Locating Sites of Negations and Denegating "Negative Essentializing": Rereading Virginia Woolf's
A Room of One's Own

Manahari Adhikari
Department of English
Northern Illinois University
300 Normal Road, DeKalb IL 60115
E-mail: mana_hari@hotmail.com

> *Somewhere every culture has an imaginary zone for what it excludes, and it is that zone we must try to remember today. This is history that is not over. -Cixous and Clement*

Abstract

This essay examines how Virginia Woolf uses writing as a tool to locate sites of negations, such as women's exclusion from places of power and knowledge, and to expose negative essentializing that permeates patriarchal structure in *A Room of One's Own*. Whereas scholarship on the book has explored a wide range of issues including sex, gender, and history, *Locating* offers a new perspective to the book as an example of "dewriting," where Woolf confronts the stereotypical images of women, challenges gender and sexual ideologies, and restores dignity to women, thereby constructing a counter-narrative to misogynist masculine aesthetics.

Keywords: Dewriting, Negation, History

1. Introduction

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* has received extensive critical attention. Scholars have made much of the book's complex narrative strategy, which opens itself to new and diverse perspectives. In "Whither, Whether, Woolf: Victorian Poetry and *A Room of One's Own*" Cornelia Pearsall (2003), for example, argues that Woolf reveals canonical disparity between the sexes early in the book by placing Tennyson and Christina Rossetti together in her discussion of Victorian poetry. The aim is to unsettle the canon while expanding its horizon so that women poets would also receive the opportunity to become equivalent of such towering figures as Shakespeare and Milton (p. 601). Shedding light on socio-political issues, Julie Robinson Solomon (1989) argues that *A Room of One's Own* recognizes women as "political subjects" (p. 332). In a patriarchal system that "consolidates its territory… [b]y means of law [and] institutions," Woolf, Solomon argues, advises women to participate in economic enterprises so as to accumulate wealth and be self-reliant so that they would be able to invest in women's education (p. 341). Restuccia Frances (1985) explains the book as a manifesto for female difference written under a cover of androgyny so that the differences between sexes as well as masculine and feminine discourses could be discussed (p. 255). What takes precedence is not androgyny but the act of "denigrat[ing] masculinity, men, and men's writing (the epitome of this is the association she makes between men's writing and fascism)" and singing the "praises of femininity, women, and women's writing" (p. 262). Woolf's call for an androgynous union of the male and female is a mask worn to protect herself from patriarchy's retaliation against her for being subversive. She does not advocate for a "delicate androgynous balancing of masculine and feminine tendencies but nudge[s] women to tap the feminine unconscious" (p. 261).

Ellen Rosenman (1989) situates *A Room of One's Own* in the context of the era's attitude toward homosexuals and argues that the book does not, as some critics have said, advocate lesbianism. According to her, it is unjust to transpose modern feminist views into the time Woolf lived, which is fundamentally different from our own. We must, Rosenman argues, attend to the "historical specificity of her own thought and consider what it meant to have lesbian identity in England in the 1920s" (p. 635). Woolf raises lesbian issues in her fictional account of a novel by Mary Carmichael, but in the pre-published version of *A Room of One's Own* "she . . . sidesteps the issue in a deliberately conspicuous and symbolically significant way" by making spare references to her lesbian identity (p. 636). Woolf uses such a rhetorical strategy because she is aware of the era's cultural precedents for human relationship. In dread of patriarchal reprisal against her, Woolf, Rosenman writes, "excise[s] the lesbian portion of her draft of *A Room of One's Own*" (p. 638). At a time when lesbianism was taken as a form of masculinity and a lesbian was thought to be a woman who bears a man's soul, Woolf is dissuaded from identifying herself as such. To do otherwise is to endorse existing notions about sex and gender (p. 640).

2. Interpretive Framework

Using existing scholarship as a point of departure, I read *A Room of One's Own* as, to use Victor Vitanza's term, "dewriting," looking at the way the book exposes sites of exclusion or strategies that are at work to disempower women, appropriates the power of language to reframe issues of identity and of aesthetics, interrogates gender-biased cultural and political structures, and critiques the misogynist nature of masculinist aesthetics. Integral to Woolf's act of dewriting is to transform language into a weapon in order to make women visible by creating a place for them inside the system of signification, to counter discourses that serve the interests of patriarchy, and to demonstrate the ways patriarchal power is created and the measures through which it is sustained.

In *Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric* Victor Vitanza (1997) reads the Western history of writing from a post-structuralist perspective, investigating rhetoricians' reliance on what he calls "the negative, on negative essentializing" (p. 12). The history of writing, Vitanza argues, is founded on sites of exclusion. According to him, "Something *is* by virtue of Nothing, or what it *is not*. The formula: Species+ genus+ differentiate. All determination is negation." Views that "a little girl is a little man without a penis [and] an Aryan is not a Jew," Vitanza says, are examples of negations. To fight against the tyranny of negations, Vitanza calls for dewriting, which means exposing discourses that denegate and constructing counter "narrative[s]" in response (p. 13). For Vitanza, dewriting is to "denegate the fixedness of things, whether fixed absolutely or strategically . . . [and] to reinclude [and] put back what has been excluded" (p. 8). It is "denying business as usual" by exposing discourses that celebrate those in power, while leaving the powerless in forgetfulness. Accordingly, dewriting is asking, "At whose expense is the social constituted?" (p. 15). Much the same impulse of denying business as usual is found in *A Room of One's Own*.

3. Reading A *Room's of One's Own*

For example, very early on, Woolf asks her readers to call her "Mary Baton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please—it is not a matter of importance" (p. 5). This sense of others being central to her identity problematizes the notion of a unified self because ordinarily this is not the way we enact ourselves. While in an ontic sense, the three Marys are not locatable in the same subject position, the self represented here is more than one. When Woolf challenges known means of expression, embracing an all-inclusive vision of the self, she ignores fixed self-other boundaries. She formulates her identity in a way that denies the unitary identity imposed upon her and questions the privileging of the normalizing subject position.

From another perspective, Woolf's self, which is constructed inside a continuum of signifiers, subverts the structure of signification. The self-contradicting identity rejects sharp self-other boundaries, denies conventions of the construction of the self, and points to a lack of positing of an identity of a difference. This is so because Woolf is more than herself and encompasses multiple selves. Mark Hussey points out that Woolf's depiction of the "speaking subject… goes to the heart of those questions about the ontological status of the written 'I' that have circulated so pervasively in literary and cultural studies for the last half-century'" (p. 85). When Woolf refuses to hold on to a fixed identity thrust upon her using plurality as an alternative, she both obliterates the self-other boundaries and shakes the foundation upon which the idea of a unitary self is based. More specifically, the polymorphous state of being subverts the Cartesian notion of the self that emerges by way of what Leela Gandhi calls the exclusion of the "unintelligible diversity . . . of the world" (p. 36).

What makes the constitution of the self so powerful is thus Woolf's radical placement of her self within multiple signifiers, and representing a difference as not just a single and unique self. Such an inherently intersubjective subject position explodes the unity between the signifier and the signified. The self as a heterogeneous whole represented by multiple signifiers, establishes a context for resistance in that the very act disrupts the harmony between the signifier and the signified, sign and referent. By embracing a plural subject position, Woolf problematizes the power of the "discursive totality" (Kristeva 15). In order to make reality intelligible, a signifier is attached to a referent; otherwise the signifier cannot be meaningful. Put differently, the power of significance is sustained by the process of totalization, which involves the repression of the "excess" of language. But, Woolf's subject position transgresses this logic by including what Julia Kristeva would call the "esoteric." Insofar as Woolf's identity emerges at the intersection of many identities, she becomes an intersection of several identities. Such an unstable self enacts violence of representation by opening a new space of signification, which both forces us to reconsider the self as theorized by patriarchy and functions as a strategy for resistance.

Woolf's focus then shifts away from the discursive production of a plural self to locate sites of negation. Her aim is to investigate strategies at work in order to discover how and where patriarchal power originates. For every society produces and reinforces subject positions for its citizens, which determines their actions and the way they conduct themselves in the world. Society sets up sexual, racial and gender rules as unbreakable. According to Vitanza, society negates: "We would no. That is, No to females, Jews, gypsies" (p. 12). Reminiscent of such negation is an episode where Woolf proceeds along the road to a library, but when she reaches at the lawn, a man's figure "rose to intercept [her].… His face expressed horror and indignation.... he was a Beadle; I was a woman. . . . Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here" (p. 7). Woolf retreats, realizing that she does not belong to the precinct she thought she did. She eventually proceeds. But, again "a deprecating, silvery…gentleman… wave[s] me back that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College" (p. 9).

From what Woolf tells us here several things become apparent. First, patriarchal dominance involves women's forceful removal from avenues of knowledge so that patriarchy's interests are safeguarded. For Jane Goldman, the Beadle and the silvery man are "patriarchy's dutiful watchdog[s]" (p. 101). Agents of patriarchy, they enact power on Woolf's body. Second, the library is a forbidden territory invested in protecting men's interests. It is no wonder these men consider Woolf as an intruder who has ventured into a space protected for men. While the men must lock the library's gates against her, Woolf has to return to places designated for women. She has no right to determine where she can and cannot go, or else "the punishment of the fathers for daring to trespass on their territory [is] 'instant dismemberment' by wild horses" (Marcus 1).

If the library is man's sphere, it is undeniably so because it is a site of knowledge and power. Woolf can now grasp why for centuries "the kings and queens and nobles . . . bore sacks of gold and silver on their shoulders, which they shoveled in to the earth. . . . All that lies beneath the colleges down there" (*A Room* 25). What is thus crucial to men's authority is expenditure. It is easy for Woolf to draw a connection between male power and the usurpation of wealth: "Money was poured in from the coffers of kings and queens and great nobles to ensure that hymns should be sung here and scholars taught. Lands were granted; tithes were paid. And when the age of faith was over and the age of reason had come, still the same flow of gold and silver went on" (p. 11-12). Oxbridge is a patriarchal base where money is poured to serve the interests of men and promise them power. The appropriation of resources is a calculated strategy and a process oriented toward men's power. Patriarchy, with its cult of absolute power, endows Oxbridge with money and gold while leaving Fernham, a women's college, in penury.

As a place that produces and transmits knowledge, Oxbridge provides men the prospect to investigate and to gain knowledge. Trained here, men inherit civilization, produce knowledge, and help create a general culture for the entire populace. Advocates of patriarchy's principles, these men preach that "half of the human race indeed, are by nature inferior to [men]" (p. 45). At this point, what Michel Foucault says about power is useful in explaining the significance of Oxbridge to men and women's exclusion from the place. In Foucault's view, "power and knowledge directly imply one another, that there is no power without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute . . . power relations" (*Discipline* 27). Oxbridge is a site, which reveals the way patriarchal authority is built and maintained. For it is a place where knowledge is produced which gives order and meaning to the world. The opportunity men receive in producing knowledge carries with it status, power, and dominance.

Commenting upon Woolf's account of Oxbridge Pam Morris writes, "Woolf adopts a tone of mock humility and reverence towards the institutions and traditions of the male colleges in order to make fun of their patriarchal assumptions of authority and knowledge" (P. 74). For Lynne Hanley "*A Room of One's Own* [i]s a triumphant appropriation for women of the Oxbridge culture Woolf loved . . . the men who produced it, and war. Oxbridge man seems to have little in common with Tyrants or Dictators with ruined hours or mutilated bodies. . . . Vanity, not brutality, inspires these men" (p. 430, 423). I suggest that Oxbridge is a site that negates women's ontological alterity as sovereign subjects. While it inducts men into knowledge and power, it displaces women from positions of power by denying them such opportunities. Woolf is now aware of how her desire to know works against patriarchy's interests which serves only the interests of, Vitanza would say, "Papa's Oedipalized children . . . faithful to Papa" (p. 14).

There is another function of Woolf's distortive use of language. The coinage of the term "Oxbridge," for example, is in opposition to the tradition of naming, which is "construed as masculine activity" (Ruthven 94). The rejection of Cambridge and Oxford and the renaming of them confiscate the power of naming. "Like Kafka," Jane Marcus says, Woolf "felt that writing was a conspiracy against the state, an act of aggression against the powerful." According to Marcus, Woolf wrests the "Mother Tongue, freeing [it] from bondage to the father and returning it to women and the working classes." If, for Marcus, Woolf frees her mother tongue from patriarchal stronghold, Woolf stages her own signifying practice so as to intervene in the system of signification. For instance, her "syntactical distortions," to borrow from Ruthven, of the terms Oxford and Cambridge, "is intended to effect an intervention in the phallocratic order of 'normal' English" (p. 68). In seeking to resignify and in fusing language with her politics of dewriting, Woolf fractures the logic of the language and ignores its limiting forms by complicating it, which constitutes a "metonymy of presence" (Bhabha 131).

Following her remarks on Oxbridge, Woolf directs her energy to investigating the nature of discourse. For writings of an era shape our consciousness, while setting parameters within which we behave. It is through discourses that we communicate and be. That is, discourses represent us as well as our social reality. What we take as reality is constructed by discourses. According to Foucault, "power … produces effects at the level of desire [and] at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it. It was on the basis of power over the body that a physiological, organic knowledge of it became possible" (*Power* 59). The important issue concerns the human body becoming a site of inscription of power. Foucault writes, "power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth, without depending even on the mediation of the subject's own representations" (p. 186). While we know about ourselves through discourses, the installation of power in our body is neither repressive nor noticeable. How discourses function as tools for perpetuating male power comes to the fore in this remark: "If females were educated . . . their ovaries and wombs could not develop properly, as blood needed would be diverted to the brain" (Campbell 12). The constitutive force of such assertions is unimaginable in that not only do they create women's psychic reality and affect their moral judgment but also encourage women to take on the roles of duty and submission. Apparently, male discursive practices tactfully ask women to suppress their desire for education, thereby removing them from the realm of knowledge and power.

Woolf then asks: "What had our mothers been doing? Powdering their noses? Looking in at shop windows? Flaunting in the sun at Monte Carlo?" (p. 26). Woolf speculates that her mothers might have wasted their lives powdering their noses and window-shopping. Here, what matters is not what these mothers do in a typical day of their lives but why they do so, because that has a direct link to their disempowerment. Existing discourses provided these mothers a motivation for what they wanted and did, thus shaping the way they viewed themselves and the world. Woolf writes, "Our mothers had mismanaged their affairs very gravely" (p. 29). It is possible that, these mothers were not immune to the patriarchal ideal of womanhood. What they do is what their husbands must have expected of them and was probably seen in a favorable light as proper womanly behavior.

Woolf's depiction of mothers takes on both weight and depth if we see it in the context of the way men conceptualize women. Consider, for example, that "woman's body seems to man to be his property, his thing. Make-up and jewelry also further this petrification of face and body. . . . Man wishes her to be carnal. . . . She paints her mouth and her cheeks to give them a solid fixity of a mask" (Beauvoir 190). In this description, while man strips woman of dignity, refuses to acknowledge her authentic identity, and characterizes her as an object of love and male desire, he thinks of his "handsome appearance … [as] transcendence; in the female, the passivity of immanence; only the second is intended to arrest the gaze. . . . Man, feeling and wishing himself active, subject . . . while women, knowing and making herself object, believes she really sees herself in the glass" (p. 643). We can easily imagine the affect of such contrasting subject positions on people and their behavior. Clearly, man manipulates the discursive power of language by investing himself with power and presence, while denying woman such qualities. In patriarchal imagination, woman did not exist as a sovereign subject. Looking back now at the mothers who powder their noses, they must be operating in the framework of patriarchy's code of womanhood. Since it is impossible for them to escape the conceptual framework in place and conceptualize the world around in their own terms, it is not surprising to find them as engaged in the frivolous. While the life they live may appear sensible to them, it only serves the interests of men.

With no education, how could Woolf's mothers aspire to vocations that would have freed them from the clutches of patriarchy? Realizing there is no point to further reflect upon what mothers did, Woolf next turns to examine the way economic structure is set up, for it is not yet clear whether women could aspire to become writers. Woolf knows that "a good dinner is of great importance to good talk" (p. 23). Writing and authorship involve freedom, space, and money. Undeniably, economic security is the locus of motivation, of action, and of power. What is thus crucial is to investigate whether material circumstances were favorable to women. The big questions for Woolf are, "Why [is] one sex so prosperous and the other so poor? What effect has poverty on fiction? What conditions are necessary for the creation of works of art?" (p. 32). During her investigation, Woolf discovers that girls were stuck in a state of dependence because they had to use their charm to procure money from their fathers or brothers (p. 174). While men could make choices, women "concentrated in occupations that were considered female, many associated with domestic labor" (Steinbeck 10).

Even if any economic opportunity existed, it was not feasible for women to bear pregnancy and raise children and make a fortune (P. 28). While economic independence is a condition for the ability to write and be creative, women had neither the space nor the money. Worse, men had absolute control over their earnings: "every penny I earn, they may have said, will be taken from me and disposed according to my husband's wisdom—perhaps to found a scholarship or to endow a fellowship in Balliol or Kings" (*A Room* 29). There was a big No to women. Trapped inside an economic system that would not allow woman to earn a fortune, women were forced to survive with the charity of men. Woolf now understands why her mothers could not leave a legacy of posterity for their daughters. She now realizes that it "useless to ask what might have happened if Mrs. Seton and her mother and her mother before her had amassed great wealth and laid it under the foundations of college and library, because, in the first place, to earn money was impossible for them" (p. 29). Woolf could not help but wonder, "If only Mrs. Seton and her mother . . . had learnt the great art of making money and had left money, like their fathers and their grandfathers before them to found fellowships . . . appropriated to the use of their own sex . . . [w]e might have been exploring and writing" (p. 27). The forceful removal of women from the economic system that only guaranteed the "safety and prosperity of one sex and the poverty and insecurity of other," is the sole cause of "the poverty of our sex" (p. 31, 26).

As Woolf gains an understanding about women as virtually banned from career, she directs her attention to the politics of representation of women in patriarchal pedagogical practices. Woolf now wants to know how does patriarchy construct the image of woman, how is she mediated in the discourses it disseminates about her, and whose interests do such discourses serve? In an attempt to find answer to these questions, Woolf visits the national library. Her impression of the place is that of a "department of the factory"(p. 33). This description is reminiscent of what Foucault says about the human subject. For Foucault, the body enters "the machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it . . . so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes" (*Discipline* 138). True, the library plays a significant role in diffusing knowledge and shaping minds. But when Woolf turns the pages of books she is stunned to find that women are "the most discussed animal on earth" (p. 34). What is more shocking still is that man himself constructed identity for woman, but not as a person. In masculinist account, women's authentic identity seemed irrelevant.

Furthermore, men conceptualized woman as "goddess, weaker creature, attractive, has no character, vain, . . . small size of brain, [and] half divine (*A Room* 37). If these are the attributes that define woman, then she is not a subject but an object of desire and of spectatorship. The conception of women as romantic figures, figures of mystery and danger, of sham and deception, have serious implications in the lives of women, for those views affect peoples' character and

shape their consciousness. Given that it is through discourses that people came to understand themselves, in a Foucauldian sense, discourses that were circulated in the society benefitted the men. For far from telling the truth, those discourses functioned as a strategy to relegate women to secondary status. Simone de Beauvoir has reason to contend that "myths built up around the subject of women is intended to sum her up in *toto*; each aspires to … pose women [as] the absolute Other, without reciprocity, denying against all experience that she is a subject, a fellow human being" (p. 283). The governing principle of patriarchal epistemology was the idea of difference and of negation, which is evident in what it circulates: "the essentials of a woman's being . . . are that they are supported by, and they minister to men," which helps reinforce male superiority (*A Room* 70). These notions about female virtue and sacrificial grace induce women to believe what men want them to believe.

More to the point, the superior status of men and the powerlessness of women was established through discourses. Foucault is right to tell us that "each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth" (*Power* 131). The images and ideas of men presented women with ways through which to understand themselves and their experiences. Apparently, patriarchy used language strategically so as to maintain the status quo. Men enjoyed "power and the money and the influence. . . . [They] seemed to control everything" (p. 43). Sadly, despite the plethora of information, there is little to no information about women's psychology and their everyday lives (102). Part of Woolf's wider strategy here is to expose how patriarchy denies truth-telling. In exposing how patriarchy disseminates lies that only secure male privilege and power and disempower women, Woolf calls for an alternative understanding of the reality of things and interrogates, to borrow from Vitanza, "the hermeneutics of forgetting" (p. 14).

When Woolf learns that patriarchal signifying practices are biased, she begins to record what she calls "obscure lives" that patriarchy has ignored. Woolf, to use Jane Marcus's terms, wants to liberate lost lives and "ghosts stranded in history" (p. 3). Central to this endeavor is to ask: what have been the effects of patriarchy upon women writers? What have women written? During her quest to investigate women's literary past, Woolf restores Mary Carmichael, Lady Winchilsea, Aphra Behn, Eliza Carter, and Fanny Burney to life and recognition. She also evokes a long list of women writers forgotten in history, which encapsulates much that is central to the absence of female literary tradition. Not only does Woolf recover women writers left in oblivion, but also discovers "a scarcity and inadequacy of tools" (p. 100). Despite this, Jane Austen, Woolf argues, "wrote as women write, not as men write" (p. 97). Praising her poetic mother, Woolf further writes that Jane Austen "devised a perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use" (p. 100). It is important to note here that, since it is impossible to chart out the entire literary tradition within the limits of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf's brief account of mother-authors omitted from literary history is her homage to them and is intended less to retrieve them all than to reclaim, to use Vitanza's terms, the "detached [or the] residuum" (p. 16). Woolf, in other words, provides instances of women who are buried in literary tradition so as to reveal female silence and make a point that what is known as the literary tradition is biased and incomplete, a product of patriarchal imagination alone.

Such an effort to reclaim the residuum leads Woolf to formulate an idea of what would have happened to women of talent in patriarchy. In her account, "Shakespeare had a sister, but do not look for her in Sir Sidney Lee's Life of the Poet. She died young—alas, she never wrote a word. She lies buried where the omnibuses now stop" (p. 148). Confined to marriage, women could not overcome the obstacles placed by wifely duties and maternal obligations and pursue their academic interests. When personal will and action do not arise, how could Judith Shakespeare ever materialize her dream of authorship? Any desire for education and career would clash with the will of her father. Women had nothing to live for, no career goals, and no economic ambitions. Woolf's capacity to capture the plight of unacknowledged female figures such as Judith, whose fate represents the fate of all lost talents, illustrates how patriarchy dooms talented women to a destiny of obscurity.

With what she discovers, it is not difficult for Woolf to imagine what fate befell her generation's mothers. She offers a sobering account of a mother who, under all circumstances, does what is best for her family only to remain a non-entity: "She would look vague and say that she could remember nothing. For the plates and cups [were] washed; the children sent to school and gone out into the world. Nothing remains of it all. . . . No biography or history has a word to say about it. And the novels, without meaning to, inevitably lie" (p. 116). Nothing offers better insight into women's plight or the kind of life they lived than this tragic speculation of the mother whose life is overshadowed by her husband and sons. What ties her to Judith is their shared anonymity and insignificance. Their plight suggests a larger reality of women who are forced to marriage "against their will, kept in one room, and to one occupation" (p. 109).

The systematic exclusionary practices, not to mention marriage and the sheer weight of domestic responsibility, common in patriarchy, are insidious and most effective, for they relegate women to a marginal status. Having learned the truth about patriarchy that it thinks for itself and its habit of writing and speaking in terms that grant it power, Woolf thinks it a "mistake for woman to read [men], for she will inevitably look for something that she will not find" (p. 132). Her misgivings toward masculinist aesthetics discount the epistemological importance and authority of man as a knower. By extension, it also invites women to write counter-narratives so as to combat patriarchal belief system that constructs perceptions about women for its own advantage. It makes sense that Woolf urges women to "write all kinds of books, hesitating at no subject however trivial or however vast" (p.142). For writing will be for their good as well as the "good of the world at large" (p. 143). It is only by writing that women can fight against the tyranny of masculinist discourses.

In addition, power and position involve intellectual freedom. It is by producing discourses that women can wage a battle against patriarchal oppression. Besides, having a tradition of writing is to have a past as well as a future. Gandhi points out, "the disempowerment of women has been facilitated, in part, through their exclusion from the space where knowledge proper is constituted and disseminated" (p. 43). Since writing has strategic functions, Woolf seems to believe that practicing one particular genre may be inadequate. That is why she does not endorse any particular genre per se: "So long as you write what you wish to write, that is all that matters" (p. 139). In her call for women to write, Woolf denies seeing the literary tradition, which is charged with men's interests, as a closure. In imagining stories of a talented girl like Judith Shakespeare and in her meditation about mothers and what they wrote, Woolf, to paraphrase Foucault, wages a battle against discourses and through discourses (*Subject* 12).

Woolf's attempt to question business as usual by revealing the way women are systematically excluded from institutions of knowledge and power is far from complete until she exposes the oppressive nature of patriarchal sexual economy. So, in the remainder of *A Room* Woolf reveals the repressive nature of heteronomy: the heterosexual ethics, for instance, that denies one's right to choose how and with whom one would be intimate. Woolf tells us that "I like women. I like their unconventionality. I like their completeness" (p. 145). She goes so far only to draw back: "I like [women's] anonymity. I like—but I must not run this way." Woolf holds back because she cannot let her feelings overtake her. She articulates her fascination with women rather than hiding it, and yet there is only so much she can reveal. What is important here is her admiration for women, which is symbolic of her subconscious desire for lesbian intimacy. Relevant here is Krystyna Colburn, who discusses Woolf's lesbian identity. According to Colburn, among other accounts, the ballad of the four Marys is the most significant in that "In popular lore and fiction of Virginia's day, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, had lesbian relations with others of her Marys" (p. 60). Likewise, in a letter to Vita Sackville-West sent during the early stage of writing *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf wrote, "I told Nessa the story of our passion in a chemist's shop the other day. But do you really like going to bed with women, she said, taking her change. And how'd you do it?" More explicit still, in a letter written in 1910, Vanessa Bell makes an explicit reference to Woolf's same sex orientation: "You are seducing the household of the hitherto respectable Miss Thomas and your own lusts are increasing at the same time. Really, what with your cultivation of Sapphism with a Swede at Twickenham…" (Bell 94). Against this backdrop, Woolf's admiration for women takes on a symbolic significance because it both recognizes the sensuality of women's bodies and provides an occasion for same sex couples to recognize themselves in her.

Woolf's covert claim of a lesbian identity, which alludes to the potentiality of sensuality and sexuality of woman liking woman, complicates the existing understanding about sex and questions the heterosexual sexual order intolerant of the homosexuals. Still, her mission to show the monolithic nature of heteronomy cannot be complete without her foregrounding the way patriarchy regulates the expression of sexuality. Therefore, Woolf next turns to Sir Archibald Bodkin, public prosecutor, and Sir Charles Biron, chief Magistrate of the trial against Radclyffe Hall, author of *The Well of Loneliness*. Archibald and Biron thought the novel dealt with sexual and physical relations between lesbian women in its portrayal of a lesbian protagonist and people living in filthy sex (Colburn 62). For this reason, they advised that all copies be destroyed. This historical reference to the repression of discourses on same-sex intimacy is enough to show the stigma associated with homosexuality. Given this, in admiring women Woolf fights an ideological battle against the coercive belief in the paramount value placed on heterosexual relationships. Moreover, when Woolf denies viewing her body and sexuality in terms set by existing sexual order, she also forces her readers to rethink their views about the body and sexuality. Such a strategy that recognizes the humanity of homosexuals challenges the patriarchal parameters of sexual being, while making it all possible for the articulation of an alternate sexual reality.

4. Conclusion

In Woolf's investigation into strategies that are at work relegating women to subordinate status, she makes a radical case against politics as usual. But, Christopher Bone argues that Woolf "did not entertain the notion . . . that art might help liberate man and facilitate individual and social action by assisting people to build consensus as to what is good and what is bad in social affairs" (p. 133). We cannot ignore the fact that when Woolf reveals what disempowers women, she expresses resoluteness in the face of patriarchal oppression and launches a crusade against patriarchy. Not every writer questions language and its power of representation, locates sites of negation, denegates negative essentializing, exposes gender prejudices of patriarchy, and maps female omission, in such a short space as *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf's political activism rests on her shaking her readers into recognizing how patriarchy operates and forcing patriarchy to confront truths about itself. She brings to readers the lived realities of women (real or imagined), brings to light what is responsible for their predicament, and exposes the repressive nature of patriarchal thinking, which are all sufficient to stimulate a dialogue to affect the sexist nature of patriarchy. By exposing institutional practices that are at work to perpetuate male power, by confronting the stereotypical images of woman, and by revealing repressive gender and sexual ideology, Woolf slaps patriarchy in the face. *A Room of One's Own* is her narrative intervention into masculine aesthetics and marks itself as an example of dewriting.

References

Bhabha, H. (1984). Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse. *Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis,* 28, 125-33.

Bell, V. (1993). *Selected Letters*. Ed. Regina Marler. New York: Pantheon Books.

Bone, C. (1973). Five Hundred a Year and *A Room of One's Own*. *A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies, 5*(2): 123-38.

Bouvoir, S. d. (1949). *The Second Sex*. (1997). (H. M. Parshley. Ed. and Trans). London: Vintage.

Campbell, K. K. (1989). *Man Cannot Speak for Her*. 2 vols. Westport, CT: Greenwood P.

Cixous, H, and Catherine, C. (1986). *The Newly Born Women*. (Betsy Wing, Trans.). Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.

Colburn, K. (1995). Women's Oral Tradition and *A Room of One's Own*. *Re: Reading, Re: Writing, Re: Teaching Virginia Woolf*. Eileen Barrett and Patricia Cramer (Ed.). New York: Pace UP, 59-63.

Foucault, M. (1975). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1979). (Alan Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Vintage.

Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality*: *An Introduction*. Vol. 1. (Robert Herley, Trans.) Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (*1972-77)*. C. Gordon (Ed.), (Gordon et al. Trans.), New York: Pantheon.

Foucault, M. (1982). The Subject and Power. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Ranibow (Ed.) Brighton: Harvester, 208-26.

Gandhi, L. (1998). *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Goldman, J. (2006). Ce Chien Est à Moi: Virginia Woolf and the Signifying Dog. *Woolfian Boundaries: Selected Papers from the Sixteenth Annual International Conference*. Anna Burrells (Ed.) et. al. Web. 23 (Jan. 2014). <http://www.clemson.edu/cedp/cudp/pubs/vwcon/16.pdf>

Hanley, L. T. (1984). Virginia Woolf and the Romance of Oxbridge. *The Massachusetts Review*. 25 (3): 421-36.

Hussey, M. (2007). Biological Approaches." *Virginia Woolf Studies*. Anna Snaith (Ed.). London: Palgrave, 83-97.

Kristeva, J. (1974). *Revolution in Poetic Language*. (Margaret Waller, Trans.). New York: Columbia UP.

Marcus, J. (1981). Thinking Back Through our Mothers. *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Marcus (Ed.). Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1-30.

Morris, P. (1993). *Literature and Feminism: An Introduction*. London: Blackwell.

Pearsall, C. D. J. (2003). Whither, Whether, Woolf: Victorian Poetry and *A Room of One's Own*." *Victorian Poetry* 41(4): 596-603.

Restuccia, F. L. (1985). Untying the Mother Tongue': Female Difference in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature, 4*(2): 253-64.

Rosenman, E. B. (1989). Sexual Identity and '*A Room of One's Own*': 'Secret Economies' in Virginia Woolf's Feminist Discourse. *Signs, 14*(3): 634-50.

Steinbach, S. (2004). *Women in England 1760-1914: A Social History*. London: Palgrave.

Solomon, J. R. (1989). Staking Ground: The Politics of Space in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. *Women's Studies, 16*: 331-47.

Vitanza, V. (1997). *Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric*. New York: State U of New York P.

Woolf, V. (1929). *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*. Morag Shiach (Ed.). Oxford: Oxford UP.