

Feminine power in "A Room of One's Own"

Romane Crépy-Banfin

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Feminine Power in *A Room of One's Own*

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INTRODUCTION

"The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself[1]*."*

That is what Virginia Woolf stated in her now renowned essay *A Room of One's Own*. Indeed, the fight for women's rights and freedom has always been an issue-rising question for some men, and that was especially true during Woolf's era. She witnessed, for example, the birth of the first suffragist movement at a time when the codes of the Victorian society were still very powerful. One can wonder why, throughout history, some men have always been reluctant to give women the freedom they are owed. And, what can explain that some would even argue and fight against this emancipation.

Virginia Woolf is often considered as one of the foremost writers of the 20th century. She was born in London in 1882 in a wealthy Victorian family. Her father, Leslie Stephen, was an important literary figure and her older sister Vanessa Bell was a renowned painter. In 1912, she married Leonard Woolf, a British man of letters, journalist and publisher, together they founded The Hogarth Press in 1917 where they published works by key modernist writers ; it also allowed the Woolfs to publish their own works, which gave Virginia the freedom to develop her experimental style. Woolf started writing when she was very young and her first novel *The Voyage Out* was published in 1915, it was followed by bestsellers such as *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), or *The Waves* (1931), she was a very prolific writer until her death in 1941. Although she is mostly known for her fictional works and the role she played in the Bloomsbury Group and the modernist movement especially for using stream of consciousness in her narrations, she also wrote a lot of non-fiction including letters, diaries, memoirs and essays on artistic theory, women's writing or literary history for example. Besides her writing, Virginia and her husband Leonard had a real impact on the cultural life around them, their house in Sussex became an important place of gathering for the Bloomsbury Group, a literary and art circle, composed of intellectuals of the time such as Roger Fry, Arthur Waley, Victoria Sackville-West, John Maynard Keynes or Lytton Strachey.

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[1] Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One's Own*. (1929) London, 2003, Penguin Classics, p. 57
In the rest of my dissertation this reference will be abbreviated to *AROOO*.

Her essay *A Room of One's Own* was published in 1929, this work is divided into six parts in which she explores the history of women's writing and women in literature through the prism of social and material conditions as well as historical and contextual elements. The roots of her reflection were a series of lectures about Women and Fiction she was invited to deliver at Newnham College and Girton College, which at the time were the only two women's colleges in Cambridge. Nowadays, thanks to the rise of feminist ideas, this essay is probably one of her most famous works and certainly a key text in feminist literary criticism. It is considered as a landmark in twentieth century feminist thinking. However, it was not until the 1970s that the second-wave feminists started to use it as a manifest for their ideas.

The main thesis of *A Room of One's Own,* "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction[2]", opened to discussion the question of women's place in society and more precisely in literature in relation to their economic independence throughout history. It is, still today, a watchword of feminist thoughts and debates.

In form as well as in content, this essay is experimental and innovative as it modifies the codes of the genre. For the sake of this analysis, several points of interest will be considered, including the questions of gender, context, form and style.

A Room of One's Own, a feminist pamphlet?

This idea is debatable, it is more complex than that, and needs to be developed. Indeed, at first sight, the lack of economic independence seems to be at the centre of the argument when talking about the place of women in literature. But it was not written as a feminist essay in the first place. The essay advocates the differences between sexes, but what Woolf points out is that women have not been allowed to develop their creativity and their own style, because they lacked the time, money and privacy to do so due to historical context or Victorian codes and values. Women's creativity has been inhibited by centuries of financial and educational disadvantages. According to Woolf, "intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor.[3]" As a result, from the beginning of time,

[2] *AROOO, p. 6.*
[3] *AROOO,* p. 106.

literature has always been men's business, as they were the ones with money, education and freedom.

What is remarkable in *A Room of One's Own* is the way the argumentation is built. Anne Fernald said in her study that Woolf's mode of argumentation is based on subversion rather than confrontation[4]. And that is exactly what feminine power is about, according to Frédéric Regard[5]. Indeed, he makes a difference between the words femininity, feminism and the feminine. Those three words all refer to women obviously but not in the same sense, they do not define the same things. According to him, " La *féminité* est un mythe. […] Le *féminisme* se veut une contre-interpellation du mythe […] Le féminin est un « post-féminisme[6] »". Therefore, the notion of femininity refers to the ideal of womanhood in its original sense, feminism is a confrontation and questioning of this ideal of femininity, and the notion of "the feminine" involves a reinvention, a way of reworking the myt , it refers to a postfeminist thinking and writing process. For example, the way Woolf gets away from patriarchal gender roles and pre-existent systems of thought and writing by avoiding confrontation is part of this feminine power Regard refers to. She also uses different points of view and genres which allow her to subvert her writing in order to make her point and reject biological determinism and male dominance.

That is why, the body of my analysis will be focused on the relations between subversion and feminine power. How does subversion, rather than straight confrontation, allow Woolf to advocate as well as demonstrate a new kind of power for women by challenging the laws of patriarchy?

I will start by analysing how history and context have always tipped the scales in favour of men, and in what ways the balance of power was distorted in the post-Victorian era Virginia Woolf was brought up in. Then, I will study how female writers still managed to assert their power, and what good it would do to women and especially to women writers to break away from confrontation. And finally, my last part will focus on how she, herself, puts the results of her reflection into practice, by deconstructing a pre-existent system of thought and by acting out what she is advocating.

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[4] "*A Room of One's Own*, Personal Criticism, and the Essay." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 40, no. 2, 1994, pp. 165–189.
[5] Regard, Frédéric, *La Force du Féminin,* Paris, La Fabrique, 2002.
[6] *Ibid*, pp. 5-6.

I. HISTORY AND CONTEXT TIPPING THE SCALE IN FAVOUR OF MEN

Throughout history, the balance of power between men and women has never been equal. Most societies were male centred, and women just seen as part of the draft but not as real members of these societies. This part will analyse how women had no chance to compete with men whatsoever and especially when it comes to literature. In different parts of her essay, Woolf develops several points to support this argument. She explains the different step of her thought process and how she looked for information with scientific meticulousness in history books, novel or encyclopaedias.

This part will be divided into two subparts, first I will study women's place in society, both before and during Woolf's time. My second subpart will deal with women writers more specifically, and women characters in literature, what Woolf makes of them, how she depicts them.

A. WOMEN'S PLACE IN SOCIETY

"But what I find deplorable, I continued, looking about the bookshelves again, is that nothing is known about women before the eighteenth century[7]." This quote sums up quite simply what was the place of women in society before the 18th century. Nothing can be found in the history books regarding the condition of women as it was not really at the centre of this period's worries. Women were invisible, transparent parts of history as Woolf explains:

> "Occasionally an individual woman is mentioned, an Elizabeth, or a Mary; a queen or a great lady. But by no possible means could middle-class women with nothing but brains and character at their command have taken part in any one of the great movements which, brought together, constitute the historian's view of the past[8]".

She goes on trying to figure out how the life of an Elizabethan woman would have looked like according to the history books.

> "Here I am asking why women did not write poetry in the Elizabethan age, and I am not sure how they were educated; whether they were taught to write; whether they had sitting-rooms to

[7] *AROOO*, p. 47.
[8] *AROOO*, p. 46.

> themselves; how many women had children before they were twenty-one; what, in short, they did from eight in the morning till eight at night. They had no money evidently; according to Professor Trevelyan they were married whether they liked it or not before they were out of the nursery, at fifteen or sixteen very likely. […] Cats do not go to heaven. Women cannot write the plays of Shakespeare[9]."

As a matter of fact, what Woolf suggests here is that the conditions according to which women lived in the Elizabethan age could not be in harmony with writing. Women were considered as second-class citizens and one can argue that it was like that until the late 19th century, as it was not until 1870, and the Married Women's Property Act, that married women were legally allowed to own money[10]. Before this date any earnings would automatically become their husband's property. And it was only in 1882, with the second draft of this Act, that married women were able to own and control property by themselves, without their husband's name or consent. And when a woman was not married, she was her father's responsibility, in short, women were owned. This patriarchal framework had an impact on the condition of women before the 20th century, women's lives were dictated by men's will, women had no existence without men in their lives. In the first chapter of *AROOO,* Woolf explains this situation as a reason for women before the late 19Th century not to have "learnt the great art of making money[11]".

> "Moreover, it is equally useless to ask what might have happened if Mrs Seton and her mother and her mother before her had amassed great wealth and laid it under the foundations of college and library, because, in the first place, to earn money was impossible for them, and in the second, had it been possible, the law denied them the right to possess what money they earned. It is only for the last forty-eight years that Mrs Seton has had a penny of her own. For all the centuries before that it would have been her husband's property – a thought which, perhaps, may have had its share in keeping Mrs Seton and her mothers off the Stock Exchange[12]".

What is the point of making money if the outcome is that it can't be yours, that your own earnings become your husband's property? None, according to Woolf, and this is probably one on the reasons why women have always been poor, and so from the

[9] *AROOO*, pp. 47-48.
[10] COMBS, Mary Beth. "'A Measure of Legal Independence': The 1870 Married Women's Property Act and the Portfolio Allocations of British Wives." *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 65, no. 4, 2005, pp. 1028–1057. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3874913. Accessed 1 May 2020.
[11] *AROOO*, p. 23.
[12] *AROOO*, p. 24.

beginning of time. The Married Women's Property Act of 1870 allowed this to evolve slightly.

The reign of Queen Victoria was a period of great changes for Britain with the first Industrial Revolution, technological progress, political reforms and social changes. Britain was the world's most powerful empire, and the biggest the world had ever known. Nevertheless, behind the curtains was a totally different picture. Indeed, during the Victorian era social inequalities grew like never before and the disparities between classes were unprecedented. The evolution of urban life contrasted drastically with the life of the lower classes in the countryside. The Victorian era is also associated with the expansion of the middle-class which coincides with the rapid growth of cities and the economy.

But, what about women? Well, during the Victorian era, women were supposed to have a life centred around their husband and children. Woolf described the Victorian ideal of womanhood as "the Angel in the house", referring to the famous poem written by Coventry Patmore. Women were expected to be perfect housewives, and not a lot of jobs were opened to them as Woolf explains in the second chapter of *AROOO*:

> "Before that I had made my living by cadging odd jobs from newspapers, by reporting a donkey show here or a wedding there; I had earned a few pounds by addressing envelopes, reading to old ladies, making artificial flowers, teaching the alphabet to small children in a kindergarten. Such were the chief occupations that were open to women before 1918[13]."

Woolf's upbringing had everything of a Victorian upper-class one. Her father graduated from Eton and Cambridge and was a renowned editor and literary critic and her mother was a celebrated model and a philanthropist. Both Virginia and her sister Vanessa were educated at home by tutors and widely encouraged to read, whereas their brothers were sent to the best school in England. At the time, it was not common for girls to go to school or even to be educated at all. And when women were educated, it was obviously not the same education as men. Yet, Virginia Woolf's education was highly guided by her father, a great man of letters, so she spent a great deal of time reading literary classics and learning about history, being brought up in a family of intellectual aristocrats enabled her to receive an open-minded education which probably played a part in her writing.

[13] *AROOO*, p. 39.

Virginia Woolf was well aware that her financial situation, and the education she received thanks to her parents' place in society, triggered the fact that she could become a writer, or at least made it easier for her to do so. She received a great amount of money from her aunt Caroline Stephen in 1909 when the latter died, which gave her a certain financial security and independence. But more than that, Caroline Stephen was a writer herself and a Quaker and despite her lack of formal education she published several well-received books[14], something that Woolf took as an inspiration.

What comes out of Woolf's analysis of women's place in society is that they did not have a room to write or the financial freedom to do so. Nothing in their daily lives was meant for them to become writers.

B. WOMEN WRITERS

A Room of One's Own was an opportunity for Woolf to talk about women and fiction, women writers and women characters in literature. In short, what had been the link between women and literature from the Elizabethan age until her own time. Throughout the essay she analyses the situation at different time periods, and with different points of view, sometimes even writing as a literary critic.

Starting from the Elizabethan age, she looked for information on the shelves of the British Museum, hoping to find answers to her different questions, such as:

> "why did men drink wine and woman water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor? What effect has poverty on fiction? What conditions are necessary for the creation of works of art[15]?"

Since she could not find anything about women and literature before the 17th century, she imagined why that was, she created a fictional character, and a good one at that, she invented Shakespeare's sister, Judith, a young woman who was as talented as her brother when it comes to writing. And she rolled out what her life would have been in the Elizabethan age, the conclusion being, without surprise, that she would not have found the fame her brother did, and her gift for writing would even have led to her death. First of all, Shakespeare's sister would not have had the chance to be educated,

[14] https://quaker.org/legacy/fqa/types/t21-woolf.html
[15] *AROOO*, p. 27.

she would have been forced into marriage at a very young age and beaten by her father if she had refused. And if she had gone to London in the hope of becoming an actress, she would have ended up bearing the child of a man who took pity on her, and she would have killed herself. "That, more or less, is how the story would run, I think, if a woman in Shakespeare's day had had Shakespeare's genius[16]."

> "This may be true or it may be false—who can say?—but what is true in it, so it seemed to me, reviewing the story of Shakespeare's sister as I had made it, is that 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, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty. […] To have lived a free life in London in the sixteenth century would have meant for a woman who was poet and playwright a nervous stress and dilemma which might well have killed her. Had she survived, whatever she had written would have been twisted and deformed, issuing from a strained and morbid imagination. And undoubtedly, I thought, looking at the shelf where there are no plays by women, her work would have gone unsigned. […] That woman, then, who was born with a gift of poetry in the sixteenth century, was an unhappy woman, a woman at strife against herself. All the conditions of her life, all her own instincts, were hostile to the state of mind which is needed to set free whatever is in the brain[17]."

What it comes down to is that women did not write, or at least did not write to be published in the 16th century. They did not hold the right cards to be able to have an impact on literature. Elizabethan women were limited by the condition of their sex, and by the weight of a patriarchal framework which prevented them from having the freedom needed to create a work of art. And when they did create works of art, they did not sign them, because who would ever read something written by a woman at that time? No one. It was more efficient to leave the author hidden than to put a woman's name on it.

With the 17th century came a great turn; indeed, Woolf did find some works written by women on the shelves of the British Museum. And there is one name to be remembered, which is Aphra Behn. I'll analyse later in my second part the impact she had upon literature, but what can be said now is that thanks to her came some great

[16] *AROOO*, p. 50.
[17] *AROOO*, pp. 51-52

names that are still recognised today. In fact, towards the end of the 18th century, "the middle-class woman began to write[18]." Jane Austen, George Eliot, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, finally Woolf could find more shelves dedicated to women's works. However, a new interrogation came to her mind, as these women were all novelists. Why did they only write novels? Why was fiction their only aspiration? Why did they not write essays or poetry, even if it was what they were good at? The answers she found were that fiction required less concentration than poetry or a play[19], it was easier to be interrupted and go back to it, women would write in their sitting-rooms so as a matter of fact there would be moments where they would have to stop what they were doing. The second part of the answer is that the novel was a young genre, there was not a lot of existing novel masterpiece. So, there was not so much expectations as with the older genres of writings, women were able to adapt, mould the novel to their own requirements:

> "There is no reason to think that the form of the epic or of the poetic play suits a woman any more than the sentence suits her. But all the older forms of literature were hardened and set by the time she became a writer. The novel alone was young enough to be soft in her hands – another reason, perhaps, why she wrote novels.

Women did not write poetry, according to Woolf, the reason for that is material, she demonstrates nearly scientifically that from the beginning women had no chance whatsoever to compete with men:

> "Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time. Women have had less intellectual freedom than the sons of Athenian slaves. Women, then, have not had a dog's chance of writing poetry[20]."

Nineteenth-century women writers, at least the ones Woolf named, had one thing in common, one thing that linked them, they did not have children. Jane Austen, George Eliot, Emily and Charlotte Brontë were childless, which means that they had time they could "call their own". In that sense they differed from the typical Victorian women, indeed as Laura Marcus states in her work *Writers and their Works : Virginia Woolf* published in 1997, "Victorian mothers were engaged in the production of children; the nineteenth-century women writers Woolf names were linked, she notes, by their

[18] *AROOO*, p. 66.
[19] *AROOO*, p. 67.
[20] *AROOO*, p. 106

childlessness[21].” These women had a certain freedom compared to their female contemporaries; they resisted the pressure for motherhood that the Victorian society put on their shoulders.

Nevertheless, to a certain extent, one can question the fact that some women writers never really managed to set themselves free from the expectations of their society, however one can also argue that, on the contrary, they did find a way to get around these expectations. Writers such as George Eliot, George Sand or Currer Bell chose to adopt a man’s name, to write under a male pseudonym. This trick is like a two-sided coin; indeed, it is a way to break free from what is expected of women writers, but on the other side what it shows is the perpetual invisibilization of women. According to Woolf, “anonymity runs in (women’s) blood[22]”, as for what history shows, works signed Anon. were probably written by women.

The fact that a depersonalized work had more value than a woman’s work clearly shows how seriously women were taken. Interestingly, (or should I say sadly) that might still be the case nowadays. Take J.K Rowling for instance, she had to make her name look like a man’s name (or at least less like a woman’s name) in order to be taken seriously by publishers. Afterwards, of course her works were received with all the fame they deserved, but my point is that in order to claim what was hers she had to hide behind initials.

As far as female Victorian writers were concerned, they did not only write novels anymore, the variety goes from Greek archaeology, history, plays to books about science and economics. Woolf suggests that women “may be beginning to use writing as an art, not as a method of self-expression[23].”

The important turn brought about by female Victorian novelists concerns women characters. Indeed, before that, women characters did not have an existence of their own, they were in the draft because male characters existed, women characters in fiction were just secondary characters without any depth or specific interest.

> “All these relationships between women, I thought, rapidly recalling the splendid gallery of fictitious women, are too simple. So much has been left out, unattempted. […] But almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men. It was strange to think that all the

[21] MARCUS, Laura, 1997, *Writers and their Works: Virginia Woolf*, Plymouth, Northcote House, p. 57.
[22] *AROOO*, p. 52
[23] *AROOO*, p. 79.

> great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen's day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex. And how small a part of a woman's life is that[24]"

To understand the reason of this simplicity, the only thing one needs to do is to look at history books, context, and women's place in society before the 20th century. In the second chapter of the essay Virginia Woolf was stunned by the number of books about women she found on the shelves of the British Museum, but more precisely by the number which were written by men[25]. After some digging, the result was clear: "women do not write books about men[26]." Here again, the disparity between sexes couldn't be more explicit.

By writing and publishing these questionings in 1929, Virginia Woolf was one of the first female writers to reflect upon women in literature, one could believe that at the time, everybody would agree with her on the fact women could write as well as men. Nevertheless, in 1928, *Life and Letters*, a literary journal published an article in which this sentence appeared: "female novelists should only aspire to excellence by courageously acknowledging the limitations of their sex[27]".

Bearing that in mind, Woolf scrupulously deconstructed every inch of this argument by asserting female power.

[24] *AROOO*, p. 82.
[25] *AROOO*, p. 28.
[26] *AROOO*, p. 29.
[27] *AROOO*, p. 75.

II. ASSERTION OF FEMALE POWER

In order to deconstruct this argument Woolf enhanced women writers' accomplishments through time, and she proved that some women writers opened a path, moved the boundaries, in order to change the history of literature. This part will be divided into two subparts, in the first one I will analyse what women writers were able to create even with the constraints that were theirs. And the second part will focus on how the binary male/female was pulled apart by women writers and by Woolf herself.

A. WHAT WOMEN WRITERS MANAGED TO CREATE

As we have seen above, women had to face all sorts of constraints if they were to write, and to make a living out of their writings. And what Woolf praises in *A Room of One's Own* is how some women managed to leave their mark on literature by acknowledging and getting around these limitations. Throughout the essay she points out women's strength, she demonstrates that women had something to bring to literature, she shows how women before her succeeded in moving the boundaries which were holding them back, or in the position of the "fairer sex".

And the first female writer to open a path for women was Aphra Behn, according to Woolf. She was a middle-class woman who after the death of her husband decided to make money out of her writings, and that at the end of the 17th century. She is still nowadays considered as a pioneer, as she was one of the first professional woman of letters in England and the first to publish a play. Aphra Behn proved that women could earn money by the pen, and all women should be thankful to her:

> "All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, which is, most scandalously but rather appropriately, in Westminster Abbey, for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds[28]."

As a middle-class woman writer, Behn also opened fiction, and literature in general, to classes that were not given a voice before that, indeed literature was formerly written by and for the upper classes, the ones that had received an education. Aphra Behn gave a voice to women, first, but also to the lower classes. She widened literature and writing

[28] *AROOO*, p. 66.

to groups of people who were ruled out of it before. Behn is considered by Woolf as the woman who allowed female writing.

Considering the time during which she lived and her class, Aphra Behn's oeuvre is of prime importance when talking about women and literature. She influenced every single female writer who came after her. In that sense, she was a powerful woman, and still is, she gave women writers something they could hope for; a woman who writes could make a living out of her pen. And as explained above, by the end of the 18th century, more middle-class women wrote.

Woolf picks four of them, Jane Austen, George Eliot and Charlotte and Emily Brontë. As explained before, the thing these women had in common was their childlessness, but also their social class. None of them came from a very wealthy family. The four of them wrote novels, novels which are still today of major importance for literature. But how did these women write?

It is not without an ounce of humour that Woolf explains how they dealt with the sentence which was believed to be the perfect sentence at the time, how they rearranged the words so that they could fit their own minds, but according to Virginia Woolf, only Jane Austen managed the trick:

> "The sentence that was current at the beginning of the nineteenth century ran something like this perhaps: 'The grandeur of their works was an argument with them, not to stop short, but to proceed.' […] That is a man's sentence; behind it one can see Johnson, Gibbon and the rest. It was a sentence that was unsuited for a woman's use. Charlotte Brontë, with all her splendid gift for prose, stumbled and fell with that clumsy weapon in her hands. George Eliot committed atrocities with it that beggar description. Jane Austen looked at it and laughed at it and devised a perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use and never departed from it[29]."

Jane Austen created her own sentence, she invented something that could be hers, and only hers. Together with Emily Brontë, they were the only ones to stand out from the rest of their contemporary female writers.

> "they wrote as women write, not as men write. Of all the thousand women who wrote novels then, they alone entirely ignored the perpetual admonitions of the eternal pedagogue – write this, think that[30]."

[29] *AROOO*, p. 77.
[30] *AROOO*, p. 75.

Woolf praises the way they wrote, without obeying to any male writing rules, they created their own style. A style that belonged to them, recognisable at first sight. She even compares Austen's writing to Shakespeare's, explaining that she wrote "without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching[31]." Being a woman, with all it implies, did not influence the quality of her work in the slightest. This was not true for Charlotte Brontë for example, but the point here is that Woolf, by depicting the nature of the works by these women writers, claims that they left a certain legacy, their names are as famous as some men's names. Quoting these great women's names in *A Room of One's Own* is a way for Woolf to acknowledge and to pay tribute to the path they helped building, to the boundaries they crossed and to the literary tradition they left as a legacy for future generations of women writers.

Finding their own path wasn't something easy for women writers, even during Woolf's time. In order to write, and to write well, women had to set themselves free from expectations, and what most female writers did during the 19th century was to write in opposition to men. By doing so, they trapped themselves and their works in the accepted masculine style of their time[32]. The blame, however, can't be put on them, they were bound by the chains of patriarchy, and the opinions of others. As a result, their writings were marked by this rancour against the other sex, and against society in general. In *Jane Eyre*, for example, Woolf argues that "anger was tampering with the integrity of Charlotte Brontë the novelist[33]." Brontë's own condition had an impact on her writing, but not the one it should have had if we follow Woolf in her argumentation. Now, one can wonder where this anger comes from, what are the roots of the resentment leaving stains on Charlotte Brontë's work, but probably other women writers too.

In one of her other essays, entitled *Professions for Women*, published posthumously in 1942 in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*[34], Virginia Woolf partly answers the questions regarding this bitterness, this anger, or whatever one might like to call it, which impacts nineteenth century women's writings. She personalizes it as a woman, but not any woman; she names her "The Angel in the House", after the

[31] *AROOO*, p. 68.
[32] http://movies2.nytimes.com/books/00/12/17/specials/woolf-room.html
[33] *AROOO*, p. 73.
[34] WOOLF, Virginia, 1942, *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*, London/New-York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

character from Coventry Patmore's poem first published in 1854. This Angel is the perfect Victorian housewife, a metaphor for what was expected of women at the time. Woolf defines her as a "phantom", a ghostly presence which was always lurking over her shoulder when she wrote.

> "And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House. It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews[35]."

For those who might not know her, as this was a speech delivered in 1931 in front of the Women's Service League, before being abbreviated and turned into an essay, Woolf goes on describing The Angel in the House, a perfect image of the Victorian woman:

> "She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it – in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all – I need not say it – she was pure[36]."

The irony is palpable when reading these lines. The excessiveness of the adjectives she uses to describe this woman becomes quite humorous. It also highlights what Woolf wasn't, and what she didn't want to be anyway. But then, how does one get rid of this phantom? How can one write without being held by the chains of one's own society? Well, women must kill the Angel in their house because she is the obstacle limiting women's intellectual freedom. Woolf even goes as far as saying "I killed her. […] I acted in self-defence. Had I not killed her she would have killed me[37]." The phantom would have killed her freedom of thought, if she had not stopped her. Because a good Victorian woman would never talk about such issues as morality, sex, or even politics. Women must have a mind of their own if they are to write, so that is why "killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer[38]." They had to get rid of the expectations of their society, they had to free themselves from other people's judgement and they had to think and write by their own minds. Again, this was far from easy during the Victorian era, or even at the beginning of the 20th century, so every woman who wrote and published a literary work of art should be acclaimed with respect

[35] *Ibid,* p. 236.
[36] *Ibid*, p. 237.
[37] *Ibid*, pp. 237-238
[38] *Ibid*, p. 238.

as she would have had to win the fight against the Angel in her House, which was not a reality but something like a dark storming cloud hanging above a woman's head. And as Woolf notes: "it is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality[39]", it is way harder to fight against something that has a reality only if you allow it to have one, than against something which really exists. The Angel in the House was an ideal built throughout generations of patriarchal domination, meaning that it was anchored in the customs of society, and worse it was even instilled in women throughout their education.

By highlighting all the struggles women writers were to face, Woolf enhances the value of their works as writers. She points out what they were able to create even with the limitations that were imposed on them by society. She celebrates and asserts *female* power.

B. PULLING APART THE BINARY FEMALE/MALE

As we have seen, throughout *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf praises all the generations of women writers who widened the fields of literature by overcoming the expectations of their society. Now, still looking for information on the shelves of the British Museum, Woolf found herself in front of the living writers, her contemporaries. She opens a book by a certain Mary Carmichael and starts reading what women write in her days. What strikes her is that Mary Carmichael breaks away from the usual sequence of the novel, she drifts the focus from the usual man / woman relationships to relationships between women. "'Chloe liked Olivia', I read. And then it struck me how immense a change was there. Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature[40]." Putting homosexuality on paper at the beginning of the 20th century was a challenging task. Woolf ironically expresses it in these lines:

> "I turned the page and read… I am sorry to break off so abruptly. Are there no men present? Do you promise me that behind that red curtain over there the figure of Sir Charles Biron is not concealed? We are all women you assure me? Then I may tell you that the very next words I read were these – 'Chloe liked Olivia…' Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women[41]."

[39] *Ibid*.
[40] *AROOO*, p. 81.
[41] *Ibid.*

Can you feel the irony in her words? Can you sense the depth of these sentences? The Angel in the House is far gone. Sexuality and especially non-heterosexual sexuality weren't something any good Victorian woman would talk about. As interesting as it might be, lesbianism was even rarer than homosexuality in literature[42], probably for all the reason we went through above. The subject of homosexuality was nearly absent from literature before, and these 'obscure lives' were given a voice for the first time in history. But it did not only include women, it gave a voice to people who were silenced by society beforehand.

Carmichael writes with something new, a new approach, Woolf argues that the way she sees and considers men explains a lot:

> "Men were no longer to her 'the opposing faction'; she need not waste her time railing against them; she need not climb on to the roof and ruin her piece of mind longing for travel, experience, and a knowledge of the world and character that were denied her. Fear and hatred were almost gone, or traces of them showed only in a slight exaggeration of the joy of freedom, a tendency to the caustic and satirical, rather than to the romantic, in her treatment of the other sex[43]."

Unlike 19th century women writers, Carmichael does not write in opposition to men, she does not write to prove anything about her sex. She does not write with fear or hatred for the other sex, she does not write to contradict men or to show that one sex is superior to the other. She just writes, without inhibitions of the past, without thinking about her condition or her sex: "She wrote as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman, so that her pages were full of that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself[44]."

This last quote raises another interesting point to analyse. Indeed, "when sex is unconscious of itself" it involves that the mind is neither one sex or the other, or none of them. The question of androgyny, as a sexual identity, is central in Woolf's text as Ellen Bayuk Rosenman explains in a journal article entitled "Sexual Identity and '*A Room of One's Own*': 'Secret Economies' in Virginia Woolf's Feminist Discourse." : "androgyny offered Woolf a way of rejecting biological determinism and undoing the privileging of

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[42] TONGSON, Karen. "Lesbian Aesthetics, Aestheticizing Lesbianism." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 60, no. 3, 2005, pp. 281–290. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/ncl.2005.60.3.281.
[43] *AROOO*, pp 91-92.
[44] *AROOO*, p. 92.

the masculine over the feminine[45]". Androgyny was a way for Woolf to escape from patriarchy, in fact this idea can be illustrated with what she says about Mary Carmichael's writing. Mary Carmichael, whom Woolf invented herself by the way, was able to write without the restraint of the patriarchal society because she didn't think of her sex.

To Woolf, "it is natural for the sexes to cooperate[46]", this sentence comes as she just witnessed a normal urban scene through her window, a man and a woman entering a taxi together, and she imagines the taxi being a metaphor for the mind, and the man and the woman being the two sides of this mind: "For certainly when I saw the couple get into the taxi-cab the mind felt as if, after being divided, it had come together again in a natural fusion[47]." Thus, she argues that a mind as well as a body can combine the two sexes. As if combining the best features of each sex, and when these two sides live in harmony in the mind, the person can and must let each or the other express itself freely. She goes on thinking about Coleridge's definition of a great mind:

> "Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine, I thought[48]."

This would mean that a mind needs both a male and a feminine part to be fully creative. Woolf uses the expressions "man-womanly" and "woman-manly" to describe what would be the perfect minds for the creation of a work of art. According to her, Shakespeare had that kind of mind for example, as opposed to some male authors of her time which are referred to in her essay as "Mr A[49]", so Mr A writes well, he is direct, straightforward, his style shows his freedom of mind. However, after a few pages something seems to annoy Woolf, to discredit Mr A, and that was the word 'I', shadowing the text. Woolf states that Mr A "does it in protest. He is protesting against the equality of the other sex by asserting his own superiority[50]." This male writer uses the 'I' as a symbol for his masculinity, and to a certain extent the word 'I' can have a

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[45] ROSENMAN, Ellen Bayuk. "Sexual Identity and '*A Room of One's Own*': 'Secret Economies' in Virginia Woolf's Feminist Discourse." Signs, vol. 14, no. 3, 1989, pp. 634–650. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3174405.
[46] *AROOO*, p. 96.
[47] *Ibid*.
[48] *Ibid*, p. 97.
[49] *Ibid*, p. 98.
[50] *Ibid*, p. 99.

phallic connotation. Therefore, Mr A does not have an androgynous mind, he does not let the woman in him speak. Woolf uses this example to support the argument that a creative mind needs to be androgynous. And in the chapter from

Writers and their Work – Virginia Woolf entitled "Women and Writing: *A Room of One's Own"*, Laura Marcus states that "the concept of androgyny clearly did hold power and resonance for Woolf as a myth of creativity, operating as a perfect balancing of sexual characteristics which neutralizes excess[51]." The concept of androgyny was thus a way out of excessive masculinity as well as excessive femininity.

We have seen that androgyny as a sexual identity could be an asset for writers, both male and female writers. But now, we will see that androgyny in writing is an assertion of *feminine* power.

[51] MARCUS, Laura, 1997, *Writers and their Works: Virginia Woolf*, Plymouth, Northcote House, p. 57.

III. DECONSTRUCTION OF PRE-EXISTENT SYSTEMS OF THOUGHT

A Room of One's Own is fundamentally considered as an essay, it was indeed written to present and support a thesis, in this case it was to argue that in order to write fiction women must have money and space of their own. However, Woolf took essay writing to another level, she adapted the argumentative dimension of essay writing to suit her own mind and thoughts. She also blurred the lines between different literary genres in order to give her work the depth it needed.

This last part will first analyse how Woolf broke away from the existing codes of essay writing, how she adapted it to her own liking; and then it will discuss how her essay became a universal narrative by reinventing new codes.

A. BREAKING AWAY FROM THE EXISTING CODES OF ESSAY WRITING

According to Frédéric Regard "l'androgynie se conçoit comme une figure de style[52]", meaning that androgyny can also appear in the text itself, in and by the words, like a stylistic device. And it has nothing to do with sexuality: using androgyny as a stylistic device means that one refuses to assign one sex to a specific place and thus refutes the existence of "feminine writing". Woolf uses androgyny as a subversion, in order to avoid frontal confrontation.

But then, what is an androgynous writing? By what means does it reveal itself? Frédéric Regard gives us food for thought on that matter. Indeed, he notes that *feminine* power mainly occurs through irony: "le féminin s'opère avant tout dans l'ironie, en lui-même et pour lui-même[53]." Having that in mind it's easy to see in what sense he meant that for *A Room of One's One*. In Woolf's speech serious arguments and ideas are intertwined with sprinkles of irony. Reading *A Room of One's Own* without giving a faint smile is not fully understanding Woolf's writing. But what is even more interesting is that every reader might smile at a different moment in the text. Woolf uses irony

[52] Regard, Frédéric, *La Force du Féminin,* Paris, La Fabrique, 2002, p. 81.
[53] *Ibid*, p. 6.

between dashes or in the middle of a sentence, and that is the result of the way she writes: using stream of consciousness, as in her novels (this point will be developed later in the analysis). Irony and humour are present in the narrator's voice throughout every chapter of the essay, for example when she explains that facts are the roots of fiction: "fiction must stick to facts, and the truer the facts the better the fiction – so we are told[54]." The last four words of this sentence might suggest that the statement is arguable. But to me the place where irony is the most powerful is at the end of the essay, when Woolf addresses the women from the Colleges, she states:

> "you are, in my opinion, disgracefully ignorant. You have never made a discovery of any sort of importance. You have never shaken an empire or led an army into battle. The plays of Shakespeare are not by you, and you have never introduced a barbarous race to the blessings of civilization. What is your excuse[55]?"

Obviously, Woolf does not seriously think that, but the irony here brings depth to her words, it gives them a strong impact on the reader and probably on the women who were listening to the speech at the time. Irony is used as a tool by Woolf to avoid direct confrontation, to divert her argumentation towards something more powerful than just anger and questions like who was to blame for women's condition throughout history.

A Room of One's Own is proof that Woolf wanted to get rid of some existing codes concerning essay writing but also writing in general, no wonder then that she was part of the modernist movement. Indeed this essay has the particularity to combine theory and artistic writing, it combines fiction and non-fiction, reality and invention. She uses fiction to corroborate the facts, to support her arguments, and to fill the blanks in women's history. Laura Marcus explains it this way:

> "Woolf thus uses fictional strategies to talk about fiction and about 'women and fiction'; 'fiction' becomes a form of identity, a style and a concept, subject and object simultaneously, and not merely a genre or theme. She also represents the intertwining of fiction and history, both writing and inventing 'women's history' through fictional characters who stand for, and stand in for, the absence in historical narrative[56]."

The most striking example of the use of fiction in her argumentation is Judith Shakespeare, the famous author's gifted sister. Woolf imagines her, and what her life

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[54] *AROOO*, p. 17.
[55] *Ibid,* p. 110.
[56] MARCUS, Laura, *op. cit*. p. 47.

would have been, to explain why sixteenth century women did not write. She compares Judith's life to her brother's.

> "Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say. Shakespeare himself went, very probably – his mother was an heiress – to the grammar school, where he may have learnt Latin […] Meanwhile his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. […] But she was not sent to school[57]."

The story goes on, she would have been forced to marry a man she didn't love, she would have been beaten by her father when she refused to marry him. She, then, would have left the house for London in the hope of being an actress, but she would have found herself with child and would have killed herself. Woolf made an impressive description of what would have happened to a woman as gifted as Shakespeare during the Elizabethan period. Creating Judith allowed her to give a picture for the reader to understand with clarity what she meant.

Judith is not the only character which Woolf imagined. Mary Carmichael, the woman who wrote about Chloe and Olivia, also came from Woolf's imagination, and so did Mary Beton, Mary Seton and Mr A. But again, all these fictional characters were created for a purpose: like Judith, they all served Woolf's argumentation. Facts and fiction are so intertwined in *A Room of One's Own* that the limits between the literary genres are blurred. In the first pages of the essay, Woolf even states that "fiction here is likely to contain more truth that facts[58]." It is especially true when talking about the history of women and women in literature, since nonfictional books before the twentieth century did not record facts about women's lives. By saying so, she forces her reader to question the veracity of the facts present in patriarchal fictional and factual narratives.

> (Woolf's) "narrative strategies in her lecture about women and fiction suggest that the marriage of fiction and fact is particularly necessary if one is to write narratives about women's lives, since nonfictional narrative forms have left unrecorded the facts of women's lives, while fictional narratives have distorted or ignored the real conditions of female existence[59]"

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[57] *AROOO*, pp. 48-49.
[58] *Ibid, p. 6.*
[59] BOEHM, Beth A. "Fact, Fiction, and Metafiction: Blurred Gen(d)Res in 'Orlando' and 'A Room of One's Own.'" *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 22, no. 3, 1992, pp. 191–204. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/30225368.

By mixing the two, she also challenges the boundaries between fictional and factual genres, and the objectivity of factual works:

> "Just as contemporary metafiction raises questions about the boundaries between fictional and (f)actual worlds and about the capacity for fiction to convey truth about worlds outside the text, Woolf's self-conscious narratives raise questions about the capacity of factual genres to be objective, to tell truths[60]."

A Room of One's Own might then be considered as a metafictional work, as Woolf's narrator goes over the process of writing while writing herself. The reflection upon women and fiction takes another dimension if studied as a metafictional text. This essay is both a reflexion and a theoretical demonstration of women writing and feminine power.

Woolf's essay writing doesn't obey to any rule or logic, it creates its own logic, its own rules, and this is how Woolf's feminine power expresses itself. According to Frédéric Regard "le féminin fait désordre originairement en brouillant les concepts fondamentaux d'ordre et d'origine[61]". The plurality of points of view, for example, is something which doesn't obey to any rule, it disturbs the fluidity of the argumentation, going from 'I' to 'She' or 'One'. We can also talk about the continual dashed intrusions of the narrator, which might break or disrupt the argumentation ("But… I had said 'but' too often. One cannot go on saying 'but'. One must finish the sentence somehow[62]") or another simple example, the first word of her essay is "But", as if the reader arrived in the middle of something, as if everything which was said before had to be protested against. What is the logic of starting an essay with this word? Or what is the logic of giving the results of your entire argumentation in the first few pages of your essay? Well, it might be to break the reader's expectations right away, or the audience's because let's not forget that this text was first intended to be a lecture. Telling the reader on the second page that what her questionings came down to was that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction", might be spoiling the entire work but as a matter of fact it doesn't; on the contrary, it gives the development meaning. The reader is, right from the beginning, aware that money and space are to be considered, so he keeps these elements in mind while reading, and thus Woolf's

[60] *Ibid.*
[61] REGARD, Frédéric, *op. cit.* p. 54.
[62] *AROOO*, p. 99.

argumentations is easily flowing. The reader is asked not to expect to find some answers at the end of her essay.

By including the reader or the audience in her narrative, Woolf deconstructed the argumentative lines of the essay.

B. REINVENTING ESSAY WRITING

While reading *A Room of One's Own*, the reader feels included in the narrator's thread of reflexion. In fact, as the first sentence of the essay is directly addressed to the audience ("But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction[63]"), the readers feel invited into a conversation with the narrator, as the latter articulates the questions they might have. According to Jane Marcus:

> "her opening sentence is the continuation of an interrupted conversation in which she is only an equal partner. […] The reader is included in the 'you', so the text becomes a three-sided conversation between the woman writer, the woman students in the audience, and the woman reader[64]."

Woolf's text becomes much more than just an essay on women and fiction, it becomes a shared reflexion. And throughout the text, we find addresses to the reader which makes it feel like the reader is an important part of the argumentation. Without us, the narrator can't speak. "Our role as readers is to collaborate in this conversation, to conspire with the woman writer and the women students to overthrow the formal rigidity of the lecture[65]", what it means is that this essay is not just a monologue, going through a thinking process, it's a conversation, a discussion, and including the women audience and the women readers is also a way to triple the power of her voice. The female readers and students are not just witnessing the reflexion but taking part in it.

However, according to Boehm: "readers are not truly invited to join a conversation in this text, but instead, they are taught to acknowledge the prejudices that lie behind the conventions of so-called "factual" discourse[66]"; that would mean that the aim of this three-parties conversation is more about teaching the reader/audience how to

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[63] *AROOO*, p. 5.
[64] MARCUS, Jane, 1987, *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy*, Indiana University Press, pp. 148-149.
[65] *Ibid.*
[66] BOEHM, Beth A. *op. cit.* p. 199.

analyse her text, how to fully understand the patriarchal framework of factual narratives. In "Woolf's feminism and feminism's Woolf[67]", Laura Marcus said: "One of Woolf's 'strategies', as Caughie suggests, was the construction of the 'feminist reader'." The reader of *A Room of One's Own* is taught to take into account feminist questionings while thinking.

What Woolf brought to essay writing is also her modernist approach to writing, with stream of consciousness for example. Indeed, it is known that she uses this tool in her novels, and that in a way, she also revolutionised novel writing with it, but why would she use this tool to write an essay? To what effects? Well, it allows the reader to be carried away through every thought, surprises or discoveries the narrator goes through and to do so simultaneously, it gives rhythm to the text, and a certain suspense as well. The reader cannot predict what the narrator will think or say or do. The interruptions in the argumentation for example make the text lively, it gives it a certain reality.

> "There one might have sat the clock round lost in thought. Thought – to call it by a prouder name than it deserved – 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 […] Alas, laid on the grass how small, how insignificant this thought of mine looked[68]"

The reader is invited to blend in the narrator's thought flow. He even gets lost in her thoughts, as if her mind was his (or hers, rather). The reader witnesses every little activity in the narrator's mind, every questioning, every ironic reflexion, every step of her thinking process. And it is a rather efficient technique to guide her reader throughout her argumentation.

The plurality of voices is also something that Woolf uses to reinvent essay writing. Indeed, when she says, "call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please[69]", she could be any woman. The multiple 'Is' that we found in *AROOO* make identification easier for the reader. It is also a trick to subvert the origin

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[67] ROE, Sue; SELLER, Susan, 2000, *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, Cambridge, University Press, p. 209.
[68] *AROOO*, p. 7.
[69] *Ibid.*

of this I. Her 'I' then becomes personal but unspecific, and thus gains in persuasive power. Jade Marcus explains that:

> "She is not Virginia Woolf standing on the platform but the voice of the anonymous female victim of male violence throughout the ages. In the text she tells us that Anonymous was most often a woman. On the platform she becomes 'Anonymous' in person. She transforms herself in the narrative to the object of her narration[70]."

Here again, the idea that *AROOO* is a metafictional text is sustainable. She also gives a new meaning to the gender-free pronoun 'one'. In fact, she forces the reader to question the way words and language in general are "culturally constructed, even in their smallest and most referential units[71]". Gender-neutral pronouns such as you, we or one were used by male academics in their lectures, so she uses 'One' on purpose referring to women to protest against this fake neutrality. In her argumentation, the reader is brought to understand that the 'One' that she will use throughout her essay is actually referring to the single and collective female. This is also a subversive trick as it could be understood as a depersonalization of women, but the irony is that the result is the total opposite.

In her title, *A Room of One's Own*, the 'One' is "as female as the *one* in 'Between puberty and menopause *one* menstruates once a month.' She is making the female the universal norm[72]". Indeed, throughout her text Woolf refers to women with different names, different pronouns, she even refers to herself with different names and pronouns. Personal but unspecific references which lead us to see the universal dimension of her narrative. "'One' is robbed of its impersonality as a gender-free pronoun[73]", it means A Room of her own, and not anyone's room. The fact that even the narrator's identity is not clear, or specifically defined, gives the text even more convincing power as it doesn't apply to one woman or even a specific kind of women (women writers for example). The universality of *A Room of One's Own* is empowering for women of any age, any social class, any century or any sexual orientation. In the last few pages of the essay, Woolf, this time as herself – "And I will end now in my own person[74]" – directly addresses the women students of the two Colleges, and what she

[70] MARCUS, Jade, op.cit. p. 149.
[71] BOEHM, Beth A, op. cit. p. 199.
[72] MARCUS, Jade, op. cit. p. 150.
[73] *Ibid*, p. 149.
[74] *AROOO*, p. 104.

wants them to do is to write, and to write anything they want, without restraining themselves to fiction:

> "There runs through these comments and discursions the conviction – or is it the instinct? – that good books are desirable and that good writers, even if they show the variety of human depravity, are still good human beings. Thus when I ask you to write more books I am urging you to do what will be for your good and for the good of the world at large[75]."

Women writings are a universal necessity, the world needs women writers, as much as it needs male writers. Woolf is urging these young women to write for the sake of women before them who couldn't, like Judith Shakespeare for example. Women need to write in order to restore the balance of power in literature.

This ending is not only empowering for the audience but also for the women readers, Woolf's essay can be regarded as a lesson, since she has taught her readers how to construct an argumentation by guiding them, step by step, throughout her own thinking process. But the interesting thing is that the process itself might be as important as the content for the reader. Woolf is giving her readers a chance to think by themselves while reading her essay, to agree or not with her arguments but also to choose what they want to make of her essay. Jade Marcus notes that:

> "We have not only gone fishing but learned to reproduce our fishing trip in our imaginations. So empowered, we can join Virginia Woolf in uddering/uttering the bull. When Woolf un-horns the bull, she un-mans the patriarchy[76]."

Not only does she teach women how to free themselves from the expectations of patriarchy, but she also breaks the founding principles of the patriarchy down into pieces by writing *A Room of One's Own*, and so does the reader of the essay. Woolf's power is to give her reader, and especially her women reader, the power to deconstruct step by step the patriarchal framework of society.

[75] *AROOO*, p. 108.
[76] MARCUS, Jade, op. cit. p. 162.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, we have seen that Woolf advocates but at the same time demonstrates a new kind of power for women, she does so by challenging the laws of patriarchy in a new way. According to Virginia Woolf, the relation between women and literature can't be dissociated from history and context. The patriarchal framework of the past centuries always discouraged women to write. Women did not have the freedom, neither financially nor intellectually, which was required to create a work of art. Patriarchal societies have always left women live as second-class citizens, as a result they were confined to their homes under the authority of their fathers or husbands. Obviously, they were not entitled to a public education, and since they did not go to school, they did not have access to the great classics of literature. Until the beginning of the twentieth century women were only expected to be obedient housewives, to bear and raise children and to do as they were asked. Literature, and arts in general were, until the eighteenth century, men's business.

Then, we have seen that when women started to write and to publish their works, they had to deal with certain constraints brought around by their sex. But even with these limitations some women managed to leave their mark on literature and to open a path for other generations of women. Aphra Benh's or Jane Austen's legacies will be forever remembered in literature. These great women moved the boundaries that were earlier so strict, and in her essay, Woolf acknowledges and praises their achievements. She also shows that women writers contributed to give a breath of fresh air to literature.

And finally, through the analysis of her own writing, we have shown that Woolf did not only write about women and fiction, or women in fiction, but she wrote to women about writing, and she wrote to act out what she was advocating. Her essay is both a reflection and a proof that subversion is a way to get away from patriarchy. She demonstrated that straight confrontation and anger were not the right tools to get around pre-existent systems of thought. She used irony and humour as a ploy, for example, to dismiss patriarchal arguments. She created a new kind of power, which happened to be more relevant here than feminism, she invented the power of "the feminine". In addition, by using stream of consciousness in her essay, she also allows the reader to

question her own questionings, which is a clever way to make people think by themselves. Frédéric Regard defined it this way :

> " Le leurre Woolfien est à double détente : plus l'interrogation s'élargit, plus la réflexion gagne en profondeur ; plus la pensée devient abstraite, plus la posture Woolfienne se précise ; plus le fracas des armes semble divertir l'esprit de ses préoccupations esthétiques, plus la force du féminin se définit[77]."

According to him, Woolf's trick is like a mechanism: the more the questioning widens the more the reflection deepens. And when her thought becomes an abstract concept that is when the power of "the feminine" expresses and defines itself. "The feminine" is a suggestive power built throughout Woolf's essay.

She brought feminist thoughts to a new level. No wonder, then, that her text became a major reference during the second half of the twentieth century, within the second-wave of feminism and the movements for 'women's liberation'. Indeed, her thinking and writing were influenced by feminisms of her time, she witnessed the birth and the achievement of the suffrage campaign for example. But, *A Room of One's Own* became the symbol of women's freedom of mind. Indeed, the title can be analysed both in terms of space, within a house for example, and in terms of intellectual space. Meaning that a woman must have somewhere to retire when she wants to write but also that she must have, within her own mind, a dedicated space where her thinking can develop itself. Today, space is an important feature of feminist thought and more precisely the occupation of public space: men tend to take more space than women in public transport for example, with what is called "manspreading". Spheres we refer to as 'public' were for centuries spaces where women were excluded[78], which means that these spheres belonged to men. That is why Woolf insists on the fact that education is the key to tear the patriarchy apart, and today modern feminist thinking agrees on that. Education is the only way out of the patriarchal framework of societies.

At the end of her essay, Woolf enumerates what progress was made for women during her time, the right to possess money, the right to vote and the right to receive an education. She insists on the fact that women should take this as an opportunity to move boundaries. *A Room of One's Own* is a reminder that nothing should be taken for

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[77] REGARD, Frédéric, *op. cit.* p. 85.
[78] http://www.isiswomen.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=630:why-womens-spaces-are-critical-to-feminist-autonomy&catid=127&Itemid=452

granted, and that women should continually be grateful for the women who fought for the fundamental rights they have today. That's partly why, I decided to work on this essay.

I discovered *A Room of One's Own* when I was in England, working as an au pair. I found this little book on the shelves of the family library and decided to read it. At the time, I was probably too young to understand it fully. But, when three years later, I reread it, I found myself shaken at the end of it. At the time, I was really into feminist thinking and questioning and this essay comforted me in my ideas. Moreover, Virginia Woolf had always fascinated me in some ways, I couldn't tell why. So, it is rather naturally that I decided to work on this essay during my master.

This work developed my critical thinking and it definitely allowed me to take into account all the aspects of Woolf's work on this essay. But, what I will certainly remember is that working on this essay gave me the opportunity to find my own room and my own voice.

PARTIE DIDACTIQUE

INTRODUCTION

Mon analyse universitaire ne pouvant pas être traitée directement en classe avec des élèves de collège ou même de lycée du fait des aspects assez complexes que j'aborde, cette partie didactique se focalisera plutôt sur la société Victorienne et plus précisément sur des artistes qui, comme Woolf, refusaient de s'astreindre à ses règles. Avec sa posture moderniste, Woolf fait partie de ces artistes qui ont montré les limites et le revers de cette société souvent représentée comme une période de progrès pour la Grande-Bretagne. Et *A Room of One's Own,* comme expliqué dans ma partie universitaire, est bien un essai visant à déconstruire le cadre patriarchal de la société victorienne. Donc, bien évidemment, le travail qui sera fait avec les élèves ne sera pas une adaptation directe de mon analyse universitaire, mais toutefois la séquence que je vais proposer ci-dessous sera bien en relation avec le contexte culturel et historique de l'écriture de l'essai de Woolf.

Étudier des extraits de *A Room of One's Own* n'aurait pas été possible en collège, le niveau de langue, la syntaxe et le contexte historique et culturel de ce texte ne sont tout bonnement pas adaptés à des élèves de collège. C'est pour cela que j'ai choisi de mettre en œuvre cette séquence en lycée, même si je n'ai pas de lycéens en cours cette année. La séquence qui va suivre sera donc pour une classe de Terminale, en spécialité Langues, Littératures et Cultures Étrangères et Régionales. En effet, cette spécialité permet aux élèves de découvrir des textes littéraires phares de la culture étudiée.

> « Cet enseignement cherche à augmenter l'exposition des élèves à la langue étudiée afin qu'ils parviennent progressivement à une maîtrise assurée de la langue et à une compréhension de la culture associée. […] Cet enseignement est un lieu d'approfondissement et d'élargissement des connaissances et des savoirs selon une perspective historique porteuse de sens et de nature à doter les élèves de repères forts et structurants inscrits dans la chronologie de l'histoire littéraire et culturelle. Il vise aussi à développer chez les élèves la connaissance précise d'éléments majeurs de la culture considérée. C'est dans le travail d'appropriation des contenus que cet

> enseignement participe à la transmission et à la valorisation d'un riche patrimoine linguistique et culturel. »[79]

L'étude de l'époque victorienne a donc tout son sens dans cet enseignement, puisque c'est une période d'importance majeure pour la Grande-Bretagne, autant d'un point de vue littéraire et artistique que d'un point de vue politique et social.

La spécialité LLCER se compose de 3 thématiques à aborder au cours de l'année (« Arts et débats d'idées » ; « Expression et construction de soi » et « Voyages, territoires, frontières »), j'ai choisi de placer ma séquence dans la thématique « Arts et débats d'idées », cette thématique se divise en trois axes : art et contestation, l'art qui fait débat et l'art du débat. La séquence pédagogique qui va suivre se basera sur l'axe *l'art qui fait débat*, dont voici une partie de la description du site Eduscol :

> « La culture anglophone est riche d'artistes qui se sont retrouvés au centre de polémiques, non pas en fonction de critères esthétiques mais à cause du regard porté par le public sur leur œuvre, à l'aune des valeurs morales ou politiques de l'époque. Ainsi, il peut être judicieux d'évoquer certaines œuvres considérées comme sulfureuses en raison des tabous qu'elles brisent […] ou subversives par la critique politique qu'elles véhiculent − en lien, bien entendu, avec leur contexte historique. »[80]

Les différents documents que je traiterai seront des œuvres qui lors de leur publication ont fait débat, ou des documents qui se basent sur des personnages historiques qui ont fait parler d'eux. L'essai de Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* rentre tout à fait dans ces catégories. Et puis Woolf, elle-même était une figure controversée de son époque.

L'essai de Woolf ne sera pas traité en entier, je didactiserai seulement quelques extraits, auxquels seront ajoutés d'autres extraits pertinents d'œuvres en relation avec l'époque. Nous parlerons notamment du personnage anticonformiste d'Anne Lister, grâce à la minisérie « Gentleman Jack ». Le but, ici, ne sera pas de leur faire comprendre tous les enjeux de l'essai de Woolf, mais bien de leur proposer une première approche, un premier contact avec l'œuvre de Woolf, et peut-être, par la suite, de leur donne envie de lire cet essai ou d'autres œuvres de Woolf, qui sait.

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[79] https://eduscol.education.fr/langues-vivantes/actualites/actualites/article/programmes-llcer-de-la-classe-de-terminale.html .
[80] https://eduscol.education.fr/langues-vivantes/actualites/actualites/article/programmes-llcer-de-la-classe-de-terminale.html .

TABLEAU SYNOPTIQUE:

<table>
<tr><td>Cycle terminal / Classe de terminale / spécialité LLCER</td><td>Thématique :
“Arts et débats d’idées”</td><td>Axe :
L’art qui fait débat</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Entrée dans la séquence : la société victorienne et ses valeurs, critiquées par de nombreux artistes.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Tâche finale: for International Women’s Day you are asked to write a short essay to discuss Virginia Woolf’s statement “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction”.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Pour réaliser la tâche finale, voici les outils dont mes élèves auront besoin, déclinés en termes d’objectifs</td></tr>
<tr><td>Culturels</td><td>Méthodologiques</td><td>Linguistiques</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">La société Victorienne

Les mœurs, valeurs et attentes sociales envers les femmes de l’époque victorienne

La critique par l’art de cette société

Des auteurs et autrices clés comme Virginia Woolf ou Oscar Wilde par exemple</td><td rowspan="2">Savoir présenter une argumentation

Exprimer des opinions</td><td>Lexicaux</td><td>Grammaticaux</td><td>Phonologiques</td></tr>
<tr><td>Linking words

Expressions pour exprimer son opinion (As far as I am concerned, to me, I believe that, I agree/disagree…)</td><td>Modaux et semi-modaux</td><td>Prononciation des modaux comme WOULD / COULD</td></tr>
</table>

DÉROULEMENT DE LA SÉQUENCE :

- **Séance 1 :**

Anticipation :

Anticiper cette séquence va avoir une importance majeure pour son déroulement, en effet il va falloir avant toute chose anticiper le contexte historique de l’époque

victorienne._C'est pourquoi dans un premier temps, j'afficherai une photo de la reine Victoria au tableau, et leur demanderai s'ils connaissent la personne projetée.



- Consigne: "React" / "Do you know this person?"
- Si par hasard ils ne reconnaissaient pas Victoria, je leur demanderais de faire des hypothèses sur qui elle pourrait-être en se basant sur l'image : "Who do you think she might be ?" / "Make hypotheses"

- Dans un second temps après avoir définit qu'il s'agissait de la reine Victoria, je leur demanderai s'ils en savent un peu plus sur cette période, s'ils en connaissent les dates, s'ils connaissent des artistes de cette période, etc… Si c'est le cas, il peut être intéressants de leur faire noter quelques noms d'artistes comme Charles Dickens, Oscar Wilde, Jane Austen, les sœurs Brontë ou William Turner.

- Nous regarderons ensuite une petite vidéo qui retrace rapidement les grandes lignes de l'époque victorienne. https://youtu.be/1NHIVFNGQX8 (vidéo qui sera raccourcit, la partie de 1.42' à 2' sera coupée ainsi que la partie de 3.52' à 4.30', la fin de la vidéo à partir de 5.10 sera aussi supprimée.)



Pour cette compréhension orale, la consigne sera simplement "watch the video and take notes". En effet, la compréhension n'ira pas beaucoup plus loin que ça puisque le but ici est simplement de donner un contexte à l'époque victorienne. Nous ferons ensuite une mise en commun de leurs prises de notes, afin de mettre en lumière les points

importants à retenir. (Queen Victoria, technological progress, rapid growth of population and cities, poverty, biggest Empire)



- La troisième et dernière étape de cette séance d'anticipation, sera la description et l'analyse de cette lithographie, très représentative des rôles et de la sphère de chacun selon leur sexe.

Consigne : "Describe the image"

Puis, dans un second temps, après avoir décrit la lithographie les questions suivantes seront: "To what extend does it represent the gender separated spheres of the Victorian society?" / "What can you say about gender roles by looking at this lithograph?"

Le but sera de leur faire comprendre grâce à la description de cette lithographie que la sphère des femmes se limitait à l'intérieur de la maison. Alors que les hommes sortaient et travaillaient et faisaient partie de la vie culturelle de l'époque. Lesfemmes, elles, se contentaient de s'occuper des enfants en attendant que leur marentre. La composition de cette œuvre se prête tout à fait à cette analyse et les élèves devraient pouvoir arriver à ces conclusions sans trop de difficultés.

- **Séance 2 :**

  - La première étape sera de récapituler le contenu de la première séance afin que les élèves se remémorent ce que nous avions fait.
  - Ensuite, nous allons étudier le premier extrait de l'essai *A Room of One's Own*. Afin d'anticiper ce texte, nous essaierons dans un premier temps de faire des hypothèses sur le contenu de l'essai en se basant sur le titre.

A Room of One's Own

On peut imaginer poser plusieurs questions aux élèves comme "what kind of text do you expect to read?" / "Make hypotheses on the themes of the text". Cela peut être très intéressant car leur faire émettre des hypothèses les aide à développer leur imagination et cela les pousse à réfléchir. S'ils arrivent à la conclusion qu'il s'agit

d'un essai, très bien, sinon ce n'est pas grave pour le moment puisqu'ils s'en rendront compte après la lecture de l'extrait.

Le premier extrait que nous étudierons est le début du chapitre 1 de l'essai (voir annexe 1), de "But, you may say […]" jusqu'à "If not, you will of course throw the whole of it into the waste-paper basket and forget all about it."

Pour cette compréhension écrite, nous procéderons en plusieurs étapes :

Compréhension globale :

- *Read the text once, what are the themes of this extract?*
- *What kind of text is it?*

Dans cette première partie, l'important c'est qu'ils relèvent les thèmes majeurs évoqués dans le début de l'essai. Pour ce qui est du type de texte, il est intéressant de leur demander leur avis puisque certains diront peut-être discours, d'autres essai ou autre chose. Le questionnement sera ouvert.

Compréhension détaillée :

- *Highlight all the pronouns referring to the narrator. What do you notice?*
- *What is, according to you, the most important sentence of the extract? Justify.*
- *Knowing that these are the first pages of the book, what do you think of the first word? Explain.*
- *What do you expect to read after a beginning like that?*

Cette deuxième partie se base plus sur le contenu du texte. Les élèves seront amenés à se poser des questions sur le narrateur et sur le but de ce début d'essai. Nous ferons ensuite une mise en commun des réponses aux questions afin d'en discuter ensemble. Ces deux premières parties d'analyse nous serviront pour la suite de la séquence.

Pour la séance prochaine, je demanderai aux élèves de faire quelques recherches sur Virginia Woolf et de m'écrire une courte biographie.

➢ **Séance 3 :**

- Tout d'abord nous ferons un récapitulatif de la séance précédente, puis nous corrigerons les biographies de Virginia Woolf, que nous prendrons en trace écrite dans le cahier. Cette trace écrite se basera sur ce que les élèves auront trouvé en
  faisant leurs recherches, mais nous auront les événements majeurs de la vie de Woolf.
- Dans un second temps, nous reprendrons le premier extrait de l'essai afin de travailler sur la partie grammaticale et lexicale. En effet, cet extrait se prête très bien à l'analyse des modaux et l'expression de l'opinion.

Pour cela, voici comment nous procéderons :

- Lecture de l'extrait à voix haute (prononciation de COULD / WOULD / SHOULD)
- *Highlight all the modal verbs you find in the extract*
  (may / might / would / should / could / must / can)

Ensuite, à partir de notre liste, nous ferons un rappel sur l'utilisation des modaux (PRL)

LES MODAUX (rappel)

❖ **EMPLOIS** : pour exprimer une modalité (ce qui est possible, nécessaire, permis, vraisemblable…)

Ex: It may rain tomorrow. (probabilité)

❖ **CONSTRUCTION :** modal (toujours invariable) + Base verbal

Ex: He must clean his room.

Les modaux se comportent comme des auxiliaires, on ne rajoute donc pas les auxiliaires « do », « have » et « be »

Ex: You shouldn't touch the kettle.

Ex: Could you let me drive?

Après ce rappel, nous travaillerons sur les emplois de chaque modal, en nous basant d'abord sur l'extrait de Woolf, puis je leur distribuerai cette infographie trouvée sur le site Englishgrammarhere.



Modal Verbs

CAN	Ability, doubt, astonishment, permission, Polite request
MAY	Permission, if not prohibition, supposition with doubt
MUST	Obligation, firm necessity, logical conclusion, probability
SHALL	intention, supposition
WILL	Wish, desire, will, confidence, in the future
OUGHT TO	Moral duty, insistent advice, strict recommendation
NEED	(un)necessity
BE TO	Obligation arising out of arrangement or agreement
HAVE TO	Unwillingness, forced circumtances
WOULD	Wish (with "to like"), polite request, a habit of the past
SHOULD	Necessity, advice, blame, recommendation, reproach, regret
USED TO	Repeated action in the past

Ainsi, ils y auront accès, dans leur cahier, lorsqu'ils le voudront. En effet, il est parfois difficile pour les élèves de se rappeler de tous les emplois de chaque modal.

Nous finirons cette séance par des exercices d'applications sur les modaux. Ce pourra être le moment pour eux de travailler en groupe ou simplement par deux. Il s'avère souvent que le travail de groupe est plus bénéfique lors de cours de grammaire.

- **<u>Séance 4 :</u>**

- Récapitulatif de la séance précédente.

- Cette séance sera encore consacrée à l'essai de Woolf, mais sous une autre forme. En effet, maintenant que nous avons vu et travaillé le début de *A Room of One's Own*, les élèves vont être amenés à écouter une analyse simplifiée de l'essai. Cette vidéo, assez courte, résume parfaitement les idées principales de l'essai, de façon claire et articulée. Il sera donc bien plus aisé pour les élèves de comprendre l'essai de Woolf sous cette forme-là, plutôt que d'analyser l'essai



An Introduction to Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own - A Macat Literature Analysis

dans sa totalité.

- Il s'agira donc ici de travailler la compréhension orale. Pour se faire, nous procéderons en plusieurs étapes :

Compréhension globale :

- *Watch the video and pick out key words.*

Nous mettrons en suite les réponses en commun avant de passer à la compréhension détaillée. De cette manière, tous les élèves auront déjà les thèmes principaux en tête.

Compréhension détaillée : (qui sera donnée sous forme de fiche de travail)

- *What is the question that Virginia Woolf tackles in her essay?*

- *What does Woolf argue?*

- *What is the key to women's emancipation according to Virginia Woolf?*

- *What is the central idea of her essay?*

- *Were women financially independent?*

- *How does she illustrate her point? (Explain)*

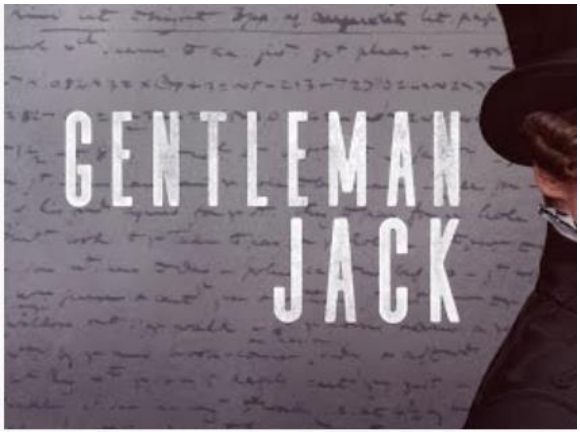
- *What are the differences between Shakespeare and his sister?*

Après cette compréhension orale, la mise en commun sera essentielle pour que tous les élèves puissent comprendre les enjeux de l'essai de Woolf. Nous corrigerons donc ensemble la fiche de travail.

Puis, nous lierons le passage de *A Room of One's Own* qui traite de Judith Shakespeare (annexe 2). Cependant, nous ne passerons pas beaucoup plus de temps sur cet extrait, il s'agissait juste pour les élèves de se rendre compte de quelle manière Woolf avait imaginer la sœur de Shakespeare. Cet extrait servira de base pour un rappel sur les mots de liaison.

- **<u>Séance 5 :</u>**
  - Nous commencerons par récapituler les choses vues pendant les séances précédentes.
  - Cette séance, pour varier quelque peu de Woolf, se basera sur la minisérie 'Gentleman Jack' créée et écrite par Sally Wainwright, et diffusée sur HBO. Cette série en huit épisodes raconte l'histoire (vraie) d'Anne Lister, un personnage excentrique de son époque. L'action se déroule dans le Yorkshire des années 1830, pleine époque victorienne donc. Anne Lister, figure féministe de la littérature anglaise, doit sa renommée à sa collection de journaux intimes, souvent codés, et à son homosexualité. L'étude de la bande annonce de cette série est donc tout à fait dans le thème de cette séquence. La série, donnant vie à des œuvres littéraires s'adapte donc aussi à la spécialité LLCER.
  - La première étape sera d'anticiper l'étude de la bande annonce. Pour se faire, j'utiliserai simplement l'affiche de la série, que je mettrai au tableau. Cette anticipation vise à ajouter un peu de suspens, en effet les élèves ne

trouveront certainement pas tout de suite que l'histoire se base sur une femme :



"React"

Les élèves émettront des hypothèses sur cette affiche, lorsqu'ils auront énoncé assez



d'hypothèses, je mettrai l'affiche en entier au tableau :

Cette révélation devrait, je l'espère, éveiller leur curiosité. Ils valideront ou non leurs hypothèses.

- Puis nous regarderons la bande annonce[81] une première fois en leur donnant juste la consigne *"watch the video, and react afterward"*.

- Dans un second temps, ils devront répondre à plusieurs questions :

- *Characters? Places? Time?*

[81] https://youtu.be/mg9d6S6N_xw

- Puis des questions plus spécifiques :

- *What strikes you about the main character?*
- *What is her nickname? Why?*
- *In what way is she the total opposite of what her society expects?*

La mise en commun révélera les mœurs de la société victorienne et pourquoi Anne Lister était perçue comme une curiosité.

- Nous mettrons ensuite cela en relation avec le passage de l'essai de Virginia Woolf sur Mary Carmichael et la phrase "Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature"

> "I am almost sure, I said to myself, that Mary Carmichael is playing a trick on us. For I feel as one feels on a switchback railway when the car, instead of sinking, as one has been led to expect, swerves up again. Mary is tampering with the expected sequence. First she broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence. Very well, she has every right to do both these things if she does them not for the sake of breaking, but for the sake of creating. Which of the two it is I cannot be sure until she has faced herself with a situation. I will give her every liberty, I said, to choose what that situation shall be; she shall make it of tin cans and old kettles if she likes; but she must convince me that she believes it to be a situation; and then when she has made it she must face it. She must jump. And, determined to do my duty by her as reader if she would do her duty by me as writer, I turned the page and read… I am sorry to break off so abruptly. Are there no men present? Do you promise me that behind that red curtain over there the figure of Sir Charles Biron is not concealed? We are all women you assure me? Then I may tell you that the very next words I read were these—'Chloe liked Olivia… ' Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women. 'Chloe liked Olivia,' I read. And then it struck me how immense a change was there. Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature."

'est de leur montrer que la sexualité, et plus précisément l'homosexualité pendant la période victorienne était perçue comme une maladie, une abomination de la nature. Pour la séance d'après, je leur proposerai d'écrire un court paragraphe sur la bande annonce. Si la bande annonce leur a donné envie de regarder la série, pourquoi ? Pourquoi pas ?

➢ **Séance 6 :**

- Récapitulatif de la séance précédente, puis lecture des petits paragraphes qu'ils devaient écrire.
- Etude d'une vidéo du site HBO, sur le personnage d'Anne Lister, décrypté par l'équipe de la série.[82]



INVITATION TO THE SET

Who Was Anne Lister?

Suranne Jones, Sophie Rundle and creator Sally Wainwright discuss the key themes from *Gentleman Jack*.

Je leur demanderai de travailler en binôme, car l'étude sera moins guidée que pour la bande annonce afin de développer leur autonomie. Ils travailleront sur tablette (dans l'idéal) pour que chacun puisse regarder la vidéo autant de fois que nécessaire. Ils auront la moitié de la séance pour travailler sur cette vidéo et expliquer en quoi Anne Lister peut être considérée comme une pionnière de son époque. Je leur demanderai aussi pourquoi il était intéressant d'adapter son histoire sur écran de nos jours et quel lien nous pouvons faire avec l'essai de Woolf. L'autre moitié de cette séance sera consacrée à la présentation orale à la classe de leur analyse de la vidéo. Cela permettra un travail sur la langue.

[82] https://www.hbo.com/video/gentleman-jack/videos/invitation-to-the-set

- **Séance 7** :

  Cette séance sera entièrement consacrée à la réalisation de la tâche finale, qui sera évaluée.

  Consigne: for International Women's Day you are asked to write a short essay to discuss Virginia Woolf's statement "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction".

  Le barème de cette tâche finale se trouve en annexe 3. Afin de réaliser cette grille d'évaluation j'ai utilisé les descripteurs du CECRL (voir annexe 4).

CONCLUSION :

Cette séquence, ayant pour but de faire découvrir aux élèves l'essai de Virginia Woolf, et la société victorienne, elle se veut volontairement assez courte afin que les élèves ne se lassent pas car l'étude d'un texte comme *A Room of One's Own,* même au lycée, peut s'avérer assez complexe. C'est pour cela que j'ai choisi de traiter seulement quelques extraits du texte et de les mettre en relation avec quelque chose de plus léger (mais tout aussi intéressant d'un point de vue sociétal) comme 'Gentleman Jack'.

N'ayant pas eu de classe de lycée cette année, je n'ai donc pas pu mettre cette séquence en œuvre mais j'espère avoir un jour l'opportunité de le faire.

ANNEXES

- ANNEXE 1: extrait 1 de l'essai *A Room of One's Own*

One



But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction—what, has that got to do with a room of one's own? I will try to explain. When you asked me to speak about women and fiction I sat down on the banks of a river and began to wonder what the words meant. They might mean simply a few remarks about Fanny Burney; a few more about Jane Austen; a tribute to the Brontës and a sketch of Haworth Parsonage under snow; some witticisms if possible about Miss Mitford; a respectful allusion to George Eliot; a reference to Mrs Gaskell and one would have done. But at second sight the words seemed not so simple. The title women and fiction might mean, and you may have meant it to 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. But when I began to consider the subject in this last way, which seemed the most interesting, I soon saw that it had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to come to a conclusion. 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 to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece for ever. All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point—a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved. I have shirked the duty of coming to a conclusion upon these two questions—women and fiction remain, so far as I am concerned, unsolved problems. But in order to make some amends I am going to do what I can to show you how I arrived at this opinion about the room and the money. I am going to develop in your presence as fully and freely as I can the train of thought which led me to think this. Perhaps if I lay bare the ideas, the prejudices, that lie behind this statement you will find that they have some bearing upon women and some upon fiction. At any rate, when a subject is highly controversial—and any question about sex is that—one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold

whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker. Fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact. Therefore I propose, making use of all the liberties and licences of a novelist, to tell you the story of the two days that preceded my coming here—how, bowed down by the weight of the subject which you have laid upon my shoulders, I pondered it, and made it work in and out of my daily life. I need not say that what I am about to describe has no existence; Oxbridge is an invention; so is Fernham; 'I' is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being. 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. If not, you will of course throw the whole of it into the waste-paper basket and forget all about it.

Extract from *A Room of One's Own* – Virginia Woolf – 1929

- ANNEXE 2 : Extrait de *A Room of One's Own (Judith Shakespeare)*

Be that as it may, I could not help thinking, as I looked at the works of Shakespeare on the shelf, that the bishop was right at least in this; it would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare. Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say. Shakespeare himself went, very probably,—his mother was an heiress—to the grammar school, where he may have learnt Latin—Ovid, Virgil and Horace—and the elements of grammar and logic. He was, it is well known, a wild boy who poached rabbits, perhaps shot a deer, and had, rather sooner than he should have done, to marry a woman in the neighbourhood, who bore him a child rather quicker than was right. That escapade sent him to seek his fortune in London. He had, it seemed, a taste for the theatre; he began by holding horses at the stage door. Very soon he got work in the theatre, became a successful actor, and lived at the hub of the universe, meeting everybody, knowing everybody, practising his art on the boards, exercising his wits in the streets, and even getting access to the palace of the queen. Meanwhile his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, 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, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She picked up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps, and read a few pages. But then her parents came in and told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers. They would have spoken sharply but kindly, for they were substantial people who knew the conditions of life for a woman and loved their daughter—indeed, more likely than not she was the apple of her father's eye. Perhaps she scribbled some pages up in an apple loft on the sly but was careful to hide them or set fire to them. Soon, however, before she was out of her teens, she was to be betrothed to the son of a neighbouring wool-stapler. She cried out that marriage was hateful to her, and for that she was severely beaten by her father. Then he ceased to scold her. He begged her instead not to hurt him, not to shame him in this matter of her marriage. He would give her a chain of beads or a fine petticoat, he said; and there were tears in his eyes. How could she disobey him? How could she break his heart? The force of her own gift alone drove her to it. She made up a small parcel of her belongings, let herself down by a rope one summer's night and took the road to London. She was not

seventeen. The birds that sang in the hedge were not more musical than she was. She had the quickest fancy, a gift like her brother's, for the tune of words. Like him, she had a taste for the theatre. She stood at the stage door; she wanted to act, she said. Men laughed in her face. The manager—a fat, looselipped man—guffawed. He bellowed something about poodles dancing and women acting—no woman, he said, could possibly be an actress. He hinted—you can imagine what. She could get no training in her craft. Could she even seek her dinner in a tavern or roam the streets at midnight? Yet her genius was for fiction and lusted to feed abundantly upon the lives of men and women and the study of their ways. At last—for she was very young, oddly like Shakespeare the poet in her face, with the same grey eyes and rounded brows—at last Nick Greene the actor-manager took pity on her; she found herself with child by that gentleman and so—who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body?—killed herself one winter's night and lies buried at some cross-roads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle.

That, more or less, is how the story would run, I think, if a woman in Shakespeare's day had had Shakespeare's genius.

Extract from *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf, 1929

- ANNEXE 3 : Barème de la tâche finale

Finale Task

<u>Your task</u>: for International Women's Day you are asked to write a short essay to discuss Virginia Woolf's statement "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction". (250-350 words)

	B1	B2	C1
Compétences grammaticales	Beaucoup d'erreurs qui peuvent parfois gêner la compréhension	Des erreurs ponctuelles qui ne gênent pas la compréhension	Les structures vues en classe sont maitrisées
	1	**3**	**5**
Compétences lexicales	- Vocabulaire limité - Orthographe peu maîtrisée	- Vocabulaire simple mais correct - Rares erreurs d'orthographe	- Vocabulaire riche et varié - Orthographe maitrisée
	1	**3**	**5**
Compétences argumentaires (cohérence)	Peut écrire un bref essai en justifiant son opinion	Peut développer une argumentation de façon méthodique et pertinente	Peut exposer et prouver son point de vue longuement avec des arguments et des exemples pertinents
	1	**3**	**4**

Réalisation de la tâche	- Consigne plus ou moins respectée - Travail peu soigné	- Consigne respectée - Travail soigné
	1	**4**
Contenu	Contenu insuffisant	Travail complet et bien mené
	0	**2**

/20

- ANNEXE 4 : Descripteurs CECRL pour le barème d'évaluation de la tâche finale. (extrait du site Eduscol)

ESSAIS ET RAPPORTS	
C2	Peut produire de manière limpide et fluide des rapports, articles ou essais complexes et qui posent une problématique ou donner une appréciation critique sur des propositions ou des œuvres littéraires. Peut proposer un plan logique adapté et efficace qui aide le lecteur à retrouver les points importants. Peut présenter sous diverses perspectives des sujets académiques ou professionnels en faisant une distinction claire entre ses propres idées et opinions et celles des sources.
C1	Peut exposer par écrit, clairement et de manière bien structurée, un sujet complexe en soulignant les points marquants pertinents. Peut exposer et prouver son point de vue assez longuement à l'aide d'arguments secondaires, de justifications et d'exemples pertinents. Peut écrire une introduction et une conclusion appropriées pour un rapport, un article ou une dissertation d'une certaine longueur et sur un sujet académique ou professionnel complexe, à condition qu'il soit en rapport avec son centre d'intérêt et qu'il soit possible de corriger le texte.
B2	Peut écrire un essai ou un rapport qui développe une argumentation de façon méthodique en soulignant de manière appropriée les points importants et les détails pertinents qui viennent l'appuyer. Peut rédiger, dans le détail, un processus complexe. Peut évaluer des idées différentes ou des solutions à un problème.
	Peut écrire un essai ou un rapport qui développe une argumentation en apportant des justifications pour ou contre un point de vue particulier et en expliquant les avantages et les inconvénients de différentes options. Peut synthétiser des informations et des arguments issus de sources diverses.
B1	Peut écrire de brefs essais simples sur des sujets d'intérêt général. Peut écrire un texte sur un sujet actuel en rapport avec son centre d'intérêt, en utilisant un langage simple pour lister les avantages et les inconvénients, donner et justifier son opinion. Peut résumer avec une certaine assurance un ensemble d'informations factuelles sur des sujets familiers courants et non courants dans son domaine, en faire le rapport et donner son opinion.
	Peut écrire des rapports très brefs de forme standard conventionnelle qui transmettent des informations factuelles courantes et justifient des actions. Peut intégrer des illustrations, des photos ainsi que des textes courts à un rapport ou une affiche de présentation.
A2	Peut écrire des textes courts sur des sujets d'intérêt familiers, en liant les phrases avec des connecteurs tels que « et », « parce que », « ensuite ». Peut donner ses impressions et son opinion dans des écrits portant sur des sujets d'intérêt personnel (par ex. les modes de vie et la culture, les histoires) en utilisant un vocabulaire et des expressions de tous les jours.
A1	*Pas de descripteur disponible.*
Pré-A1	*Pas de descripteur disponible.*

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Back cover

Summary: This memoire raises the issue of feminine power in Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own*. It highlights how Woolf advocates and demonstrates a new kind of power for women by challenging the laws of patriarchal societies. Analysing both form and content, this work shows that Woolf reinvented the codes of essay writing, so that it would fit her liking.

Keywords: *A Room of One's Own*, feminine power, Virginia Woolf, women writers, women in literature, feminist thoughts,