**A Room of One's Own**

**A Feminist perspective**

**Feminism:**

*‘I have the feelings of a woman, but I have only the*

*language of men’ (E II: 67. Far From the*

*Madding Crowd ).*

Feminism is a diverse collection of social theories, political movements, and moral philosophies, largely motivated by or concerning the experiences of womenThe term feminism describes political, cultural, and economic movements that aim to establish equal rights and legal protections for women (Drucker). . Most feminists are especially concerned with social, political, and economic inequality between men and women; some have argued that gendered and sexed identities, such as "man" and "woman," are socially constructed. Feminists differ over the sources of inequality, how to attain equality, and the extent to which gender and sexual identities should be questioned and critiqued. Thus, as with any ideology, political movement or philosophy, there is no single, universal form of feminism that represents all feminists. Women have advocated for gaining political and social rights associated with their right for property, voting; body integrity and autonomy; abortion and prenatal care; protection from violence, sexual harassment, and rape; they also claimed for having rights in workplace such as the right for maternity leave and equal pay; and against all forms of discrimination women encounter. Nancy Hewitt writes, “…the propagation of new waves was not simply a means to recognize distinct eruptions of activism across time. Feminists in each wave viewed themselves as improving upon, not just building on, the waves that preceded them. Thus even as advocates of women’s liberation in the 1960s and 1970s eagerly sought out foremothers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we frequently insisted that we were broader in our vision, more international in our concerns, and more progressive in our sensitivities to race, class, and sexual politics than earlier activists” (Hewitt, 2012: 661).

Feminist history can be divided into three waves. The first-wave refers to the feminism movement of the nineteenth through early twentieth centuries, first-wave feminism focused mainly on suffrage and overturning legal obstacles to gender equality (e.g., voting rights and property rights). The value of first wave feminism can be found in that it forged a new path for women to gain agency and autonomy in the largely male-dominated social organization

***Suffrage abroad***

***At the same time, British suffragists (and their opponents) watched developments abroad with interest. One woman remarked that ‘scarcely anything does more good to women’s suffrage in England than seeing those who speak from personal experience’. In fact, Antipodean examples seemed particularly encouraging. In New Zealand, women could***

***vote from 1893; in Australia, state after state granted women the vote during the 1890s, until in 1902 women could finally vote in Federal elections. A conservative (male) professor remarked, darkly, in 1904, that ‘I think Australia is doomed’. (On the other hand, Australian Aboriginals, male or female, could not vote until the late 1960s.) In America, the states, one by one, enfranchised white women; by 1914, women could vote in 11 states, though they had to wait until 1919 for the national vote. Denmark enfranchised women in 1915, and the Netherlands in 1919.***

Mary Wollstonecraft, whose Vindication of the Rights of Women, published in Britain in 1792, is widely recognized as the first substantial and systematic feminist treatise.

The second-wave (1960s-1980s) dealt with the inequality of laws, as well as cultural inequalities. second-wave feminism broadened the debate to include a wider range of issues: sexuality, family, the workplace, reproductive rights, de facto inequalities, and official legal inequalities. Clare Snyder argues that the second wave is a common experience of the oppressive patriarchal forces. “In short, classic second-wave feminism argues that in patriarchal society women share common experiences, and through a sharing of their experiences with one another in consciousness-raising (CR) groups, they can generate knowledge about their own oppression” (Snyder, 2008: 184).

The third-wave of Feminism (1990s-present), is seen as both a continuation of and a response to the perceived failures of the second-wave” (New World Encyclopedia, 2017). Third-wave feminists embraced individualism in women and diversity and sought to redefine what it meant to be a feminist. It emerged in the mid-1990s, led by Generation X, and gave rise to significant developments and changes. “The third wave was made possible by the greater economic and professional power and status achieved by women of the second wave.

**Feminist quotations:**

Crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs.

And I, too, said nothing, showed nothing; I didn't open my mouth, I didn't repaint my half of the world. I was ashamed. I was afraid, and I swallowed my shame and my fear. I said to myself: You are mad!

**Hélène Cixous, The Laugh of the Medusa**

contemplative purity,' is a life of silence, a life that has no pen and no story, while a life of female rebellion, of 'significant action,' is a life that must be silenced, a life whose monstrous pen tells a terrible story.

**Sandra M. Gilbert, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer**

**and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**

To be feminine is to show oneself as weak, futile, passive, and docile. The girl is supposed not only to primp and dress herself up but also to repress her spontaneity and substitute for it the grace and charm she has been taught by her elder sisters. Any self-assertion will take away from her femininity and her seductiveness.”

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.

“..her wings are cut and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly.”

“Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth.”

**Simone de Beauvoir , The Second Sex**

women who 'adjust' as housewives, who grow up wanting to be 'just a housewife,' are in as much danger as the millions who walked to their own death in the concentration camps...they ate suffering a slow death of mind and spirit.

As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night- she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question-- 'Is this all?

**Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique**

**VIRGINIA WOOLF (1882-1941)**

“The question now inevitably asks itself, whether the lives of great men only

should be recorded”.

The Art of Biography (1939)

VIRGINIA WOOLF is an English writer, essayist and feminist. She is considered one of the most important modernist 20th-century authors and a pioneer in the use of stream of consciousness as a narrative device. As a young girl, Virginia was curious, light-hearted and playful. She started a family newspaper, the Hyde Park Gate News, to document her family’s humorous anecdotes. However, early traumas darkened her childhood, including being sexually abused by her half-brothers George and Gerald Duckworth, which she wrote about in her essays A Sketch of the Past and 22 Hyde Park Gate. In 1895, at the age of 13, she also had to cope with the sudden death of her mother from rheumatic fever, which led to her first mental breakdown, and the loss of her half-sister Stella, who had become the head of the household, two years later.

Woolf came to know the founders of the the Bloomsbury Group. She became an active member of this literary circle. Woolf's changing representation of feminism in publications from 1920 to 1940 parallels her involvement with the contemporary women's movement (suffragism and its descendants, and the pacifist, working-class Women's Co-operative Guild). Black guides us through Woolf's feminist connections and writings, including her public letters from the 1920s as well as "A Society," A Room of One's Own, and the introductory letter to Life As We Have Known It. She assesses the lengthy development of Three Guineas from a 1931 lecture and the way in which the form and illustrations of the book serve as a feminist subversion of male scholarship. Virginia Woolf as Feminist concludes with a discussion of the continuing relevance of Woolf's feminism for third-millennium politics.

**A R OO M O F O N E’ S O W N**

In 1929, Woolf published A Room of One's Own, a feminist essay based on lectures she had given at women's colleges, in which she examines women's role in literature. In the work, she sets forth the idea that “A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.” Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own is arguably the founding text of twentieth century feminist literary criticism, and along with her essays ‘Women and Fiction’ and ‘Professions for Woman’, which take up similar themes, forms the core of her thinking on the relationship of women and fiction.

The starting premise of her argument in all three is a fundamentally material one: ‘a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction’ (AROO: 4). The demands of the domestic household, the laws that denied married women ownership of funds or property, and a lack of educational opportunity, made it almost impossible for a woman before the nineteenth century to take up writing as a profession.Writing requires time, privacy and literacy, and women suffered from too little of all of these things.Woolf then elaborates a range of theories – about the exclusion of women from literary history, the construction of ‘femininity’ within patriarchal discourse, the importance of a tradition or heritage of women’s writing, the relation of sex and genre, and the gendered qualities of literary style – which pre-empt many of those taken up in more recent cultural and literary analysis.Anxious that her polemical argument for women’s financial and social independence from men would provoke a negative response among the largely male critical institution, she awaited reviews with considerable nervousness: ‘I shall be attacked for a feminist and hinted at for a Sapphist’, she noted in her diary, ‘I am afraid it will not be taken seriously’ (D III: 262).