

# A Feminist Exploration of Women's Independence and Creativity

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## Abstract

*Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own (1929) is one of the most powerful feminist's works that talks about women's freedom to think, create, and live independently. This paper looks at Woolf's ideas using the theories of Jacques Lacan, a psychoanalyst who explained how people form their sense of self and identity. It focuses on how Woolf shows a woman's self as broken or incomplete because society, which is ruled by men, does not give her a proper place to express herself. By comparing Woolf's essay with the ideas of feminist thinkers like Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva who were influenced by Lacan the paper shows that Woolf's work connects deeply with later feminist discussions about language, desire, and identity. Finally, the paper argues that Woolf's idea of the androgynous mind, a mind that is both masculine and feminine, represents her wish to go beyond the strict rules of gender and to imagine a new kind of female identity that is free from male control.*

**Keywords:** Virginia Woolf, Lacan, Feminist Psychoanalysis, Split Self, Female Identity.

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is an important work in feminist literary criticism because it clearly explains the real life and emotional struggles that women writers face. When Woolf says that a woman needs a room of one's own and five hundred a year, she is not only talking about money and a private space. "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Virginia Woolf, p.4). She also means that women need mental and emotional space a sense of personal freedom where they can think, write, and be themselves without the control of a male dominated society. The essay is therefore more than just a criticism of society it also explores how women's inner selves are shaped and limited by the world of men, language, and power.

When we look at *A Room of One's Own* using Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, the book shows how a woman's sense of self is divided and uncertain because she is left out of the male dominated world of language and culture. Lacan's ideas about how language shapes identity and how it can make people feel distant from their true selves help us understand how Woolf shows the woman writer's broken or incomplete identity. "It is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex" (Virginia Woolf, p.102). This paper discusses how

Woolf's writing both shows and challenges these inner conflicts. It suggests that through creativity and the idea of an androgynous mind, Woolf begins to imagine a new and more complete form of feminine identity, free from the limits of patriarchy.

Lacan's mirror stage theory explains an important stage in how a person's identity is formed. It happens when a baby first sees itself in a mirror and recognizes its reflection. The baby feels a sense of wholeness, but this is only an illusion underneath, the self is still divided and incomplete. Language and culture later add to this division, shaping how people see themselves. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf shows a similar idea. When a woman looks at herself in a mirror, she doesn't see a complete or confident person. Instead, she sees a reflection that has been broken and shaped by years of male control and the way society has defined women. Virginia Woolf's narrator says, Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. This means that for centuries, women have been treated like mirrors their role has been to make men feel stronger and more important, rather than to see themselves as independent people.

In Lacan's theory, this shows how women are placed in the position of the Other in a male centered world. They are seen as reflections that help define men's identity, but they are not given the same chance to express or define themselves. Lacan says that the mirror stage is a moment when a child moves from feeling incomplete to imagining a complete version of themselves. In the same way, Woolf's female narrator feels a deep sense of lack she cannot see herself as an independent person and she tries to find that missing wholeness through writing. But unlike the child in Lacan's theory, who becomes part of the world of language and identity, Woolf's woman is shut out of it. The male dominated universities, libraries, and literary traditions represent this closed world. Because she is excluded from these spaces, her sense of self remains broken. She can only exist as a reflection created by others, not as the starting point of her own story.

According to Lacan, when a person enters the symbolic order, they become part of the world of language, rules, and culture a world controlled by what he calls the Name of the Father, or the power of male authority. In this system, women are defined not by who they are, but by what they supposedly lack the same authority and recognition that men have. In *A Room of One's Own*, this idea appears clearly when the woman narrator tries to enter the Oxbridge library but is stopped by a man who waves her away. "Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the library is closed to women unless accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction" (Virginia Woolf, p.8). This moment shows how men control access to knowledge and culture, just like the law of the father in Lacan's theory. Woolf also shows this struggle through her shifting narrative voice using names like I, Mary Beton, Mary Seton and Mary Carmichael.

Luce Irigaray says that in a male centered world, women have always been treated as mirrors, as the other, or as something missing. Woolf's narrator understands this well she knows that women's voices and writing have long been controlled and defined by men. Irigaray also says that when a woman speaks honestly about herself and her body, she breaks the rules made by men. "For most of history, Anonymous was a woman" (Virginia Woolf, p.51). Woolf's narrator does exactly this she takes back her voice and refuses to exist only as a reflection of men's ideas. So, *A Room of One's Own* is more than just an essay about money or space. It is Woolf's attempt to create her own space in language a symbolic "room" where a woman can speak freely, in her own voice. In this way, Woolf's writing itself becomes an act of independence and self-expression.

In Lacan's theory, every person is divided inside there's the part we are aware of the conscious, self and the hidden part made up of desires and feelings we can't fully express the unconscious. This split happens because of language: language helps us communicate, but it also separates us from our true feelings. "I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it

is worse, perhaps, to be locked in” (Virginia Woolf, p.24). For women, feminist thinkers who followed Lacan say this division is even deeper because language and culture are built around male power. In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf’s narrator feels this same inner conflict. She says, I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse, perhaps, to be locked in. This shows her struggle between two painful states being shut out of society unable to speak or be seen and being trapped within herself unable to express her thoughts. Writing becomes both a risk and a release when she writes, she opens herself to the world, but staying silent would mean staying imprisoned inside her own mind.

Julia Kristeva, in her essay *Women’s Time*, explains two kinds of language: the symbolic, which follows logical, structured, and male-centered rules, and the semiotic, which comes from emotion, rhythm, and the body especially the maternal or feminine side. Woolf’s poetic and flowing style of writing often moves toward this semiotic language. For example, when her narrator talks about the little fish slipping between the reeds of her thoughts, it suggests a natural, emotional movement of ideas and imagination. “Fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact” (Virginia Woolf, p.5). a kind of writing that is free and not limited by strict rules. Helene Cixous calls this kind of expression *écriture féminine* or writing the body. She says that women must write about themselves and express their own experiences openly. Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* does this long before Cixous it shows a woman writer trying to connect her thoughts, feelings, and body through her own words, creating a new kind of feminine writing and identity.

In the last chapter of *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf talks about the idea of androgyny, saying that it is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly. Some people think she means that gender should not matter, but from a Lacanian point of view, this idea goes deeper. Woolf’s androgynous mind can be seen as an effort to bring together the two sides of the self to heal the inner split and move beyond society’s strict divisions between male and female. “It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly” (Virginia Woolf, p.102). In Lacan’s theory, this kind of balance allows access to *jouissance*, a deep form of pleasure or creative fulfilment that lies beyond the limits of male-centered language and control. Irigaray describes feminine *jouissance* as multiple and fluid something that cannot be trapped by rigid, logical systems. In the same way, Woolf’s idea of androgyny represents a blending of masculine and feminine qualities in harmony, where both can exist freely without one dominating the other.

This idea in *A Room of One’s Own* is both hopeful and psychological. Woolf imagines a state of wholeness, where a person’s inner conflicts are healed. She says, the mind must be porous if it is to be creative, meaning that an open and flexible mind allows for true creativity. “The mind must lie wide open if it is to receive the impressions” (Virginia Woolf, p.110). Her idea of the androgynous mind doesn’t erase the differences between male and female; instead, it combines them in balance like in Lacan’s idea of the early imaginary stage, where identity is still fluid and equal. But Woolf also understands that this perfect balance is hard to achieve in real life. The inner split the tension between different parts of them self never fully disappears. In fact, it becomes the driving force behind creativity and writing. When Woolf says, there must be freedom and there must be peace. Freedom to think of things in themselves, she means that true liberation is both outer social freedom and inner mental or emotional freedom. Together, these form the core of feminist and psychological freedom that Woolf dreams of.

For both Woolf and Lacan, language is where a person’s identity and desires meet. But while Lacan says the unconscious mind is shaped like a language, Woolf shows that this language itself is built in a male-centered way. So, for a woman to express herself, she must create a new kind of language one that can speak from the silent, hidden parts of the feminine mind. Woolf’s story

of “Shakespeare’s sister,” Judith, is a symbol of this idea. “Any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village” (Virginia Woolf, p.48). Judith represents all the talented women in history who were never allowed to write or speak. Her story, buried by patriarchy, becomes what Freud would call “the return of the repressed” something forgotten that comes back in another form.

When Woolf says, she lives in you and in me for great poets are not born among slaves, she means that the spirit of those silenced women still lives within modern women writers. “She lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here tonight, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed” (Virginia Woolf, p.113). In this way, *A Room of One’s Own* is both sad and hopeful. It mourns how patriarchy has broken women’s sense of self, but it also celebrates the act of rebuilding creating a new language and identity through which women can finally speak for themselves.

Through the view of Lacanian feminism, *A Room of One’s Own* is not just a call for women’s financial and social independence. It also explores how women understand themselves and deal with inner conflict. The narrator shows a divided self a mind torn between being shut out of the male dominated world and the desire to find wholeness through writing and imagination. By using language as a creative and personal space a kind of room within society Woolf predicts the ideas of later feminist thinkers like Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva, who connected language, the unconscious mind, and the female body.

Her idea of an androgynous mind shows her hope for a balanced mind that combines both masculine and feminine sides, going beyond traditional gender divisions. In the end, *A Room of One’s Own* tells the story of a woman’s journey from silence to expression, from confusion to clarity, and from being ignored to becoming a writer. Woolf’s essay is therefore not just feminist, but also deeply psychological showing how writing can heal the divided self and give women a voice of their own.

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