

Gender of the Genius

Virginia Woolf published her famous work *A Room of One's Own* in 1929. The main meaning of the work is that the woman should have her own space, and the necessary material means for her to be able to write. The author touched upon numerous feminist themes, including women's access to education, lesbianism, marriage, and women's writing in history. Using original literary approaches, Woolf revealed the subject of gender with different, previously unknown sides. In chapter 3 of *Shakespeare's Sister*, Woolf explored the status of women in the Elizabethan era and the possibility of birth a female genius like Shakespeare. The writer described the life of a girl, Judith, who has the writer's genius as Shakespeare.

This paper examines the main question, "Could the girl, according to Virginia Woolf, possess such a genius, to realize it in the Elizabethan era?" Moreover, this work tries to understand, which concrete obstacles were placed on the Judith way, and what is necessary for her to have her own space and the opportunity to write. Therefore, men inhibited the development of talents that women had by relegating them to housewives who had no place in the literary world.

Virginia Woolf explores the ability to possess the genius of Shakespeare during the reign of Elizabeth. She has no doubt that a woman, of course, may have a similar phenomenon in contrast to what is mentioned by Bishop Professor Trevelyan, the author of *History of England*. Professor wrote that women, in contrast to men, just could not have the genius of Shakespeare and create such significant and outstanding plays. Woolf, remembering Trevelyan, develops the theme of 'inability' in the future and uses some



surprising literary devices. It is incredible but from the very beginning she agrees with the professor in a slightly ironic tone. Then she builds an essay structure so that it becomes obvious that the professor is wrong and far from the truth. By an indirect agreement, she reaches an absolute refutation of all the so-called 'historical conclusions'. The second major literary method, which Virginia Woolf uses to attract readers to the question of gender issues and position of women in society, is itself the inversion of 'men-women' images. Fictional image of Judith, an incredibly gifted sister of Shakespeare, is an alternative version of events from life of not quite typical woman of that era. Judith goes the same way, which in his time Shakespeare has passed, but it is accompanied by standard clichés of the 16th century, which are applicable to women. Since childhood Judith, who possesses the writing talent, has been restricted in the possibility to reveal her talent. Her failure to obtain the minimum school knowledge resonates with the life of Virginia and the fact that her father found it unprofitable to give the girl the knowledge, in view of its future uselessness.

While Shakespeare "may have learnt Latin – Ovid, Virgil, and Horace", his sister did not even have a chance to learn the simplest grammar rules. There were not many obstacles; the whole way of Judith was one abnormal obstacle. After the end of childhood, in the 16th century it was the age of 13-14 years, the girls were obliged to get married, but they were limited even in the chance to choose a husband. They were chosen by men, their parents married them off, and then girls had to become the property of their husbands. All the families' 'we' were, in fact, the voices of husbands, who were taking all the decisions. There could be no talk of a female writer career as such. It was silly, strange, and useless. Woman could be an actress, but in this case she would be suspected of debauchery, ignorance and other vices. Unfavorable outcome was waiting for all the girls at the time, having the genius of Shakespeare, including Judith. All of them would end their



lives by suicide, going crazy or becoming loners. Thus, comparing the primary moments of Shakespeare and Judith's lives, the reader can understand that a man and a woman of Elizabethan era have a different set of rights and submit to certain traditions.

Virginia Woolf throughout the essay tries to understand what caused this 'impossibility' of women's realization. The first and the most obvious conclusion is that the living conditions of that period could not allow a woman to implement a favorable outcome, especially for a girl like Judith. For the 16th century, it was quite trivially that girls were taught nothing, and were immediately married off once there was a favorable occasion. Living conditions did not allow them to realize their genius. Even if such girls as Judith were daring to express themselves, they ran across the wall of misunderstanding on the part of society. Men had many possibilities and opportunities but women 'did not need' them. Paradoxically, even despite the fact that women were giving the birth to men geniuses, including Shakespeare, they have been doomed to fail in their claim for talent. Woman gives birth and brings up children, takes care of the household, cooks and washes, but cannot write plays.

Another paradox is that in Shakespeare's time, the head of the state was a woman who had powerful rights, powers, and privileges. It seems unimaginable that in the power of the woman, women were so helpless in their rights. The onerous burden of centuries hung over the women, not allowing them to have a chance for free creation of masterpieces and creativity. A 'tradition' has proved to be much stronger. Virginia Woolf goes on and talks about consequences of such a 'tradition' in the nineteenth century. Such outstanding writers, as Charlotte Bronte, Mary Ann Evans, and Amantine Aurore-Lucile Dupin had to use male names or pseudonyms, such as Currer Bell, George Eliot, and George Sand, accordingly. They did not want



their works to be judged from the standpoint of gender. They wanted to be independent of the humiliating influence of stereotypes. That is why they were forced to hide themselves under false men's names. In this case, speculations, gossips, and idle talks were not flaring up around them and were not interfering the gender to belittle the quality of their literary works. On the other hand, the recourse to such anonymity is a subconscious woman's fear to be 'naked' before the public in her literary face. After all, no doubt that the bias and emphasis on 'female weakness' on the part of society does not keep it waiting. To show the kind of attitude to the creative work of women as a lifework, Virginia Woolf has used the image of a dog. The first time it is mentioned in the story of Judith, when she came to the door of the theater and was rejected, "He bellowed something about poodles dancing and women acting...". The second allusion is a comparative ironic phrase, "Ce chien est à moi", which means "This dog is mine". Such visualization allows the reader not only to understand but to feel the social position of women.

In case if 'Shakespeare's Sister' did not help to understand bad conditions, in which women of that age find themselves, it was necessary to make own inversion events. Suppose that a woman had absolutely all the freedoms that are only possible to imagine. She was a source of knowledge in all its manifestations. A man, in his turn, has been limited in his desires, and had the right only to spend more time doing his house work. After having imagined it, the reader can realize that it is meaningless, but that is how things were for women in Shakespeare's times.

Thus, bright approach that was used by Virginia Woolf in the essay helped vividly imagine all the difficulties and obstacles on the way of a young girl who wants to write outstanding literary works. This work concludes that creating a fictitious inversion of Shakespeare genius between a man and a



woman, Woolf proved that, in truth, the birth of female genius in the age of Elizabeth was not possible primarily due to psychological pressure in the society and oppression. Women had certain duties and rights. The traditions that prevailed at that time, did not allow them to go beyond established boundaries. That is why a woman was not able to realize her talents in the 16th century.

