

Spring 4-24-2013

# A Room Revisited: Dissonance in Virginia Woolf's Feminism from Essay to Novel

Lauren Nickodemus

Valparaiso University, [lauren.nickodemus@valpo.edu](mailto:lauren.nickodemus@valpo.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.valpo.edu/cus>

---

## Recommended Citation

Nickodemus, Lauren, "A Room Revisited: Dissonance in Virginia Woolf's Feminism from Essay to Novel" (2013). *Celebration of Undergraduate Scholarship*. Paper 207.  
<http://scholar.valpo.edu/cus/207>

This Oral Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Sponsored and Undergraduate Research at ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Celebration of Undergraduate Scholarship by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at [scholar@valpo.edu](mailto:scholar@valpo.edu).

## **A Room Revisited: Dissonance in Virginia Woolf's Feminism from Essay to Novel**

Lauren Nickodemus

*Departmental Affiliation:*  
Christ College

Few texts have argued for the artistic rights of female authors as passionately as Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, a provocative essay that joined the ranks of essential feminist texts by defending the ideal of an independent, creative working woman. Both Woolf's arguments for the breaking of patriarchal norms and her artful fictional depiction of the damage done by patriarchy have inspired her categorization as an empowering feminist author. However, upon closer examination, the positive, almost utopian vision of self-sufficient women found in *A Room* is surprisingly absent from two of her best-known novels, *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. The female characters portrayed therein, such as Lily Briscoe or Clarissa Dalloway, do not in fact strive for independence but rather fail to seize opportunities for social change, falling into obedience under traditional patriarchal control. Meanwhile, socially dictated feminine roles like Mrs. Ramsay's are portrayed in an accepting if not fairly positive light, with no equally strong models of successful working women to counter them. The range and setup of Woolf's fictional characters provide examples curiously unlike the standard striven for in *A Room*, calling into question whether she considered it genuinely possible, and furthermore casting doubt on the classification of these novels as patently feminist. Building upon such considerations, this project argues that the social vision proposed in *A Room* is more a quixotic ideal than a workable goal for Woolf, and that the failures of her characters reflect her underlying pessimism about the likelihood of women overcoming oppression in practice. This demands a reconsideration of Woolf's social philosophy, viewing her not as an optimistic and action-oriented feminist but as a critic of the fallibility of both men and women, who saw potential avenues for social improvement but did not confidently expect them to be fulfilled.

*Information about the Author:*

Lauren Nickodemus is a senior from Freeland, Michigan majoring in Spanish and minoring in French and humanities, with a Christ College scholar distinction. She will pursue a master's degree in publishing and creative writing this fall. This research project reflects her deep interest in the depictions of women in literature and the social commentaries that they entail.

*Faculty Sponsor:* Dr. Edward Upton

*Student Contact:* [lauren.nickodemus@valpo.edu](mailto:lauren.nickodemus@valpo.edu)