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Exploring Subjectivity and Modernist Language Techniques: Time, Gender, and Identity in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*

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Abstract: This research examines the advantages and drawbacks of modernist ideas through Virginia Woolf's perspective, emphasizing her interaction with time, modernism, and the notion of gender equality. This study explores *A Room of One's Own*, emphasizing Woolf's distinctive take on modernist themes, her portrayal of gender, and her criticism of societal conventions. The analysis highlights Woolf's skill in connecting personal struggles with wider cultural and philosophical issues, especially those impacting women's lives and identities. Moreover, the research explores how Woolf reinterprets character representation, time, and modernity, illustrating the transformative impacts of modernization and technological advancements in the early 20th century. This study seeks to shed light on Woolf's insightful critique of modernism and gender relations, highlighting her unique narrative technique and ideological input during her time. This is qualitative research based on the primary data of the text. The researcher examined the text by connecting time, subjectivity, and modernism, seeking to understand how gender and the subversion of gender roles are represented in Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own*.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, Modernism, Time, Subjectivity, Gender Equality, *A Room of One's Own*, Modernization, Early 20th Century, Gender Roles, Modernist Essays

Introduction

Virginia Woolf's literary career began in 1913 with the publication of *The Voyage Out* (1915). Over her life, she authored nine novels and numerous essays, focusing on themes of time, gender, and modernist experimentation. Woolf's works, including *A Room of One's Own* (1929), advocate for gender equality and creative independence, highlighting the barriers women face in achieving intellectual and artistic freedom (Bussey, 2011). Her involvement in the pacifist movement and the creation of the Hogarth Press was pivotal in her career, coinciding with the modernist movement that redefined artistic expression in response to industrialization and social upheavals (Carter, 2010). Woolf's modernist approach, seen in works like *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931), employed innovative narrative techniques such as stream-of-consciousness to portray subjective experiences and fluid perceptions of time (Gauntlett, 2008). According to Bussey (2011), her study of gender roles, especially in *A Room of One's Own*, challenges patriarchal systems and argues that women's freedom of creativity requires both financial independence and personal space. Modernist elements, such as the fragmentation of reality and the concerns of technological advancement, are present throughout Woolf's writing (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

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Woolf had a profound influence on modernist philosophy and literature because of her inventive writing, which reinterpreted literary expression and criticized norms of society. This change may be seen in Woolf's work, where she worked with unusual narrative tools to illustrate topics of gender, time, and subjectivity. Jarraway (2003) says that the goal of modernist writing was to represent the quickly changing social structures by prioritizing creative thinking and experimentation over conventional wisdom. The analysis of gender roles and the subversion of social conventions are major themes in Woolf's writing. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf makes the case that women's creative freedom necessitates both financial independence and private space. Her claim that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" highlights the structural obstacles that women had to overcome in order to achieve equality in the arts and mind (Marcus, 2005). Woolf's works often feature strong female characters who navigate the constraints of their gender, reflecting her broader critique of patriarchal structures. Modernist literature frequently grappled with themes of alienation and technological progress, reflecting the anxieties of a rapidly industrializing world. Woolf's novels capture these tensions, portraying characters who navigate the fragmented realities of modern life. As Hua & Jian (2015) observe, time was a central preoccupation for modernist writers. Woolf's innovative use of temporality, particularly in *The Waves*, demonstrates her ability to encapsulate the fleeting nature of human experience.

Objectives

To Identify the elements of subjectivity in *A Room of One's Own*

- To Examine the role of time and modernism in *A Room of One's Own*
- To Analyze the relationship between subjectivity and modern time in the essay

Research Questions

- How are elements of subjectivity identified in *A Room of One's Own*?
- How do time and modernism feature in *A Room of One's Own*?
- How do subjectivity and modern time relate in *A Room of One's Own*?

Purpose of the Study

This study analyses the liberal feminist elements, time, and modernism in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. It will provide critical insights into women's freedom, especially regarding their literary contributions and social roles.

Significance of Research

This research will:

- Offer new perspectives on the themes within Woolf's essay
- Provide up-to-date insights into the essay's relevance to modern literature
- Assist students and researchers in understanding Woolf's contributions to literary studies

Statement of the Problem

Woolf explores the material and psychological barriers that hinder women writers in *A Room of One's Own*, arguing that women's creative potential is stifled by a lack of independence and space. She also introduces the idea that artistic creation requires an androgynous mindset, blending both masculine and feminine traits.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The study is limited to an analysis of *A Room of One's Own*, excluding Woolf's entire body of work. This research is confined to six essays from *A Room of One's Own*, focusing on themes of subjectivity, time, and modernism. Woolf's notion of the androgynous mind in creative work will also be explored.

Literature Review

The literature review highlights Virginia Woolf as a significant figure in 20th-century literature, celebrated for her modernist contributions, feminist viewpoints, and innovative narrative styles. Her battles with mental illness and her tragic death had a profound impact on her writing, which delved into themes of subjectivity, alienation, and taboo subjects, pushing against traditional realist norms (Anderson, [2007](#)). Woolf was a member of the Bloomsbury Group, which was instrumental in the development of British modernism (Bernard, [2012](#)). However, her reputation faced a temporary decline after WWII, partly due to criticisms regarding elitism and her portrayals of Jewish characters (Blommaert, [2005](#)). Woolf's cultural heritage continues to shape discussions in both academic and popular circles around the globe, with her works, including *The Hours*, introducing her to new audiences (Bradford, 2013). The importance of Woolf in the realm of fiction is underscored by authors like Taylor Andrew ([2009](#)), who acknowledges her impact in crafting characters and narratives. Contemporary writers such as Pat Barker and Ian McEwan have also drawn inspiration from Woolf's feminist philosophy and narrative techniques, weaving her concepts into their own stories (Carroll, [2004](#)).

In works like *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf illustrates how modernism transformed literature by exploring women's roles and their inner conflicts while challenging traditional forms (Delany, [2015](#)). Woolf stands out as a pivotal figure in both modernist and feminist discourse, thanks to her use of stream-of-consciousness and her critique of patriarchal structures (Eysteinnsson, [2018](#)). Her writings often depict women grappling with societal expectations and the complex facets of their identities shaped by male influence (Ferguson, [2006](#)). Alongside poststructuralist notions, in great detail, Woolf's critical works seem to rethink traditional literary criticism through the zooming perspective of transactions between text and the reader (Fernald, 2011). Her ideas surrounding creation do not resort to old aesthetic arguments, because fiction is not the image of reality, it has to do with something else, something active and ever forming (Fowler, [1996](#)).

In *A Room of One's Own* Female Woolf pointed out how society's demands obliterate a woman's voice and what is needed to overcome it should be economic security and Writer's Block of some sort (Gruber, [2005](#)). Also, the essay is concerned with such phenomena as the position of women writers in the past whom critics oh so conveniently painted into the marginal realm of literature (Hall, [2004](#)). What seems to occupy the thoughts of women and hinder them in concentrating is defined by Woolf, how women During her novel exploring creativity, she concludes with a suggestive hint that women's creative writing opts for novels instead of poems because there are interruptions in their lives (Meehan, [2020](#)). She insists on the balance between masculine and feminine gender, plus the necessity to achieve that balance towards the end of her work (Taylor, [2006](#)). Whereas other critics rejected the common literary canon, a reader-friendly one, saying Woolf's critical works are the heart of postmodernism, because they lay down the principles of the postmodern literary theory (Bussey, [2011](#)).

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive methodology, concentrating on textual analysis to investigate the subjectivity themes in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Instead of using quantitative techniques, the study focuses to analyze the ideas, concepts, and metaphors in the text in order to better grasp the topic. Woolf's text serves as the primary source of data, and published works, journals, and internet sites are used as secondary sources to support the findings. The text's language choices and sentence structures are examined using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and theme analysis to reveal underlying ideologies, social practices, and power dynamics, especially with reference to gender and modernism. Norman Fairclough's 3D model of CDA is used to analyze text, socio-cultural practices, and discursive practices, making it wellsuited for exploring issues such as gender discrimination, modernism, and feminist ideologies. Ethical considerations are maintained throughout the research, with no direct interaction with human subjects.

Data Analysis

Here is a summarized data analysis of all 6 essays from *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf in table format:

Table 1

Theme	Excerpts	Analysis
Time	- "The river reflected whatever it chose of sky and bridge and burning tree..." (lines 64-67)	Woolf contrasts objective clock time with subjective, personal time. Time in the mind gains form from its repetitive nature but remains deeply individual. Through metaphors like the river, Woolf captures the fluid, subjective nature of time and its role in shaping reflections.
Social Inequality	"Somebody must have poured gold and silver out of a leathern purse into their ancient fists..." (lines 201-207)	Woolf critiques the economic privileges that sustain elite institutions like "Oxbridge." The imagery of gold and silver as a perpetual stream emphasizes the systemic nature of wealth disparity and its role in maintaining patriarchal structures.
Subjectivity	- "I began to consider the subject in this last way which seemed the most interesting..." (lines 17-23)	Woolf argues that complete truth is unattainable because experience is inherently subjective. She emphasizes the interconnectedness of personal biases and individual perspectives in shaping art and opinions.
Disruptions and Creativity	- "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction..." (lines 24-27)	Highlighting the necessity of personal space and financial independence for creative work, Woolf critiques societal limitations that have historically stifled women's literary achievements. The metaphor of disruptions in reflection underscores the broader theme of systemic constraints on women's intellectual freedom.
Modernism	- "No need to hurry. No need to sparkle. No need to be anybody but oneself..." (lines 263-269)	Woolf reflects on the modernist ideals of freedom and individuality. This passage emphasizes the joy and simplicity of being oneself, contrasting with societal pressures to conform. The fluid narrative style exemplifies modernist experimentation with form and content.
Mind and Creativity	- "The organ complained magnificently as I passed the chapel door..." (lines 270- 275)	Woolf discusses the state of mind conducive to creativity, emphasizing harmony and openness as essential conditions for artistic expression. The serene atmosphere in this excerpt metaphorically conveys the idea of mental peace as a foundation for the "art of creation."

Table 2

Data Analysis of Essay 2 from *A Room of One's Own*

Theme	Excerpts	Analysis
Time	- “The scene, if I may ask you to follow me, was now changed. The leaves were still falling, but in London now, not Oxbridge...” (lines 1-8)	Woolf transitions from Oxbridge to London, illustrating the fluidity of time and space. Her exploration of subjective time underscores its existence within the individual. This passage reflects her modernist perspective that time is a personal construct, shaping experiences and influencing narrative structures.
Social Inequality	- “Even the names of the books gave me food for thought...Sex—woman, that is to say—also attracts agreeable essayists...” (lines 75-78)	Woolf critiques the patriarchal obsession with defining and categorizing women. The overwhelming number of male-authored texts about women’s inferiority highlights systemic inequalities. The “red light of feeling” versus “white light of truth” metaphor emphasizes the biased lens through which women have been studied.
Subjectivity	- “Here had I come with a notebook and a pencil proposing to spend a morning reading...a herd of elephants...” (lines 54-61)	Woolf reflects on the difficulty of pursuing objective truth when reading biased literature about women. The imagery of elephants and spiders symbolizes the overwhelming and multifaceted nature of the task. Her subjective reaction to male anger illustrates the interplay between personal feelings and societal discourse.
Intellectual Freedom	- “Life for both sexes...calls for gigantic courage and strength. More than anything...it calls for confidence in oneself.” (lines 209-211)	Woolf argues that intellectual freedom is grounded in material conditions, such as financial independence. Confidence is critical for both men and women to navigate life’s struggles. However, she critiques the historical use of women as mirrors that reflect men’s greatness, reinforcing patriarchal structures.
Modernism	- “A very curious fact it seemed, and my mind wandered to picture the lives of men who spend their time in writing books about women...” (lines 100-106)	Woolf’s modernist approach critiques traditional gender roles while emphasizing individual freedom and creativity. The narrator’s observations about male authors’ fixation on women highlight a broader societal issue of gendered narratives. Her financial inheritance is portrayed as a turning point, enabling intellectual and creative independence.
Material Conditions	- “Intellectual freedom depends upon material things.” (paraphrased)	Woolf highlights the foundational role of financial and material independence for intellectual and creative pursuits. This theme is central to her argument about women’s historical exclusion from literary traditions due to systemic barriers like poverty and lack of privacy.

Table 3

Data Analysis of Essay 3 from A Room of One’s Own

Theme	Excerpts	Analysis
Time	Woolf critiques the perception of time, emphasizing its subjectivity and its influence on creativity. She reflects on the challenges of women producing art in male-dominated eras, constrained by societal and personal barriers.	"Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband." (Essay 3, Lines 83–86).
Subjectivity	Woolf examines the lives of Elizabethan women, emphasizing their restricted intellectual opportunities. She illustrates how societal expectations and lack of resources prevented women from contributing significantly to literature.	"I have no model in my mind to turn about this way and that. Here am I asking why women did not write poetry in the Elizabethan age..." (Essay 3, Lines 152–156).
Modernism	Reflecting modernist ideals, Woolf connects the historical and cultural conditions shaping women’s opportunities with the broader literary landscape. She argues for the need to analyze these influences through facts, not opinions.	"It would be better to draw the curtains; to shut out distractions; to light the lamp; to narrow the enquiry and to ask the historian, who records not opinions but facts, to describe under what conditions women lived..." (Essay 3, Lines 6–12).
Social Critique	Woolf critiques male-dominated histories, illustrating the impossibility for women to produce work like Shakespeare’s due to systemic inequality. She uses the fictional Judith Shakespeare to symbolize women’s struggles and lost potential.	"It would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare." (Essay 3, Lines 178–180).
Feminist Perspective	Woolf highlights the absence of female representation in literature and intellectual history, urging women to claim their space and resources to foster their creativity and intellectual freedom	"And undoubtedly, I thought, looking at the shelf where there are no plays by women, her work would have gone unsigned." (Essay 3, Lines 305– 308).

Table 4

Data Analysis of Essay 4 from A Room of One’s Own

Theme	Excerpts	Analysis
Time	Woolf explores time indirectly, often using nature and subtle hints to depict its passage. She critiques how women writers of the 19th century adjusted their creative vision to external societal pressures.	"A scene in a battle-field is more important than a scene in a shop—everywhere and much more subtly the difference of value persists." (Essay 4, Lines 508–514)
Subjectivity	Woolf highlights the personal struggles and emotional conflicts of	"It was a thousand pities that the woman who could write like that...

Theme	Excerpts	Analysis
	women writers. She emphasizes how societal expectations and internalized doubts shaped their narratives, often leading to anger and bitterness in their work.	should have been forced to anger and bitterness." (Essay 4, Lines 66– 71).
Modernism	Woolf embraces Modernist principles, focusing on individuality and how women adapted to societal challenges. She praises female novelists like Austen and Behn for creating unique literary forms in restrictive environments.	"George Eliot committed atrocities with it that beggar description. Jane Austen looked at it and laughed... and never departed from it." (Essay 4, Lines 597–600).
Feminist Perspective	Woolf critiques the systemic constraints faced by women writers, advocating for literary independence and creative freedom. She underscores the influence of societal norms on women's writing styles and thematic choices.	"They could have no higher excitement or satisfaction than in the exercise of their art and endless generations of truth and beauty." (Essay 4, Lines 590–595).
Cultural Critique	Woolf contrasts the writing opportunities of men and women, noting that societal expectations limited women's experiences and freedom to explore broader themes.	"All the great novelists like Thackeray and Dickens... have based it on the sentence that was current at the time." (Essay 4, Lines 582– 590)

Table 5

Data Analysis of Essay 5 from A Room of One's Own

Theme	Excerpts	Analysis
Time	Woolf explores modernist notions of time, breaking from traditional linear perceptions. She draws inspiration from philosophers like Henri Bergson, aiming to depict time more fluidly and abstractly in women's writing.	"Aspiring and graceful female novelists this way! So they kept at her like the crowd at a fence on the racecourse..." (Essay 5, Lines 426– 429).
Subjectivity	Woolf highlights how women's writing evolves as both an art form and a medium of self-expression. She critiques conventional hierarchies and promotes innovation in narrative structure.	"She may be beginning to use writing as an art, not as a method of selfexpression." (Essay 5, Lines 20– 23).
Modernism	Woolf embraces modernist principles, including experimental techniques like breaking traditional sentence structures and employing stream of consciousness. She views women's evolving roles as key to their creative freedom	"First she busts the sentence; now she has broken the sequence. Very well, she has every right to try to do both these things..." (Essay 5, Lines 337–344).
Cultural Shift	Woolf observes the increasing opportunities for women to explore	"Men were no longer to her 'the opposing faction'; she need not waste

Theme	Excerpts	Analysis
	diverse subjects in literature. She notes that as women’s societal roles evolve, their writing reflects broader themes and new possibilities.	her time railing against them." (Essay 5, Lines 375–379).
Feminist Perspective	Woolf continues her feminist critique, acknowledging that while historical restrictions have eased, women’s writing still carries the potential to redefine literary traditions through their unique perspectives and experiences.	"There are books on all types of subjects that a generation ago no girl could have touched." (Essay 5, Lines 71–79).

Table 6

Data Analysis of Essay 6 from *A Room of One’s Own*

Theme	Excerpts	Analysis
Unity and Cooperation	Woolf uses imagery of a man and a woman entering a cab as a metaphor for the unity of the sexes. She emphasizes that achieving balance between male and female elements in the mind fosters creativity and happiness.	"The sight of two people coming down the street and meeting at the corner seems to ease the mind of some strain..." (Essay 6, Lines 55–58)
Time	Time is subjective and tied to individual perception rather than the rigidity of measured clock time. Woolf critiques traditional views of time, favoring personal and fluid experiences of its passage.	"Why do I feel that there are severances and oppositions in the mind...What does one mean by 'the unity of the mind'?" (Essay 6, Lines 67– 72).
Subjectivity	Woolf argues that all perception and art are influenced by personal experiences, biases, and individuality. She rejects absolute truth, asserting that each person's unique reality shapes their creative output.	"For certainly when I saw the couple get into the taxicab the mind felt as if, after being divided, it had come together again in a natural fusion." (Essay 6, Lines 93–96).
Modernism	Woolf celebrates modernist ideals, breaking away from traditional literary forms. She connects intellectual freedom to material independence, noting that poverty has historically limited women’s ability to write creatively.	"It indicated such freedom of mind, such liberty of person, such confidence in him." (Essay 6, Lines 158–163).
Feminist Perspective	Woolf critiques gender consciousness in her era, asserting that focusing excessively on sex hinders creative freedom. She calls for a holistic approach to writing that transcends gender biases and builds a foundation for future women writers.	"It is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex." (Essay 6, Lines 106– 110).
Materialism and Creativity	Woolf emphasizes the importance of financial and spatial independence for intellectual and artistic freedom, asserting that these factors are prerequisites for great writing.	"Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom and women have always been poor...from the beginning of time." (Essay 6, Lines 10–16).

The above mention analysis combines the key ideas and quotations from each essay, exploring Virginia Woolf’s treatment of gender, time, subjectivity, and the material conditions necessary for artistic and

intellectual freedom. In a critical analysis of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, the researcher observes how the author uses subjectivity and modernism as integral themes to address the intersection of gender, creativity, and societal constraints. Woolf's exploration of subjectivity is central to her critique of the patriarchal literary canon, emphasizing how personal experiences shape perception and artistic expression. This focus on the individual's inner world, as seen through her complex language techniques, aligns with modernist principles, where traditional forms are rejected in favor of new modes of thought and expression. Woolf's modernist style, marked by fragmented narrative structures and a fluid conception of time, challenges linear, objective portrayals of reality. Enriched by an ever more delineated understanding of gender and sex as constructs, one can interpret Woolf's particular interest in the context of the 20th century embroiled in turmoil of various sorts — that is, as a desire to unlock the essentials of female creativity in order to make a fuller sense of the world. This expectation is probable considering Woolf is often seen arguing in favor of a certain form of dualism between the creative subject and public norms of representation. On a wider scale, acknowledging changing perspectives on gender over time is beneficial in interpreting Woolf and her contemporaries as responding to lived changes. It is worth noting how women have featured and continue to feature in Western literature, and reconstructing their depiction has been an ongoing process.

Woolf is best placed as belonging to the moment of Modernism, and there is much for the reader to appreciate in her biography and work. For instance, the contrasting relation of women and literature written by women has been leading to notions of anti-canon. There is also an interesting paradox woven into her biography in relation to her work as an author, as the works of contemporaries including Lawrence, Klein and many others such as E. M. Forster show a progressive depiction of women. Woolf's perception of time, which she views as not so much chronological but more personal and continuous, shows the modernist belief of contesting historical and linear views. This flexibility is evident in her alleged criticism of history in general, particularly her view of Judith Shakespeare as an icon of the unexpressed woman's ability to create desperately suppressed by the condescension of society. In her writing, Woolf tackles the gendered boundaries of her epoch, and also the contingencies of the traditional literary structures, indicating that modernism is more than just form. She suggests that artistic genius is indelibly related to economic conditions of life and that to have true artistic freedom; women are not only required to be free in the mind but also in the society and economy. Lastly, Virginia Woolf Through modernist style, *A Room of One's Own* tackles the concept of appreciation of personal experience in literature while conveying some interesting arguments. Through her investigation of gender, time and material circumstance, Woolf reaches to a conclusion that women's creative and intellectual abilities need to be looked at differently. Her critique is as much a philosophical discussion on the nature of personal freedom as it is a call to action.

Conclusion

The article concentrates on *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf as an analysis of social subjectivity, modernism, and temporality of people. In her writings, Woolf tries to break down traditional ways of thinking by showing how social and political change in the early 20th century altered subjective time particularly with modernization, technological progress and new ideas of time, which were experienced by people especially women. The emphasis on the subjective and how it shades how characters are developed as seen in the use of 'moments of being' changes the conventional ways of looking at time and the senses of time in modernist literature. Given the fact that she critiques sexual discrimination in terms of what women wrote, Woolf also addresses the historical erasure of women from literature as well as their self-assertion and intellectual liberation. While this work does reflect the time period in which it was written, it provides valuable perspective worth considering when discussing the equal treatment of women and men. It could also be useful to study Woolf's description of the modernist style and temporal aspects of it in comparison with such authors as James Joyce or T. S. Eliot. It will be also interesting to study the evolution of gender images in Woolf's prose, for example, in her essays and diaries. Woolf's appeal for women's economic independence and freedom of expression might be applied to current gender-related problems, especially in the creative and professional worlds. To gain a greater understanding of Woolf's

work, a multifaceted strategy that takes gender, racism, and class into consideration would be helpful. In the end, analyzing the social and historical changes Woolf predicted may provide insights into the contemporary progression of women's roles. Scholars may ensure Woolf's voice continues to have an impact by examining her work deeper and shedding light on the continuous struggle for creative freedom and gender equality.

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