

Feminist Marxist Aesthetics and Women'S Literary Voice: An Analysis of Virginia Woolf'S Essays

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Abstract

Art and literature according to Marxist aesthetic theory are part of the social superstructure founded upon the economic infrastructure. Relations of production determine the moral, intellectual and aesthetic values of a particular time according to Marxist aesthetic theory. Marxist theorists contend, building on Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, that the ruling class upholds patriarchal values and silences the voices of women by using cultural production, including literature, to sustain control over the political and cultural spheres in addition to economic ones. Marxist literary theorists look at the tangible circumstances surrounding the creation and dissemination of literature. The present paper seeks to prove that Virginia Woolf's aesthetic theory advances a materialist explanation of literature. Woolf investigates production and proliferation of literature and explicates that in a money-oriented social set-up, literature is shaped by ideologies of powerful gender groups. Woolf embarks in an investigative journey to reveal the political nature of literature and its historical development in Britain. In addition to gender biases, women's voices are muffled because of their marginalized status within the class system. Historically, women have had less access to the professional networks, financial resources, and education that are essential for success in writing.



These financial obstacles are perceived as a type of systemic oppression that has added in suppression of women's voices; she places a strong focus on the value of retrieving and appreciating the literary contributions made by historically oppressed women. By critically reevaluating literary canons and drawing attention to underappreciated or neglected works by women, this challenges the prejudices that have influenced criticism and literary history.

KEY WORDS: *Marxist aesthetic theory, social superstructure, economic base, bourgeoisie literature, gender-determined social set-up, suppression, women's voices*

Introduction and background

Karl Marx's social, political, and economic theories serve as the foundation for Marxist literary theory, sometimes referred to as "Marxist criticism", which examine literature. Marxist literary theorists examine class conflict, power relations, and ideology as lenses through which to view the marginalization of the subordinate people's voices in literature. They consider this silence to be component of larger systems of exploitation and oppression found in capitalist societies. Marxist theorists contend that the social and economic status of any group of people within a capitalist society is directly related to their oppression in the literary industry; they consider literature inseparable from the politics of class antagonism. They addresses the question of literary history, theory, production and dissemination of literary products.

Marxists believe that art and literature are the building blocks of social superstructure and serve as ideological products determined by economic base. Marxism question the means of literary production and dissemination, the social position of the authors and the social determinants of readers' taste. It also questions the meaning, form, and style of a literary work; Marxism sees the whole work in its historical perspective and argue that these relations are determined by the material ground which gives rise to a superstructure which encompasses

certain laws and politics whose primary goal is to consolidate the social class's hold over financial resources.

Superstructure also includes “social consciousness” shaped through political, religious and aesthetic conundrum, which gains the title of “ideology” in Marxist perception. Marx and Engels do not believe that art and literature proceed from literature’s “internal laws of development” (Preface, 11) which supposedly control, and determine literary products. They persist that the essence, birth, growth and the position of cultural artifacts, in a given society, is explicated only through the profound analysis of the social system in which these artefacts are produced. This stance is stated directly in the “Preface” (20), that the general processes of social, political and intellectual life are shaped by the manner of production of material life. Hence, “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (Preface 23).

Marx and Engels emphasize that people’s predilection to appreciate a literary artifact is not inborn; rather, it is a “socially acquired” (28) phenomenon. People’s material conditions of existence shape their aesthetic abilities, their capabilities for an aesthetic world view, for comprehending the beauty of the world and creation of aesthetic artifacts is the result of a long evolutionary process of human societies. An investigative project of the development of aesthetic products cannot be done in isolation; rather, growth of art in lieu with the evolution of material conditions of existence are to be done for a serious question of art in any given time period. The content and form of literary products are not established in isolation but they inevitably develop and change in accordance with the development of economic conditions of a particular period in a given society.

Alan Swingewood in Sociopolitical Poetics and Aesthetic Theory writes that Idealist aesthetics and formalist approaches consider art and literature as reproduction of the ideal standing above and over social reality. Materialistic dialectics propounded by Karl Marx and Engels (Qtd. In Swingewood, 59), on the contrary, propound that literature is determined by materialist and social reality. Swingewood sees Marxism as “a materialist theory of economic and historical change, which defines culture not as a product of individuals or ideas but the collective result of class struggle” (121). Marxist critics look at texts for how they portray social

injustice, economic power, and class conflict; they emphasize how literature either challenges or reflects the dominant ideologies and class structures of the day.

Marxist literary theorists claim that “historical, social, and economic conditions are reflected in literary works” (Lukacs 89). Lukacs makes the case that realism is the most effective approach to portray the complexity of society and that writing should capture the entirety of social interactions. Marxist critics have also investigated the dynamics of “cultural hegemony” (Gramsci 67), who believes that rather than using force, the ruling class preserves control through cultural institutions and ideals. Antonio Gramsci’s “Prison Notebooks” explore how popular culture and literature can both uphold and subvert prevailing views. He discusses class dynamics and cultural creation in addition to the marginalized voices in literature. He claims, “A whole network of practices and expectations” is achieved by the “effective domination of one class over the social and cultural process”, and “the degree of cohesion or consent” is achieved by various means, the author states (113). He further writes, “No cultural process can be analyzed independently of the material social practices and relationships within which it exists, which it expresses and conditions, and it must in turn affect” (121).

Marxist critics have also analyzed the role of class antagonism in creating “ideologies”. Althusser’s theory of ideology, in his oft-cited essay “Ideology and State Apparatuses”(123-4) in particular examines how literature serves as an “ideological instrument” to sustain or question class divisions. He places emphasis on how ideology shapes people’s conceptions of reality. The close ties between literature and culture and the social and economic spheres have been profoundly explored by other Marxist theorists like Raymond Williams who presents the perspective of “cultural Materialism”(18), an idea that views cultural artifacts as the result of particular historical and material conditions. Williams examines how particular historical and material circumstances shape literature and culture in his book *Marxism and Literature*. He contends that the interests and viewpoints of the ruling class, which frequently marginalizes or silences the opinions of those in inferior position.

William’s theory of “cultural materialism” offers a framework for comprehending how capitalism’s social and economic systems influence the creation and consumption of culture, especially the structural obstacles that the subordinate groups must overcome. William

highlights how social and economic factors, which have the potential to marginalize particular groups, especially women, are intricately linked to artistic output. He opines that it is common to minimize the nuanced interactions between the arts and social forms, which reduces cultural processes to simple reflections of class relations, whereas they are also sites of struggle, negotiation, and transformation” (128). He opines that it is important to take into account the ways that underrepresented voices challenge and subvert prevailing cultural norms.

The influence of the current wave of capitalism on the commodification of literature has been examined by Fredrick Jameson (43) who contends that late capitalism has commodified literature and culture, reflecting “the superficiality and fragmentation” (45) of modern society. Jameson looks at how the present wave of capitalism’s cultural logic commodifies cultural goods, creating a fractured and shallow cultural landscape. He looks at how literature and other artistic forms are impacted by this commercialization, highlighting how they both reflect and reinforce the workings of the capitalist system. Marxists consider literature inextricable from the politics of class antagonism. To Marxists, literature and culture can occur only within the scheme of class relations. How literature and culture say something will be determined by that lay out. Literary and artistic creations are not aesthetic objects to be appreciated only; rather, they are produced and reproduced as commodities, argue Marxists. This production process is carried out by publishing houses which work for profit.

In such an industry, literary artifact becomes a capitalist business. All this production is done for the consumer who is audience or the reader. Critics in this materialistic notion of literature are not only analysts of the text, but academics hired by the bourgeoisie to work for a wage; the writer is reduced to the level of a “wage laborer” who enriches the publisher and is enriched by him. Subsequent Marxist literary theorists (Eagleton, “Marxism and Literary Criticism” 46; Benjamin, 68) analyze aesthetic products in the light of historical processes that gave rise to it. All changes are rooted in history, ideology and reading a criticism needs a close critical examination of historical factors which shaped his criticism (Eagleton 1-6). Although, Marxist writers (Williams 129) have touched upon the subject of women’s subordinate position in production of literature, yet a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the material realities responsible for subjugating women’s perspective, has not achieved considerable attention. The

systemic obstacles that women writers have had to overcome and which have contributed to their marginalization in the literary canon are reflected by many feminist writers.

The history of female's literary pursuit is deemed "a story of exclusion, suppression, and resistance" (Showalter 12). Female literary tradition has been imprinted by "the dynamic interaction between women writers and society" (Showalter 14). The women writers themselves have frequently felt omitted from their own societies. This othering has been exacerbated by the "male critics' whose animosity further silenced women across history. The demands placed on women to conform to societal norms have historically limited their opportunities and recognition as serious writers. In addition to that, feminists (Millet 75, hooks 34) criticize the ways that scholarly traditions and criticism have diminished and devalued the contributions made by women writers, hence perpetuating larger trends of gender inequality. Female writers' contributions in literary realm have often been "trivialized" and "patriarchal norms" are frequently upheld in literature, disregarding and denigrating their experiences and contributions.

Women's portrayal as "sex objects" or as "secondary characters, which serves to reinforce male dominance in establishing literary canon, has been critiqued by feminist scholars (Millet, 41 Showalter 39). Gender prejudices in literary analyses have also been exposed by feminists. Kate Millet writes, "Rather than acknowledging the intellectual and artistic merit of women's literary achievements, critics have often trivialized them by attributing them to the author's femininity". These prejudicial and biased cultural expectations have compromised women writers' ability to express themselves creatively and with authority. This trivialization of women writers is a reflection of broader patriarchal conventions that minimize the intellectual and creative accomplishments of women.

By analyzing intersectional relationship between gender and class in women's muffled voices, Virginia Woolf fills this gap and augments Marxist literary perspective by adding gender-based nuance in interpretation of the historical process of literary production, dissemination and establishment of literary canon. Woolf contradicts the view of universal form, allegedly propounded by realism and argues that art forms, by virtue of belonging to particular eras of history, are determined by various production and disseminative forces. Virginia Woolf's

polemical texts are exploration of causes for limitations and repressions of women's artistic creativity. Woolf examines marginalization and exclusion that women writers have faced across history and advocates for a reassessment of women's literary contribution as well as the appreciation of their intellectual and creative value. She strives to validate and reclaim the presence of women writers in literary history by examining the ways in which they have been portrayed and limited and pushes for a more equitable and inclusive acknowledgement of their creative accomplishments.

Because of its distinctive fusion of literary style, narrative technique, and historical understanding, Woolf's (*A Room*) stands out. Woolf uses a distinct style of expression and fuses essayistic writing with fictional storytelling which helps her explore her narrator's innermost feelings and ideas, offering a very intimate and introspective examination of the issue. By using made-up events and characters to emphasize actual historical and social themes, she blurs the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction; this creative method draws readers in, something that scholarly books might not be able to do. Lifting her criticism to the level of art by using lyrical and poetic language, she turns her argument into a work of art. Other feminist theorists, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, and bell hooks, provide thorough and perceptive analysis; nonetheless, Woolf's essay (*A Room*) excels for its inventive storytelling approaches and literary grace.

A view of this essay reveals Woolf's subscription to Marxist Aesthetic theory. The conception of literature, developed by her, diverges tangentially from the "apolitical and aesthetic" conception developed by liberal Humanists and formalist approaches. The notion of "all consciousness" and "social subjectivities" (Eagleton 78) determined by material base compels her to see literature as being "ideologically conditioned and politically motivated". Woolf perceives a "mechanical one to one" (Lukacs 64) connection between the material substrate and artistic superstructure. She takes upon herself the task of questioning the dominant forces that helped growth of artistic creations and emphasizes that these relationships of production can be altered in favor of a gender-neutral aesthetic venture. Woolf, in a number of her writings, investigates the relationship between economic base and literary superstructure. She questions the conditions that have constrained the women's literary pursuits. She also

questions the absence of women literary writers on the aesthetic horizon prior to eighteenth century and investigates the reasons for women's indulgence in "fiction and only fiction" and not poetry or drama, after they started writing. Woolf is particularly troubled about the predominance of men and absence of women's voices in Elizabethan literature.

Analysis and Discussion

Woolf vehemently disagrees with the notion of "biological determinism" (Beauvoir 78) and maintains that economic, social, and cultural influences, rather than biological makeup, influence women's roles and capabilities. She takes a firm stance against the idea that women are less intellectually gifted than males; rather than innate inequalities, she blames the absence of women writers on systemic impediments primarily lack of financial independence. Like an objective researcher, Woolf before embarking on her investigatory project, declares that she does not intend to influence her readers or assert her opinion; rather, she wants to put facts in front of her readers. She exposes the confinements, the biases and the foibles of the speaker. Woolf (A Room) addresses students of an imaginary women's college "Farnham" and asserts at the outset, "A woman must have money and a room of one's own" (A Room 6) if she desires to create a work of art. In her opinion, "lack of one's own room and money" (A Room 7) are decisive factors that determine women's artistic skills.

Then she sets out to answer the questions by declaring that "historically England had been patriarchy" (A Room 12). She recalls that back in the early part of twentieth century women were not allowed to enter libraries if unaccompanied by "a fellow of the college or furnished with a letter of introduction" by a male. Woolf contends that the only way we can understand the success or failure of women writers is by understanding the true status and circumstances of common women's experiences. She reveals several unexplored spaces that altercate one period of activity from another period of aesthetic productivity. She pays tribute to Greek poet "Sappho" who ventured to write poems many hundred years before the birth of Christ. This was again followed by "a sudden period of literary inactivity". In sixteenth century England, when drama writing touched its literary horizons, women were conspicuously absent from theatrical creation and production. This literary turpitude was followed by a zealous women activity reflected in fiction. The periods of literary activity and impairment begs for a

profound inquiry into the reasons of these inconsistencies; and finds out that patriarchy's strong grip on England's institutions was sustained with the help of men's "strong economic position" (A Room 22).

Not only religious institutions, but higher seats of learning and literary stage were also patronized by monarchs and aristocracy; this patronage produced "loyal" scholars who paid homage to monarchy and aristocracy. The "age of faith" was followed by "the age of reason" in which the same "gold and silver" was showered on the seats of learning by "the newly emerging class of businessmen and merchants" (A Room 46). These merchants and industrialists prodigiously showered money on educational setups, which endowed "more chairs and fellowships" in universities that further augmented their strong influential position. The metaphorical elaboration of differential culinary attributes served at different institutions solves the riddle for Woolf.

In contrast to the sumptuous lunch being served to boys' college, Farnham offers "a dinner scarcely enough to feed someone properly" (A Room 46). In contrast to partridges, there is "beef accompanied by greens, and potatoes" (47). Woolf declares the significance of "a good dinner" because, "One cannot think well, love well, and sleep well, if one has not dined well" (47). She laments at the tortuous efforts done by hapless women in order to collect funds to construct women's college. With utmost difficulties, they could collect a meagre amount of funds, which could hardly provide sapless learning environment for women; so wine, partridges and servants carrying tin dishes is unimaginable to women. Woolf bursts out in scorn at the deficiency of basic requirements at women's college. Amenities, such as privacy to study, are inconceivable in a women's college; she is further dismayed at women's poverty, who do not have economic strength to bestow their daughters with the required money.

She questions that why women could not leave any fortune back then? She assumes that material conditions of her contemporaries would have been different had their mothers "learnt the art of money-making and had left their money, like their fathers and their grandfather before them, to found fellowships and lectureships and prizes and scholarships appropriated to the use of their own sex" (A Room 57). Endowed with financial lineage the women in twentieth

century would have the knowledge and skills to discuss the emerging scientific fields in addition to writing fiction.

Woolf laments that history has always been monopolized by “economically powerful gender” who wrote about their deeds, and adventures. Chronicles record everything about men and their pursuits; men from monarchs to soldiers filled the pages of records. However, there is no written record of our mothers or grandmothers. They are only mentioned as “a tradition” in the historical records; or they are remembered as “beautiful” or for their “red- hair”. They exist as “peripheral” (24) as Beauvoir writes. Their reference is the man they are married to and all that is known about them is “their names, the dates of their marriages, and the number of children they bore” (A Room 56). Even if women had personalities of their own in literary texts, like Shakespearean heroines, they were still objects in real life. In the actual world women were their husband’s property and they were deprived of intellectual resources. Women existed nothing better than “knowledge objects” in historical documents displayed in British library. Historical chronicles seldom mention an upper class woman, but any middle class woman having “brains and character at their command” (A Room 54) was almost never found in these records.

An average English woman’s life is wrapped in mystery as writing diaries or autobiographies was not permissible for them. There are no letters that an ordinary English woman left behind that would allow to piece together an ordinary woman’s life. The biographical sketch of a typical Elizabethan woman “must be scattered” in parish records and account books, which fail to give complete details about her life, her concerns, interests and abilities. Since, knowledge producers were men, the lives of women went unregistered, undocumented, and their services unacknowledged. Woolf discusses the significance of financial independence in generating financial security and freedom of thought for women. Using her own personal example, she exhibits that she inherited five hundred pounds a year and that made her pursue her work without being reliant on men. Prior to the inheritance, she asserts, that the only possible career for women was marriage, hence they adopted marriage as career and indulged in domestic affairs.

Combining married life with public career was inconceivable as “no human being could stand it-making a fortune and bearing thirteen children” (A Room 68). Furthermore, referring to

“the law of coverture” she states that it is pointless to speculate as to what might have happened to all these ladies had they accumulated immense wealth and invested it in universities and libraries, since they were barricaded by certain laws which would not have allowed them to keep money they made. She laments at being “locked in” and “locked out” (A Room 42). It was only after the laws were transformed by Women’s Rights’ movement that women overcame “the poverty and insecurity”. She inherits the legacy of her aunt conterminously with the legislation granting women the right to vote. This financial independence changes her outlook upon life considerably and consequentially, “the bitterness is gone”. She enjoys the money as, “food, house and clothing are [hers] forever” (A Room 54). She has imperceptibly begun to perceive the other half of humanity with “a new attitude” as material resources “unveiled the sky” (54) to her.

Critique of Literary Canon

Woolf questions the phillagocentric values in her writings. Since literary canon was controlled strictly by economically powerful men, they are the arbiters of aesthetic conventions. She contends that women’s literary contributions have frequently been overlooked as being less significant or worthwhile. Systemic gender prejudices and cultural conventions, that have historically undervalued the efforts of creative women, are to blame for this trivialization. She draws attention to the fact that male literary establishment frequently downplays the significance of women’s experiences and interests. The idea that women’s writing is unimportant or subpar results from cultural biases nourished through centuries. She talks about how males have typically dominated literary criticism, which may have prevented them from appreciating or comprehending the viewpoints and experiences of women.

Although a woman’s perspective differs from a man’s perspective, “thus when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values-to make serious what appears insignificant to a man and trivial what to him is important” (A Room 84). The altered sequence perplexes a male critic, who renders a verdict against her efforts. Woolf writes in *Three Guineas* that nevertheless, it is evident that women’s values considerably differ from those created by men; “yet it is the masculine value that prevails” (*Three Guineas* 67). For instance sports and football are significant; fashion design and purchasing clothes are insignificant. Furthermore, these values are “inevitably transferred from life to

literature” (Three Guineas 68). Woolf asserts that for the lack of female models, women started imitating men writers in their literary pursuits. At the outset of their writing career, women chose to express either “indignation” or “resignation” in the choice of their subject, unnatural self-assertion and unnatural docility. Their vision loses its real “integrity”, which is the most substantial characteristic of a work of art, and their work reflects “either too masculine or too feminine” attributes.

Woolf thinks that since the achievement of suffrage, women have become more independent in expressing their opinion. In Victorian era, women wrote fiction which was for the most part autobiographical. Their motivation to write was “to explore their own sufferings... to plead their own case”. In first half of twentieth century, this motivation does not hold sway, now women writers have started representing women authentically as, “to write of women as women have never been written before” (A Room 89). Prior to the women writers’ expressing themselves “women were the creation of men in literature” (92) Woolf states.

Woolf’s essay reaffirms her conviction that women are frequently confined to private sphere for their financial reliance on men, leaving them with little time, space, or energy to devote to writing or other intellectual endeavors. She also explicates that women’s ability to establish and contribute to literary traditions has been hampered by their lack of financial independence. Achieving economic freedom equips them with agency, help them develop their skills, voice their opinions, and actively participate in intellectual pursuits. During her tour of the library, she discovers that considering the economic constraints it can safely be divined that it would have been “impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare” (A Room 87) because, the people who have creative skills of Shakespeare “are not born among laboring, uneducated, servile people” (A Room 87). She asserts that literature could not have been written by women whose domestic obligations start at a very early age.

Woolf looks for “a novelist, a poet who was silenced, a silenced and disregarded Jane Austen, or some Emily Bronte, insane from the torment her gift had caused her” (A Room 89) when narratives about a woman “possessed by a devil”, or “a witch being burnt”. She writes, “To have lived a free life in London in the sixteenth century would have meant for a woman who was

a poet and playwright a nervous stress and dilemma which might have killed her had she survived” (A Room 94). Or if she dared to express her creative potential, she left her work unsigned.

Explicating the reason for predominance of “novel writing” in nineteenth century women’s writing, Woolf states, “Fiction is the easiest thing for women to write”, and “novel is the least concentrated form of art” (A Room 64). It is unfortunate that women, relegated to private sphere, were abnegated travelling and seafaring experiences which immensely influenced men writers like Conrad’s writing skills. She reveals that a common mediocre English family, in Victorian era had only a single living room; women writers had to pursue their passion in the shared space and were constantly interrupted. Using the evidence of Jane Austen’s life, she states that Austen was often interrupted by people; and she had to be vigilant that visitors and servants would not suspect her writing endeavors and had to use blotting paper to cover her manuscripts. In such a constrained environment women writers’ sensibilities were shaped to observe characters and write about “intimate relationships” only. Consequently, even if it appears that the majority of these writers were “born poets”, it was only natural for a middle class woman to produce novels when she started writing.

Women’s writing has been marginalized and undervalued through “anonymity and pseudonymity”. A woman’s attention to publicity was considered abhorrent. Women employed anonymity and pseudonymity as a tactic to cut through institutional and societal constraints that prevented them from publishing and being recognized as legitimate writers (Russ, How to Suppress Women’s Writing). On the necessity for anonymity Russ writes, “Being different from the dominant literary tradition, women’s writing is often labeled as anomalous or exceptional, and frequently women authors have found it necessary to hide their identities to avoid prejudice and bias” (41). About systemic suppression, she writes, “the requirement for anonymity is a testament to the pervasive and systemic barriers that have existed to suppress women’s writing. Women had to navigate a hostile literary environment that often deemed their work less valuable or legitimate simply because of their gender” (23). The pervasive discrimination against women in the literary community frequently made adoption of these strategies unavoidable for women; they could avoid the prejudice that accompanied them to get access to publishing

possibilities, and shield themselves from social and professional consequences by publishing anonymously or under male signatures. Far ahead of her times, Woolf draws attention to how crucial it is to value and acknowledge the contributions made by women to literature as well as to confront the systems that have traditionally suppressed them.

Woolf arrives at a conclusion that writing could be adopted as a lucrative profession as some courageous women in eighteenth century adopted. She honors all those women who, despite all these obstacles remained impervious to criticism and expressed their minds. She argues that writing is important for women to achieve autonomy and self-expression; women can question social norms and regain their voices through writing. Acknowledging the significance of literary expression feminists believe, “words can help us move or keep us paralyzed”, and that “language holds the power to change reality” (Reich, “On Lies, Secrets, and Silence”). This emphasizes how writing can help women by giving them a platform to express their stories and have an impact on cultural narratives. According to Woolf’s beliefs, “money dignifies what is unpaid for”. It was undeniable that they could stuff some cash into their purses, even though it could still be appropriate to mock “blue stocking with an itch for scribbling” (A Room 87). Women’s adoption of writing as a career is more significant than “crusades or the war of roses” in Woolf’s estimation, as it paved the way for many other aspirant women. Woolf pays tribute to all those “unsung voices” because the masterpieces, created by contemporary women, are the result of their shared thought that they inherited rather than being the product of “a single, isolated” woman’s effort. Woolf honors the lone voice that broke with conventions, law, and precedent and became exemplary and exhorts, all ladies “to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn ... who earned women the right to speak their minds” (A Room 68).

According to her, despite advancements, women may still be subject to institutional disadvantages; as a result, women may still face challenges in obtaining the right to speak their minds. She talks of the risks and difficulties that women writers may have in future, despite the fact that they are becoming more successful and have greater access to resources. The internalized gender conventions may still be a problem for women authors even as society progresses. This encompasses the anticipation of writing in a manner that adheres to conventional roles surrounding gender. She cautions that this can stifle a woman’s true voice

and creativity. In the future, literature will become an art form for women to study, just like it is for men, provided they have time, access to intellectual apparatuses and private space to indulge in creative endeavors. The women must hone their creative abilities. The genre of “novel” should no longer be a repository for the author’s private feelings; rather, it should develop into a piece of art like any other, and its possibilities and constraints will be investigated. And it will be “a step toward more sophisticated art”. Women should experiment with all genres including essays, criticism, history, and biographies; as she writes, “For besides improving the quality of the novel itself ... they will write “fewer novels, but better novels” (A Room 84). Encouraging women writers to abnegate the societal expectation to be selfless, pure, and committed to others, she uses the metaphor of “the Angel in the House” (The Death 64). She contends that in order for women authors to write freely and honestly, they must “kill” this symbolic “angel” in their minds since the pressure to live up to such standards might hinder their creativity. Hence a woman must assume the office of “the gadfly” suggests Woolf. Hence she comments:

We must expect that the office of the gadfly to the state, which has been so far a male prerogative, will now be discharged by women also. Their novels will deal with social evils and remedies. Their novels will investigate the determinants of gender, class and racial prejudices. (The Death 94)

Woolf bravely plays the part of a “gadfly” in her widely cited essay “Mr. Benet and Mrs. Brown” in which the authoritative voice of “one solitary, ill-informed, and misguided” person is directly questioned by her. In this article, Woolf challenges a well-known critic named Arnold Bennett, and states that “character development is the only necessary element” (84) for excellent literature; style, story, and originality of viewpoint are all important, but none of them are as important as character development. She wants female writers to understand that personalities may force themselves on authors as Mrs. Brown’s character insinuating herself into the writing of a novel. Woolf believes that particularly all great books focus on character rather than promoting ideologies, belting on tunes, or extolling the virtues of the British Empire. She urges female authors to get off their pedestals and portray Mrs. Brown as authentically and beautifully as possible. Women authors should stress that she is an old lady with boundless potential and limitless variation, able to show up wherever, dress however she pleases, say anything, and do

everything one can imagine. However, “the things she does and says, as well as her eyes, nose, speech, and silence, have an overwhelming fascination, for life itself is, of course, the spirit we live by” (The Death 91). At the conclusion of the essay, Woolf remarks that women writers are poised to enter one of the greatest periods in literature history. However, women writers can only succeed if they are adamant that they will “never, ever abandon Mrs. Brown” (The Death 92).

Demonstrating her unwavering trust in the connection between literary attitudes and material realities, Woolf states that women will naturally concern themselves, more than has previously been feasible, with the skill of literary writing when economic security and private space is at their disposal. They will use the writing skill more fully and subtly; and their method will get more sophistication. Hence she urges vehemently that it is imperative that women “Should be free to earn their living. It is the first step, and it must be made” (The Room 98). Financial security will help them take up writing as empowerment. Writing has historically been dominated by patriarchy, which has given men the ability to control the minds of women. Women need to write in order to take back their identities and speak for themselves. The history of creative expression is confused with “the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallogocentric tradition” (Cixous 875). Utterly negating generalization of women’s writings she asserts that women’s bodies and experiences are so varied, they cannot be adequately represented by one story or voice, and, “there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman” (Cixous 884). What is striking in women is “the infinite richness of their individual constitutions” (Cixous 885). Woolf urges women to break free from the limitations of patriarchal definitions and expectations and utilize writing to investigate and express their own viewpoints in all its variety.

Conclusion

A view of Woolf’s writings shows that Marxism has a significant influence on Woolf’s interpretation of literature; and stresses issues of class, power, ideology and the material conditions of literary production. She thinks that the literary attitudes and material realities are intertwined. In her writings, Woolf opposes the notion of biological determinism and promotes

the elimination of social and institutional barriers that hold women back from expressing their full potential. Woolf offers a thorough analysis of the ways used to suppress women's voices; she also suggests the ways in which reclaiming and empowering those voices is possible when integrating material considerations into critiques of patriarchal society where economically powerful men monopolize literary canon. Woolf believes that the intellectual emancipation of women depends on financial stability. She makes the case in several of her writings that women cannot achieve intellectual and creative freedom until they first attain economic independence. She draws attention to the fact that historically, women's lack of autonomy has deprived them of economic resources which are substantial for their intellectual growth; the combination of material realities and gender biases has severely restricted their chances and artistic contributions. If given the required money, free time, and the opportunity to view with objectivity and impersonality, women will concern themselves with the writing; they will employ the writing instrument more fully and subtly, and their writing style become bolder and richer.

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