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***Feminism and the Quest for Selfhood in Virginia Woolf's Fiction and
Nonfiction: A Case Study of Mrs. Dalloway (1925), To the Lighthouse
(1927) and A Room of One's Own (1929)***

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ABSTRACT

The following dissertation studies feminism and the quest for selfhood in Virginia Woolf's fiction and nonfiction: *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929). It demonstrates how resistance to tyranny in a male-dominated society can lead Woolf's female characters to the quest for affirming their identity through their disruption of the patriarchal traditional discourse. This research relies on Josephine Donovan's *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism* (1992) in which she studies the concept of class-consciousness that raises against the ideology of the ruling class. In other words, it is through Woolf's female character's confessions that we understand Marx's concepts of "governing ideology" in *The German Ideology*. The outline of this study comprises a discussion of four important sections that include: Woolf's cultural context and origins, patriarchy and the quest for the self in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), otherness and cultural marginality in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and feminism and selfhood in *A Room of One's Own* (1929). The final conclusion that can be drawn from this study shows Woolf's feminist commitment in both fiction and nonfiction. Her aim is the construction of the feminine identity through a self-destruction of the masculine dominion and patriarchy and the rehumanization of the British woman. This assumption has been demonstrated and consolidated in the thematic analysis of Woolf's sociological essay *A Room of One's Own* which demonstrates her feminist stance. I close my dissertation with a suggestion that both Woolf's fiction and nonfiction can be read as a feminist approach to women liberation.

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I. General Introduction

The issue of the “*gendered-other*” is still resonant as women have always known a large number of oppressions which were legitimized mainly by the rigid patriarchal rationalism and the capitalist hegemonic marginalization of women as a mass class. In the Renaissance period, the saliency of the patriarchal discourse was built on the hierarchical *Great Chain of Being* placing God, king, man at the top and woman, animals and things at the bottom.¹ This debate remained unchallenged until the appearance of the Enlightenment revolutionary thoughts that attacked “*Absolutism*” while gender inequality was enhanced by the “*Bible’s Myth-Making*” which ordered women to be under their husbands’ dominion.² This dangerous nexus put the blame of the fall of Adam’s humanity on the female who “*usurped*” God’s power. The biblical accusations of the female inferiority were strengthened by the patriarchal institution of marriage.³

Having long been oppressed, marginalized and dramatically othered, feminine awareness emerged as a powerful self-affirmative reaction to such patriarchal abuses. One wonders how female writers could resist tyranny, denounce patriarchy and answer back the male hegemonic discourse. In an answer to these questions, it is useful to consider that feminism, as a western concept, can be understood as a struggle by women to get their rights and achieve the equality of the sexes. Leaving aside the huge question of whether gender studies emerged out of feminine awareness and free commitment, it is important to note that the rise of woman consciousness started in the Enlightenment era.⁴

The stirrings of women resistance go back to the Enlightenment era that witnessed the rise of liberal illuminating ideas. Feminine resistance was immensely strengthened by Marry Astell’s *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700) that was considered as a liberal feminist denunciation of patriarchy and marriage as an abusive institution. The age of Enlightenment

in England knew the formation of the feminine discourse. The French Revolution(1789) achieved new illuminating ideas of freedom included in such works as Olympe De Gouges' *Déclaration des Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne* and Marry Wollstonecraft's *A vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). The latter was described as the most well-known feminist book that emphasized the legacy of freeing the female from trauma.⁵

In literature, thresholds of gender studies were developed gradually from the awareness of female inferiority to a strong resistance to patriarchy. The women question in Victorian England revealed a struggle with the oppressive burdensome domesticity. To make full sense of these claims, the situation of women was examined by many female writers such as Emily and Charlotte Bronte, Elisabeth Gaskell and Jane Austen. Charlotte Bronte's Gothic classic *Jane Eyre* (1847) depicted women as being restricted by patriarchal barriers.⁶

The scope of gender studies further developed in parallel with cultural, social and political shifts of focus. The awareness of the capitalist hegemony and dictatorial governments led to revolutionary ideas such as Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" against the ideological dictatorial domination and the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) which resulted in popular self-conscious reflections about the governor. Gramsci's "ideology" and "hegemony" influenced the suffragette's movements and their feminist intervention.⁷

The outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918) was also a crucial point in the history of humanity as a whole. It was during this period that a new literary movement emerged. Its duty was writing about chaos, disorder, disillusionment, the marginalized and the "other". As Feminist concerns were excluded from the British male elitist class, the Leavisists' and Arnoldian's views were considered as the "Cultural Capital".⁸ Mathew Arnold's exclusion of the "other" from *Culture and Anarchy* (1932) was reinforced by F. R.

Leavis' teachings and famous review *Scrutiny* (1932) that focused on three kinds of “*inertia failure*” including Marxists and Bloomsbury writers.⁹

Given these considerations, the twentieth century era was known as an age of the greatest psychoanalytical explorations of the unconscious. Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) gained a primary influence on the modernist intelligentsia.¹⁰ This shift of focus was interrelated with new sciences, and cultural studies. The new interest was psychoanalysis and the inner life of the individual. Modernist writers such as Joyce, Stein, Sinclair, Conrad, Forster and Woolf explored the stream of consciousness technique and the “*free indirect discourse*” to reveal the inner life of their characters¹¹. The gains of understanding emotional questions were depicted in art, poetry and literary works through “*expressionism*”, “*impressionism*”, and “*vision and view point*”.¹² This interest suggested particular impressive fashionable paradigms of a more theorizing of feminism. The cultural practice of the “*other*” prevailed in many literary works by modernist writers, and this tendency towards the inclusiveness of the “*other*” prevailed more in the feminist literature along with the “*organic intellectual*”.¹³ Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) is an English Modernist novelist who was born into a high talented upper-class intellectual family. Her fiction and nonfiction deal mainly with the tyrannical situation of women othered by patriarchy and capitalism.¹⁴

This modest dissertation; therefore, suggests the study of Marxist Feminism and the quest for selfhood in Woolf's fiction and nonfiction. It explores the underlying conditions of the oppressed British woman under the hegemonic patriarchal rationalism and class distinction. *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927) deal with women subjugation while *A Room of One's Own* (1929) unveils Woolf's feminist stance on women oppression and dominion. Woolf's gender discourse suggests the stirrings of the British feminism as she

achieved the cultural position of a “*highbrow*” feminist amongst the “*Cambridge apostles*” who chastened the patriarchal discourse¹⁵

Among the reasons why Woolf’s fiction and nonfiction have been selected is that they advocate women’s social, cultural and professional liberation. Woolf’s fiction may be considered as experiments in the “*bildungsroman*” and in the “*kunstlerroman*.”¹⁶ Both *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) deal with marriage as a major oppressive institution. Woolf focuses on her heroine’s mental ability to think, to remember and to resist to tyranny by depicting the oppressive truth of women othering. Therefore, her narratives engage in a conscious gender discourse and explore the fertile literary period of her modernist era while her nonfiction embodies her point of view of the gender-biased patriarchal Victorian hegemony, and the present dissertation explores her Marxist Feminist commitment in *A Room of One’s own* (1929) as a consolidation of her quest for identity in her fiction. Her writings aim at the liberation and rehumanization of the oppressed British woman.¹⁷

Woolf’s fiction and nonfiction have also been selected to highlight her feminist counter hegemonic feminist debate that aims at the denunciation of patriarchy and women class distinction. Another reason behind the selection of Woolf’s fiction is to analyze her advocacy of women cultural and material liberation.

Review of the Literature

Woolf’s fiction and nonfiction have already received substantial consideration in terms of stylistic and thematic studies. For example, Brian E. Sheehan’s thesis “The *Mrs. Dalloway* Confessions” (2006) explores *Mrs. Dalloway*’s interior monologue from a feminist perspective without linking it to other works of the same author.¹⁸ Yi Hsuan Lai’s “The Poetics of mourning in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*” (2007) is based on Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia* (1918) and does not adhere to their feminist

perspectives and their state of otherness. His study focuses rather on the author's experimentation through the stream of consciousness.¹⁹

Feminism and the quest for selfhood in Woolf's fiction and nonfiction support the liberation of women from patriarchal oppressions and material determinism of the capitalist hegemony. This has been a centre of interest for many critics. In an attempt to go beyond feminism in Woolf's fiction, studies have focused on her writings in relation to her personal feminine experience of gender inequality. Woolf's writings are embroiled in materialist and patriarchal issues that bring a rising tide of women liberation. It is for this reason that this review of the literature adheres to both patriarchal and capitalist issues. While some research studies emphasize patriarchy, others suggest that it is capitalism and its hegemony that subjugate women.

The majority of earlier critics focus on patriarchy. Alice Fox's pioneering *Virginia Woolf and the Literature of the English Renaissance* (1990) suggests that Woolf's commitment to a feminist experimental literature is a heedful product of an ongoing struggle of the sexes due to patriarchal institutions. She points out: "*Woolf made a conscious decision to eschew a feminist response [...] that her perception of literature frequently differed from that of men because she was a woman*".²⁰ Woolf's presence in a masculine literature such as Joyce, T. S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats affirms not only her existence as a female writer but highlights her experimental feminist literature as well. While there are clearly some missing points in Fox's book as her analysis does not rely on modernist empirical data-based research but rather on the English Renaissance, James J. Miracky in *Regenerating the Novel: Gender in Woolf, Forster, Sinclair and Lawrence* (2003) argues that Woolf's engagement against patriarchy is developed through her theory of androgyny or gender equality:

Woolf paints herself into a bit of a logical corner here. In an attempt to get beyond gender difference, Woolf develops her idea of androgyny with its "marriage of the

opposites” that is necessary for creative production. Because her motive here is formalist as well as feminist, she sees that “modernism” is not exhaustively correlated with femaleness. However, her feminist claims for women in their relationship to writing seem to rest on essentialism that conflicts with her androgyny purposes.²¹

Woolf uses her stylistic and literary techniques in order to achieve her main purpose as a feminist. She portrays her heroines as class conscious women who are persevering and enduring loneliness and subjugation while her use of “*androgyny*” shows the equality of both the masculine and feminine minds. In a typical analysis of this criticism, it can be argued that Miracky highlights Woolf’s androgyny purposes but seems to miss interviews that aim at discovering the very underlying truths and motives of Woolf. For instance, Woolf’s theory of “*gender equality*” is against phallogocentric literature. The inductiveness of “*androgyny*” is beyond the “*marriage of opposites*”. Therefore, along with patriarchy, Woolf’s categorization of women is concerned with materialism as well.

While these critics do not adhere to Woolf’s monetary liberation, other studies emphasize capitalism and material determinism. An illustrative critic is Jane Garrity. In “Virginia Woolf, Intellectual Harlotry, and 1920s British Vogue” (2000), she argues that Woolf’s writing is rather about the gendering of mass culture that is related to hegemony and Marxist feminism:

Within the last decade, several critics have challenged the tenacious myth that modernist writers scorned popular appeal, refused to advertise themselves, and sought refuge from the commercial sphere[...]/far from being opposed to the economy of production and consumption, canonical modernists such as Pound, Eliot, James Joyce and Lawrence were thoroughly preoccupied with marketplace concerns [...]. For a writer like Woolf, whose allegiance were divided between her upper-class affiliation, her desire to make living at journalism, and her identification with women as a sub-ordinated group, the relation of mass culture to femininity is necessarily more ambivalent and vexed than it is for her male counterparts.²²

Garrity explains that modernist literature is not co-opted by commercialism. The gendering of mass culture is rather unequivocal. One of Woolf’s concerns is the interrelationship between high culture / mass culture. Besides, in the same article, Garrity continues her idea of “Consuming Woolf: The Contamination of the Popular” by arguing that Woolf’s political

engagement is concerned with the feminization of mass culture. She considers that Woolf's appearance in *Vogue*, a mass circulation women's periodical, is a contaminating factor of her language which "*exposes her elitist scorn "for the masses and reveals her tendency to hierarchize different forms of cultural production"*".²³ Although Garrity's distinction is a pivotal and useful one, it remains aloof from Woolf's resistance to patriarchy and capitalist hegemony through class-consciousness.

In *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf* (2006), Jane Goldman suggests that Woolf involves her materialist arguments concerning the "*categorization of middle-class women*".²⁴ Goldman argues that Woolf's feminist stance is essentially concerned with class struggle in Britain. She goes on to add that "*women be understood as a separate class altogether*".²⁵ Therefore, Goldman locates Woolf as a classless intellectual British woman who fights against class division in Britain. This point of view is expounded by Mary Hellen Snodgrass. In her *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature* (2006), she points out that Woolf "*pictures autonomy as spaced- rooms free of domestic intrusions in which women can actualize their creative urges*".²⁶ This justifies Woolf's call for feminine property and material autonomy. Both Goldman and Snodgrass are making allusions to Woolf's engagement in Marxist Feminism. However, none of them adhere to Woolf's individual action on her Marxist anti-imperialist feminist woman. This means that Woolf is against the capitalist female laborer. What appears very crucial is that Woolf is a very conscious woman who engaged in the participation of an ideological apparatus.

From this review of the literature, it can be argued that Woolf employs her novels as intellectual commitments. She condemns the institution of marriage and advocates women's involvement in the public sphere by creating an "*androgynous world*" in which balance is found between intellect and emotion.

Issue and Working Hypotheses

A large number of books, articles and theses have explored Woolf's feminist scope and quest for identity. One might also say that "*selfhood*" and "*otherness*" in Woolf's fiction and nonfiction have been largely emphasized. However, one of my assumptions is to address Woolf's search for selfhood from a Marxist Feminist perspective. Therefore, this analysis endeavors to focus on Woolf's attempt to break down the patriarchal rationalism by focusing on women material liberation and denouncing their distinction as a mass class in Britain, throughout her fiction and nonfiction: *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Throughout *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), the two female characters are haunted by the quest for the self and are placed in the same state of the enslaved proletariat. It will, therefore, be my concern to demonstrate that Woolf's feminism shares the same principles with Marxist Feminism when she deals with the theory of the "*material determinism*" of women, the formation of ideology and the raise of class-consciousness through her alienated female characters. Woolf's female characters develop an "*analogous true consciousness of their own oppressed condition*" as she introduces her theory of androgyny as well as "*the angel in the house*" to criticize the hegemonic male dominated gender discourse.²⁷ As a consolidation to her fiction, Woolf's sociological essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929) can be considered as a feminist approach to the liberation of women.

Woolf's female characters fall in a state of intimate confessions. Her stance is for female creativity, education and liberation. Therefore, Woolf's novels "*probe the secret coded relations of men and women*".²⁸ As a feminist writer, she is aware of the oppressive, tyrannical and abusive situation of the paradigm of the Victorian womanhood.

Method and Materials

It has so far been demonstrated that the materials selected to study Woolf's scope of feminism and the quest for selfhood in her fiction and nonfiction concern *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929) as a consolidating sociological essay. Feminist and Marxist Theory is the more appropriate approach in carrying this research because it deals with women engendered worlds who suffer from patriarchal domination and the capitalist hegemonic masculinity. This truth is broadly similar to the proletariat who are enslaved by the bourgeois class. Involvement in the public sphere and class-consciousness are the major facts that women need in order to develop their own true consciousness against subjugation, domination and oppression.²⁹

In *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism* (1992), Josephine Donovan's argues that women will remain illiterate as long as they stay without knowledge of the Feminist Theory. Donovan's work is considered as a teaching source of both the historical and philosophical main events that led to the rise of the Feminist Theory. She classifies different types of Feminism in accordance with historical evolution. According to her, feminism is divided into several types: "*Enlightenment Liberal*", "*Cultural*", "*Marxist*", "*Freudian*", "*Existential*", "*Radical and the New Feminist Moral Vision*".³⁰

Woolf's fiction and nonfiction are shaped by her own experience of patriarchy and capitalism. Her feminist commitment is revolutionary in a Marxist sense. For she "*was attacking -a feminist- patriotism, nationalism, the values of the British patriarchal establishment for which so many wars have been fought all over the world*".³¹ Donovan argues that Woolf's feminism assumes a fundamental difference between men and women who see the world through "*different eyes*". This "*stems from their condition of being outsiders*".³² Their awareness is an outcome of "*consciousness-raising*" which is rooted in Marxist premises. As evidence, Frederick Engels points out: "*He [the husband] is the*

bourgeoisie and the wife represents the proletariat".³³ Marxist feminist intellectual powers have developed in dialogue with economic or material determinism.

The idea of material determinism is generally known as "*historical materialism*". Marx and Engels, in the preface to the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), claim: "*In every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, the social organization [...] can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch*".³⁴ In *The German Ideology* (1846), Marx also argues that it is the economic conditions that influence ideology. He points out: "*We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life- process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process*".³⁵ Considering this outlined quotation, ideology is primordial and has an inherent role in the idea of class-consciousness. The proletariat becomes conscious and opposed to the ruling class hegemony. The class-conscious proletariat who has long been exploited and othered, becomes alienated and marginalized. In this respect, Donovan argues that alienation is the product of the "*objectification of labor*".³⁶ The worker not only feels cut off from others but also becomes an "*outsider*". It is, therefore, in this perspective that *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927) converge with the Feminist and Marxist Theory. Woolf's androgynous ideas of the participation of women in the public sphere and rise of class-consciousness are referred to in Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Marxist feminism deals with the idea of the "*material determinism*" of women as proletariat.³⁷ It follows from the above assumptions that Woolf's revolutionary ideas denounce the marginalization of the British woman class and consider their monetary liberation as a primordial fact. Woolf's experience spans both Victorian and modern times. The Modernist period has known many historical and social events such as the widespread of the Marxist ideas and women's right to vote.

My selection of Woolf's fiction and nonfiction is justified by the fact that Woolf seeks to highlight the alienation of the woman in the British patriarchal society. *A Room of One's Own* (1929) can be considered as a feminist appeal to the liberation of women as Woolf's expression and truth of facts draw a historical revision of woman writing and voice the patriarch in a contradictory pervasive rhetorical debate.

Methodological Outline

In order to explore the themes of feminism and the quest for selfhood in Woolf's fiction and nonfiction, this dissertation is divided into four sections. The first section addresses Woolf's feminism, cultural context and origins during the modernist era in Britain. It introduces to the reader the cultural milieu of the author and shows the situation of the patriarchal oppression experienced by the author. The second section is devoted to the study of feminism in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and the quest for selfhood. It highlights the major themes of "otherness" and the quest for the "self". It deals with Woolf's feminist awareness as a main cause to resistance through her androgenic fictive world and demonstrates how the writer uses androgyny as an outcome of her feminist class consciousness and expression. The third section is concerned with *To the Lighthouse* (1927) in which Woolf's position as a cultural outsider is embodied in her female characters. "Ordinary experience"³⁸ and class-consciousness are to be discussed in accordance with the themes of feminism and selfhood. The fourth section is a consolidation of this data-based research which concerns Woolf's feminism and material determinism. Within this topic, it should be demonstrated that Woolf suggests a harsh criticism of both patriarchy and capitalism in *A Room of One's Own* (1929). This sociological and philosophical essay demonstrates the presence of the British women in the literary ground and voices the patriarchal contradictory discourse. It should be argued that

A Room of Own (1929) embodies a rhetorical and functional debate of Woolf's fiction and nonfiction.

Endnotes

¹ Josephine Donovan, *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1992), 10.

² Mohamed Gariti, "Hobbes, Locke and Astell: Dialogue and Polemics" (Magister dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Magister Degree in English, Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou, 2006), 1-20

³ Catherine Acka and Ali Gunes, "Male Myth-Making: The Origins of Feminism", 2009 at: <http://www.nobleworld.biz/images/A-G> pdf. June 18, 2014.

⁴ Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature* (New York: Facts on File, 2006), 127-128.

⁵ Mohamed Gariti, "Hobbes, Locke and Astell: Dialogue and Polemics" (Magister dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Magister Degree in English, Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou, 2006), 20.

⁶ Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature*, 198.

⁷ Iain Chambers, "Waiting on the End of the World?" in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* ed., Morley David and Chen Kuna-Hsing (London: Routledge, 2005), 213-219.

The word "*ideology*" is clearly dealt with in Gramsci's "*Selections from Prison Note Book*" (London: ElecBook, 1999), 704. He considers "*ideology*" a powerful belief related to education, religion, morality...etc and which serves as an aspect of "*sensationalism*" of the French philosopher and economist Antoine Louis Claude Destutt de Tracy's (1754-1836) *Memoire Sur La Faculté de Penser, Projet d'Element D'Ideologie* (1801-1815).

The word "*Hegemony*" originates from Greek "*hegemon*" which means a leader or a ruler. In *The Cultural Studies Reader* (1999), Simon During argue that it is used to refer to an influence or a rule of one country over another. In the 20th century Marxism, The Italian Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) used it to explain the rule of the dominant class over other classes; it is an indirect form of domination which is generally manifested by Coercion. Gramsci's theory of Hegemony was central in the development of cultural studies.

⁸ Christopher Gillie, *Movements in English Literature 1900-1940* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 103.

⁹ Ibid, 101-107.

The founding fathers of British Cultural Studies are: Arnold, Richards and Leavis. They shared the view that culture is elitist. In *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Mathew Arnold calls the Bible Protestantism of ancient Hebrews "*Hebraism*". He divides the British social class into "*barbarians*" or the upper-class who prefer the physical culture rather than the intellectual, the "*philistines*" or the middle class and the "*populace*" or the rest of the lower class in Britain. The philistines are ignorant people and violent. The Arnoldian view of culture consists of what Pierre Bordieu calls the "*Cultural Capital*". It is against ordinary culture and "*mass culture*".

¹⁰ Mark Wollaeger, *Modernism, Media and Propaganda: British Narrative from 1900 to 1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 33.

¹¹ Jane Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 68.

Goldman argues that “free indirect discourse is a technique of is a technique that voices the narrative multiple view speech of characters.

¹²Mark Wollaeger, *Modernism, Media and Propaganda: British Narrative from 1900 to 1945*, 33.

¹³ In his *Selections From Prison Note Book*,¹³¹, Gramsci coins his concept of the “*organic intellectual*” which he defines “*organic intellectuals*” as the member so of the society who are not distinguished by their profession but rather by their intellectual “*aspirations*” they exercise in their class to which they “*organically belong*”.

¹⁴Brody L. Susan. “Literature and the Legacy of Virginia Woolf/ Stories and Lessons in Feminist Legal Theory, 2. Http// .repository. Jmsl. ed./ factpubs.com. accessed on June 2014.

¹⁵Jane Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 22. Goldman explains that “*bildungsroman*” and “*kunstlerroman*” i-e which deal with individual and the artistic development of the character or the protagonist. A “*kunstlerroman*” is a type of a “*bildungsroman*”.

¹⁶Ibid, 86.

¹⁷Jenifer Rich, *An Introduction to Modern Feminist Theory: The Radical Belief that Women Are Human Beings*” at Support@humanities-ebooks.co.uk, 2007, 6.

¹⁸Brian Sheehan, “The Mrs. Dalloway Confessions” (Lycoming College, 2006), 3.

¹⁹Jing- Yun Huang “Towards a Feminine /Feminist /Female Discourse of Virginia Woolf” (Ph Dissertation, National Sun Yat-Sen University 2004) , 4.

²⁰Alice Fox, *Virginia Woolf and the Literature of the English Renaissance* (Oxford: Clemson, 1990), 15.

²¹James J. Miracky, *Regenerating the Novel: Gender and Genre in Wool, Forster, Sinclair, and Lawrence* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 17.

²²Jane Garrity, “Virginia Woolf, Intellectual Harlotry, and the 1920s British Vogue in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. Pamela L. Caughie (New York: Garland Publishing, 2006), 187.

²³Ibid, 193.

²⁴Goldman ed., *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf*, 112.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature* (New York: Facts on File, 2006), 475-476.

²⁷Ibid, 614.

²⁸ Ibid, 596.

²⁹Donovan, *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1992), 184.

³⁰Ibid, 184.

³¹Ibid, 65

³²Ibid, 65

³³Ibid, 66

³⁴Ibid, 68

³⁵ Ibid, 67.

³⁶Ibid, 67.

³⁷Ibid, 67

³⁸Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 355.

III. Results and Discussion

Woolf's feminism is revolutionary in a Marxist sense. The pervasiveness of her feminist commitment prevails both in her fiction and nonfiction. This dissertation studies feminism and the quest for selfhood in Woolf's fiction and nonfiction: *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929). It addresses the founding problematic on how Woolf's writings denounce the Victorian patriarchy and capitalism amidst the distinction of the woman class in Britain that emerged as a striking social debate. The following study argues on her feminist position that demeans the capitalist materialism and the patriarchal hegemony from a Marxist feminist perspective. Donovan's ideas of "alienation", "material determinism" and "consciousness raising" contribute to the theoretical and analytical arguments for the construction of this dissertation which reaches four major findings: the juxtaposition of Woolf's cultural milieu with the early twentieth century revolutionary Britain, the quest for the reconstruction of feminine identity through *Mrs. Dalloway's* (1925) rebellious narratives, the expression of cultural marginalization in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and the denunciation of feminine oppression as well as dehumanization throughout *A Room of One's Own* (1929).

The main findings of this analysis provide a contextual and cultural milieu of the author. The first section juxtaposes Woolf's interwar cultural British milieu with an alternative account of the aftermath of the First World War (1914-1918) and the revolutionary era of early twentieth century. It demonstrates how Woolf's dichotomized late Victorian and modern life experiences made of her a truly prolific feminist writer who challenged the hegemonic Edwardian "myth-making" discourse on the inferiority of the female sex.

The second section's main results deal with patriarchy and the quest for selfhood in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). It has been argued on the extent to which Woolf creatively unveils the

Victorian “*myth-making*” paradigm of womanhood and keenly mirrors her heroine’s quest for the self. The truth of this novel denounces the patriarchal institution of marriage. It is important to note that throughout *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Woolf reveals how feminist awareness evolves through the human consciousness and leads to resistance. This resistance to oppression can be understood as Woolf’s expression through her character’s confessions which leads to the introduction of her theory of androgyny. Amidst the patriarchal ideological influences and the material reality, Woolf demonstrates the possibility of the equality of both the masculine and feminine human minds.

The third section centers on cultural marginality and otherness in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927) which reflects Woolf’s feminist revolutionary responsibility and demonstrates the British woman independence possibility. *To the Lighthouse* assumes Woolf’s feminist position as a cultural outsider and indicates women class-consciousness as an outcome of their “*ordinary experience*”. As a second wave Marxist feminist, Woolf aims at the rehumanization of the British woman who has long been bound to material determinism and patriarchy. In “Hobbes, Locke and Astell: Dialogue and Polemics” (2006), Doctor Gariti argues that an essay develops a dialogic truth of facts that is defined by what Edward Hoagland (1988) describes as “*mind speaking to mind*”. Therefore, it is important to point that Woolf’s provocative feminist discourse provides fiction that embodies elements of nonfiction.

The fourth section seeks to extend Woolf’s search for selfhood throughout her sociological nonfiction essay *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) which contributes to a broad denunciation of the oppressive feminine truth of facts. It can be read as a feminist appeal to the liberation of woman from their class distinction, marginalization and dominion.

Finally, the general conclusion acknowledges how writings reverse the patriarchal discourse on the inferiority of the female sex as well as dehumanization of the feminine

identity. Woolf's voicing of patriarchy demeans its great historical mythic interpretations and dominion. It has been argued that Woolf's writings seek to free women of their downgraded mass position due to their marginalization and "*material determinism*" in Britain and achieve a feminine monetary independence.

Section One: Virginia Woolf's Feminism: Cultural Context and Origins

Woolf's cultural milieu of the Bloomsbury group is of much influence as her literary sphere and feminist commitment are enhanced by her cultural origins and context. Her historical awareness of the oppressive wrecks of patriarchy is suffused with disenchantment while the main tenets of hegemonic patriarchy and otherness are at the core of her feminist discourse.

Virginia Woolf was born Adeline Virginia Stephen on January 25, 1882 in Kensington in London. Her life coincided with two important British eras: the Victorian and the Modernist times. Frederiech Angel's publication of *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) highlights the class struggle of the proletariat in Victorian England. Woolf's cultural origins and context as a "*highbrow intellectual*" situate her as an explicitly feminist author who lived and experienced the revolutionary movements of the "*Fin de siècle*" period, the Bloomsbury group, the emergence of modernism, the feminist movement and the First World War (1914-1918).¹

The *fin de siècle* period knew many historical events such as: Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (1897), the suffragettes' movements, Irish Home Rule agitation (1910-1912), the Russian Bolshevik Revolution (1917), the establishment of Irish Free State (1922) and the Labour Government in Britain (1924). Capitalism and patriarchy were harshly attacked not only by the Fabian society but by the feminist movement in Britain as well. It was during this turbulent era that increased many revolutionary Marxist thoughts as Trade unions and the

Labour movement were seeking to improve the working conditions of the proletariat. The socialist Beatrice Webb (1914) writes: “*The landslide in England towards social democracy proceeds steadily, but it is the whole nation that is sliding, not one class of manual workers*”.² Working class women started to become aware and conscious of their situations. It was in these circumstances that women were exploited not only by their husbands but also by factory owners. The Victorian woman, who had long been enslaved, subjugated, dominated and even considered as a property, started also to participate in the First World War with men. Woolf’s cultural feminist commitment could not stand aloof from her ideological, historical and cultural sphere of the Bloomsbury milieu.

Woolf belonged to a group known as Bloomsbury in Great Britain that included: her brother Thoby, a brilliant Cambridge Graduate, Maynard Keynes (1883-1970), E.M Forster (1879-1941), Roger Fry (1866-1934), T.S Eliot (1888-1965), Vanessa Bell (1879-1961) and Leonard Woolf (1880-1969). Bloomsbury group soon became “*synonymous with avant-garde art, formalist aesthetics*”.³ It was composed of what Goldman describes as the “*Cambridge Apostles*”. In *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* (2000), Mc Neillie claims that Bloomsbury:

Was in origin Victorian and by acculturation surely British upper-middle class[...]/ among the Bloomsbury groups forebears and relations were noted opponents of slavery[...]/ lawyers and civil servants, members of the judiciary, agents of empire, Cambridge dons.⁴

Mc Neillie argues that Bloomsbury was created in 1904 by a young British generation of upper-middle class authors, critics and painters who were influenced by the “*English Aesthetism*”, “*Platonic philosophy*” and the French nineteenth century expression of “*l’art pour l’art*” or arts for art’s sake.⁵ Woolf’s revolutionary ideas were enhanced by her cultural milieu. Raymond Williams describes Woolf’s fiction as “*different experiences and readings of experience*.”⁶ Woolf was influenced by the Bloomsbury philosophical circle of thoughts

such as “*anti-imperialism*”, “*antifascism*”, “*feminist politics*” and intellectual development of the modernist era.⁷

A great deal of debate has been conducted on Woolf’s cultural context and modernism. Modernist literature witnessed a shift of focus thanks to the emergence of modernism as an artistic and intellectual efflorescence of ideas. It portrays the inner life of the individual through vision, viewpoint, stream of consciousness and flashback techniques. It is the literature of the inner self and the psyche. Psychoanalysis is the science of the unconscious, the human desires and emotions. Woolf’s essay “*Modern Fiction*” deals with the idea of the emergence of the psychoanalytic theory and practice in England, which was discovered first by Freud and later on by Havelock Ellis and Ernest Jones⁸. Psychoanalysis offers many deep explanations of the unconscious functions that spontaneously occur in the production of art. In “*Modern Fiction*”, Woolf acknowledges the fact that there is a close connection between psychology and modern literary practice: “*For the moderns [...] the point of interest lies very likely in the dark places of psychology*”.⁹ Therefore, it is important to note that Woolf’s engagement with psychoanalysis resulted from her construction of a feminine identity. Woolf’s artistic innovations are concerned with the way she herself understood the on-going controversies that she witnessed. She considers the act of writing as a revolutionary as she explores class consciousness and “*ordinary experience*” of her female characters. According to Williams, Woolf was a “*highbrow*”. “*Highbrowism*” can be seen as one of the main public issues. He considers highbrows as intellectually superior toward non intellectuals. However, Woolf uses the term “*middle brow*” in *Common Reader* in order to avoid the growing cultural tension¹⁰. Both her fiction and nonfiction are considered as a teaching source which calls for women resistance. Therefore, throughout her innovative works, Woolf’s writings are put in a “*sexist literary tradition*” in which women are given more importance imaginatively than practically:

She pervades poetry [...] she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact, she was the slave of anybody whose parents forced a ring upon her finger.¹¹

It is understood that as long as the position of the British woman is under the patriarchal dominion, she is excluded from history and politics though she remains omnipresent in the masculine lives and fictions. It follows from the above quotation that Woolf condemns even the institution of marriage which is coercive and tyrannical to women.

Woolf's contributions to feminism seek to free the position of women of class distinction in Britain. Her moral and cultural identifications of the self are successfully challenging patriarchy, gender class victimization and repression. Her rejection of patriarchal rules enlivens her combining fictional depiction of gender othering. Western civilization and literature have always been considered as patriarchal and "*phallogocentric*". As evidence, Abrams points out that: "*phallogocentrism*":

manifests itself in the western discourse not only in its vocabulary and syntax, but also for its rule of logic, its proclivity for fixed classifications and oppositions, and its criteria for what we take to be valid evidence and objective knowledge¹²

The tyrannical situation of women deprives them of their minimal rights to education and participation in the public life. Their lives are devoted to procreation and slavery domestic surroundings. Woolf herself was subjected by the patriarchal rule in her family. Being aware of the need of class-consciousness and rebellion against such dominant patriarchy, she experiences her readings from: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Mary Wollstonecraft and many others. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), she mentions:

I think we are on the frock of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, of some mute and inglorious Jane Austen, Emily Bronte who dashed her brains out on the moor or mopped and mowed about the highways crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to.¹³

Woolf was an influential member in several feminists groups like: the Suffrage Movement, World Women Organization and National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

From the onset of her career, Woolf maintained her position as a feminist writer. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, she says: “*For in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house*”.¹⁴ Woolf criticizes directly the Victorian patriarchal society and its illusion that was destroyed by the First World War (1914-1918).

The experience of the First World War (1914-1918) was an important event for the whole humanity. It served as a potent foil in Woolf’s writings for great political, social and cultural changes that occurred in Europe. John Bourne (2000) argues that: “*The First World War was truly ‘the Great War’ [...] There were advances for the organized working class, especially its trade unions, especially in Britain, and arguably for women*”.¹⁵ The impact of the First World War (1914-1918) on Britain was so disastrous, dramatic and atrocious. Women situations were gradually changing from illiteracy to elementary education as their experience of the war merged with their enduring actions. The Women’s Social and Political Union was demanding the right to vote while the debates on their position of unrepresented domestic service increased. Consequently, in 1928, women’s right to vote was recognized in Britain.¹⁶

In conclusion, it is important to note that the First World War (1914-1916) led to disappointment, depression and uncertainty. However, the struggle for women’s right achieved liberation. Woolf’s fiction is based on her memory of her own experience in the British patriarchal society.

Endnotes

¹ Jane Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf, Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25.

² David Mc Dowall, *An Illustrated History of Britain* (England: Longman, 1989), 167.

³ Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf*, 46.

⁴ Mc Neillie, Andrew. "Bloomsbury" in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* ed. Roe, Sue and Susan, Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Melba Caddy-Keane, *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 27.

⁷ Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf*, 141.

⁸ Ibid, 140

⁹ Caddy- Keane, *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere*, 27.

"*Different experiences and readings of experience*: Woolf's fiction mirrors exactly the way British women lived in the status of the "*proletariat*" where they experienced subjugation and tyrannical domination of a life full of sorrow and anxiety.

¹⁰ Ibid, 5.

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*. Ed . Antony, Gray. (London: Wordsworth, 2012), 560

¹² Caddy-Keane, *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere*, 5.

"*To an Unnamed Listener*": BBC Series launched by J. B. Priestley's talk "to a *High-Brow*" and his mate Harold Nicholson's talk "to a *Low- Brow*". In fact, the cause of this clash was Woolf's use of the term "highbrows" in a letter addressed to editor of the *New Statesman and Nation* in 1932 but was never sent. Woolf called herself a highbrow because she considers language is never "*transparent*" since it exposes cultural values of every one.

¹³ Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 590.

¹⁴ Ibid,, 183.

¹⁵ Bourne John, "Total War: The Great War" in *The Oxford History of Modern War* ed. Townsend Charles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 137-151.

¹⁶ John Oakland, *British Civilization: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1998) 21.

Section Two: Patriarchy and the Quest for the Self in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)

Mrs. Dalloway (1925) is Woolf's fourth novel, written between 1922 and 1925. It is a one-June-day novel which is set in London in 1923, in the author's own hometown. Throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf emerges as an innovative feminist writer who seeks to unveil the gender-biased discourse of the Edwardian era in Britain. Donovan's idea of Marxist feminism is clearly dealt with in *Mrs. Dalloway* as Woolf depicts Clarissa Dalloway as a class-conscious woman whose loss of identity is due to patriarchy and capitalism. Consequently, her theory of androgyny is an outcome of her turbulent feminist resistance while her feminist awareness results in her expression.¹

Patriarchy, the Quest for Selfhood and the Spirit of a Confronting Endurance

Woolf's powerful and turbulent feminist commitment prevails in *Mrs. Dalloway* in which she explores her confirmation of women involvement in what Melba Caddy-Keane describes as the "*public sphere*" during the postwar patriarchal Britain. *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) takes place over the course of one single day. The novel portrays Clarissa's loss of identity by the act of marriage. Being married to a fiftyish upper-middle-class man Mr. Dalloway makes of her a marginalized "*other*". Clarissa Vaughan, who has lost her free identity, spends all her day in mourning her dramatic "*otherness*" by the act of becoming Mrs. Dalloway: "*being Mrs. Dalloway, not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway*".² The institution of marriage is described as a house of oppression, obedience and subjugation. Clarissa's loss of identity is reflected in her spirit of a confronting endurance and alienation.

The spirit of a confronting endurance that prevails in Clarissa Dalloway denounces the unexposed truths of the oppressive otherness of women in the British patriarchal. She cannot communicate freely with her husband: “*But he stood for a moment as if he were about to say something; and she wondered what [...] Some Committee? She asked [...] Armenians’ he said; or perhaps it was, ‘Albanians.’*”³. Mrs. Dalloway is depicted as being aware of her husband’s neglect and cannot even ask him a simple question of where he was going. Woolf portrays the subjugated life of a married woman. Marriage is governed by patriarchy and male hegemony. As a matter of fact, Clarissa’s identity is lost by the act of belonging and loneliness reinforces her frustrations.

Alienation is one of the main important elements in Marxist feminism. Clarissa Dalloway suffers from loneliness and solitude: “*Loneliness and frustrations catch Clarissa’s thought while she remains young in heart*”. ⁴Clarissa’s isolated “*self*” is in need of communication. Though years passed, she keeps hope and organizes a party so as to offer some satisfactory moments of joy to her family and friends. Though she is old, her feelings and emotions are still alive. Mrs. Dalloway’s coming of age involves her disillusionment as she moves from innocence to experience and ignorance to knowledge. Her identity is shaped by her oppression and solitude as she suffers from the lack of communication which leads her to alienation. Her experience draws out the unique challenges that patriarchy and capitalism imposed on women through a gender marginalized class. Throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf seeks to depict a highly disturbing male dominion brutality. Her conscientious “*ordinary experience*” is demonstrated through her heroine’s intimate confessions about her isolated self and confronting spirit of endurance.

Woolf’s enduring is shown in the heroinism of Clarissa Dalloway. Her engaged feminine struggle is suffused by her powerful “*ordinary experience*” and class-consciousness.

Consequently, her resistance is an outcome of her consciousness raising while the introduction of her theory of androgyny prevails as a result of her feminist expression.

Woolf's Class-consciousness, Resistance and Androgyny

The search for selfhood in Woolf's fiction indicates to what extent she believed in the power of art to resist, to save and to free the oppressed. *Mrs. Dalloway* provides the deflating patriarchal authority as Woolf's heroine is portrayed as a fully realized character whose confessions offer an engaging story of wryness and class consciousness

Woolf's feminist class consciousness is a powerful cause of her expression that offers a rejuvenated emphasis of the interconnectedness of both the masculine and feminine minds. This feminist awareness is shown through her inclusion of the memory of the First World War (1914-1918). Sandberg (2010) argues Woolf portrays Clarissa Dalloway as an experienced woman and integrates Elizabeth Dalloway as an innocent young character.⁵

Mrs. Dalloway (1925) offers a deeply thought-provoking tone that highlights the sense of self-consciousness and self-reflexive resistance. So innovative and creative is her complex varied heroinism. Through her writings, she conveys the experiences of her moral, cultural, social and political grounds. Just as deeply significant is her fiction, she succeeds to convey the terror, violence and senselessness of patriarchy and war. Therefore, "memory" ⁶is an important factor in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) which occurs in her integration of the aftermath of the First World War (1914-1918). Herein, she introduces Septimus' sufferance as a warning vision of death: "went to France to save England [...] The war had taught him. It was sublime [...] he had especially in the evening, these sudden thunder- claps of fear". ⁷ Though the war is finished, Septimus is still remembering and living its outcomes. Memory is an important mental process which leads to awareness. It is also what Paul Ricoeur describes as being related to time. He considers *Mrs. Dalloway* as a novel "about time"⁸ while he identifies two

types of time: “*chronological time*” and “*internal time*”⁹. As far as the “*chronological time*” is concerned, it is represented by: the clocks and the striking of “*Big Ben*” in the novel while the “*internal time*” is “*the time of consciousness*”. In other words, internal time is private while chronological time is public. Snodgrass points out: “*Mrs. Dalloway characterizes a seemingly unimportant turning point in a day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway. The closing sentiment summarizes her problem with the past*”.¹⁰ Woolf’s heroine is a freethinker and a strong-minded woman who bears an extraordinarily acute memory and an intellectual conscious mind as she develops a solid understanding of her feminine consciousness of both the patriarchal experience and time.

Woolf’s intellectual and moral class consciousness of patriarchy is mainly seen through her heroine’s life and experience. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa has developed a deconstructive awareness that she has developed through her experience of femininity. Though she suffers from her torrential grief, she challenges the capitalist and patriarchal intersecting oppressions. Consequently, she spends all her day in thinking and talking to herself: “*but to go deeper, [...] in her own mind now, what did it mean to her, this thing she called life? [...] she felt what a waste; and what a piety*”.¹¹ Clarissa’s awareness of “*piety*” and “*waste*” establishes her as an experienced woman who is aware of her situation thanks to her reflections. Her memory is a dynamic factor as it links her to her past and present at the same time. As a prodigious and prolific feminist writer, Woolf engages in a rebellious literature that proves her eventual success. Throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, she suggests a feminist re-envisioning of her feminine consciousness that depends on experience and age.

The integration of Clarissa’s daughter shows the importance of feminist consciousness in relation to age. Elizabeth, her daughter is the only character who is portrayed as unaware since she is a young girl: “*and her fine eyes to meet, gazed ahead, blank, bright, with the staring incredible innocence of sculpture*”.¹² Elizabeth Dalloway is a different character as

she appears freer than her mother, thereby Woolf advocates women liberation through her juvenile vision of the coming women generations. However, In “The Tunneling Process: Some Aspects of Virginia Woolf’s Uses of Memory and Past” (2000), Dick Susan argues that Elizabeth Dalloway lacks a “*retrospective orientation*”. It is important to point out that memory is an important aspect in Woolf’s fiction and nonfiction that challenge the patriarchal Victorian discourse.¹³

Woolf’s feminist class consciousness is concerned with facing the patriarchal dominant masculine stereotype. As evidence, she claims in her essay *Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid*: “*If we could free ourselves from slavery we should free men from tyranny*”¹⁴. Women are considered by Woolf as being trapped in their micro world of the domestic picture of the “*angel in the house*” that enslaves them. The more important reality on the ground is the fact that Woolf is concerned with feminism and cultural criticism as her writings include the pervasiveness of power in her gender discourse. Both her fiction and nonfiction reflect social, cultural and political issues through her feminist awareness which leads to resistance.

Resistant literature achieves a grand narrative that underpins the gender class distinction in Britain throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*. Woolf’s search for selfhood constructs an invisible power that emerges in her writings. Having emphasized memory and experience, she conflates both her past and present due to her successful covering of the gender othering: “*she could remember scene after scene at Bourton- Peter furious, Hugh not, of course his match in any way, but still not a positive*”.¹⁵ In order to answer back the arrogance of the Edwardian patriarchy, her contemptuous resistance achieves a tremendous power as she denounces the tyranny of marriage and the self imprisonment of the domestic life. Goldman argues: “*As the name of the eponymous heroine suggests, women’s identity is considered here as circumscribed by men*”.¹⁶ The richness of Woolf’s feminism aims at demonstrating the British oppression of women as a mass class. Her resistance contains a quite accurate

understanding of sexism as it embodies “*open-ended*” narrative discussions on women as a down-graded mass in Britain. At the heart of her quest for identity, Woolf discusses the low status of woman as a “*gendered-other*”.

Woolf’s sense of uniqueness and self-formation has given a great deal of value to her wholly-positioned feminist manifesto while her resistance exposes the gendered-other sexually and intellectually. Her aim of this liberation is a convincing truth as her introduction of the androgynous mind is an outcome of an expression that seeks for the equality of both the male and female sexes.

Given the ubiquitous nature of Woolf’s androgynous mind, it should be argued that her theory of androgyny is an outcome of resistance and awareness. Consequently, her fiction argues for gender equality through her theory of “*androgyny*” which is an archetypal vision of the union of both sexes in one soul. It is shown through gender equality and the character of Septimus Warren Smith.

Androgyny, as a theory, exists in relation to two forces: the masculine and the feminine minds. Woolf employs androgyny to concentrate on her characters’ full individuality and selfhood. The problem with the question “What is meant by androgyny?”, then, is that it is still trying to predetermine answers that go back to its real Greek sense in which “*andro*” means male while “*gyn*” means female. Professor Riche points out that “*androgyny*” is traced back to Plato’s idea of the human being that unites both the male and the female in one sex. When man and women rebelled against God, they were split into two halves.¹⁷ Fuller defines it as being “*two halves of one thought*” or the fact of mixing both male and female traits¹⁸. In *A Room of One’s Own* (1927), Woolf says: “*History is too much about wars; biography too much about great men; poetry has shown, I think a tendency to sterility and fiction*”.¹⁹ The androgynous aspect of her mind is reflected in her writings as she provides gender equality as

one of the most consistently successful and purest fact that demeans the masculinization of discourse. Patriarchal hegemony excluded women from literature, discourse and history. Jing Yung Huang argues that androgyny can occur in “*multiplicity instead of singularity, fluidity instead of rigidity, polyphony instead of monologue*”.²⁰ Polyphony or heteroglossia prevails in the Bakhtenian dialogism that considers the coexistence of different types of discourse in one novel. Bakhtin argues that the dialogic aspect of language “*foregrounds class, ideological and other conflicts, divisions and hierarchies within society*”.²¹ For instance, Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* achieves androgyny through the polyphonic technique of the stream of consciousness that she uses. Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus are very connected by Woolf’s narrative. Woolf says: “*if she only knew, if he only knew, if they only knew*”.²² It is important to point out that polyphony is one technique of androgyny. Therefore, both Clarissa and Septimus are in an active dialogue with Woolf.

In this context, the character Septimus embodies Woolf’s creation of her true thoughts about life itself since she herself suffered from madness and committed suicide. This androgyny does not only stand for Mrs. Dalloway but also for Woolf herself. Septimus Warren Smith is an important character who expresses Woolf’s opinion on what Smith calls “*the debilitating effects of feminizing and medicalizing grief*”.²³ Androgyny prevails in both Septimus and Clarissa who are supposed to be one and express what Woolf calls “*sanity and insanity*” as well as “*life and death*”.²⁴ Woolf’s inclusion of the character Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway* reflects her tragic end and suicide. Septimus suffers from the same psychological anxiety disorder problem which depresses Woolf as well. As evidence, Woolf’s mind is androgynous in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Her theory of androgyny is what she calls “*be woman-manly or man womanly*”.²⁵ Being a man or a woman in the British Edwardian society is measured by the class system and the proletariat status. She aims to achieve the equality of the sexes since it is the soul which triumphs not the body. Woolf makes a direct statement in the *Room of*

One's own: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction".²⁶

This shows Woolf's autonomous materialism as regards the distinction of the British women class. Similarly, Doctor Siber points out that Woolf's androgynous spirit prevails in both the characters of Evans and Sally throughout *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Evans is Peter's beloved while Sally is very close to Clarissa. As evidence, Woolf says: "*So there was no excuse [...] except the sin for which human nature had condemned him [Septimus] to death. That he did not feel. He had not cared when Evans was killed. That was the worst*".²⁷ Septimus committed suicide because he could not live without his beloved Evans while Clarissa and Sally share an androgynous mind of love. Woolf pens: "*But this question of love [...] this falling of love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love?*".²⁸ Clarissa's androgynous spirit demonstrates androgyny as an outcome of her awareness of patriarchy.

It follows from the above assumptions that *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) centers on Clarissa's act of speaking and denouncing subjugation. This brings us back to the scenario of Woolf's feminist expression as she comes to grips with her class-consciousness. Beneath these powerful realities, Woolf's androgyny offers us a way of viewing both the masculine and feminine minds as a unique complementary force. Her use of her theory of androgyny is an outcome of her expression, whereby locating herself as a cultural outsider.

Endnotes

¹ Jane Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 22.

²Virginia Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*. Ed. Antony, Gray (London: Wordsworth, 2012), 202.

³ Ibid, 200

⁴Ibid, 206

⁵ Eric Sandberg, "'Mysterious Figures': Character and Characterization in the Work of Virginia Woolf" (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2010), 112.

⁶Quoted in Eric Sandberg, "'Mysterious Figures': Character and Characterization in the Work of Virginia Woolf" (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2010), 110.

⁷Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 210.

⁸ Paul Ricoeur, ed., *Time and Narrative*. Quoted in Eric Sandberg, "'Mysterious Figures': Character and Characterization in the Work of Virginia Woolf" (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2010), 110.

⁹Quoted in Eric Sandberg, "'Mysterious Figures': Character and Characterization in the Work of Virginia Woolf" (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2010), 110.

¹⁰Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature* (New York: Facts on File, 2006), 614.

¹¹Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 200.

¹² Ibid, 212.

¹³ Quoted in Eric Sandberg, "'Mysterious Figures': Character and Characterization in the Work of Virginia Woolf" (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2010), 110.

¹⁴Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 15.

¹⁵Ibid, 15.

¹⁶Jane Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 68.

¹⁷ The term "androgyny" prevails in Plato's *Symposium* through Aristophanes' voice: "*the original human nature was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman and the union of the two*". Quoted in Plato, *Symposium* at <http://www.classics.mit.edu/plato/Symposium.html>. June 2014.

¹⁸Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf*, 147.

¹⁹Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 14

²⁰Huang, Jing-Yun, “Towards a Feminine / Feminist / Female Discourse of Virginia Woolf” (Ph D dissertation, National Sun Yat- sen University2004), 45.

²¹Adolphe Haberer, “Intersexuality in Theory and Practice” (Lyon: University of Lyon2, 2007), 57.

²²Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob’s Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One’s Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 202.

²² Ibid, 183.

²³ Ibid, 25.

²⁴ Ibid, 26.

²⁵ Ibid, 580.

²⁶ Ibid, 186

²⁷ Ibid, 149.

Section Three: Otherness and Cultural Marginality in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927)

The term of the “gendered -other” is resonant with all the complexity of the many different patriarchal experiences it implicates, and as the extracts in this study demonstrate, it addresses a primordial concern in Woolf's fiction and nonfiction. Her intellectual role locates her feminist position as a cultural outsider.

Woolf's Feminist Position as a Cultural Outsider

To the Lighthouse (1927) is Woolf's autobiographical novel that employs her self-revelatory gender otherness and cultural alienation. It is based on her childhood summers spent at St Yves in Cornwall and set in the period before and after the Great War from 1909 to 1919. The proliferation and diversity of her narrative achieves what Goldman describes as a “*kunstlerroman*”¹. Therefore, genre and identity prevail as predetermined aspects in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) while Woolf's voice is expressed through the character of Lily Briscoe who succeeds to affirm her presence, her art and existence as a free individual. Her mature character and identity are shown through her ability to see, to resist and to act. Accordingly, Woolf's awareness of the gender- biased Victorian patriarchy occurs in *To the Lighthouse* in which she highlights her rebellious spirit and writes a manifest literature of a class-conscious “*ordinary experience*”. As a matter of fact, she advances her rebellious literature by condemning the institution of marriage, showing women exclusion from politics, and suggesting women participation in the “*public sphere*” of work and independence.²

To the Lighthouse (1927) depicts the institution of marriage as being coercive, tyrannical and oppressive. Far from mutual love, respect and harmony, the unity of marriage is given a soulless vision of a master and slave relationship. Herein, Woolf's stance of the “*other*” is shown through a resistant wife and mother portrayal. Throughout *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay is a “*sympathetic*” obedient wife. Woolf says: “*She excelled in the*

difficult arts of family. She sacrificed herself daily [...] she never had a mind or a wish of her own.”³ Mrs. Ramsay’s sole duty is the satisfaction of her husband and children while her own desires are neglected. Woolf describes a house wife as an artist home maker who “*excelled*” in her difficult roles. Contrary to his wife, Mr. Ramsay is described as a “*tyrant*”. Therefore, Woolf’s gender discourse problematises the tricky negotiations inside marriage which is represented as a well-structured dominant institution. She says: “*but what remained intolerable [...] was that crass blindness and tyranny of his which had poisoned her childhood*”.⁴ Woolf considers men’s oppression to women as similar to poison which kills the essence of femininity and alienates women. Consequently, *To the Lighthouse* (1927) underlies the most brutal of women political exclusion.

Woolf’s conscious position as a cultural outsider is reinforced by her depiction of women’s exclusion from politics while she denounces the political dimension of oppression that denies women rights. Broadly similar to *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* depicts women as being outside the political scenes: “*Probably Mr. Bakes though, as Tansley accused the government [...] argued about politics, and Lily looked at the table cloth; and Mrs. Ramsay, leaving the argument entirely in the hands of the two men*”⁵ Both Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe are not involved in political affairs as they are unconcerned with the political debate between Mr. Banks and Tansley. During Woolf times, women were rather involved in their ordinary household matters. As a matter of fact, women are shown as marginalized by the hegemonic masculine power. The study of Woolf’s character Mrs. Ramsay shows how she portrays the inner self in relation to other selves. It is important to note that Woolf associated her own autobiographical elements as a mixture between fiction and reality. For instance, her summer home is described as “*days of pure enjoyment*”.⁶ Mrs. Ramsay stands for her mother while Mr. Ramsay for her father. They are based on Leslie and Julia Stephen but they are still fictional characters for Woolf attests: “*I don’t like being exposed as a novelist and told my*

*people are my mother and father, when, being in a novel, they 'are not'.*⁷ Throughout *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf has pursued a potentially artistic and cultural woman –centered discourse as she not only rejects patriarchy and capitalism but she calls for women cultural and material power which will contribute to social change. Therefore, Woolf supposedly entwines women involvement in the “*public sphere*” with work and monetary liberation.

To the Lighthouse (1927) suggests women participation in the public life as a solution to dominance and “*material determinism*”. It mirrors Woolf’s intersecting oppressions of gender and class in Britain. She provides a framework for understanding the British woman’s life and experience. Society was governed by patriarchal rationalism and the public sphere was controlled by the capitalist political economy. Her involvement in the feminist movement just after the First World War (1914-1918) is seen in her rebellious spirit in this novel while her position as a cultural outsider is merely shown through her portrayal of Lily Briscoe, an artist woman who rejects Mr. Ramsay’s patriarchy. Mrs. Ramsay is the portrayal of Woolf’s “*angel in the house*”.⁸ Unlike Mrs. Ramsay, Lily is unmarried, lives an independent life and is a painter. Mrs. Ramsay describes her as “*an unmarried woman has missed the best of life*”.⁹ The institution of marriage is considered as an obligation since unmarried women are excluded from society. However, it is through Lily Briscoe that Woolf shows the rebellious spirit of women who are capable of thinking and arguing freely as women do not always remain silent and consent to patriarchy. Lily Briscoe is an artist who “*clearly shows a spirit of rebellion to male society’s values as represented by Charles Tansley and William Bankes that say ‘women can’t paint, women can’t write’*”.¹⁰ However, Lily has finished her paintings and has proved that she is intellectual. Goldman states: “*Lily Briscoe [...] attempts a painting which serves as self -reflexive reference point*”.¹¹ Lily Briscoe is a rebellious woman, unmarried and shows a free spirit of an artist. Therefore, she stands for Woolf’s cultural position as an outsider to household wives. Not only does this quotation show her position, it

does also overshadow patriarchy, Goldman argues: “*Lily’s rejection of Mr. Ramsay’s amorous approaches, combined with his children’s defiance, suggests an unsettling, if not an overcoming of (his) patriarch*”.¹² Woolf’s word “yes” is carefully employed and it is generally followed by “*but*”. Lily Briscoe says yes not to the widowed Mr. Ramsay but only to her art. Lily is put in a marginalized but intellectual position. She is an outsider to the Ramsays. Woolf situates herself in Lily’s intellectual woman artist when she finishes her portrait of Mrs. Ramsay; she says “*I had my vision*”.¹³ Her artistic success and rejection of patriarchy rest on her principled critical intellectual mind.

Woolf’s rebellious discourse condemns the patriarchal marriage as it downgrades the position of women. Both Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe are seen in a low-positioned status by Mr. Ramsay and Tansley. For Woolf addresses this issue by depicting their exclusion from the political debates. Her affirmation of her position as a cultural outsider is understood in terms of her provocative use of the sentence “*women can’t paint, can’t write*”¹⁴. Woolf involves a breakdown of distinction between the male class and the female class in Britain. One comes to the conclusion that women’s mass-categorization is reinforced by the institution of marriage and lack of monetary liberation. Hence, “*gender- othering*” has accelerated the marginalization of the woman class in Britain while the raise of women class-consciousness is due to their daily struggle for the self and “*ordinary experience*”.¹⁵

Woolf’s Ordinary Experience and Class-Consciousness

Another major powerful argument is Woolf’s depiction of the “*ordinary experience*” of women as a reminder of the hegemonic “*angel in the house*”¹⁶ portrayal in *To the Lighthouse*. Her intense concern with identity and the search for selfhood are merely shown through her description of her female character’s mental processes, confessions and memory.

Woolf suggests women oppression as a provocative issue which raises their class-consciousness.¹⁷

To the Lighthouse (1927) has proved to be a voice of the oppressed housewife and the marginalized woman artist. All in all, her “*kunstlerroman*”¹⁸ achieves an anti- hegemonic patriarchal discourse and tersely interpretative framework. Woolf’s novel elevates the intellectual and artistic ability of women and holds up their class-conscious rebellious mind.

Class-consciousness emerges in *To the Lighthouses* (1927) as a conscious position of the buttressed patriarchal capitalist ideology that considers the woman class as being inferior to men and marginalizes them. Woolf suggests a reconstruction of the feminine identity through her consciousness raising that has developed into class-consciousness. Therefore, her fiction simultaneously brings with it new perspectives on the patriarchal subjugation of the British woman. In *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Mrs. Ramsay says: “*Then why did she mind what he said? Women can’t write, women can’t paint*”.¹⁹ Mrs. Ramsay is a mature and conscious woman who knows very well how she is viewed by men. For women are inferior to men since they under estimate them. However, no matter how under estimated women really are, Woolf’s sentence “*women can’t paint, women can’t write*” is considered as provocative challenge that defies men and patriarchy. Not only does this sentence oppress women, it also shows to what extent they are living in tyranny.

Woolf’s own feminist concern is reflected in her fiction as she rejects the negative image of women inferiority. She is painfully aware of the patriarchal capitalist abuse on women. Wherein, she suggests a look back to her past personal aspects. In “Virginia Woolf’s Photography and the Monk’s House Albums” (2000), Maggie Humm points out: “*Memories, or ghosts of the past as Woolf repeatedly suggests, often occur in gardens.*”²⁰ *To the Lighthouse* embodies Woolf’s frustrations, memory and emotions. She uses fictional

dynamics such as painting in *To the Lighthouse* in order to voice women and encourage their involvement in the public life. Her ideology of the “*angel in the house*” plays a pivotal role in her feminist theory. Her long feminist debate on the Victorian womanhood is focused on in *To the Lighthouse*, for Woolf’s character Mrs. Ramsay is an oppressed obedient housewife. Being a wife of a tyrant, her only sacrifice is for her children, whereas, her own identity belongs to her husband. Lily Briscoe is an example of a class-conscious woman who is aware of the selfless passive “*angel in the house*”. This lends support to the aforementioned assertion that Woolf’s class-consciousness aims at freeing women from material determinism and patriarchy.

Along with patriarchal subjugation, Woolf explains its further drawbacks that are more dangerous. Children will hate their father if he is a tyrant: “*But his son hated him. He hated him for coming up to them, for stopping and looking down on them[...] exaltation and sublimity of his gestures*”.²¹ Mr. Ramsay’s anger, egotism and disturbance make him lose his son. James’s feeling of an intense anger towards his father indicates the complexity of Mr. Ramsay and refusal, for going to the Lighthouse irritates his son who cannot believe his pretext of a bad weather. This bad behavior of man is a result of the saliency of the Victorian ideals. Woolf’s sentence “*he was a failure*” validates the denunciation of absolutism and shows the conflicting father/son relationship²². Love of man, woman and children are the primordial pillars in the foundation of any family in which women are important as men. Though they are oppressed, their mission remains sacred for they are the source of love. Mr. Ramsay’s intellectual mind does not help him to fill the role of perfect husband and father because of his patriarchy as the whole point of his fatherhood cannot be achieved. Therefore, Woolf’s fiction disempowers the patriarchal rationalism.

Herein, it can be argued that Woolf’s fiction is pervasive in a Foucauldian sense and a powerful portrayal of the image of woman, for literature has proved to bear the space, power

and knowledge of her feminist discourse. Woolf's fiction is rooted in her times as the power of her self-positioning reflects her cultural and social milieu. This power of knowledge and self-positioning reveals her "*mode of vital experience*" that denounces patriarchy and capitalism.²³ *To the Lighthouse* empowers the British woman and mirrors her challenges that she experiences so as to embark on a path of individual freedom. Woolf emphasizes the feminist cultural thoughts and innovation that create and recreate a construction of feminine identity while her feminist commitment involves a considerable struggle against gender othering.

All in all, it is important to note that Woolf's concern with feminism in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) expresses her deep frustrations of otherness, cultural marginality, "*ordinary experience*" and class-consciousness. This is done through the main character Lily Briscoe who says yes to art and no to patriarchy by her refusal to marry Mr. Ramsay. Hereafter, it is equally important to mention that Woolf's feminist struggle and class-consciousness indicate her isolated-self as an intellectual highbrow amongst phallogocentric and Eurocentric thoughts. For during her modern times, the literary scene has been dominated by misogynist male writers. *To the Lighthouse* (1927) appears to be a novel about feminine class-consciousness that overthrows the gender-based domination, capitalist class hegemony and gives voice to the British woman's traumatic experience of patriarchy and addresses her silenced-wretched life.

Endnotes

¹ Jane Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 52.

² Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf*, 74.

³ Virginia Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*. ed., Gray, Antony (London: Wordsworth, 2012), 316.

⁴ Ibid, 202.

⁵ Ibid, 200.

⁶ Eric Sandberg, "'Mysterious Figures': Character and Characterization in the Work of Virginia Woolf" (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2010), 127.

⁷ Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 202.

⁸ Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf*, 76.

⁹ Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 130.

¹⁰ Ibid, 202.

¹¹ Jane Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf*, 72.

¹² Ibid, 72.

¹³ Ibid, 72.

¹⁴ Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 75.

¹⁵ Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 77.

¹⁶ Ibid, 66.

¹⁷ Jane Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf*, 72.

¹⁸ Ibid, 72.

¹⁹ Ibid, 72.

²⁰ Maggie Humm, *Virginia Woolf's Photography and the Monk's House Albums*, in *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. Pamela L. Caughie (New York: Garland Publishing, 2006), 187.

²¹ Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 202.

²² Ibid, 200.

²³ Edward Soja, “History: Geography: Modernity”, ed., Simon Durin in *The Cultural Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 113.

Section Four: Feminism and Selfhood in Woolf's Nonfiction: *A Room of One's Own* (1929)

This analysis addresses issues presented in Woolf's master piece *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Her feminist intellectual commitment for the quest for the self can only be achieved by women's rebellion on the hegemonic Victorian discourse through their involvement in the public life. *A Room of One's Own* (1929) is Woolf's popular essay that presents her unmediated viewpoints concerning patriarchy and "*material determinism*". It is composed of six chapters and embodies Woolf's own feminist commitment and critics concerning women writings in England. Feminism was associated with women literary works and cultural products. *A Room of One's Own* can be read as a "*feminist approach*" that highlights the problem of the distinction of the woman class in Britain.¹

Woolf's Historical Re-envisioning of Women and Fiction

Accordingly, as a consolidation of her fiction, *A Room of One's Own* portrays Woolf's stance of the feminist search for selfhood through resistance to patriarchy, class struggle and a feminist revision to the history of women writing and androgyny.

Reading *A Room of One's Own* (1929) offers a fertile ground for the different approaches about feminism and resistance to patriarchy. It is a debate which mirrors Woolf's own thoughts about the status of women, though it is expressed through a "*duality of a speaker/narrator*"². Her voice appears present in the essay: "*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*".³ She engages in a feminist discourse that seeks to free women from patriarchy and capitalism. She advances a claim that a woman needs a room of her own in order to write fiction. It follows that the absence of women from the literary sphere is due to oppression and poverty. Woolf

illustrates the famous representatives of feminist fiction as follows: “*some witticism if possible about Miss Mitford; a respectful allusion to George Eliot; a reference to Mrs. Gaskell*”.⁴ This means that female fiction comes as a reaction to patriarchy. Woolf reflects the hard truth of being a woman and examines both the private and public identity quest. She illustrates the patriarchal hegemonic upheavals and openly inveighs against the hypocrisies of male domination as well as the exclusion of women from art and education. Woolf offers a disappointing argument on the subjection of the British woman and hails the rise of feminine class-consciousness and women inclusion in the literary sphere. Snodgrass argues that “*Selecting as models of feminist excellence Aphra Behn, Charlotte and Emily Bronte [...] Woolf honors women who follow their true nature outside the bounds of society and culture*”.⁵ Women resistance and expression is due to the patriarchal powers which lead them to react in the Foucauldian sense which states: “*where there is power, there is resistance*”.⁶ Herein, Woolf’s nonfiction is a powerful evidence of a feminist voice that woes women silenced wretched lives and calls for their material independence. Her feminist accomplishment reaches a turning point that encourages women expression and revolutionary narrative experimentation. She says: “*a woman must have money and a room if she is to write about fiction*”.⁷ Woolf starts by claiming the moral and intellectual awareness of the difficulty to speak about woman and fiction as she considers that it is hard to explicate her underlying truths. In spite of patriarchal oppressions, many female writers emerged and succeeded in their writings. She mentions Jane Austen, the Brontes, and Mrs. Gaskell as brilliant writers of the Victorian era. She also suggests the presence of an audience through Woolf’s introduction of the second person “*you*”: “*Are you aware that you are the most discussed animal in the universe?*”⁸ Similarly, she uses the first person singular “*I*” so as to advance a rhetorical debate which aims at convincing the audience in a vivid artistic way as it provides the truthfulness of her fiction. According to Woolf, the audience should be aware of patriarchy and capitalism

and diligent in taking notice. She focuses on “*a room of one’s own*” and “*money*”. Therefore, Woolf suggests that feminine liberation is primordial, and reinforces the idea of Marxist feminism which accounts for the patriarchal subordination of women as well as their class struggle must be reinforced.

Another illustrative consolidating fact in *A Room of One’s Own* is when Woolf advances her acute claim against patriarchy and over-develops her strong resistance: “*Professor von X, engaged in writing his monumental work entitled The Mental, Moral and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex. He was not in picture a man attractive to women.*”⁹ Woolf elevates the weaknesses of patriarchy through her illustration of Professor Von X’s *The Mental, Moral and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex*. She highlights his emotional weakness by saying: “*as if he were killing some noxious insect as he wrote [...], some cause for anger and irritation remained. Could it be his wife?*”¹⁰ She mocks the professor’s weaknesses and jealousy through a class-conscious questioning as her rhetorical multifaceted narrative strategies overemphasize her pursuit of facts. Consequently, her feminist self-confidence and intellectual class-consciousness ostensibly defends women liberation and disempowers women categorization as she supremely embodies a value-bearing powerful nature of women. Making matters worse, she believes that it is the weakness of patriarchy and the bourgeois which causes anger to both the patriarch and the bourgeois class:

Had he been laughed at to adopt the Freudian theory, in his cradle by a pretty girl? [...] Or is anger, I wondered, somehow the familiar, the attendant sprite on power? Rich people, for example, are often angry because they suspect that the poor want to seize their wealth. The professors, or patriarchs, as it might be more accurate to call them, might be angry for that reason partly.¹¹

Being aware of the underlying woman oppressions, Woolf focuses on the term patriarchy which she considers “*more accurate*” than the word “*professor*” and makes a reminder of the Victorian gender biased belief. She argues on the weaknesses of both the patriarchs and the bourgeois by referring to psychological explanations as she mentions the

Freudian theory as supportive evidence that claims that anger is a source of weakness. Herein, she demonstrates her knowledge as a scientific empowerment while she seeks to demean the hegemonic patriarchal matrix of domination. In other words, Woolf might have meant that if women were not important, men would have never thought of them. As evidence, Woolf claims: “*Making a fortune and bearing thirteen children no human being could stand it*”¹² This depicts the strength of being a woman. In claiming and arguing about her feminist commitment against traditional materialism and patriarchy, Woolf refers to reality and psychological truths which are based on personal experience in life such as child bearing. *A Room of One's Own* proves to be inspirational as it addresses an accumulation of facts, on women subordination, categorization and downgraded mass class in Britain. It can be viewed as a connective bridge that links art to reality, culture to society and history to originality. Woolf portrays fiction as a reality of nonfiction as it unveils the psychological, ideological and historical truths. Therefore, she locates the Elizabethan era as a starting point of women portrayal in fiction.

Woolf offers an important function to fiction through a truthful expression of woman oppression that goes back to the Elizabethan era. She is very conscious and aware of the absence of women writers during the Elizabethan period. Elizabethan Literature flourished and gained a pioneering success. Throughout her fiction and nonfiction, Woolf makes allusions and references to Shakespeare whose art is about men and women. The image of women in William Shakespeare's plays such as *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliette*, *A Merchant of Venice*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Othello* and *The Tempest* is omnipresent and even given important roles: “*Cleopatra must have had a way with her; Lady Macbeth, one would suppose, had a will of her own*”.¹³ This portrayal of women by men paves the way to ask many questions of how women's conditions, lives, and status really were. Woolf herself asks such questions: “*Why was the one sex so prosperous and the other so poor? [...]*Are you

*aware that you are the most discussed animal in the universe?”*¹⁴ This means that women are absent from the literary sphere. Although they prevail in some phallogocentric works, they are portrayed in their own views and not on the real ground. Woolf's quest for women selfhood goes back to history and the reality of the masculine literary grounds. Her feminist discourse embodies a great feminist feedback as one feels involved in a crucial debate amidst the presence of both the narrator and the audience. She unveils the oppressiveness of women by using the term “*animal*”. However, Woolf recognizes an important positive side of the Shakespearean mind: “*one goes back to Shakespeare's mind as the type of the androgynous, of the man womanly mind*”.¹⁵ She mentions the satisfaction of the complementarities of both sexes and considers Shakespeare as an androgynous man who is rather ambivalent with women. She explicates her theory of androgyny by referring to the presence of both the masculine and feminine minds in each human soul. According to Woolf, the definition of the male or female sex depends on the predominance of one mind over the other. Therefore, her suggestion of a woman artist is a provocative statement which shows the coming of the woman literary canon. Goldman describes Woolf's assertions in *A Room of One's Own* as “*gendered-sentence*”.¹⁶ Woolf perceptively explores her Marxist feminist debate that sets out to change the downgraded vision of the moral inferiority of woman. Along with the Elizabethan era, Woolf alleges women success to the Enlightenment age.

With regards to women writing, the enlightenment era was an age of the efflorescence of many ideas. Woolf argues on the seventeenth century women writing by mentioning: “*Mrs. Behn was a middle-class woman with all the plebeian virtues of humour, virility and courage*”.¹⁷ The quest for selfhood in Women's writings has started with the emergence of “*great ladies*” such as Aphra Behn who “*proved that money could be made by writing at the sacrifice [...] A husband might die or some disaster overtake the family*”.¹⁸ It is important to point out that Behn (1640-1689) is a feminist peer of the English Restoration era who

assumed the penname of “Asterea”. Behn’s loss of her husband is a strong argument held by Woolf. In 1665, Behn was widowed at the age of twenty and was obliged to carry on her life alone. Her writings involve: *Oronokwo* or *The Royal Salve* (1688) and eighteen plays such as: *The Jealous Bridgeromm* (1670) and *The Rover* (1677).¹⁹ According to Woolf, her writings made her a powerful rebellious woman. Behn is a vivid example provided by Woolf to consolidate her opinion for the liberation of women that is through commitment to literature and art. Therefore, her nonfiction essay addresses historical and cultural issues of the equality of the sexes.

Beneath these powerful realities, the equality of the sexes has been developed side by side with feminist expressions and writings. *A Room of One’s Own* is not only a consolidation of her fiction but also an answer back to the gender-biased preconceived ideas on women such as Jean Jacque Rousseau’s *The Social Contract* (1763) in which he calls for the education of women for the sake of the benefit of men and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667) in which he argues that the creation of the female is only for men’s pleasure.²⁰ *A Room of One’s Own* can be considered as an innovatively creative project that maintains many divergent perspectives. Woolf explores the reconstruction of feminine identity through literary, historical and cultural illustrations. Consequently, her nonfiction registers her personal quest for identity and self-understanding while it offers a fertile convincing depiction of women subjugation. Her artistic and strategic narrative calls for feminine liberation and reaction.

A Room of One’s Own (1929) is a popular and sociological essay in which Woolf makes a direct appeal to women urging them to act rather than react: “*Shakespeare had a sister [...] She died young- alas, she never wrote a word [...] But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences*”.²¹ She presents an argument about William Shakespeare’s sister who is as intelligent as him, as able to write fiction as him but lacks power. It is the power of freedom and free expression that was killed by the British

absolutism and patriarchal hegemonic gender discourse. Goldman argues on the possibility: ““*Judith Shakespeare*” stands for the silenced woman writer or artist”.²² This indicates a contradictory model of the individual male writing. Therefore, Woolf’s feminist debate can be considered as a feminist revision of the historical construction of the feminine identity starting from the Elizabethan era, the Enlightenment and the outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918).

The First World War (1914-1918) appears to have been a pivotal issue in Woolf’s fiction and nonfiction. Similarly, Woolf writes about the War in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929): “*Shall we lay the blame on the War? [...] Why, if it was an illusion, not praise the catastrophe [...] that destroyed and put it in its place?*”²³ The outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918) is so fatal and catastrophic. It killed millions of people, orphaned millions of children and plunged the whole humanity into waste, despair and absurdity. *A Room of One’s Own* appears to be a teaching source, a convincing book that seeks for the inner truth of the psyche, of the unconscious and of the darkness that hides behind the social, religious and cultural norms. In Woolf’s words, the so-called catastrophe did destroy the illusion of the Victorian moral and social certainties. Her awareness of the Edwardian materialism and patriarchy is shown through her experiments and personal witness as her interest in both psychology and psychoanalysis is expressed explicitly in *A Room of One’s Own*. For instance, she mentions the “*anger*” of the professor and the bourgeois. Hence, she suggests a feminist re-envisioning that seeks to disempower the patriarchal rationalism

A Room of One’s Own (1929) is nonfiction popular and social essay in which she highlights clearly her personal feminist commitment and her vision about the patriarchal rationalism, absolutism and the oppression of women. *A Room of One’s Own* holds the truths of the patriarchal equivocator discourse, the awakening of the Enlightenment era and the benefits of the catastrophic World War (1914-1918). Throughout her nonfiction, Woolf

advances her feminist commitment which seeks for feminine identity. Her main arguments are concerned with the material determinism of the British woman.

Woolf's Advocacy of a Material Liberation

As a second wave feminist writer, Woolf explores a great deal of debate concerning the idea of materialism in both her fiction and nonfiction. Her feminist commitment yields intense cultural, artistic and monetary polemics and advocates monetary liberation for women. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf elevates the materialist argument of the specifics of the middle-class woman, her insistence on money and a room of one's own.

Throughout *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf highlights the material situation of the middle-class woman. Goldman argues: "*Woolf proposes, in A Room of One's Own, that women be understood as a separate class altogether.*"²⁴ This validates Woolf's feminist Marxist position that looks for the liberation of women in Britain. 1929 is an important date in the history of the enfranchisement right for women. Class-struggle in Britain was an important phenomenon which divided the British society into the Bourgeois and the proletariat. According to Woolf, women were considered as a different class. Her materialist argument is interspersed with her insistence on money and a room of one's own.

Woolf advances her materialist argument for money and a room of one's own. She says: "*All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one mirror point- a woman must have money and a room if she is to write about fiction*".²⁵ Her statement is made out of her personal experience of the male hegemonic Edwardian discourse. According to her, a woman should free herself from oppression. Snodgrass (2006) states: "*To focus on the need for female self expression, she pictures autonomy as spaced- rooms free of domestic intrusions in which women can actualize their creative urges*".²⁶ This means that this materialism of having a room and money is needed for the sake of women autonomy. Her idea of materialism departs

from her categorization of middle-class women and a room of one's own. Herein, Woolf can be qualified as a classless intellectual since she advocates feminist autonomy and monetary liberation as a "*feminist approach*" to the rehumanization of the British woman.

Main readings can be drawn from Woolf's nonfiction essay including the feminization of mass culture and women rehumanization. Her "*ordinary experience*" is contrasted to the patriarchal and capitalist assumption of the masculine elite culture that underestimates feminine mass culture. *A Room of One's Own* (1929) holds a powerful pervasive discourse for the liberalization of women as a mass class. As a feminist, Woolf engages in a contradictory "*free indirect discourse*" that voices patriarchy and denounces its hegemonic dominion.

Throughout *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf suggests a feminist revision of women writing by voicing patriarchy through a "*narrative illusion*".²⁷ She says: "*why does Samuel Butler say, 'Wise men never say what they think of women? [...] Here is Pope: 'Most women have no character at all'.*"²⁸ Woolf voices the male patriarchal rational discourse and highlights freely Samuel Butler's words, the Pope's claim. Her quotation appropriates the patriarchal discourse in the sense that she reports exactly what every man thinks about women. Her rebellious ordinary spirit challenges the patriarchal rational basic assumptions since the pope's debate is clearly labeled as a patriarchy-defined dialogue. This appears as a strong vivid feminist debate since her stance is given an objective viewpoint. Before addressing her comments, Woolf starts by portraying the truth as it was said or written. *A Room of One's Own* is depicted as a strategic narrative of the patriarchal discourse. Given these considerations, Woolf's nonfiction stands as a logical narrative of the male portrayal ascribed to woman question. It is a powerful sociological essay that denounces the Edwardian patriarchal discourse and religious myth-making on the subjection of women. It addresses her materialist argument and the low-positioned status of women class in Britain. Their downgraded position categorizes them in an isolated mass class. As a highbrow intellectual,

Woolf's ordinary experience is expressed through an anti-elitist debate that highlights the hegemonic women exclusion from education, politics and public life and elucidates the contradictory patriarchal voice.

Woolf's rhetorical debate, in her sociological essay, elevates a counter-hegemonic discourse that voices patriarchy and attacks its hegemonic dominion. She argues: *Are you aware that you are the most discussed animal in the universe?*"²⁹ She engages in questing women about their place in literature and male discussions. Her current feminist discourse reflects on feminine identity formation and concomitant rhetorical discourse that overthrows the patriarchal rationalism. Snodgrass points out: *"A Room of One's Own confronts the suppression of women thinkers and writers... in a series of heart-to-heart first-person addresses to a female audience."*³⁰ *A Room of One's Own* is written in an artistic combination of various viewpoints and debates. It can be read as a communicating source of multiple feedbacks. The presence of the audience is given place in Woolf's nonfiction while her use of the *"free indirect discourse"* introduces male and female opposing arguments of sex, feminism and power. Snodgrass qualifies *A Room of One's Own* as a *"hear-to-heart first-person"*.³¹ This means that Woolf's sociological essay is not only a feminist appeal to the liberation of women but a woman-to-woman -confession as well. More to the point, Goldman suggests that Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is *"centered in literary criticism, analyzing and probing the production of literature by and about women"*.³² This describes Woolf's nonfiction as a feminist revision on woman writings and literature. *A Room of One's Own* belongs to the British mass art that seeks to rehumanize woman and underestimate patriarchy as well as capitalism. Therefore, the complexity of her essay is so formative and constructive as it bears women's search for selfhood. As a realist feminist author, Woolf's intellectual debate has always been so difficult to decipher though she presented herself as an ordinary reader.

In conclusion, it is important to note that *A Room of one's Own* (1929) is a rhetorical debate that voices patriarchy and denounces its underlying abusive hegemonic truth. As a highbrow author, she maintains an anti-elitist prolific spirit which is revolutionary and rebellious in a Marxist sense. She advocates women cultural and monetary liberation and addresses an objective truth of facts that she portrays in her fiction. In her defense against women oppression, she promotes a self-understanding of the patriarchal repressions of the British feminine identity. Her cultural reaction highlights her alienated position as an intellectual woman as her strategic narratives provide a constructive feminine emancipation. In this respect, the pervasive power of her feminist discourse contributes to the Marxist feminist appeal that argues on the feminine consciousness raising and elevates their class consciousness.

Endnotes

¹ Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 140.

² Siren Elise Froytlog Hole, “ Elements of Fiction in Virginia Woolf’s Nonfiction. Dissolving the Boundaries in *A Room of One’s Own*” (University of Osloensis, 2012), 80

³Virginia Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob’s Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One’s Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 564.

⁴Ibid, 564.

⁵Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature*, 475

⁶Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. Volume I: An introduction. Quoted in:

Tanya Turneure, *Life and the Literary Subject in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway*. A Master of Arts Thesis. 2011. P.80.

⁷Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob’s Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One’s Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 580

⁸Ibid, 586.

⁹ Ibid,580.

¹⁰ Ibid, 580.

¹¹ Ibid, 580.

¹²Ibid, 580.

¹³ Ibid, 586.

¹⁴ Ibid, 586.

¹⁵ Ibid, 629.

¹⁶ Ibid, 115.

¹⁷ Ibid, 598.

¹⁸ Ibid, 598

¹⁹Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature*, 475

²⁰Hafidha Seddiki, “Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill: An analysis of their Feminist Views” (Magister thesis, Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi ousou, 2006).

²¹Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob’s Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One’s Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 588.

²² Ibid, 588.

²³Ibid, , 117.

²⁴Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 12.

²⁵Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 580

²⁶Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature* (New York: Facts on File, 2006), 475-476.

²⁷Siren Elise Froytlog Hole, "Elements of Fiction in Virginia Woolf's Nonfiction. Dissolving the Boundaries in *A Room of One's Own*" (University of Osloensis, 2012), 32.

²⁸Woolf, *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of One's Own, The Waves, Three Guineas, Between the Acts*, 586.

²⁹Ibid, 579.

³⁰Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature*, 476.

³¹Ibid, 476.

III. General Conclusion

Throughout this study, the aim has been to highlight feminism and the quest for selfhood in Woolf's fiction and nonfiction: *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1925) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929). This analysis has concentrated on four major themes: Woolf's scope of feminism and cultural context, patriarchy and the search for the self in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), otherness and cultural marginality in *To the Lighthouse* (1917) and feminism and selfhood in Woolf's nonfiction essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929).

In the first section, the focus has been on Woolf's feminism and cultural context. Her historical experience was a central element in the formation of her intellectual highbrow position as her life spans both the Victorian and modern eras. As a prolific highbrow author, she lived the atrocities of the First World War (1914-1918) and emerged as a British intellectual and feminist writer. Woolf's writings have been influenced by the satirical and revolutionary thinking of the "*Cambridge Apostles*" who maintained a strong link with their society and popular concerns.

The second section is concerned with patriarchy, otherness, class-consciousness and resistance in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). I have attempted to show Woolf's portrayal of her heroines as mature women who think, resist and criticize patriarchy and capitalism. Marriage is portrayed by Woolf as an oppressive institution of egoistic and tyrannical husbands. She suggests a self-destructive faith of the act of belonging to patriarchy. It is important to emphasize the fact that Woolf's resistance to patriarchy, political capitalism and imperialism prevail in her writings through the pervasiveness of the power of her gender discourse that denounces the hegemonic othering of women. Her theory of androgyny aims at uniting both men and women in one soul. Her writings imply cultural criticism on the grounds that they are concerned with highbrow intellectuals that seek to emphasize the equality of the sexes as

well as the bourgeois /proletariat status. One of the main conclusions is that Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* are considered as a manifest literature that provides a reconstructing subjectivity of the self. Both novels deal with Woolf's ideology of the androgynous mind of men and women being united in one soul.

The third part of this analysis is devoted to Woolf's otherness and cultural marginality in *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Women othering is pivotal in Woolf's writings, for both her fiction and nonfiction deal with the theory of the hegemonic "*angel in the house*". In other words, it has been argued that Woolf's heroines emerge as self-aware female characters who think and resist to coercion. Woolf engages in a pervasive powerful discourse in which she portrays her feminist position as a cultural outsider. It is through "*ordinary experience*" of women's domestic lives that she depicts the subjugated selfless woman. Class-consciousness prevails as a strong fact that condemns the institution of marriage, domesticity and patriarchy. Needless to say that Woolf's vision of patriarchy and capitalism is framed by the hegemony of tyranny and loss of feminine identity. Hence, it is necessary to focus on Woolf's biography as well as cultural contexts as her writings cannot stand aloof from her personal experience of the patriarchal rationalism as well as dominance.

In the final section, the focus has been on Woolf's truth of facts expressed in her nonfiction essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Consequently, a consolidating study indicates her personal stance against patriarchy and historical materialism. *A Room of One's Own* (1929) appears to be a teaching source of the struggle of woman liberalization from the Victorian myth-making gender discourse. It has been argued that Woolf's rebellious spirit and quest for selfhood prevail both in her fiction and nonfiction. Her act of writing represents her exploration of her past, experience and memory as well as a feminine empowerment of knowledge. Her novels become an impact of the creation of her feminine selfhood. Woolf's reaction against patriarchy and materialism aims at making visible what is unseen and

showing the female querulous mind that is unviewed. Her feminine rehumanization is interspersed with the material situation of woman. Woolf's feminism deals with a theory of a Marxist class analysis and the value of the social transformation.

Woolf's idea of "*consciousness raising*" is rooted in Marxist feminism as her writings attack both capitalism and patriarchy. Nonetheless, it is an undeniable fact that Woolf's heroines' quest for the self is condemned by the hegemonic patriarchal domination. Their oppressive selfless portrayal is similar to that of the proletariat. Herein, Woolf's effort to rehumanize the feminine identity means bringing her female literary canon and heroism to the pervasive continuity of the autonomous British women. Beneath these powerful realities, Woolf's fiction and nonfiction traces the quest for selfhood from subversion and repression to expression.

Woolf's powerful feminist commitment remains extremely influential on the contemporary literary terrain. For it has successfully jettisoned the patriarchal discourse. A Marxist feminist reading of Woolf's fiction and nonfiction highlights her classless rebellious stance that criticizes women class-categorization, subjugation and dehumanization. Her Marxist battle of ideas seeks to break down both the patriarchal and capitalist hegemonic monopolies in Britain. Both her fiction and nonfiction bear witness to highly demarcated fields for feminist, cultural and philosophical investigation. For her Modernist Marxist emancipator feminism offers further critical debates on innovation, experimentalism as well as post-modernism and historicism.

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