A Room Of One's Own': A Feminist Text

The inequality of genders is a recurring theme that has inspired authors for generations. In the text, “A Room of One’s Own,” Virginia Woolf examines the gender inequalities faced by women in the early 1900s that violate basic human rights and interfere with quality of living in her journey to better understand the relationship between women and fiction. “A Room of One’s Own” is a feminist text because Woolf incites social change by exploring women’s misrepresentation in literature and denial of equal rights. Feminist texts maintain relevance to contrast the progress made thus far towards gender equality from the gender inequalities that persist today.

Woolf chooses to thoroughly research what has been written about women to better formulate an educated response regarding the topic of women and fiction. She soon realizes that the two subjects share a troubled past, for women are horribly misrepresented in literature. In one text, she finds Alexander Pope noting that “Most women have no character at all” (29). This discriminatory radical assumption portrays women as simple beings lacking in individuality. In other instances, some, “maintain that women are half divine and worship them on that account” (30). After discovering numerous other contradictions in her research concerning the definition of women, she realizes that women are being subjected to criticisms by male authors who have no credibility on the subject save that they are not women. Woolf marginalizes the original topic to delve into the more serious issue of the inequality of women. Woolf uses examples from her personal life to demonstrate the poor treatment of women. These first-hand accounts of social injustice introduce the viewpoint of inequality from a woman’s perspective. The first incident occurs when she is intercepted by an upset Beadle rushing towards her. Regarding this event, she marks, “This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me […] though turf is better for walking than gravel” (6).

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Moving past her denied entrance to the library, Woolf considers the effects of barred education on women and fiction. She does this by examining the hypothetical situation of an equally-gifted female counterpart, a sister, to Shakespeare. Her claim rests, "it would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare" (46). She starts by bluntly stating that the inequality of women would have completely hindered any artistic abilities and thus prevented the success of a woman of the same caliber as Shakespeare's. In this detailed hypothetical, Shakespeare's sister Judith, "remained at home. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic" (47). By denying equal education to women, talented female writers would have had their imaginations extinguished with gifts left unnourished. Relating back to her initial task of analyzing women and fiction, she questions how women can be expected to write influential pieces of fiction if they are not being well educated or given equal opportunities to nurture their writing.

Woolf notices other hindrances to women's ability to write quality literature. Throughout the ages, women have been forced into being the poorer gender. In her research, she reads, "' The poor poet has not in these days […] a dog's chance'" (108). This premise declares that any poet facing poverty has no chance of becoming a successful author. Woolf extends this claim to the situation of women. Since women have always been poor, "Women, then, have not had a dog's chance of writing poetry" (108). Due to their imposed poverty by men, women have been robbed of equal economic standings and of equal opportunities. By deductive reasoning, Woolf concludes that the inequality of women made it so they had little chance of becoming successful authors.

Another deterrent for female writers is the lack of privacy women have. Woolf claims that a woman cannot be expected to write any influential piece of literature if she does not have a room of her own and the idle time to write. Appropriate to that time period, she mentions that for a woman, "to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or a sound-proof room, was out of the question, unless her parents were exceptionally rich" (52). This fact serves as a foundation for her conclusion thus far of what is necessary for women to have equal opportunities to author anything worthwhile. Woolf asserts that society must, "give her a room of her own and five hundred a year, let her speak her mind and leave out half that she now puts in, and she will

write a better book one of these days” (94). This basis for an answer to the current social injustice problem being faced by women shows the feasibility of progress towards gender equality.

Finally, Woolf has concluded, after analyzing numerous gender inequalities, that a woman needs money, education, and a room of one’s own to be able to write fiction. It is through this analysis that she actively calls to mind the issues with her current society regarding the inequality of women and provides a groundwork for possible solutions to help with social change. On a broader scale, the information laid out in this essay, along with the proposed solutions, help modern societies compare and contrast to see how much they have accomplished and just how much work still needs to be done.