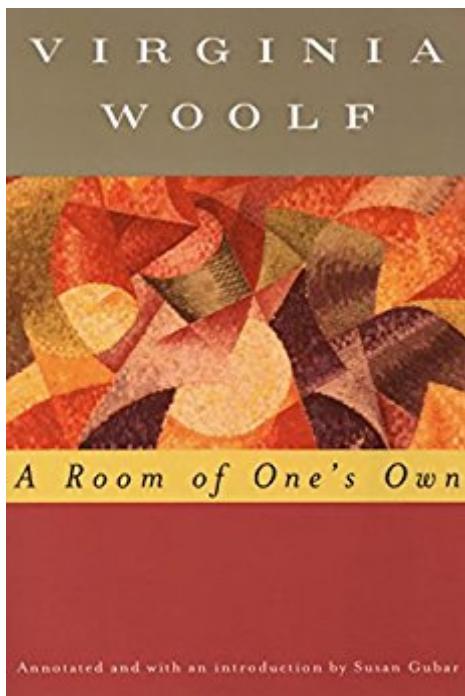


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A Room Of One's Own (Annotated)



Synopsis

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf imagines that Shakespeare had a sister: a sister equal to Shakespeare in talent, equal in genius, but whose legacy is radically different. This imaginary woman never writes a word and dies by her own hand, her genius unexpressed. But if only she had found the means to create, urges Woolf, she would have reached the same heights as her immortal sibling. In this classic essay, Virginia Woolf takes on the establishment, using her gift of language to dissect the world around her and give a voice to those who have none. Her message is simple: A woman must have a fixed income and a room of her own in order to have the freedom to create. Annotated and with an introduction by Susan Gubar

Book Information

File Size: 875 KB

Print Length: 220 pages

Publisher: Mariner Books; 1 edition (February 3, 2015)

Publication Date: February 3, 2015

Language: English

ASIN: B00T2415CC

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #407,271 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #302 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Women Authors #383 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Women's Studies > Women Writers #1518 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Classics > Literary

Customer Reviews

In 1928, Virginia Woolf was asked to speak on the topic of "women and fiction". The result, based upon two papers she delivered to literary societies at Newnham and Girton in October of that year, was "*A Room of One's Own*", an extended essay on women as both writers of fiction and as characters in fiction. And, while Woolf suggests that, "when a subject is highly controversial-and any question about sex is that-one cannot hope to tell the truth," her essay is, in fact, an extraordinarily even-handed, thoughtful and perceptive reflection on the topic. Woolf begins with a simple and

enigmatic opinion: "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unresolved." From this spare beginning, Woolf deftly explores the difference between how women had been portrayed in fiction, and how they actually lived in the world, during the preceding centuries. "A very queer, composite being emerges. Imaginatively, she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was a slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger." The source of dissonance between how women were portrayed in fiction, and how they actually lived, was the fact that most fiction prior to the nineteenth century was written by men. As Woolf astutely points out, "[i]t was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen's day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex.

Virginia Woolf is a writer of intelligence and grace. *A Room of One's Own* is a skinny little treasure of a book with words and wisdom that will stay with the reader long after it is read. The essay contained in the book is the result of two papers that Ms. Woolf read to the Arts Society at Newnham and Odtaa at Girton (England) in October of 1928. She was asked to speak about the topic of "Women and Fiction", and after doing so, she expanded her papers and later published them as this book. Woolf begins the essay by writing, "I soon saw that [the subject of women and fiction] had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to come to a conclusion. I should never be able to fulfil what is, I understand, the first duty of a lecturer- to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece for ever. All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point- a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction... At any rate, when a subject is highly controversial- and any question about sex is that- one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker." It is in this straightforward and honest manner that Woolf writes about women and fiction. Although the speech was given and the book was published in 1929, all of its points are still important for women- and especially women writers and artists- today.

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