empowered to challenge socially constructed superiority. Therefore, Woolf sees it as her task to do what she can to promote creativity, freedom of mind and thought in those women who do not want to belong to the sex that is perceived as inferior. As a lobbyist and promoter, Woolf is an inspiration for women to write. Hence, those who follow in Woolf’s steps challenge patriarchy with creativity.

Angry and disgusted at being regarded by men as the mentally, morally, physically, and inferior sex, Woolf criticises society in her polemic. She emboldens women to write as

she is of the opinion that the pen is mightier than anything else. My findings indicate some factual and ideological reasons to why Woolf wrote *A Room of One's Own*. Provoked by Affable Hawk's review on a book on women that underrates the value of women and their mental capacity, Woolf could not ignore her anger and frustration. In open letters in the *New Statesman*, Woolf retorts with a sharpened pen, answers that are the seedlings to *A Room of One's Own*. The invitation to talk to women students at Girton and Newnham and Woolf's ambition to battle patriarchy are reasons to why Woolf wrote *A Room of One's Own*.

There are several things that Woolf wants for women. In my analysis, I have claimed that she wants women to be critical of the written word as well as of society at large. In order to do this, women first of all have to kill the restraining Angel. Not only does the Angel give false protection, it also restrains women's creativity and freedom. Moreover, I have found that Woolf trains her readers' critical mind with the use of a lie in her writings. Woolf also wants women to be professionals, offering herself as an example of a woman who writes to earn money which she is free to spend as she wish, even if only on Persian cat. Wanting to battle the socially constructed norms and all men of power, Woolf finds that the forum in which to make her voice heard is in her writings. As shown in my analysis, the reason why Woolf urges more and more women to write is that she believed so strongly in the written word. What she really wants for women is to boost their creativity and independence so that they can continue battling patriarchy.

In inspiring women to write and in promoting literature as a way of making a living, Woolf outlines some necessary conditions for creativity to exist. Understanding that she is a role model for new writers, she guides them as professional writers. Pointing to the requirements of room, money, and space, she highlights what makes creativity grow. Analysing Woolf's writings, I have as well highlighted what hampers creativity, namely the Beadle, symbolising men with power. The Beadle makes Woolf aware of the difference of the unspoken rights of men and women. Furthermore, I have shown in my analysis that the Beadle is an impediment to women's creativity. Finally, in influencing women to write, Woolf claims that women's position in society will be improved if they take her advice. One piece of advice is to adopt the behaviour of cats, by marking out new preserves and hunting for freedom and creativity, which will reward Woolf's disciples with girl power.

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