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Trabajo Fin de Grado

**The Representation of
Feminism in Virginia
Woolf's *A Room of One's
Own* and *Three Guineas***

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Resumen

Virginia Woolf es una de las autoras del siglo XX más reconocidas respecto a su lucha por los derechos de las mujeres y la representación del feminismo en cada una de sus obras, pero, sobre todo, en sus ensayos *Una habitación propia* (1929) y *Tres Guineas* (1938). Por un lado, en cuanto a *Una habitación propia*, en este trabajo se van a estudiar los temas más relevantes de esta obra en relación al concepto de feminismo, tales como: la pobreza de las mujeres, la consideración de las esferas pública y privada, la relación entre las mujeres y la literatura, además, la exploración de la sexualidad. Por otro lado, más adelante se van a estudiar los temas más importantes de *Tres Guineas*, tales como: la educación de las mujeres, la vida profesional de las mujeres y, por último, el fascismo y la guerra.

Palabras clave: Virginia Woolf, feminismo, mujeres, literatura, patriarcado

Abstract

Virginia Woolf is one of the most recognized authors of the 20th century regarding her fight for women's rights and the representation of feminism in each of her works, but, above all, in her essays *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938). On the one hand, regarding *A Room of One's Own*, this dissertation will study the most relevant topics of this work in relation to the concept of feminism, such as: the poverty of women, the consideration of the public and private spheres, the relation between women and literature, and the exploration of sexuality. On the other hand, the most important topics of *Three Guineas* will be studied, such as: the education of women, the professional life of women and, finally, fascism and war.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, feminism, women, literature, patriarchy

1. Introduction

The concept of feminism, from its origin, has been a controversial topic. But over the years, society has changed the interpretation and perception of this notion to include and accept literary works written by women. According to Day (2016), feminism is an “interdisciplinary approach to issues of equality and equity based on gender, gender expression, gender identity, sex, and sexuality as understood through social theories and political activism”. Moreover, Day states that “feminism has evolved from the critical examination of inequality between the sexes to a more nuanced focus on the social and performative constructions of gender and sexuality”.

Virginia Woolf's struggle to include the idea of feminism and its representation in her works has been very controversial, especially in the England of her time, as Sellers states: “Virginia Woolf’s writing has generated passion and controversy for the best part of a century” (2010:19). Woolf was able to publish on topics she was not allowed to even think about, and she was the inspiration for many other intellectuals, such as Naomi Black in her work *Woolf as a Feminist* (2004), and Simone de Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex* (1989), to name a few.

Among the most recognized representatives of 20th century literary modernism, we find Virginia Woolf. She was a novelist, essayist, literary critic, biographer and, in turn, an outstanding feminist, a characteristic of her personality that is insinuated, more or less implicitly, in each of her works, although she is best known internationally for many of her famous novels, such as *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *Orlando* (1928), and *The Waves* (1931), among other novels. Moreover, she is best known internationally for several of her most prominent short stories, some of which were experimental in nature. However, her vast production also includes biographies and autobiographies, and a number of important essays. Among these essays, we find *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938), both written from a feminist perspective which was advanced for her time.

The purpose of this work is to analyse the feminist ideology of Virginia Woolf in her work *A Room of One's Own*, in comparison with the representation of feminism that appears in her other essay *Three Guineas* and her vision of the English society from her era, especially with regard to socially imposed male and female roles, strictly subjected to the patriarchal scheme. On the one hand, the most relevant topics that appear in *A Room of One's Own* will be studied in this dissertation, such as the poverty of women, the consideration of public and private spheres, the relation between women and literature, and the exploration of sexuality. On

the other hand, in *Three Guineas*, the main topics that will be studied are: the analysis made by Virginia Woolf about the education of women, the professional life of women, and finally, the examination of the concepts of fascism and war.

2. Virginia Woolf and her context

Virginia Woolf was born in London, England, in 1882. She belonged to a family of bourgeois social class, without economic problems. The socio-educational context in which Virginia Woolf was educated was very peculiar, since she did not receive any formal education. She was the daughter of the writer and historian Sir Leslie Stephen. Virginia was raised by her parents, unlike her male stepbrothers who attended Cambridge. However, the fact that her father was one of the most recognized men in the London literary circles of the late 19th century, led this young woman to grow up under the great influence of Victorian literary society. In 1905, after her father's death, she moved with her brother and sister to the London neighbourhood of Bloomsbury, which became the meeting place for her older brother's former university companions, including intellectuals such as the economist John Maynard Keynes and the philosophers Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

From these meetings emerged the so-called "Bloomsbury Group", which would designate a group of intellectuals who met regularly. It was made up of young British artists and writers who lived and worked in that area of London, many of them Cambridge graduates. When Virginia entered, it was made up of high-level thinkers, both from the literary, philosophical and artistic world, as mentioned above.

Virginia married Leonard Woolf in 1912, an economist and member of the group, with whom she founded the Hogarth Press publishing house five years later, which edited Woolf's work, as well as that of Katherine Mansfield, T. S. Eliot, and Sigmund Freud. After several periods of depression, Virginia Woolf committed suicide in London in 1940.

2.1. Relationship with feminism

Virginia Woolf not only stands out for her literary contributions, she also promoted feminism in the middle of the 20th century. According to Marcus, the relationship that Virginia Woolf

had with feminism is “a symbiotic one” (2010:142). Also, in relation with this statement Marcus adds that “Woolf’s feminism shaped her writing profoundly”, and this is due to the fact that Woolf incorporates not only “her explicit feminist politics but her concern and fascination with gender identities and with women’s lives, histories and fictions” (2010:142). Woolf was a pioneer in reflecting on the condition of women and their relationships with art and literature. These topics are highly reflected in some of her publications, such as *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three guineas*. She believed that society had restricted women in many areas, such as education, which had as a result that women were not allowed to go to university and had to be educated by a tutor at home.

As a consequence, the feminist movement of liberal suffrage was socially encouraged thanks to the literary works of Virginia Woolf in reference to the situation of women and their respective rights, as Marcus states:

Woolf’s emphases on education and experience as the necessary conditions for women’s cultural and intellectual life are a key aspect of her contributions to a ‘sociology’ of culture, in which the environment and the social sphere become far more significant determinants of literary capacity and production than any concept of creativity as a purely personal property. (2010:146)

Although her work is part of the literary trend known as “modernism” as Goldman states, “Woolf’s writing became central to critical and theoretical formulations on modernism” (2006:130), her texts differ from those of other authors of the time. Many of them were dedicated to writing about sexuality openly and with a more direct style. On her side, Virginia paid attention to details. She emphasized the inner thoughts and experiences that occur within the minds of her characters.

Moreover, Virginia Woolf refers to patriarchy, whose bases are located in the belief of women’s inferiority. The writer makes a comparison between the sexes, making it clear that for both of them life is arduous and means a continuous struggle in which strength and courage are essential, as well as self-confidence. Woolf criticized patriarchy in most of her works as the foundation that sustains society and the general exclusion of women.

Woolf criticized the established upbringing with which she had been educated and, in addition, she proposed a different look at the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’. Also, concerning sexuality, Woolf touched in her writings topics such as lesbianism and bisexuality.

Another of her demands was the role of women writers, which she also mentioned in *A Room of One's Own*, stating that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (3). With this, she returned to criticize society, since it meant that women had to earn both a private and a social environment in order to develop their capacities. She clearly explains that if women do not have financial freedom, they cannot unleash their freedom in general and in most of the contexts, such as education and in the professional life. And Virginia Woolf relates the ideological concept of the supposed feminine inferiority to the masculine economic power, which is the reason why the most necessary liberating tool is always economic independence. But this topic will be discussed in depth later.

Thus, it can be said that Virginia was not simply a pioneer in giving voice to women, but thanks to her literary works she managed to change the standards of literature known until then. She had a way of narrating never before seen; describing situations, environments and settings down to the smallest detail was unthinkable for the authoress, who preferred to leave them behind and focus on her characters and what was happening inside the mind of each of them.

And so, through the interior monologues of her characters, the expression of their feelings and the daily situations narrated, Virginia Woolf managed to capture with words those aspects which were unheard. Therefore, Virginia Woolf is considered a pioneer woman in her field, that of literature, but also a pioneer in giving a voice to each and every woman.

3. *A Room of One's Own*

A Room of One's Own is one of most recognized works written by Virginia Woolf. The work is an essay that was published in 1929 and the main argument of this essay is that women need financial freedom and “a room of one's own” in order to write fiction.

In 1928, Virginia Woolf was asked to give a series of talks on the subject of women and the novel. The work is based on this series of lectures that the authoress developed at Newnham College and Girton College, both of which were female colleges of the University of Cambridge. Although the essay uses a fictional narrator and prose to explore women, and the paper prepared for the lectures was entitled “Women and Fiction” (Marcus 2010:146), the work

is considered 'non-fiction'. It is usually classified as a text that represents the feminist movement in a variety of ways.

In this essay, Virginia Woolf, far from any dogmatism or presumption, raised the question from a realistic, courageous and very particular point of view. Here, the authoress asks a question about what women need to write fiction, and she answers that women need financial freedom and independence, that is, a room of one's own. At the time Woolf wrote this text, it was only nine years since the vote for women had been granted and there was still a long way to go when it came to women's rights. There are many psychological and social issues involved in this essay; the historical nuances that make the issue of the female condition and the alienation of women in society have not lost any sense at the present time. Starting from a direct treatment and using sharp and ironic language, Virginia Woolf narrates a story that presents captivating arguments to illustrate her points of view. This essay is a visionary contribution to the issue of feminism from an inevitably literary perspective.

A Room of One's Own stands out for its prose which flows clear and bright and for its simple, but also ironic language, revealing in each paragraph the deep and thoughtful intelligence of this writer. The narrative style is very peculiar, enriched with a great variety of metaphors and admirable images that will be studied later, such as that of the woman as a mirror that reflects the man twice his real size, or the image of Shakespeare's fictional sister with the same capacity and wishes as him but without any of his opportunities.

3.1. Summary

The essay is divided into six chapters and in the first of them, Virginia Woolf creates a fictional narrator that can be called "Mary Beton, Mary Seton or Mary Carmichael" (4). She also creates a fictitious space called Oxbridge, which combines Oxford and Cambridge to locate the conferences that have been discussed above. The authoress reflects on her doubts when choosing the most appropriate approach for the analysis of the subject, finally opting for the exposition of her own chained thoughts and her impressions on the matter, which led her to come to the final conclusion that a woman should have money and a room of her own to be able to write fiction and from there she invites readers to draw their own conclusions.

In the second chapter the character changes scenery: now she is in the British Museum in search of the truth for her uncertainty. There, she verifies that women are “the most discussed animal in the universe” (21), since many men throughout history have written about them. She refers then to the lack of university preparation of women. Then, in the third chapter she takes us to the Elizabethan era, the time of Shakespeare, to the fictional sister of Shakespeare and explains the causes that prevented the women from that time from writing literature. In the fourth chapter, she makes a catalogue of the other women who made their way into literature. Among all of them she highlights Aphra Behn, who proved that it was possible to earn money writing. Then, she mentions Charlotte Brontë and Jane Austen. Towards the first, she shows an attitude of rejection, since Brontë’s anger and indignation are evident in her works; and towards the second she shows her admiration, since Jane Austen wrote without hatred or rancour.

In the fifth chapter, she presents her ideal of androgyny, using Mary Carmichael as an example, and Woolf concludes the essay in the last chapter when Mary begins to think of a theory in which the brain has two halves, one is female and the other male, these two parts form harmony and represent the different qualities of the two sexes. In the middle of the chapter, the imaginary protagonist stops talking, concluding that you need “to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry” (79).

3.2. Main topics

A Room of One’s Own deals with many topics connected with feminism that have been an issue for discussion since Virginia Woolf wrote about these themes in her works at the complex time she was living, not only because of the difficult situation of women, but also because of the condition of the world in general due to the frequent wars. And, in relation with the topics that appear in this essay Goldman states that:

A Room of One’s Own is cited as the locus classicus for a number of important modern feminist debates concerning gender, sexuality, materialism, education, patriarchy, androgyny, subjectivity, the feminine sentence, the notion of ‘Shakespeare’s sister’, the canon, the body, race, class, and so on. (2006: 97)

Thus, this section will be devoted to the analysis of the main themes presented in *A Room of One’s Own* in relation with the issue of feminism.

3.2.1. The poverty of women

Of all the factors that can influence the fact that a human being is poor, none influences as much as gender. And this issue is magnificently represented in *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf.

Women are, throughout the planet, those who suffer the most from inequality and poverty. Multiple factors play a role in creating this reality: income disparity; reduced access of girls to education; stereotypes, which represent a brake on studying certain degrees or accessing more qualified jobs; care and domestic work that most women face after their working day; or the wage gap, among others.

A Room of One's Own also refers to the idea that women are condemned to poverty, first material and then symbolic, consequently. It reflects on the fact that women are reduced to a domestic body that will only be able to have children and take care of the house and that will be excluded from freedoms and rights. It even refers to the laws of 1870¹ and 1882² as a certain advance, because before them, women did not earn money, or if they did, they could not have it. Thus, Virginia Woolf argues about the cause of women's poverty:

Professors, schoolmasters, sociologists, clergymen, novelists, essayists, journalists, men who had no qualification save that they were not women, chased my simple and single question—
Why are some women poor? (22)

Although in her extensive argumentation she does not arrive at a concrete answer as she would have liked to be able to do, some possible answers are evident: inequality of opportunities. Women of previous centuries did not have access to formal education as they were married as soon as they entered in their adolescence. Likewise, their intellectual capacities were underestimated and it was not even thought that they could cultivate any artistic activity in a public way.

One relevant concept that could be interesting to introduce in this section is the so-called “the feminization of poverty” which is an expression invented by Diana Pearce in the 1970s in the United States in her work *The feminization of poverty; Women, work and welfare* (1978) to question the concept of poverty, its indicators and its measurement methods, and to point out a

¹ The Elementary Education Act of 1870: a law to create a compulsory education for both boys and girls.

² The Married Women's Property Act of 1882: to reform the law related to the property of married women.

set of phenomena that, within poverty, affected women more frequently. In relation with this, McLanahan and Kelly state that:

Noting that the feminization of poverty was due to a relative rather than an absolute decline in women's economic status, McLanahan and her colleagues blamed the feminization of poverty on changes in the family that had uncovered women's latent economic vulnerability. (2006:127-128)

In consequence, speaking about the feminization of poverty is to speak about:

[...] the tragic consequence of women's unequal access to economic opportunities and when referring to industrial countries it is linked to the unequal situation in the labour market, their treatment under social welfare systems, and status power in the families. (Johansson, 2002: 31)

This aspect can be clearly seen in the works by Virginia Woolf, and specifically in the following quotation from *A Room of One's Own* when she writes about the poverty of women in relation with time: "And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time" (81).

More than forty years later, the expression and its deep meaning are generalized: the persistence and extension of the feminization of poverty throughout the planet is verifiable. Poverty hits women more than men in any context, any country or any continent. Gender gaps are manifested in all areas: in access to education, natural resources, land, employment, income, health services or technological resources. The hundreds of plans, projects, declarations or ratifications of national, European or international conventions do not succeed in breaking down the obstacles that condemn women for being women, such as discrimination, vulnerability, inequality and social exclusion.

The feminization of poverty is a vicious circle that will be perpetual as long as the other half of the population tries to preserve privileges that discriminate and exclude women. Freedom, equality and solidarity are necessary issues to generate equitable relations between genders and to fight cooperatively for a better world.

Talking about *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf recognizes the courage and audacity of her predecessors Austen, Brontë and other novelists for being able to write as middle-class women and without having a space of their own in which to isolate themselves from the real world to be able to think freely. She concludes that women have always been poor

and that this has limited their ability as writers because “intellectual freedom depends upon material things” (81).

The quotation above leads to another issue that is frequently represented throughout the essay when Virginia Woolf alludes to materialism, but this materialism is only a consequence of the aforementioned poverty of women. We can see this several times in the essay, for example when Woolf said: “Earn five hundred a year by your wits” (50). And she notes what she suggested at the beginning of the essay, that without financial independence and without a room of her own, women cannot create great literary works. That economic independence, which Virginia figures at 500 pounds a year, is a metaphor for having time for oneself, which represents the main argument of *A Room of One's Own*, that of: “to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry” (79). Goldman suggests that this is a “materialist argument” that appears to vary “from her apparent disdain for the ‘materialism’ of the Edwardian novelists that she records in ‘Modern Fiction’ and ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’” (2006:98).

3.2.2. The consideration of public and private spheres

The place that women occupy in different contexts, in both real and symbolic spaces, requires a reflection that compensates for the forgetfulness to which they have been subjected. Space is a central and integral category for the study of human behaviour. And in the specific case of women, space acquires a fundamental relevance since it is a category that has certainly determined their identity and social being in a very special way. Moreover, it has been many times from the space or spaces they inhabited or to which access was allowed, from which 'typically' female models of behaviour and identity have been projected.

In patriarchal societies, women were associated with home, and their presence was restricted to the so-called private sphere, specifically, to the domestic sphere and, within this, especially, to certain rooms such as the kitchen, the bedroom or living room. Concerning this, Virginia Woolf affirms that:

If a woman wrote, she would have to write in the common sitting-room. And, as Miss Nightingale was so vehemently to complain, —‘women never have an half hour ... that they can call their own’ *—she was always interrupted. Still it would be easier to write prose and fiction there than to write poetry or a play. Less concentration is required. (50)

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf's thesis is clear from the first pages: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (3).

All the historical, sociological or anthropological review that she does throughout the work is aimed at justifying her main thesis. Your own room is literally a quiet room where you can carry out your writing job. But it is also a symbolic dimension that accompanies the whole question of gender:

In the first place, to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or a sound-proof room, was out of the question, unless her parents were exceptionally rich or very noble, even up to the beginning of the nineteenth century. (40)

"A room of one's own" should mean for all women much more than the need to have their own physical space, also the recognition of an intimate space where they can accommodate and recognize their own desires, aspirations and needs, and where they can escape from the almost genetic servility that always puts women at the service of others.

Thus, the metaphor of "a room of one's own" seems to be rather complex because it refers not only to 'being able to think for oneself', to the need for privacy and silence requested by the creator, but also to an exercise of abstraction which in this case liberates the woman of her ancestral ties; a closed place, in which she does not allow the entrance of the opinions of others, of the speeches of educators and tutors and not even of the own conscience of the traditional situation of dependence and submission that women have always suffered. Of course, it must also ignore those who, at the time of Virginia Woolf, subjected women to degrading judgments because of their creative, political and social aspirations. Virginia herself seems to be aware that, to mature in all these aspects, she still needs other hundred years, after which she will be able to enjoy that literary tradition and that stimulus of freedom, which until then had been the exclusive privilege of men.

That is the reason why Virginia Woolf is claiming for women a private space similar, for example, to the traditionally male office, in which women can develop her creative or professional activity. In addition, the own room is a private room but it is also universal, because it implies a struggle of years, a battle that women are still fighting today.

3.2.2. Women and literature

This section is deeply connected with the previous one because the main argument of *A Room of One's Own* is a direct consequence of women's desire to write and the association with the female characterization in literary works through ages, in other words, its interrelation with literature. But one of the main problems that Virginia Woolf had, and that we still have today, is that there are not many stories about women in ancient times. Concerning this, Goldman states that:

The main argument of *A Room of One's Own*, on the historical and continuing exclusion of women from the literary canon and from literary debate as well as from formal education, emerges from the opening narrator's account of being refused access to an Oxbridge college library (presumably Trinity College, Cambridge), and to the manuscript therein of John Milton's *Lycidas*, the greatest elegy in English literature. (51)

And one of the main causes is that these women were not in the spotlight. At that time the situation of women was to be at home, taking care of their children, their husband and their own home. They couldn't aspire to much more, they had to settle for it. If one of them dared to write, they called her crazy or reckless, a bad woman. Another issue was that no matter how much they wanted to write, they were not treated seriously, their words were despised for the simple fact of being of the opposite sex. There was no value in what a woman could say.

To this, we must add that, as we have commented before, the woman had a fundamental function of upbringing and care. It could be thought that at some point she might take some time to dedicate to herself. It was not that simple, this type of work is full time, they hardly had much more time without neglecting their tasks.

For this reason, Virginia Woolf, speaks of "a room of one's own". Many women who finally decided to dedicate themselves to writing did not have a space of their own, where no one would interrupt them. They had to write secretly, taking care that no one could see their texts and writing in common rooms and crowded dining rooms with people chatting. It was very difficult for great works of art to come out under those conditions, but there she is, for example, Jane Austen, who, as impossible as it may seem, could do it. Woolf points out that women like Jane Austen, George Eliot or the Brontë sisters are: "[...] women so poor that they could not afford to buy more than a few quires of paper at a time upon which to write *Wuthering Heights* or *Jane Eyre*" (53).

And they wrote their great novels in the sitting-rooms of their houses, where noise and commotion made concentration difficult, as we can see in this quotation when the authoress speaks about the place where these great novels were written: “[...] written too in the common sitting-room of that respectable house [...]” (53).

On the other hand, we also have the female character. This was always linked to male perception. Female representations were rare and most of the time they appeared as part of a typical function: always acting as wife and mother. In most cases, as seen in the works by male writers, they had two attitudes towards women: they loved them or they had a grudge against them.

It must be borne in mind that these female characters, in addition to being stereotyped, had no relationship with other women apart from with those being mere relatives. Women did not have friends as such and if they did, their topic of conversation revolved around men. Everything was in relation to the male gender. A woman was wicked if she ignored a man, she was wonderful if she played along. They were mere ornaments in their stories, a minor character outlined but not in depth.

Going back to the subject of writers, economy was very important. As can be deduced from Virginia Woolf's book, at that time women needed five hundred pounds to be able to dedicate themselves to writing. But it is not only economic power that could set them free, it is also having the ability to see the world, to enjoy nature, different cultures, to soak up reality to be able to describe it later.

As Woolf recounts, rich families sent their children to study abroad or if they could afford it, they looked for accommodation with views of the city. These opportunities were not given to women, they had to marry, they could not let them live alone like any other.

Despite this, female writers who could do it didn't have much credibility. Many of them had to hide behind a pseudonym in order to write, as Virginia Woolf wrote in her work: “I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman” (38). This is why anonymity was a better alternative than a harsh exposure to a hostile society which could not either understand or forgive a woman dared to write:

[...] any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl

who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty. (38)

In connection with the meaning of the term “Anon” and its correlation with representation of women in literature, Fernald states that Virginia Woolf: “argues that many works whose authorship is unknown to us must have been written by women and further argues for the importance of this swelling of voices in literature” (2006: 87). And together with this issue, the critic concludes saying that: “The practice of anonymous publishing, which has all but died out today, has a predictably mixed effect” (Fernald, 2006: 87).

In this same text, Woolf vindicates women as a literary topic: “Have you any notion of how many books are written about women in the course of one year? Have you any notion how many are written by men?” (21), without being able to avoid the comparison of genres, Woolf freely compares the works of authors and authoresses in her ironic way, and emphasizes her writing in first person, highlighting that her text has its own voice, and that it is not an imitation of any other text:

Women do not write books about men—a fact that I could not help welcoming with relief, for if I had first to read all that men have written about women, then all that women have written about men, the aloe that flowers once in a hundred years would flower twice before I could set pen to paper. (21)

And despite being relieved at this discovery, Woolf cannot help wondering about the cause of this disparity as she tries to find the answer by reviewing an extensive bibliography of male authorship that emphasizes the supposed “mental, moral and physical inferiority of women” (25). Therefore, Woolf seems to challenge in 20th century England that patriarchal legacy that for years kept women in a place of submission and inferiority, not only personal but also intellectual, social and economic. Taking Simone de Beauvoir's definition in *The Second Sex*: “the whole of feminine history has been man-made.... they created values, mores, religions; never have women disputed this empire with them” (1989:148). For her, men have always had the fate of women in their hands.

Likewise, Virginia will review the history of women who dared to write, from the 15th century to the present, missing in these women the creative freedom and the experiences lived by men or, in other words, their economic independence and their ability to think for themselves. In this sense, she knows that the woman lacks a remarkable history, and that the

novel has never discussed her true feelings, her concerns and thoughts, her wishes and desires, her hopes and dreams; that is to say, a history of themselves as they are. If a woman, she says, were able to tell the truth about the man and about herself, the result would be of surprising interest, “Comedy is bound to be enriched. New facts are bound to be discovered” (69). But she can only achieve this when she writes in such a way that sex is unconscious of itself. Because we must not limit our vision, rather, we must see beyond the personal relationships between men and women, since we are part of a larger world.

The authoress also emphasizes the fact that female characters in literature did not lack personality and character, but it was impossible to know the life of a real woman in Shakespeare's time. While poets put intelligent and witty phrases in the mouths of their female protagonists, these, in real life, could barely read and were completely ignored by history. The following quotation reflects perfectly this situation:

Not being a historian, one might go even further and say that women have burnt like beacons in all the works of all the poets from the beginning of time—Clytemnestra, Antigone, Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Phèdre, Cressida, Rosalind, Desdemona, the Duchess of Malfi, among the dramatists; then among the prose writers: Millamant, Clarissa, Becky Sharp, Anna Karenina, Emma Bovary, Madame de Guermantes—the names flock to mind, nor do they recall women ‘lacking in personality and character’. (33)

In addition to this issue, Virginia Woolf declares that: “But this is woman in fiction. In fact, as Professor Trevelyan points out, she was locked up, beaten and flung about the room” (33). Consulting Professor Trevelyan's *History of England* (1926), Woolf finds that, in Shakespeare's years, beating women was a recognized right of all husbands, regardless of social origin, and that marriages for upper-class women were arranged long before they were out of adolescence. Woolf is surprised that the image projected of women through female literary characters was so different from the reality experienced by women of Shakespeare's time.

It was impossible that in the seventeenth century a woman could write the plays of Shakespeare. They did not receive a proper education, an education comparable to that which, ancestrally, men had enjoyed. And she illustrates this fact by telling us a splendid story about what would have happened if Shakespeare had had a sister perfectly gifted for poetry, named Judith. As regard to Shakespeare's sister De Beauvoir states that: “In *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf contrasts the meagre and restricted life of an imaginary sister of Shakespeare with his life of learning and adventure” (1989: 128).

His imaginary sister was a talented sister like him, with the same sensitive spirit, eager for knowledge, poetry and the world. Virginia Woolf wonders the chances Shakespeare's sister would have had in contrast to her brother. On the one hand, the male brother was able to leave home, look for work in the big city, approach the theatre as a spectator, then as a horse-groomer, then as an actor, and finally as a playwright:

Meanwhile his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She picked up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps, and read a few pages. But then her parents came in and told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers. (36)

Before she could discover or express her vocation, she would have already been betrothed to someone else. And if in a fit of courage, she decided to run away from home and seek a life like her brother, in the city, no one would have opened the doors for her: there was no work for her, unless she agreed to be a prostitute, much less a position as an actor or playwright. In that little story, she exposes to us the obstacles that she would have to face in order to finally not be able to write a single line, and end up being humiliated and mocked. Perhaps she would end up insane, and it might even come that she chose to commit suicide.

On the other hand, regarding the socially assigned roles for men and women, De Beauvoir describes the passivity of women throughout much of history:

The majority of women resign themselves to their lot without attempting to take any action; those who have tried to change it have intended not to be confined within the limits of their peculiarity and cause it to triumph, but to rise above it. (1989:149)

Thus, it could be said that Woolf was from that minority of women who did dare to challenge the conventions imposed on the social role of women, in this case through her writing, even at a time when women's social participation was viewed with distrust and suspicion. This is how Woolf expresses it in these words taken from the second chapter of *A Room of One's Own*, when referring to the supposed female inferiority:

Whatever may be their use in civilized societies, mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action. That is why Napoleon and Mussolini both insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge. That serves to explain in part the necessity that women so often are to men. (28)

3.2.3. The exploration of sexuality

This section will be devoted to the principal topics related to the exploration of sexuality that Virginia Woolf develops in *A Room of One's Own*. The main elements that will be commented in this part are the concepts of what she considers 'masculine' and 'feminine', in other words, gender identity. The characteristics we use to identify men and women are socially constructed; other concepts that will be analysed are lesbianism and androgyny.

One of Virginia Woolf's great concerns was gender identity and its roles. Woolf realized that throughout history, both men and women have inflexibly locked themselves into predetermined roles, and she said that this prevents us from knowing ourselves. This issue is reflected in the quotation below in which Fernald states:

Questions of tradition are particularly vexed for women. In societies with rigidly defined gender roles, such as the Victorian Britain into which Woolf was born, tradition is passed down from mother to daughter and from father to son. (2006: 3)

To grow as people, we must erase the line that so rigorously divides the genders and venture to experience sensations that do not fit into the mould of what we understand as only male or solely female. Only in this way can we develop a complete and original personality.

Moreover, Woolf realized that this mental rigidity is the cause of the deprivation of intellectual and spiritual freedom of which women have been the victims throughout history. Based on this idea, she sought to liberate women and allow them to function on an equal footing with men, so that they can develop their ideas and pursue their passions with the same freedoms. These two ideas, those of exploring the inner afflictions of the mind and breaking the limits that gender roles impose on us, constantly coexist in her works.

This consciousness of sex causes, according to Woolf, tension in the mind and distracts women from their true goal: to find their true essence, their true identity. The woman must find her style, her identity as a writer. The woman must carry out her own tradition, she must find a state of harmony within herself so that, later, she can write freed from that state of tension:

[...] it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly...for anything written with that conscious bias is doomed to death. (78)

Virginia Woolf, as a feminist and as an artist, tries to contribute to the search for feminine values where they differ from masculine ones. This does not mean waging a fight between the sexes, quite the contrary. Although the masculine and feminine values are different, they can only be given in the cooperation between them. It is here that she raises her idea of an androgynous mind where a reconciliation of the feminine and intuitive aspect with the critical and masculine side of the mind is generated.

Thus, Virginia Woolf suggests an ideal “state of being” that she calls “the androgynous mind” (74). Woolf spends time drawing the ideal blueprint of a soul plane in which this supposes the existence of “two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body” (74). There are two powers: the masculine and the feminine:

[...] in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man’s brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman’s brain the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. (74)

Woolf alludes to Coleridge's concept of androgyny, when he stated that great intelligence is androgynous. Woolf understands by androgynous mind the ideal state of the writer where female and male components meet. The proportion between these will determine the predominant sex without this implying the exclusion of the other. The ideal state for writing, she says, would be that of the fusion of both, where the two powers can live together in harmony:

Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine, I thought. (74)

These two powers are not opposed and they “live in harmony together” (74) to give rise to the real state of fullness, as Bazin and Freeman state in their study “The androgynous vision” about the concept of androgyny in relation with the works by Virginia Woolf:

Psychologist like Carl Jung and his followers also support the theory that the human psyche is androgynous; and, like Virginia Woolf, they assert that only when individuals integrate and achieve a harmonious balance between their male and female natures can they be truly creative, only then can they achieve wholeness and peace. (1974: 191)

Woolf uses Shakespeare as an example of an androgynous mind, since she considers that he had the most favourable state of mind for poetry that has ever existed. If he really managed to free all of his work it was thanks to his free mind:

In fact one goes back to Shakespeare's mind as the type of the androgynous, of the man-womanly mind, though it would be impossible to say what Shakespeare thought of women. And if it be true that it is one of the tokens of the fully developed mind that it does not think specially or separately of sex, how much harder it is to attain that condition now than ever before. (74)

Thus, the idea of androgyny contributes to the solution of the problems of women writers at the same time as it explains the reason for the dissatisfaction of women when reading the literature of some modern writers: their writing is one-sided, they write only with their male appearance. As regard to this, Koppen declares that: "This humanised and humanising androgyny is a figure of modern gender relations and modern writing in *A Room of One's Own* as well as *Orlando*" (2009: 69).

Another relevant issue related to the exploration of sexuality is the relationship between members of the same sex, and in the case of *A Room of One's Own*, the concept of homosexuality, especially that of the lesbian sexuality, as we can see in the following quotation when Woolf writes about the relationship between two women in literature, Chloe and Olivia: "'Chloe liked Olivia,' I read. And then it struck me how immense a change was there. Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature" (62). About this, Goldman states that this "refrain" has turned into "a critical slogan for lesbian writing" (2006: 102).

Through this argumentation, the subtle and refined, but brutally daring treatment that she made of sexuality and of female sexual identity as a creative space to accommodate new ways of being, is tremendously revolutionary and it may have promoted many women of that time who were lesbians:

Then I may tell you that the very next words I read were these — 'Chloe liked Olivia ...' Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women. (62)

But also, later generations have become deeply identified with her texts and have used her arguments to come out of the closet and live openly their sexuality. Women will recover the dignity so that they don't have to be either straight or anybody's lady to identify with that part of themselves until that moment had been repressed. Women will join the pieces of a

broken identity. The issue that Woolf raised to an entire era in favour of the visibility of homosexuality, especially that of lesbian visibility, therefore deserves considerable recognition. Goldman concludes saying that: “In *A Room of One’s Own*, she calls for women’s writing to explore lesbianism more openly and for the narrative tools to make this possible” (2006:102).

In consequence, both Woolf and her works inspired many women who dared to challenge the impositions of that masculine and heterosexual order through sexuality, which would become a battlefield against conventionalism and the closed limits of social reality. Sexuality became, through her literary works, a performance, a break with the established rules that questioned, fought and surpassed the models of the patriarchal order. The consciousness about gender, as well as the powerful female friendships that she designed in her novels, meant an unconsciousness of the self and an escape from the demands of female identity, which she lived and conceived as oppressive.

4. *Three Guineas*

The two works by Virginia Woolf that openly show the political passions that are embodied in her novels are her two feminist essays *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938). Concerning the political issues in this essay, Goldman states that *Three Guineas* is “a highly influential book because of her pacifist tract analysing correlations between patriarchy and fascism” (2006:96).

Three Guineas was published in 1939, nine years after the publication of *A Room of One’s Own*. Both works are very much concerned with feminism, which is an intelligent and surprisingly current issue. But, if we compare *A Room of One’s Own* with *Three Guineas*, we find that in the last one Woolf’s vision is more radicalized. Whereas *A Room of One’s Own* is a plea finely calculated to convince men, in *Three Guineas* we find a notable change in style: there is a rejection of seduction in favour of cold argumentation, and there is also more interest in showing and confronting data.

With regard to the origin of *Three Guineas*, although *A Room of One’s Own* was published just one year after it was taught, the writing process for *Three Guineas* was long and laborious. This was due to the fact that Woolf initially tried to develop a new literary form: an essay-novel, to be entitled *The Pargiters*. In it she planned to alternate scenes of fiction with

chapters of historical analysis. Failing in this project, Woolf decided to make a novel, entitled *The Years*, and a political essay, *Three Guineas* (Goldman, 2006:23-24). In these two essays, she would express her views about political and pacifist issues from the point of view of feminism, her feeling towards the brutality of the discrimination of women that she saw every day and, above all, she would heal a great personal wound: her lack of a formal university education, for being woman, but instead of launching a personalized and victimizing complaint, she transforms her pain into an effective feminist allegation.

The work has a title that is not understood until one begins to read. *Three Guineas* is a rougher book, less seductive, more feminist militant, and perhaps for that reason less read, than *A Room of One's Own*. Regarding the title, a guinea was “a unit of money or a gold coin used in Britain in the past, worth £1.05” (Macmillan Dictionary, 2021). In the form of a response to a letter in which a cultured man asks for her opinion on how to avoid war, the text is divided into three parts. In each of these three parts “the daughter of an educated man” (98) donates a guinea in order to avoid war, and in each one Woolf analyses discrimination against women based on the problems that women have concerning the access to education, the difficulty in their professional life and their absence from decision-making places.

Both works originate from lectures: the one that gave rise to *A Room of One's Own* was based on women and fiction, and it was delivered in the academic context of Cambridge in 1928 as has been previously mentioned, while the one that delivered in 1931 in the political environment of London and the “National Society for Women's Service on professions for women” was the basis of *Three guineas* (Briggs, 2010:71-72). This presentation had great significance in the personal history of Virginia Woolf and in her feminist thought. In relation with this, Goldman differentiates these two works stating that, on the one hand, *A Room of One's Own* is “centred in literary criticism, analysing and probing the production of literature by and about women” and, on the other hand, *Three Guineas* is focused on “the political and social institutions of patriarchy and connects the politics of the rising fascism in Europe with the politics of the personal and domestic sphere at home” (2006:110).

4.1. Summary

In *Three Guineas* Woolf replies to three imaginary letters asking her for a contribution for different causes. Each of these three letters divided the essay into three chapters, indicated by part one, part two and part three, and each of them examines one of the requests, and proceeds

to refute them. Although the essay is divided into three clearly differentiated sections, all parts revolve around a common axis which is to invest a guinea for different causes.

The sender of the first letter is a man whose identity is unknown, presented by the authoress as an exponent of the educated class. The request of the man, with which the essay begins, represents the leitmotif of the entire work, and it is substantiated in the question “How in your opinion are we to prevent war?” (89). To answer this, Woolf will carry out an analysis of the condition of women, placed in relation to the social, cultural, economic and religious institutions of the time, supporting a basic thesis: there is a profound link between the patriarchal system responsible for the discrimination and exclusion of women.

The first part of the essay deals with education. The authoress responds that letter and through that letter she expresses her ideas regarding the importance of education for women and how education has been up to that time. This part ends with the contribution of a guinea on the part of the narrator to the reconstruction of a women’s college.

The second part of the essay is a response to the donation of a guinea to a women’s association for the support of women engaged in the search for a job. Woolf reflects on the importance of work and on whether it would be worth investing a guinea in promoting the economic independence of women. Again, we see the impressions of the time of the authoress. She talks about the need to exercise a profession, especially in relation to the economic freedom that it would mean for women.

Finally, Virginia deals with a chapter on culture and intellectual freedom. The authoress considers that women's education has influenced their ability to dedicate themselves to culture and intellectual freedom. This part ends with the contribution of the last guinea to the anti-war society mentioned above.

4.2. Main topics

Three guineas deals with many issues related to feminism and this section will be devoted to the analysis of the main topics presented in *Three Guineas*.

In response to a letter asking for her opinion on how to avoid war, Virginia Woolf analyses in depth the discrimination against women, and claims their rights to receive the same

education as men and to have the same professional and social opportunities that they had lost within a patriarchal society. She also analyses issues such as fascism and war.

4.2.1. The education of women

To answer the question of how to prevent war, Woolf will carry out a systematic analysis of the condition of women, placed in relation to the social, cultural, economic and religious institutions of the time, supporting a basic thesis: there is a deep link between the patriarchal system responsible for the discrimination and exclusion of women from the public sphere, and war, militarism and totalitarianism. In relation to this Briggs states that: “*Three Guineas* finds some compensation for women’s exclusion from power in the fact that, as outsiders, they are peculiarly well placed to offer an informed critique of their society” (2010: 81).

Preventing war is fighting against this model of society based on masculine values, and women can contribute to achieving this objective by exercising their diversity, the result of a condition of exclusion and a different psychology which allows them to escape from that value system that discriminates them.

Virginia calls into question the unequal access of women to education, an experience that she knows very closely, and that for a woman who belongs to a family with a good economic background, it becomes more difficult, because, the only access to free education was at home, and it was destined to prepare women for marriage.

Woolf observes how the women of her class are stripped of all ‘privilege’, they only receive the minimum economically and intellectually, without allowing them any autonomy and making it impossible for them to make decisions in relation to their own lives. For this reason, categories such as class remain narrow to describe and analyse the reality and life of women.

The definition of the content of female diversity is suspended to introduce a second letter, in which an honorary treasurer requests a contribution for the reconstruction of a college. Woolf will make one condition for her guinea donation: the applicant's commitment to educating young people to hate war. Also, Virginia denounces that the existing universities, Cambridge and Oxford, have for centuries hindered women's access and recognition of their degrees, they have shown that the value of education is not an absolute value: “Oxford and

Cambridge, as we have seen, strictly limit the number of educated men's daughters who are allowed to receive a university education" (139).

In the first part, Woolf deals with the issue of the secular exclusion of women from higher education and from positions of power and relates it to the goal of eliminating wars. Responding to the request of an honorary treasurer, she points out the reasons for and against donating a guinea for the reconstruction of a university college for young ladies. Since the education given to men for so many centuries has not succeeded in eliminating wars, she wonders whether giving women the same educational opportunities as men could contribute to avoiding wars.

Her answer to this issue is negative. Not if women receive the same education as men, full of symbols, hierarchies, titles, rituals:

We can say that for educated men to emphasize their superiority over other people, either in birth or intellect, by dressing differently, or by adding titles before, or letters after their names are acts that rouse competition and jealousy—emotions which, as we need scarcely draw upon biography to prove, nor ask psychology to show, have their share in encouraging a disposition towards war. (107)

Woolf proposes that women reject an education that is based on symbolic distinctions such as degrees and decorations, professing unreal loyalties, patriotism, family or religion. Rather, she guides us to put aside competition with men and despise their merit system, even if women are tempted by money and political and social positions. She invites them to reject fame and accolades as well. It is a question of assuming the historical difference that we have had with men, that difference that she makes explicit in *Three Guineas* through the biographies and the history of women.

Therefore, although she knows that women need colleges that give them access to knowledge to build their freedom, she thinks that this guinea would contribute more to avoiding war if it were used to buy matches and fuel and set that college on fire. Instead, women should build a different school:

[...] where nobody can walk freely or talk freely for fear of transgressing some chalk mark, of displeasing some dignitary. But if the college were poor it would have nothing to offer; competition would be abolished. Life would be open and easy. People who love learning for itself would gladly come there. Musicians, painters, writers, would teach there, because they would learn. (118)

According to Black, this discussion on education reveals the “tension” between “educational qualifications as means to economic autonomy” which at the same time is “an extension of the theme of *A Room of One’s Own*” and “the impact on the students of the sexist, racist, and militarist content of elite education as it currently exists” (2004: 91-92). Finally, Black concludes stating that:

[...] the compromise solution may remind us of the situation of women’s studies programs, where advocacy of alternate models of research, pedagogy, and institutional structure accompanies a reluctant acceptance of the traditional structure of departments and degrees. (2004:92)

Then, Woolf ironizes about the “unpaid-for education” (92) that prepares for free professions, that is, to do unpaid work that men do not do. This “unpaid-for education” is not a simple moral discourse that has been given to women but a process of formation of conscience about the conditions in which their lives have developed.

The teachers of this “unpaid-for education” have been four: poverty, chastity, derision and freedom, as Woolf herself expressed:

Then, If you refuse to be separated from the four great teachers of the daughters of educated men—poverty, chastity, derision and freedom from unreal loyalties—but combine them with some wealth, some knowledge, and some service to real loyalties then you can enter the professions and escape the risks that make them undesirable. (160)

The “daughter of the educated man” has received too little money for her expenses so that her brother could study at Oxford or Cambridge, her mobility has been reduced as a guarantee of chastity, her initiatives in the public sphere have garnered derision, and finally the feeling she has of not having received anything from institutions such as churches or states frees her from patriotism or male conformism in the face of meaningless or unjust customs and ceremonies.

According to Woolf, these teachers (poverty, chastity, derision and freedom) have generated virtues but also defects, ignorance, suffering and disasters, which brings us to the next section of this dissertation.

4.2.2. The professional life of women

One of the main issues, as important as the education of women, is the access of women to the professions, that is, the professional life of women. In this part, she analyses patriarchy in her ideas of what work is. The reflection is articulated around the convenience of donating or not a second guinea to an institution that supports educated women to find work.

For Woolf, women must come out of their domestic seclusion because in it they are both responsible for and participants in the war. Marriage as the only female profession implies total dependence on men, on their ways of earning money and on their opinions and, therefore, favours the positive attitude of women towards war: “In short, the thought of marriage influenced what she said, what she thought, what she did. How could it be otherwise? Marriage was the only profession open to her” (122).

Even the boredom produced by confinement in domestic life makes periods of war, which meant for women participation in different tasks (nursing, replacement of men in jobs), be welcomed. Moreover, she reminds us that the relationship of manhood with war was fostered by young English women who, in the street, gave a white feather as a symbol of cowardice to men who did not wear a uniform: “That the daughters of educated men then should give their brothers neither the white feather of cowardice nor the red feather of courage, but no feather at all” (186).

Therefore, the first step towards the elimination of war is to fight for the emancipation of women. For this reason, she will dedicate the first two guineas to the education and labour insertion of young women. The economic independence of women represents for Woolf the necessary condition for freedom of thought, the new “weapon against war” (124). Until women are educated and can earn a living from their professions, they will depend on their husbands and will not be able to express their own opinion: they will be consciously or unconsciously in favour of the war:

And it is at once obvious, if what we have said about influence is true, that we must turn to the professions, because if we could persuade those who can earn their livings, and thus actually hold in their hands this new weapon, our only weapon, the weapon of independent opinion based upon independent income, to use that weapon against war, we should do more to help you than by appealing to those who must teach the young to earn their livings; [...] (124)

For Virginia Woolf, the economic independence of women was necessary for an autonomy of thought. She describes, incredibly, how women 'daughters of educated men' live under the influence of the father or the husband, without being able to exercise their opinions. In this way, by obtaining money with their own hands and not having to depend financially on a father, brother or husband, women could freely exercise their talents and abilities, also express their opinions in a disinterested way, that is, without having to please anyone, mainly men, to survive. This does not mean that Woolf appealed to a system of equality in relation to men, on the contrary, she is critical of the way in which access to education and work is being carried out, she senses that if this situation is not called into question, it can lead women to reproduce the same 'false loyalties' of men.

Virginia calls paid work a “weapon of independent opinion” (124) and she calls women to remember with gratitude those who opened the doors of higher education and the professions for us. Home is the place of powerlessness, you cannot mistake, she claims, influence with real power. The influence or power in the shadow was always the feminine way to alleviate impotence, but it is exercised through dependence on men and is only effective in the aristocracy.

Economic independence is, therefore, the precondition to help abolish war. Only financial independence will allow the free manifestation of difference and its effectiveness in an area that exceeds the limits of privacy and personal relationships. This economic independence allows women not to sell their mind:

‘But what,’ she may ask, ‘is meant by “selling your mind without love”?’ ‘Briefly,’ we might reply, ‘to write at the command of another person what you do not want to write for the sake of money. But to sell a brain is worse than to sell a body, [...] Thus we are asking you, Madam, to pledge yourself not to commit adultery of the brain because it is a much more serious offence than the other.’ (172)

Perhaps, the most important issue in Woolf's work is precisely the clues she gives women not to negotiate their minds and reproduce the same belief that promotes segregation and the struggle for power and legitimacy of patriarchal institutions. Women should be conscious of their own potentialities, which does not require exercising an intellectual arrogance, typical of the culture of men.

Woolf, in advance, is able to foresee the danger that the ideal of equality represents for a woman. She is very clear about what it means to enter the professionalization system, whose greatest risk is to seize the creative potential in order to obtain the same jobs and the same recognitions that men have built to mark hierarchies.

The truth is that, at present, women have reached levels of equality, always in relation to men. We have progressively entered the university. However, in the workplace, access to employment, permanence and promotion within it are difficult and unstable for women. The actual professionalization system maintains sexist stereotypes in the professions, hiring is abusive in terms of temporality and partiality, which make it difficult to leave home and social and labour insertion. This situation limits the development of professional careers.

Women across the world occupy the majority of jobs that require less qualification, in precarious sectors in which they are often the object of labour exploitation, always to a greater extent than men. Sexual harassment and discrimination based on sex in the workplace turn the workplace into hell, as when Woolf talks about the importance of the atmosphere in the professional life of women:

Atmosphere plainly is a very mighty power. Atmosphere not only changes the sizes and shapes of things; it affects solid bodies, like salaries, which might have been thought impervious to atmosphere. An epic poem might be written about atmosphere, or a novel in ten or fifteen volumes. But since this is only a letter, and you are pressed for time, let us confine ourselves to the plain statement that atmosphere is one of the most powerful, partly because it is one of the most impalpable, of the enemies with which the daughters of educated men have to fight. (135)

The activities of women in the field of care, not freely chosen but secularly imposed, which have freely sustained a capitalist system and the privileges of men, are socially undervalued. Likewise, these impoverished and exploited women, in addition to being caregivers, are also educators of daughters and sons. In relation to this issue Woolf states that:

In one world the sons of educated men work as civil servants, judges, soldiers and are paid for that work; in the other world, the daughters of educated men work as wives, mothers, daughters—but are they not paid for that work? Is the work of a mother, of a wife, of a daughter, worth nothing to the nation in solid cash? (136)

Among the unpaid jobs are the housework performed by women at home as well as the care, they also dedicate a large part of their day to these tasks. From this, it is possible to re-examine the role of women at home: being their support and main element. In addition, it is an

invisible and stigmatized job, because throughout history it has not been taken as a job like others, causing the social and emotional burden to be higher.

Therefore, women who have been engaged in household activities not only do not have an income, but also do not have other benefits that workers enjoy and are entitled to. In consequence, older women earn none or unworthy income after having worked their entire lives taking care of the people around them. Women's rights are always questioned and are often in danger, some of them having to be reconquered.

4.2.3. Fascism and War

Three Guineas summarizes the situation of international politics in the 1930s, with the spread of fascist regimes throughout Europe. According to Goldman, *Three Guineas* is focused on “the political and social institutions of patriarchy and connects the politics of the rising fascism in Europe with the politics of the personal and domestic sphere at home” (2006:110). Moreover, Woolf shows the horrors of war with photographs, in order to avoid their possible imitations in the following decade, because of the cyclical nature of war and the inability of human beings to learn from their mistakes.

In the book *Virginia Woolf and Fascism* (2001), Pawlowski states that the voices of many women writers were “unheard” due to the fact that they “raised against the intolerable nature of fascist ideology”. In consequence, Pawlowski said that they will try to search for “new perspectives on Woolf’s voice against tyranny and her resistance to fascist seduction”. Then, the goal is that “the power and contemporaneity of her argument may be brought more fully to light” (2001:2).

According to Briggs, Woolf links “the oppression of patriarchy with that of the fascist dictators” (2010:80) and she offers a quote from *Three Guineas* that cannot be dismissed in relation with this issue and its analysis:

The whole iniquity of dictatorship, whether in Oxford or Cambridge, in Whitehall or Downing Street, against Jews or against women, in England, or in Germany, in Italy or in Spain is now apparent to you. (180)

Woolf attributes the cause of this situation to the patriarchal culture, founded on the division of sexual roles and the confinement of women to the family, to the narrow

dependencies of the husband, and believes that totalitarian regimes are the direct expression of this culture:

There we have in embryo the creature, Dictator as we call him when he is Italian or German, who believes that he has the right whether given by God, Nature, sex or race is immaterial, to dictate to other human beings how they shall live; what they shall do. (135)

Furthermore, Woolf says that fascism and Nazism are born from patriarchal culture, and the women opposed them, even in a closed office, “fighting the Fascist or the Nazi as surely as those who fight him with arms in the limelight of publicity?” (135-136). Fascism and Nazism do not reside abroad, but also in Great Britain:

And what right have we, Sir, to trumpet our ideals of freedom and justice to other countries when we can shake out from our most respectable newspapers any day of the week eggs like these? (136)

In addition, Gätgens states that *Three Guineas* is a “a comprehensive attempt to theorize the significance of gender for fascism”. Also, Gätgens said that the focus of Woolf’s analysis on fascism is reflected in “the patriarchal relationship between men and women” and, the “key element” to produce fascism is “the unequal distribution of power between the genders” (2001:21). Thus, Fascism and Nazism were a sociocultural genocide against all female influence in public and private spheres, which contributed to hatred and segregation between both sexes. In relation with this, Gätgens states that:

Woolf examines England, a democratic country, and shows that women are systematically excluded from all public positions of prestige and power, excluded from all positions that would enable them to have real political agency, making that country far from democratic for women. (2001:21)

However, the totalitarian enemy, Hitler, Mussolini or Franco, would not be a dictator located only in Germany, Italy and Spain, respectively, but would also be comfortably installed in the Great Britain of Virginia Woolf, still anchored in the patriarchal tradition, patriotism, misogyny and nationalism during the years before World War II, and that would incite violence against women or against other European nations. In relation to this notion, Lee argued that:

Though *A Room of One’s Own* and (more problematically) *Three Guineas* have long been valued for their arguments against dictatorship, repression and conformity, the politics of her literary essays have not been so fully understood. (2010:94)

In relation with this section, Black states that although the letters sent to the narrator in *Three Guineas* “are directly related to war”, the real objective is “peace or victory” (2004: 90). The first chapter opens with a description of the content of a letter in which an unknown sender, when asking the authoress what should be done to avoid war, addresses three proposals: signing a letter to the newspapers, joining an association that opposes war or making a cash contribution to this association.

In the letter, which Woolf defines as “perhaps unique in the history of humanity's correspondence”, because for the first time an “educated man” addresses such an important request to a woman (89), Woolf establishes an intentional, explicit distance from her interlocutor by means of the opposite use of the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘you’, which will continue to be a constant in the essay, immediately clarifying its nature:

For though many instincts are held more or less in common by both sexes, to fight has always been the man's habit, not the woman's. (...) how can we answer your question, how to prevent war? The answer based upon our experience and our psychology—Why fight? —is not an answer of any value. Obviously there is for you some glory, some necessity, some satisfaction in fighting which we have never felt or enjoyed. (92)

According to Woolf, war has a sexual connotation, it belongs to the male gender and the two sexes occupy a different social position. Women do not enjoy equal access to education and the professions; they cannot exert “neither the pressure of force nor the pressure of money”, they are excluded from the army and navy, the stock market, diplomacy and the church (97). Their condition of social marginalization leads them to consider the reasons for war in another way:

What then, we must ask next, is this ‘patriotism’ which leads you to go to war? Let the Lord Chief Justice of England interpret it for us: Englishmen are proud of England. (...) But the educated man's sister—what does ‘patriotism’ mean to her? Has she the same reasons for being proud of England, for loving England, for defending England? Has she been ‘greatly blessed’ in England? (94)

As for the second proposal put forward by the gentleman, namely to offer a cash contribution to an anti-war association, Woolf is glad that it is addressed to a woman, because it means that, for the first time, the daughter of an educated man has the opportunity to freely dispose of the money earned from her work. Woolf immediately remembers how “those queer

dead women in their poke bonnets and shawls” (179-180), who in the 19th century fought for women's rights, not only fought for themselves:

‘Our claim was no claim of women’s rights only;’ —it is Josephine Butler who speaks—‘it was larger and deeper; it was a claim for the rights of all—all men and women—to the respect in their persons of the great principles of Justice and Equality and Liberty.’ [...] They were fighting the tyranny of the patriarchal state as you are fighting the tyranny of the Fascist state. Thus we are merely carrying on the same fight that our mothers and grandmothers fought. [...] You are feeling in your own persons what your mothers felt when they were shut out, when they were shut up, because you are Jews, because you are democrats, because of race, because of religion. (180)

According to Woolf, fascism has only extended, but its roots have remained the same, the iniquity of the dictatorship manifests itself in Oxford or Cambridge, in England or in Germany. Now, the struggle has become common: “the daughters and sons of educated men are fighting side by side” (180). Due to this, Woolf decides to give her guinea to the association that has requested it, so that it can defend the principles of justice, equality and freedom for all, men and women.

Responding to the proposal regarding membership in this association, Woolf specifies that if women fight alongside men for common purposes, they will not participate in their companies, because “we should merge our identity in yours” (183).

Then, Woolf proposes the creation of a women's association, formed by the “educated men’s daughters working in their own class”, which will work with their own methods and totally separated from the other association that was proposed to her to join, the cause of “liberty, equality and peace” (183):

In the first place, this new society, you will be relieved to learn, would have no honorary treasurer, for it would need no funds. It would have no office, no committee, no secretary; it would call no meetings; it would hold no conferences. If name it must have, it could be called the Outsiders’ Society. (183)

This group is “the Outsiders’ Society”, which will use “indifference” and “independence” as an aid not only to avoid war, but also to end the “infantile fixation” (183), as Gätgens states:

The political program of the 'Outsiders' Society' consists primarily in a militant practice of 'indifference', a continual refusal to join in and to identify with the nation, its various institutions, and the men of her class. (2001: 33)

Thus, Woolf uses the expression "outsiders" to refer to women as individuals excluded from a society in which rights and privileges are held only by men. If women are to unite in any way for a common goal, let them unite as strangers and call themselves "outsiders". To do the opposite, to enter without further hesitation or reasoning in one of the many societies that make up the male society that has excluded them and that continues to exclude them, would mean erasing their difference and suppressing their strangeness.

By basing their indifference on reason rather than instinct, outsiders will not be guided by any patriotic sentiment, and will discover that their homeland has always treated them as slaves and denied them "education or any share in its possessions" (185). In the following statement, Woolf, in her outsider condition, denies any nationalistic sentiment towards England: "As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (186). According to this issue, Pawlowski relates the outsider status of women to the figure of Antigone:

Without doubt, and as Woolf is well aware, this space 'outside' is where women have always already been. The difference now resides in choice. Choosing the figure of Antigone as her icon of choice, Woolf suggests the despair which must attend women's determination to resist masculine domination. (2001:54)

Virginia Woolf compares the authoritarianism of 20th-century tyrants to the Greek tragedy of Antigone, as Joannou explains about the Antigone of Sophocles: "Antigone is prohibited from burying the brother she loves in the fashion decreed by the gods by the tyrant Creon, who speaks in the full authority of the patriarchal state" (2001: 150).

Woolf does this to show that, for several millennia, there has been the same violence against different victims:

It seems, Sir, as we listen to the voices of the past, as if we were looking at the photographs again, at the picture of dead bodies and ruined houses that the Spanish Government sends us almost weekly. Things repeat themselves it seems. Pictures and voices are the same today as they were 2,000 years ago. (214)

She suggested that the extermination of plurality and difference is the same atrocity committed by man and directed, without distinction, against the female collective, Jews or other ethnic or religious minorities and everyone who loves peace. In relation with this, Joannou concludes stating that:

Woolf presents Antigone as a feminist icon whose defiance of the tyrant removes her from the jurisdiction of her family thus transforming her so that she is seen to have the potential to become a full citizen. (2001: 150)

5. Conclusions

First, in *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf starts from the problems that are established between women and literature to extend, from there, to a more comprehensive level: the problems of women within society. The whole essay is a deep and courageous analysis of the history of women and their relationship with issues such as education and literature as a consequence of living within a patriarchal society. In addition, the work is one of the most famous literary works regarding the issue of feminism and its representation. In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf reflects the numerous difficulties and prejudices that women had, and still have, to overcome in order to dedicate themselves to literature in freedom, or in a more simple way, to set themselves free and fulfil themselves as independent human beings that are taken into account, getting rid of the labels and corsets often imposed by illustrious men, angrily says the authoress, who have attacked them throughout history.

One of the conclusions that we can obtain from this work is that women are poor, both materially and symbolically. It reflects on the fact that women are reduced to a domestic body that will only be able to have children and take care of the house and that will be excluded from freedoms and rights, which brings us to the concept of the feminization of poverty that gives answers to this issue. Due to this, a woman needs money to be free from the patriarchal society that condemns women in so many aspects.

In addition to money, women need “a room of one's own” to separate public and private spheres, which is an idea that she develops perfectly with many examples. She believes that women have been removed from the world of writing, no one has made it easy for them and believes that if they achieve economic freedom, they will only be able to worry about writing. Also, she tells us how many times the parents deprived their daughters of the education that

they did give to the boys, something that did not favour the appearance of women writers either. A forceful conclusion that evidences the need for women to have their own independence and freedom, so that nothing ties them down because in this way it is impossible to create history with their actions, it is impossible for women to become great writers.

In my opinion, one of the most important events in her work was her imaginary character, "Shakespeare's sister", who was a woman with the same writing skills as her brother, who even hypothetically could have fled his home as Shakespeare did, but because she was a woman she could not write and create the majestic works that her brother created and transcended history.

Moreover, *A Room of One's Own* touches on topics such as lesbianism and androgyny. Starting from the ideal of her androgynous mind, she proposes a solution that encompasses each of these planes, the internal harmony of the individual; harmony as a writer, since it supposes a mind without tensions that allows to release the creative force, and harmony between the two parts of humanity.

Regarding *Three Guineas*, the first part of the essay deals with the education of women. The authoress expresses her ideas regarding the importance of education for women and how education has been up to that moment. In addition, Woolf reflects about the importance of work and about whether it would be worth investing a guinea in promoting the economic independence of women. Again, we see her impressions, well ahead of the authoress' time. She talks about the need to exercise a profession, especially in relation to the economic freedom that it would mean for women.

As we can see in the three chapters, Virginia is a woman who argues for peace, the need for women's rights, freedom and economic independence. The importance of education for her is very well reflected, since she did not have the education she would have wanted. Moreover, the echo of the authoress continues to resonate: our reality is the same and, at the same time, different. Despite the fact that almost a century has passed since the publication of her works, today they are not obsolete, the relation between pacifism and feminism is, even today, a utopia. The world continues to be besieged by totalitarianism and threats of war. Gender equality is present in some aspects, but it is not real, while violence and fear remain the enemies of freedom and peace.

What may be surprising is that today we have gone further than Virginia Woolf dared to dream of in her essays, that is, to this day women have achieved more freedom than she thought. But would Woolf be delighted to live in the world we live in now? We could doubt it, although women have advanced a lot with respect to what she describes or allowed herself to think, we are still very far from equality and even more seeing what happens day by day, and it is that sometimes and depending on the part of the world where you live, women do not earn the same as men, nor are we considered the same, nor can we go out alone without fear of what may happen. But luckily, thanks to years of struggle, progress has been made with respect to the society that Virginia Woolf describes.

6. Bibliography

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