

Feminism in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative Analysis of
Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Margaret Atwood's *The
Testaments*

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Introduction

Feminism has long been a controversial topic. According to Karen Offen “feminism emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and a movement for socio-political change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination within any given society” (151). Feminism can mean many things, for example activism for equal rights and equal treatment of men and women. Furthermore, feminism can mean striving for equal payment, but also for “special treatment” of women in the form of maternity leave, and therefore it is such a complex topic. Different feminist groups and movements have ideas about what the right level of equality should be and what strategy would be best to achieve that, thus feminism does not have one clear-cut definition.

First-wave feminism developed during the late 19th and early 20th century, and the movement focussed on legal issues and the right to vote. Second-wave feminism advanced during the 1960s and lasted through the 1970s, and this movement built on the successes of first-wave feminism. The achievements of the first-wave gave the second-wave a foundation on which they could build and develop their arguments. Second-wave feminism was concerned with sexuality, family life, and reproduction, and in the United States Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) is often seen as the initiator of the second wave (Evans 2). In Europe Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) was widely recognised as a feminist cornerstone that set off the second wave. It must be noted that these surges of feminism and what they entail are representative of the West, meaning the United States and Europe.

After years of battle to gain the right to vote, gain more rights in the work field, and more equality between men and women on all kinds of aspects in life, feminism lost its popularity. Feminism was even “forcefully rejected” by both women and men during the 1970s and 1980s (McRobbie 31). From this rejection another phenomenon developed: post-

feminism. McRobbie argued that young women distanced themselves from feminism in order to get “social and sexual recognition” (255). In other words, feminism was not fashionable anymore and post-feminism was more concerned with individualism and agency (Gill 612). According to Rosalind Gill, “postfeminism is involved in the undoing of feminism,” a phrase that is coined by McRobbie (612). This suggested that feminism had achieved all of its goals and fulfilled its purpose. Similarly, McRobbie argues that “post-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force” (255). Feminism was no longer deemed necessary for women and in popular culture post-feminism was on the rise (McRobbie 261).

However, third wave feminism and more recently fourth wave feminism emerged, redefining the meaning and political context of feminism. These new surges of interest in the concept are indicative of the evolving nature of feminism, and the fact that feminism is not a single monolithic theory that ceases to be important. In contemporary times it is still a crucial method for creating equality between the sexes and free society of misogyny. Furthermore, it is fruitful to women to rid feminism of its negative stigma. It is useful to engage with older feminist texts and read contemporary feminist literature through that lens, to be able to see how feminism has developed.

In *A Room of One's Own* (1929) Woolf stated “it is necessary to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry” (101). The book written about women and their relation to fiction was a catalyst for much debate and paved the way for many female writers to follow. According to Fernald, readers “feel a personal connection ... with the ideas she is discussing”, because many women experienced the situations Woolf described (187). In addition, Woolf wrote about a completely different

occupation for women than was usual, and by showing other possibilities women became familiar with the opportunities that were available to them.

This thesis will use Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) as a centrepiece and as theoretical background to analyse Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* (2019). The aim is to gauge how Woolf's particular strand of feminism developed in the century following its inception. Furthermore, the thesis investigates to what extent Woolf's feminism has or has not changed in contemporary literature. By looking at *The Testaments*, one particular type of feminism embodied by Atwood is compared to Woolf's line of feminism in the 20th century.

The type of feminism that this thesis focuses on is aimed at, conceived and carried out by white middle-class women in an Anglophone context; women for whom the domestic sphere often felt like a prison. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* was a ground-breaking work that she published in 1929. For many women the book was a hopeful pamphlet and the reception was generally positive, to Woolf's contentment. According to Sullivan "she recorded that she had 'done quite well so far with R. of one's Own,' and was pleased with both the sales and the 'unexpected letters' she received in support of her work" (167). Before its publication, Woolf feared that *A Room of One's Own* would receive a lot of criticism and that "she would be attacked for a feminist & hinted at for a sapphist" (Sullivan 167). Furthermore, she was worried that her book would not be taken "seriously", despite the fact that she was considered a "highbrow" author (167). According to Sullivan this initial fear shows that "Woolf desires to position her work as a serious contribution to women's literary criticism and history" (168). It was important to her that the public understood this and she hoped to initiate debate around the position of women. The book supported the ambitions of women from different levels of education.

In this thesis I want to identify to what extent Woolf's theory on the position of women finds a way into her own writing, and to what extent her theory is still relevant in contemporary literature. Feminism has, according to Moi, always been associated with "women's struggle for authorship and authority" (264). Both Woolf's and Atwood's novels are concerned with this idea. The main characters in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Testaments* respectively explore their power in relation to agency and authority. Despite the fact that *A Room of One's Own* was widely praised, the book later also faced criticism, primarily because Woolf excluded all women of colour or other minorities. In 1983 Alice Walker criticised Woolf for lack of inclusivity in her book: saying that every woman needs a room of her own to Walker seemed to express a lack of solidarity with enslaved women who did not even own themselves (235). Woolf did not do this explicitly or on purpose, but within her circle she did probably not come across many people of colour and thus it never occurred to her that she should have made a more inclusive statement. Although slavery did not formally exist anymore and Walker's statement may seem farfetched, it does show that the discussion around feminism should continue in order to become more inclusive. Since the world and the way in which humans interact with each other is constantly changing and evolving, it is important to acknowledge this so that feminism can also move in new directions. Feminism is not a fixed concept but is always moving and developing, and in recent waves feminists have often tried to make the movement more inclusive.

This thesis will look at how narrative voice is used in the novels and how this influences the stories. According to Susan Landser narrative voices "seek to write themselves into Literature without leaving Literature the same" (8). In other words, they attempt to make a change, often for a higher cause. This is also true for the novels this thesis analyses. In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf has decided to present the book to the readers through a story with a fictional character named Mary, "(call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by

any name you please – it is not a matter of importance)” (5). By stating this at the start of the book, Woolf ensured her readers that the identity of the author is not necessarily of importance, but that the narrator is a female voice. Simultaneously this method can indicate that the Woolf tried to distance herself from the content of her work. By doing so Woolf created a body of literature that aimed to be informative and ground-breaking, and that would speak for itself rather than for Woolf herself. Similarly, Atwood’s *The Testaments* also uses narrative voices that analyse female agency and authority. *The Testaments* has three separate plotlines with different narrators. These different narratives primarily show how a lack of feminist perspective within the Gilead regime creates a disproportionate power balance. The individual narrators likewise ensure that the reader has to be critical towards the story, since it is unclear at times whether or not the protagonists are reliable narrators. This thesis will critically analyse the different voices and will try to find a correlation between their agency and feminism.

The first chapter discusses the theoretical background of this thesis. *A Room of One’s Own* by Woolf and *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) by Betty Friedan are used as a framework for the proposed analysis. Both works are representative of the zeitgeist of their time of publication, and are therefore extremely suitable to give a sense of the dominant strands of feminism of their time. *A Room* is representative of the English feminist movement and *The Feminine Mystique* can be seen as a catalyst for the feminist movement in the United States. The second chapter analyses to what extent Woolf’s own theories, that she discusses in *A Room of One’s Own*, are present in *To the Lighthouse*. Lily Briscoe’s character can be analysed in connection to the theory. She tries to gain agency over her paintings, but she struggles throughout the novel. Strikingly, at the end of the novel, when she is mostly alone, she manages to finish the painting that she has been working on for years. Mrs. Ramsay will be analysed in relation to Lily Briscoe concerning her views on family life and marriage.

Lastly, Mr. Ramsay's relation to the women in his life will be analysed, to see to what extent feminism is problematised through male characters. The third and final chapter of this thesis researches Atwood's inheritance of Woolf's legacy. The idea that women need a room of their own in order to create and to have agency over their lives is explored and challenged in *The Testaments*. Furthermore, Atwood seems to represent a continuation of the type of feminism that Woolf developed; feminism that is aimed at middle-class Anglophone women. This thesis aims to critically examine the choices Atwood has made with regard to this particular type of feminism, since it is a conscious decision to use certain elements and to omit others. With this thesis I will argue that, with *The Testaments*, Margaret Atwood accepts her position as beneficiary of Woolf's feminism.

Chapter 1

1.1 Theoretical background

This chapter establishes the academic framework within which the primary texts will be analysed. The first wave of feminism emerged in the late 19th and early 20th century throughout the Western world. For this thesis feminism or the feminist movement refers to the feminism of, by, and for white middle-class, (New) England women (Roth 2). It is in this era of feminism that Virginia Woolf published *A Room of One's Own* (1929). According to Woolf, the two most important things a woman should have is a room of her own and five hundred pounds a year in order to provide for herself (101). The book became popular and was a driving force in the women's movement. From this, second-wave feminism developed which, in the United States, was sparked by Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and Kate Millett's and Ti-Grace Atkinson's women's rights activism (Poirot 204; Fahs 563). Both works were provocative and caused tremendous discussions. However, both *The Feminine Mystique* and *A Room of One's Own* adhere to a certain type of feminism that is predominantly intended for white middle-class women. Black feminist theory and queer feminist theory were not yet on the rise, and neither Woolf nor Friedan included working-class or non-white perspectives in their works. This thesis acknowledges that the books are a product of their time, and that black women and queer women started fighting for their rights when they found the room for it, decades later. This thesis acknowledges that this erases key perspectives, however unintentionally, and strives to make inclusive analyses.

1.2 The domestic and the public sphere

In most parts of Europe and the United States individuals were part of a larger whole and aspects of life that nowadays would be considered private, were often public affairs (Willen 561). Religion is one example of a private concern that was very public in practice. According

to Diane Willen “religious practices ... were perceived as legitimate matters of public concern for the body politic” (561). In other words, the lines between the public and private were blurred, but this gradually changed and by the 19th century there was a distinct separation between the public and the private sphere.

For a long time the domestic and public sphere were strictly separated. Men were usually confined to the public sphere and women to the private. Although this separation seemed symmetrical it also inserted hierarchy, since the public sphere was considered to be more important. Nonetheless, women who were poor, working-class citizens were expected to participate in both the private and the domestic sphere.

The domestic sphere included every aspect of the home and the family, whereas the public sphere was located in places related to paid work and politics. This distinction is extremely important when discussing feminism and feminist theories. However, many articles written about the distinction between the public and the private emphasise that women did play a significant role in the public sphere as well as in the private, especially during the 19th century this was on the rise (Willen 560, Landes 22, Lopata 177). According to Lopata women did participate in the work field (177). There is a great contrast between aristocratic women, middle-class women, and women of the lower classes. Women from poor backgrounds often worked alongside the husband and on top of their house duties.

According to Jane Rendall “the domestic or private sphere was contrasted with the ‘public’, the extensive, residual but gendered category incorporating the market, civil society, and the state” (478). She continues by arguing that the contrast between the public and the private is “what the feminist movement is about” (478). This is in line with both the works of Virginia Woolf and Betty Friedan. Furthermore, by writing politically influential books both authors placed themselves in the public domain; this constituted an assertive step that many

women they wrote about and wrote for could often only dream of. However, they were an example for women that there were opportunities, even if they seemed unconventional.

1.3 First-wave feminism and *A Room of One's Own*

When *A Room of One's Own* was published Virginia Woolf had already written a number of novels: *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *Orlando* (1928). She was an avid advocate of equal rights for women and she deemed education extremely important in order to achieve equality. Woolf was in the position to study, and she did so at King's College in London. However, Woolf was rather unique in this, since formal higher education was usually not available for women. Education was strictly divided by gender, and often only men from aristocratic backgrounds were expected to go to university. According to Susan Williams, Woolf was in favour of the shift that occurred in opportunity in education for girls; however, she was critical of the male-centred education that was the norm. Feminists doubted if "the education established for boys and men, by men, was the best way forward for girls" (Williams 118). The method of education was subject to change and Woolf, among others, started thinking about an approach that was more suited to women. Woolf also stated in *A Room* that "it would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only? Ought not education to bring out and fortify the differences and similarities?" (85). By stressing the differences between women and men Woolf also highlighted that their individuality gives women control over their lives, and that, despite the differences, women should get equal opportunities. With *A Room* Woolf tried to establish these ideas and make them more common, and prioritise female agency in all facets of life.

The form and content of *A Room of One's Own* are somewhat divergent. Woolf chose to write her manifesto in the form of a story with a main character who is also the narrator. Using a fictional character tells the reader something about the message Woolf tried to convey. A fictional character creates a façade between Woolf, the content of her ideas and the reader. It ensures that the reader goes along with the storyline without being focussed on Woolf as the author. In *A Room* Woolf described the differences in opportunities for men and women regarding education as well as inequalities women faced in day to day life. She wondered if Shakespeare's hypothetical, equally talented sister would have had the same opportunities and would have gained the same status as Shakespeare. The answer is no, obviously. Woolf continued by saying that this hypothetical sister 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" (46). Without being able to immerse oneself in that knowledge it is extremely difficult to gain the same status as men. However, even if a woman had the opportunity to learn all this, she would not be granted the same status as a man.

With this analogy Woolf argued that these inequalities are simply unacceptable, and she exposed the injustice. Thus, she tried to prove that women are deserving of the same treatment and freedom as men. Feminism gained widespread recognition during Woolf's lifetime and her book echoed many of the popular standpoints in favour of feminism that were present in society at the time. The work was a product of several lectures Woolf had given to women who already had access to education, and she reminded them they were in a fortunate position, since not many women were able to get an education.

Woolf compared the experiences of women to those of men to highlight the disadvantaged position of women. In the first two chapters of *A Room* Woolf expressed her frustration about seemingly accidental discrimination. The first is when fictional character

Mary Beton is walking towards a university building and she is not allowed to enter, “only the Fellows and the Scholars are allowed there, the gravel is the place for me” she states (6).

Mary Beton continues her journey through Oxbridge and is stopped before the library doors. There Mary is reminded of the fact that women are not allowed in unless they accompany a man or if they have a “letter of introduction” (7). Women always needed a man to go to places and this reinforced women’s exclusion from many public places.

Fernald makes a sharp observation about Woolf’s use of Beton as a persona that experiences struggles that every woman faces. She argues that through the character of Mary Beton the reader forgets that Woolf herself was already a renowned writer in 1928, and, as mentioned, did attend university herself (176). Therefore, it could be argued that such a narrator is misleading the reader, since the author probably barely experienced it. However, Fernald does think that “Woolf’s use of a narrator inhibits us from being distracted by Woolf the personality and allows us to enter into a sympathetic relationship with the persona” (177). In this case the use of narrative voice distances Woolf from the content of her book, this allows the reader to judge the work independently from Woolf and all she embodies.

Woolf highlighted some more rather questionable facts concerning the position of women. For example she notes that it is absurd that men write about women as if they are holy creatures, while the reality women face is that they are treated as second-class citizens:

indeed if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater. But this is woman in fiction ... Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history (Woolf 43).

In this paragraph Woolf analysed the huge difference between the real life of a woman, and their subordinate position, to the romanticised image that men in literature write about. Woolf argued that women should get the same treatment as they get in fiction. The paragraph is striking to read since men have such conflicting opinions of women. According to Mr Greg in *A Room* “nothing could be expected of women intellectually” (53). The final sentence is particularly painful, because Woolf reminded her readers that women, and society in general, had to take big steps to restore that disproportionate representation in history. In the following quote Mary Beton ponders the situation the two sexes find themselves in:

I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in; and, thinking of the safety and prosperity of the one sex and of the poverty and insecurity of the other and of the effect of the tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer (23).

The first sentence refers to the library that she is not allowed to enter; it feels uneasy knowing that you are denied access to information, knowledge, and power. Woolf proceeded by reversing the idea saying that being locked in is probably even worse. She seems to suggest that for many women being trapped in marriage and being confined to the home, is the opposite beneficial for women. This quote suggests that by being locked in there can never be progress and there can never be change, because the same archaic ideas and theories will be repeated.

Society’s view on the position of men and women was already changing; however, Woolf was aware of the amount of work that still had to be done. For example, Woolf wrote “have you any notion of how many books are written about women ... have you any notion of

how many are written by men? Are you aware that you are, perhaps, the most discussed animal in the universe” (26). By choosing the word “animal” Woolf underlined the fact that women are repeatedly described as the inferior sex. Very often Woolf was candid in her description of men, writing, e.g., “that [his superiority] was what he was protecting rather hot-headedly and with too much emphasis, because it was a jewel to him of the rarest price” (34). Woolf suggested that the superiority of men is so important to them that they will do everything in their power to sustain it. Furthermore, Woolf discussed how men deem themselves the superior sex, and how they affected the lives of women for centuries.

Woolf mentioned several times that having a room of one’s own is of the utmost importance: “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” (51). Strikingly, the female writers that are mentioned in the book most likely had no room of their own. Woolf used Jane Austen as an example to show that having a room at one’s disposal to relax and to write in is crucial for literary inspiration to flow. It seems impossible to concentrate when there are constantly people around that interrupt the writing process: “‘how she was able to effect all this’, her nephew writes in his Memoir, ‘is surprising, for she had no separate study to repair to, and most of the work must have been done in the general sitting-room, subject to all kinds of casual interruptions” (65-66). However, Woolf also indicated that having no room helped those female novelists to make great character analyses, since they sat in drawing rooms for centuries, observing all the people that made an appearance.

Chapter 5 is mostly concerned with the literary history of women, while Woolf discussed the work of Mary Carmichael. In this piece of literature a “shocking” thing occurs, Woolf wrote “‘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” (80). It is important to write

about lesbianism and in the early twentieth century it was a brave thing to do. Still, there is something odd about the preceding sentences. Mary Beton explicitly asks if there are no men secretly hiding behind a curtain: “we are all women, you assure me?” she asks the audience (79). This suggests that all men would neither approve nor understand same sex relationships, or that lesbianism only exists for the pleasure of male voyeurs. According to Ellen Rosenman earlier drafts of *A Room* had included more about lesbianism, but the published version contains only a few sentences (636). The symbolism and importance of the longer section is lost and “the imagery of attachment and space creates a double image of lesbianism and its suppression” (Rosenman 636). By leaving it out there is a another layer of suppression that Woolf laid bare.

Woolf often mentioned how curious the relationship between men and women is, since women are always seen in relation to men: “it was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen’s day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex” (80). Here she focused on women of fiction, though this idea is applicable in all aspects of life. Woolf continued by cleverly reversing this phenomenon: “suppose, for instance, that men were only represented in literature as the lovers of women, and were never the friends of men, soldiers, thinkers, dreamers . . . literature would be incredibly impoverished, as indeed literature is impoverished beyond our counting by the doors that have been shut upon women” (81). Woolf saw this as an effect that certain elements in a woman’s life had on the opportunity of writing about women or the opportunity women had to write. It is a vicious circle because women never had the freedom to develop themselves because of other “typically” female duties, such as giving birth and caring for the children, and because of these duties women did not grow and flourish as much as men did. Furthermore, men, who already dominated the world with their power, deemed that women

were not and could not be as smart, interesting, or inventive as men. Thus, women probably felt that there was no room for them to attempt having a career.

In addition, women can be cruel to one another and most women presumably did not support each other in pursuing a career. Towards the end of *A Room* Woolf discussed the rivalry that existed between women: “when a woman speaks to women she should have something very unpleasant up her sleeve. Women are hard on women. Women dislike women. Women – but are you not sick to death of the word?” (107). This quote insinuates that society presumes there is rivalry between women, but one can question how often this is the case. Woolf continued by stating that she does not necessarily share this idea and that she rather likes women and “their unconventionality” (107). The whole book tries to encourage female empowerment and Woolf acknowledged the fact that, besides the room men ought make for women, the female sex should start advocating for female rights.

In the end of the book Woolf expressed some controversial ideas. First of all, Mary Carmichael is mentioned again, and Woolf stated that “she wrote as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman, so that her pages were full of that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself” (90). Woolf suggested that in order to write good literature anybody, male or female, should forget his or her gender and write in genderless freedom. This quote also suggests that women can only be successful writers if this is the case. However, men are conscious of their sex because of their prominent position in the patriarchal 20th century. This shows that men, despite being considered ‘neutral’ in terms of voice, show that genderless writing is impossible, and therefore it cannot be expected of either men or women. According to Kathleen Wall this is a Modernist approach because it is “free from personal emotions” (185). Gender is inextricably linked to certain emotions, thus writing genderless means that the implications linked to a certain gender cease to exist. However, in the first two chapters of the book Woolf connected gender

to the work. Furthermore, Wall continues by stating that “she [Woolf] both assumes that the artist’s life and her work can be disconnected and illustrates that they cannot” (185). By saying that writing is only good when the author is unconscious of his or her sex, Woolf undermined her own authorship.

1.4 Second-wave feminism and *The Feminine Mystique*

In order to compare the differences between the feminist movement in Europe and the United States it is useful to analyse Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*. It is valuable to do so since this thesis looks at two feminist novels that were created in the UK and the US. Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 when the popularity of the first-wave feminism of the early twentieth century had subsided. The publication of Friedan’s book is often seen by scholars as the starting point of second-wave feminism (Evans 13; Gerhard 88). According to Gerhard Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* started a new way of thinking about women and femininity, namely “that femininity was a cultural construct permeated with social values that had little basis in biology or genuine female experience” (88). Friedan was an author and after writing for left-wing and labor union publications, she became a freelancer for various magazines. In *The Feminine Mystique* Friedan mentioned that the magazines she wrote for were partly to blame for “the feminine mystique”, along with “advertisements, television, movies, novels, columns and books by experts on marriage and the family” (21). All these factors collectively shaped an image of women that is not realistic according to Friedan. Furthermore, it is far from the ideal life that women have in mind.

Friedan starts by introducing “the problem that has no name”, which is also the title of the first chapter (5). This nameless problem is described as “a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for

groceries ... she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question: 'Is this all?'" (5).

Certain elements of this quote are noteworthy, beginning with the location. The problem is a problem of women in the United States, and the whole book is focused on the US.

Nonetheless, this book is regarded as one of the cornerstones of the feminist movement in the West, and therefore, speaks to women universally. According to Meredith Miller the book symbolises a change in consciousness about the position of women and "it does represent an iconic moment in which vast numbers of middle-class American women became actively aware of themselves as gendered beings within a context of work, media and consumption" (Miller 2). Furthermore, Friedan continued by saying that the problem was a result of years of a particular type of exposition: "they learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights – the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for" (5). In the years after first-wave feminism a reversal of standards and opinions emerged, women were told that women who pursued careers were the opposite of attractive and were seen as masculine. Furthermore, the image women were presented with in the magazines was one-sided: "the image of woman that emerges from this big, pretty magazine is young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies, and home" (23). Thus, women in mid-twentieth century America were aiming to fit this image. However, it is not a satisfying position as Friedan's research shows.

According to Friedan is strange that after the struggle and fight of first-wave feminists all principles regarding agency, autonomy, and women's rights seem to have evaporated and that "the suburban housewife ... was the dream image of the young American women ... of women all over the world" (Friedan 7). The suburban housewife is the opposite of what feminists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century fought for. According to Friedan

it is easy to see the concrete details that trap the suburban housewife, the continual demands on her time. But the chains that bind her in her trap are chains made up of mistaken ideas and misinterpreted facts, of incomplete truths and unreal choices. They are not easily seen and not easily shaken off (19).

Again, Friedan seems to suggest that societal beliefs and ideas have had a major influence on how women were seen. According to Jane Gerhard “she [Friedan] argued that middle-class women had been denied their status as equal citizens not by legal restrictions but by organized cultural messages that denigrated women’s nondomestic capacities” (88). Thus, the articles in magazines and advertisements directly aimed at middle-class housewives reinforced their position as ambitionless mothers without a mind of their own, but also the so-called experts claimed that women were only suited for one job.

Meredith Miller is critical of Friedan’s analysis that all the magazine articles and advertisements lead to the frustration suburban housewives experienced. Rather, Miller argues that “women’s dissatisfaction is the driving force – the desire – behind an enormous market potential and an imminent mass political movement” (5). In addition, Miller states that by referring to *The Feminine Mystique* as the catalyst for second-wave feminism, the dissatisfaction that already existed is undermined (5). In other words, Friedan based her research on the wrong evidence according to Miller. However, Friedan seems supported by numerous scholars in her claim that all these aspects were the cause of the increasing popularity of second-wave feminism. For Friedan “the problem that has no name” is a serious social failure, since “the feminine mystique permits, even encourages, women to ignore the question of their identity” (53). It created women who lived on autopilot, leaving no room for self-development. Furthermore, Friedan argued that “the feminine mystique is so powerful that women grow up no longer knowing that they have the desires and capacities the mystique

forbids” (50). It completely numbed any form of autonomy for women, leaving them so conditioned that even the thought of breaking out of their symbolic prison never occurred.

According to Friedan, first-wave feminism came to an end when women obtained the right to vote. Furthermore, she stated that “the feminists had destroyed the old image of women, but they could not erase the hostility, the prejudice, the discrimination that still remained” (77). Therefore, feminism should regain its popularity because women still needed to fight for their rights. However, for decades women were taught the opposite, “instead of educating women for the greater maturity required to participate in modern society – with all the problems, conflicts, and hard work involved, for educators as well as women – they began educating them to ‘play the role of women’” (118). The role of women was to concern themselves with the family and the home, but this needed to change. Friedan argues that “women, as well as men, can only find their identity in work that uses their full capacities” (273). Friedan ends by stating that the power to break out of the feminine mystique is present in every woman:

once she asks herself “What do I want to do?”, she begins to find her own answers.

Once she begins to see through the delusions of the feminine mystique – and realizes that neither her husband nor her children, nor the things in her house, nor sex, nor being like all the other women, can give her a self – she often finds the solution much easier than she anticipated (274).

This final account reiterates the importance of female agency and shows how important it is that women realise they always have the opportunity to choose how they want to structure their lives. Woolf was already advocating in favour of female agency and Friedan actively chooses to incorporate agency in her analyses.

Chapter 2

2.1 *To the Lighthouse*: Introduction

In Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) an anonymous narrator tells the story of the Ramsay family and their family friends, who come to visit them in their holiday home on the isle of Skye. In this chapter the two central female characters in *To the Lighthouse* will be analysed in relation to Woolf's theory on the position of women. One of those characters is a family friend Lily Briscoe, who is an artist who works on a painting of Mrs. Ramsay. *To the Lighthouse* predates *A Room of One's Own* which means that Woolf's feminist theory was still being developed when she wrote *To the Lighthouse*. Therefore this novel can be seen as an experiment of creating feminist storylines that later are reflected upon in *A Room*.

At the start of the novel Lily has difficulties expressing her artistic abilities to her fullest capacity, but throughout the novel she develops herself and at the end she is able to finish her painting, thus accomplishing her life's work. In addition, Mrs. Ramsay, who is the head of the family, will be analysed to get an insight into her agency. The two characters are very different in personality and beliefs, and, therefore, Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe are very suited to analyse and to compare. Both characters represent a type of woman that also adheres to a type of feminism that Woolf wrote about. According to Isham Shihada Woolf purposefully placed Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay alongside each other in order to "integrate the masculine and feminine qualities into a balanced whole that would render men and women the capacity to achieve meaning in life" (137). Mrs. Ramsay represents a more traditional woman, who has a husband and children, whereas Lily represents a different type of woman, who chooses her own path and career. Both women experience positive and negative sides of being the kind of woman they are. Finally, Mr. Ramsay will be analysed to give an idea of men's perspective and opinion of women and Woolf's translation of that. The main ideas in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* are that women need a personal space where

they can work on their self-development in peace and that they should be granted agency over their lives, meaning both men and women should ensure this. This chapter will analyse the unique ways in which the two characters approach these concepts.

2.2 Androgynous writing

In this chapter I will analyse to what extent *To the Lighthouse* adheres to the ideas and theories present in *A Room of One's Own*. Amongst female agency and authority, Woolf discusses the author in *A Room*. The author, whether male or female, has to have certain qualities in order to be a good writer. Woolf states, for example, that women who are unconscious of their sex are better writers. In *A Room* Woolf further develops this idea into the concept of androgynous writing. Elizabeth Wright argues that Woolf uses the term androgynous writing to create “a positive creative force that gets rid of gender stereotype, prejudice and discrimination in literature” (15). However, the term was also widely criticised by scholars because, according to them, it reinforced the binary opposition between male and female. Nonetheless, androgynous writing ensured that the debate around the ability to write good literature continued. Randi Koppen suggests that the writer is aware of the abilities and restrictions both men and women have, thus with this in mind the author is able to write most freely (382). Furthermore, the author should be able to put oneself into both the shoes of men and women in order to be fully creative and sincere. Koppen states that “the good writer, to Woolf, writes like a man *and* like a woman, *To the Lighthouse* fulfils her desire to do so” (382, emphasis in the original). With Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf is able to portray the positive as well as the negative sides of womanhood and motherhood, whereas with Lily Briscoe and Mr. Ramsay she can explore the masculine elements, the work-related struggles and the opinions of society that are a strain on both men and women.

2.3 Mrs. Ramsay: Beauty and the brains

Mrs. Ramsay is an intriguing character since she occasionally expresses controversial thoughts about womanhood, whilst simultaneously in her own life she meets the expectations of women at the time. Woolf created a traditional woman with Mrs. Ramsay who thinks family life is one of the most valuable things. Through the indirect characterisation of Mrs. Ramsay the reader understands that she is good-looking, as she is often described by the other characters as beautiful: “Charles Tansley ... felt the wind and the cyclamen and the violets for he was walking with a beautiful woman for the first time in his life” (19). He finds her beautiful, but he is also startled by this because a few moments before that he thinks: “what nonsense was he thinking? She was fifty at least; she had eight children” (18). This quote exposes a few prejudices that apparently were present in the twentieth century and that still survive nowadays. Women, when they are of a certain age, are no longer attractive anymore. Similarly, women who have become mothers also often have to deal with such stigmatising remarks. Furthermore, Mrs. Ramsay’s looks are often the only thing she is judged by.

It is clear that Woolf tried to make a statement with Mrs. Ramsay. Woolf is critical towards the view that men have of women, that are particularly linked to looks. Especially with regards to appearance, beauty often overshadows a woman’s intellectual capacity. According to Jingrui Hui “the emphasis of Mrs. Ramsay’s beauty is a basic element in shaping her as the traditional aspect of women” (2). Thus, Woolf used Mrs. Ramsay to show the epitome of the traditional woman. Hui continues by stating that “beauty, an embodiment of men’s visual and physical pleasure, is exaggerated as the basic element of virtue and is imposed on women” (2). In other words the idea of beauty is created by men and is simultaneously seen as the most important aspect of a woman. However, as Hui argues this is “imposed” on women, thus women never actively choose to be objectified in the way that Hui describes.

Woolf used Mrs. Ramsay and her beauty to show that the idea of beauty at the time and the implications that were associated with it did not always work in favour of women, since it was often the only aspect that women were judged upon. Mr. Ramsay criticises his wife for not being smart, but immediately he focusses on her looks: “he wondered if she understood what she was reading. Probably not, he thought. She was astonishingly beautiful. Her beauty seemed to him, if that were possible, to increase” (131-32). Despite the fact that she probably understands more than Mr. Ramsay can ever imagine, it does not matter whether she understands what she reads, because she is beautiful and that is the only thing that is important to him. This quote shows that looks outweigh intelligence and that men are happy to reinforce this phenomenon. Furthermore, it demonstrates that when women are not granted education they also cannot develop themselves and looks will remain the only thing they are judged upon. Thus, Woolf’s point in *A Room* about how every woman should be able to learn is also present in *To the Lighthouse*.

Another element to consider in relation to men and their idea of women is intelligence. Very often throughout the novel the male characters refer to women as silly or mindless. For example, Mr. Ramsay becomes infuriated with his wife after she makes a small observation about the weather: “the extraordinary irrationality of her remark, the folly of women’s minds enraged him” (37). He has no reason to be so upset by his wife’s comment, but he judges her harshly because he thinks he is in the position to do so. The reader follows Mrs. Ramsay’s thoughts and finds out that Mrs. Ramsay “was not good enough to tie his shoe strings” (38). Through these thoughts and comments the relationship between the two becomes apparent, and it is an example of traditional husband and wife relationships at the time. Shihada argues that Mr. Ramsay “has no questions about the division of social roles which have shaped the relationship between husband and wife in a patriarchal society” (138). It would not occur to him that his wife might want to have a job or divide household tasks. He would, therefore,

never change something in the way they structure their relationship. This shows that there is an unequal balance in their relationship, in which Mrs. Ramsay is subordinate to Mr. Ramsay.

Furthermore, Mr. Tansley, another family friend, is explicit in his observation of women. According to Mr. Tansley women make life difficult: “it was the women’s fault. Women made civilization impossible with all their ‘charm’, all their silliness” (93). He is certain that women do not add anything to society and he speaks very contemptuously about them. In addition, he feels trapped by women, in particular by Mrs. Ramsay and her daughter, he feels judged by them since he does not dress according to their standards. However, he will not let the women think badly of him: “he was not going to be made a fool of by women, so he turned deliberately in his chair and looked out of the window and said, all in a jerk, very rudely, it would be too rough for her to-morrow. She would be sick” (94). He suggests that he would gladly be made a fool of by men, but not by women since he thinks of himself as superior because of his sex. Repeatedly, Woolf uncovered aspects of the relationship between men and women that are striking and need to change. Through *To the Lighthouse* the reader also realises that there are aspects in life that seem normal, but that need to be re-evaluated.

According to Beth Daugherty the idea that women are inferior to men goes back to the story of Adam and Eve. She explains that God punished Eve more harshly than Adam, for Eve wanted “knowledge, sight, and power” and so be equal to the Gods (294). Furthermore, Daugherty argues that “the story presents as truth both the definition of woman as secondary, sinful, and inferior and the right of man to define her that way” (295). Similarly, Hui proposed beauty is imposed on women rather than that women actively choose to be judged by it. Women are often deprived of their right to be judged on broader or different array of aspects, because there is always one prominent feature that they are evaluated by. Women experience inferiority since the beginning of mankind and Woolf tried to use her works as a

platform to bring those inequalities to life and to help change society's view of women. A thought by Mr. Ramsay again illustrates his opinion of women:

he thought women are always like that; the vagueness of their minds is hopeless; it was a thing he had never been able to understand; but so it was ... They could not keep anything clearly fixed in their minds. But he had been wrong to be angry with her; moreover, did he not rather like this vagueness in women? It was part of their extra-ordinary charm. I will make her smile at me, he thought (182).

On the one hand the vagueness in women annoys him and he dislikes it, but on the other hand he confesses to himself that he also likes this vagueness. It is difficult to decipher what Mr. Ramsay means with "vagueness". However, I assume he means that he does not always understand what goes on in the mind of a woman. This contrasting disclosure helps to maintain certain ideas about women, because women's "vagueness" is what makes them inferior, but it is also what makes a woman attractive. Furthermore, it means that women will have to meet certain standards created by men that are exhausting and degrading.

2.4 Lily Briscoe: Painting

Lily's insecurity about her painting skills partly stems from criticism she receives from Mr. Tansley. While she is painting she remembers "Mr. Tansley whispering in her ear, 'Women can't paint, women can't write...'" (54). It makes her unsure of her skills and it haunts her throughout the novel. Mr Tansley can be seen as a representation of society's beliefs about women that work and have careers. He is critical about it and he voices his criticism. Towards the end of the novel Lily remembers Mr. Tansley's remark and thinks that he was: "making it his business to tell her women can't write, women can't paint, not so much that he believed it,

as for some odd reason he wished it” (213). Thus, Lily supposes that he did not believe in what he said, but that he wished it, in order to feel superior. He is afraid that a woman is more talented in something than he is, and he cannot stand this simply because she is a woman. His fear of women who are more talented than men, becomes reality with Lily.

Instead of supporting Lily in her journey to become the best painter she can be, men’s opinions thwart Lily and she doubts her abilities. Whereas had she been a man the attitude towards the job would have been very different and more encouraging. Through fictional characters in *To the Lighthouse* Woolf demonstrated inequality between men and women which was also analysed in *A Room*. While painting Lily experiences all sorts of insecurities, and she often wonders about the purpose of her paintings. At one moment in the novel she expresses how vulnerable she feels when starting a new painting:

always (it was in her nature, or in her sex, she did not know which) before she exchanged the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting she had a few moments of nakedness when she seemed like an unborn soul, a soul reft of body, hesitating on some windy pinnacle and exposed without protection to all the blasts of doubt (173).

Perhaps women are more conditioned to doubt themselves than men. Lily believes that her self-doubt is due to her personal character, but this seems to coincide with her gendered conditioning. Although Lily knows that painting is her calling, she is only human and amenable to self-doubt.

Lily Briscoe goes through a transformation in the course of the novel. At the beginning she is unsure of her work and life as an artist, but throughout the novel she develops a certain sense of determination which sparks her creativity. Lily starts painting Mrs. Ramsay, but she is unable to complete the work of art since she repeatedly feels that the

painting does not quite represent what she intends it to. Like many artists, Lily feels deeply uncomfortable when displaying her work:

she braced herself to stand the awful trial of someone looking at her picture. One must, she said, one must. And if it must be seen, Mr. Banks was less alarming than another. But that any other eyes should see the residue of her thirty-three years, the deposit of each day's living, mixed with something more secret than she had ever spoken or shown in the course of all those days was an agony. At the same time it was immensely exciting (58).

Lily feels as though her work is a reflection of her personal life and is afraid that people will judge her for having lived for her paintings. Simultaneously, revealing her art is also extremely thrilling to her, and showing off her work is also rewarding. In the final lines of the novel she is able to finish the painting she has been working on for years: "with a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision" (226). She calls her art visionary, and suggests that before this moment she was unable to reach this state of lucid concentration for her painting. Lily Briscoe is only able to develop her art if there are no external distractions:

and as she lost consciousness of outer things, and her name and her personality and her appearance, and whether Mr. Carmichael was there or not, her mind kept throwing up from its depths, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space, while she modelled it with greens and blues (Woolf 174).

This scene echoes the part in *A Room* in which Woolf stated that women who are unconscious of their sex are better writers. Here she suggested that only when Lily forgets about her name, personality, and appearance, in other words about her womanhood, she can succeed as an artist. It is clear that Woolf used her novels to inspire women to fight for their rights, like Lily, and to make unconventional career paths possible for women.

Furthermore, Lily's artistic dedication also displays a certain relationship she has with her art. The fact that she neither marries nor has a relationship can be linked to the fact that she considers her painting the most important relationship she has. In order to be completely devoted to her art she cannot have distractions such as love. In addition, she is so immersed in painting that she does not need a man in her life to fulfil her. By creating Lily Briscoe in a world and an era that was dominated by stern family values and reproduction, Woolf suggested that there were more options for women than being a wife and a mother. Lily is a good example of a woman that succeeds in life without the oppressing strains of a husband and children that were put on women. However, she does experience other oppressing strains: the very fact that she does not commit to family life is one thing that she receives criticism about; another aspect is her work ethic, as it was uncommon for women to have a job and provide for themselves, leaving Lily discouraged to doing so. She obtains agency through her art and is able to structure her life in the manner she wants to. Moreover, Lily is a character that actively chooses to dedicate her life to painting. Lily Briscoe embodies what is argued for in *A Room of One's Own*, which shows that Woolf tried to create characters that conform to the ideas she expressed in *A Room*.

2.5 Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay: Opposing views on marriage

Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe are both strong female characters in their own right, but there are also striking differences. The biggest difference is probably their diverging attitudes towards marriage and family life. In Mrs. Ramsay's eyes marriage is pivotal to a woman's life, she has obviously been married for a long time herself. Mrs. Ramsay makes it her personal job to ensure that all women in her close circle will marry. She believes that "an unmarried woman (she lightly took her hand for a moment), an unmarried woman had missed the best of her life" (56). Mrs. Ramsay is portrayed as the traditional woman, who lives her life in dedication to her husband and children. She is the opposite of what Woolf strived for with Mary Beton in *A Room*. According to Mrs. Ramsay a woman's life is most wholesome and valuable when she is married. Naturally, she is critical of how Lily structures her life, her artistic devotion and the absence of a lover. However, she also admires her individuality and her talent for organising her life: "with her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face she would never marry; one could not take her painting very seriously; but she was an independent little creature, Mrs. Ramsay liked her for it, and so remembering her promise, she bent her head" (21). Here Mrs. Ramsay implies that her appearance is the reason that Lily does not have a husband, but the main reason is probably that she is too independent and caught up in her painting, and therefore she has no room for a man in her life.

For Lily, marriage is not high on her list of priorities. She is more invested in her art and perfecting her painting that she works on throughout the novel. Besides, there are other things in life that demand attention. However, Lily also feels pressured by Mrs. Ramsay's obsession with marriage and she sometimes feels that she is missing something: "oh but, Lily would say, there was her father; her home; even, had she dared to say it, her painting. But all this seemed so little, so virginial, against the other" (56). In a society where getting married and having a family is seen as the standard and the good way of life, it is difficult for Lily to

remain true to her own plans and ideas, especially since they do not involve finding a husband and having children. Although Lily has one clear purpose in life, she gets insecure and wonders if it is really worth it to live a solitary life. However, at the end of the novel Lily reflects that it is definitely important enough to live her life that way. She is an example for women to follow their dreams and shows that women should not be discouraged by traditions or oppositions.

Both women seem to be conflicted by the pressures of twentieth-century society with regards to marriage. Mrs. Ramsay, although she holds the opinion that every woman should marry, also encounters some negativities concerning marriage. Mr. Ramsay is a prominent figure with a notable job which means that his wife often finds herself in his shadow. This becomes apparent in one of Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts: "for then people said he depended on her, when they must know that of the two he was infinitely the more important, and what she gave the world, in comparison with what he gave, negligible" (45). She makes herself subordinate to him, because she measures her impact on the world to his impact. However, the fact that he has a job and fulfils a certain position in society which Mrs. Ramsay does not, does not necessarily make him more important. Within the family she fulfils a more valuable role than her husband. Nonetheless, she finds herself trapped in her marriage. Jennifer Haytock states that by "watching the Ramsays' marriage, Lily sees the immense toll maintaining a relationship takes on the woman and the way marriage would sap energy Lily would rather direct toward art" (226). Although her surroundings sometimes pressure her to get married, Lily is able to prioritise the things in life that she finds important. Without a husband or children she can direct all her attention to her passion.

Lily Briscoe's opinion of any kind of human relationship is sceptical because she feels that she has to be a different person in order to be liked or be accepted. After a conversation with Mrs. Ramsay in which she instructs Lily to ask something to Mr. Tansley, Lily states

that “human relations were all like that, she thought, and the worst ... were between men and women. Inevitably these were extremely insincere” (101). She seems to suggest that relationships, especially relationships between men and women, are never really truthful. One party always triumphs over the other causing the relation to be unequal. This is another reason for Lily to refrain from getting married. In fact, halfway through the novel the idea of marriage revolts Lily. She thinks to herself “she need not marry, thank Heaven: she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution” (111). Here Lily displays her aversion to marriage since she calls it “degradation”, apparently every aspect of marriage is now negative to her. Lily acts courageously because during the time in which the novel is set it was not common to object to marriage, since marriage meant stability and financial security for women. She is brave enough to choose for herself whether she wants to marry or not, rather than simply adhering to the norm.

2.6 Mr. Ramsay’s relation to women

Finally Mr. Ramsay will be analysed in relation to the traditional roles of women. On the one hand he is the epitome of masculinity. He is a talented metaphysician who contributed greatly to his field of profession in his younger years, and he is obviously the breadwinner. On the other hand he seems to be dependent on approval and appreciation, mostly from women. Perhaps he is no longer as accomplished, which could be a reason for Mr. Ramsay to constantly pester his wife for confirmation of his brilliance: “he wanted sympathy. He was a failure, he said. Mrs. Ramsay flashed her needles. Mr. Ramsay repeated, never taking his eyes from her face, that he was a failure ... It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life” (43). His need for approval and validation seems to stem from insecurity, and this intrinsic need to be reminded of his value is

difficult to manage. Mr. Ramsay has a complicated relationship with his children, especially with James. He is sure that James despises him:

but his son hated him. He hated him for coming up to them, for stopping and looking down on them; he hated him for interrupting them; he hated him for the exaltation and sublimity of his gestures ... but most of all he hated the twang and twitter of his father's emotion which ... disturbed the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relations with his mother (42).

Mrs. Ramsay is always with the children, which naturally ensures that she has a different, deeper, relationship with them than Mr. Ramsay. In addition, Mr. Ramsay has difficulty with channelling his emotions. Jane Lilienfeld argues that "Mr. Ramsay's kindness and attachment to his family all but disappears as his tyrannical neediness looms over his being like the shadow of a massed cloud formation" (345-46). He is unable to separate his desire for praise and the love he feels for his family. Perhaps even more so because he feels subordinate to Mrs. Ramsay within their family. Woolf's desire to write from an inclusive and androgynous point of view definitely comes forward in *To the Lighthouse* and the ideas discussed by Mary Beton in *A Room* are displayed in this novel through characters such as Mr. Ramsay.

Furthermore, Mr. Ramsay's view on women is debatable, since he fails to maintain his desires. Several times throughout the novel Mr. Ramsay expresses problematic thoughts. In the following lines Mr. Ramsay's desire echoes the intention of rape: "an enormous need urged him, without being conscious of what it was, to approach any woman, to force them, he did not care how, his need was so great, to give him what he wanted: sympathy" (165). According to Susan Smith this quote presents "a suggestion which condemns the traditional sexism that makes women answerable for men's emotions" (320). In this case Mr. Ramsay

was accompanied by Lily Briscoe and the two are together at the summer home after Mrs. Ramsay has died. He craves comfort and sympathy, but Lily refuses to give him what he desires. A few moments later Mr. Ramsay thinks the following: “instantly, with the force of some primeval gust (for really he could not restrain himself any longer), there issued from him such a groan that any other woman on the whole world would have done something” (165). Mr. Ramsay believes in man’s superiority; he holds patriarchal ideas and thinks he can ask anything from women. Furthermore, he suggests that Lily is out of the ordinary in her actions, or rather in her lack of action. Again she defies the standard idea of women in the patriarchal society.

Smith addresses another common concept, namely the burden of mourning that was often put on women (321). In this case Mr. Ramsay places the burden of his wife’s death on Lily – she is there for him to alleviate his pain. However, Lily shows that she is unable to do so which brings Mr. Ramsay in a state of desperation, because Mr. Ramsay – and this was probably true for many men in the twentieth century – did not know how to properly control his emotions. He was never taught how to behave whilst feeling certain things, because the focus for men was always on being strong, working hard, and acting tough. By creating Mr. Ramsay, Woolf disclosed certain behavioural aspects that were deemed normal in society, but that actually needed change. She implied that it was fine for men to show their emotions and to have feelings. This type of characterisation and storytelling hints at a more androgynous style of writing, and Woolf is able to come to the essence of both men and women. Furthermore, it indicates that men and women should be able to find comfort in each other and that the balance between the sexes should be more equal.

There is another effect that Mr. Ramsay has on women, especially on Lily, that could hint at female oppression. After ten years, when Lily is back on the isle of Skye, finally she feels that she is able to finish her painting: “she had borne it in her mind all these years. It

seemed as if the solution had come to her: she knew now what she wanted to do” (161).

However, Mr. Ramsay’s presence stops her from painting. Lily says that every time he comes close to her “ruin” and “chaos” approaches (162). Lily feels as though she is not in the position to be creative or to be herself. This could be a reflection of society’s pressure on women, that forces them to be wives and mothers and not to have ambitions of any kind. Painting is Lily’s job and passion, but she is an exception in many ways, and throughout the novel maintaining this passion is made difficult for her. In other words, Mr. Ramsay represents all the disheartening opinions about women who tried to build a life for themselves. In *To the Lighthouse* Woolf fictionalised the arguments made in *A Room and* used them to enhance and create a powerful feminist image.

Chapter 3

3.1 *The Testaments*: Introduction

The Testaments (2019) by Margaret Atwood is the sequel to her famous novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). *The Handmaid's Tale*, which received several awards, was made into a film (1990), an opera (2000), and a very popular television series (2017). The expectations for the long-awaited sequel were high and after more than thirty years *The Testaments* was published. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a dystopian novel about a totalitarian state named Gilead. In this state women are subordinate to men in every aspect of the patriarchal society. Due to environmental problems infertility becomes increasingly common. Therefore a system is created by the Gilead regime which uses enslaved fertile women, the so-called Handmaids, as a vessel for childbirth. Their only use is to give birth, so that the child can be passed on to the Wives. The Handmaids are used as breeding machines, a horrible reality for those women. *The Testaments* builds on this extraordinary story and offers different perspectives.

The Testaments is set fifteen years after *The Handmaid's Tale* and has three different story lines, recounted by three different narrators. The first narrator is Aunt Lydia, who is a character from the previous novel; the second story line is told by Agnes, a young woman that lives in Gilead; the final plot line is narrated by Daisy, a young woman living in Canada. Each narrative tells its own story, but all three are interwoven and connected. The Ardua Hall Holograph is narrated by Aunt Lydia and is a manuscript, whereas the other two narratives are testimonies. The governors in Gilead are under the spell of baby Nicole, who was born in Gilead but smuggled out of it when she was a baby. Ever since this happened Gilead does everything to trace baby Nicole's steps in order to get her back. Towards the end of the novel, when all three plotlines come together, it becomes clear that Daisy is baby Nicole.

In this chapter each narrative will be analysed in relation to women's rights, agency, and whether Atwood follows the line of Woolf's feminism. First of all, Aunt Lydia's manuscript will be examined in terms of Woolf's theory on the position of women. Aunt Lydia has a long history in Gilead and has helped design it, so she knows how the Gileadean system works. With her manuscript she tries to expose all the injustice and exploitation that happened inside Gilead, and she likewise exposes her part of the wrong-doing. On one of the first pages Aunt Lydia acknowledges that her retelling of the story might not be complete or not completely truthful. Therefore, the effect on the story of an unreliable narrator will also be analysed. Agnes recounts her childhood and her teenage years in Gilead in her testimony. She discovers that she is the daughter of a Handmaid and instead of getting married to a high Commander, she becomes a Supplicant, a stage women have to go through in order to become an Aunt. During her childhood she was already confronted with the extremely oppressing and patriarchal nature of Gilead. The oppression she experienced will be analysed. Daisy, or baby Nicole, has a different perspective on Gilead because she only knows it through news reports, creating a very negative attitude towards it. Her story is different since she is the only one from outside of Gilead and she is not in the midst of the oppressing society. Her opinion of Gilead will be analysed in relation to feminism and injustice to women. This chapter will explore to what extent the theories analysed by Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* and *To the Lighthouse* are present in Atwood's novel, or if Atwood approaches feminism differently.

3.2 The Ardua Hall Holograph

The narrator of the Ardua Hall Holograph, Aunt Lydia, begins her manuscript with acknowledging the uncertainty of the survival of her writings: "if you are reading, this manuscript at least will have survived. Though perhaps I'm fantasizing: perhaps I will never have a reader. Perhaps I'll only be talking to the wall, in more ways than one" (5). It

immediately draws the reader's attention, because it shows that it is written in a place where there is no such thing as free speech. The reader will question what kind of society the narrator lives in. Simultaneously Atwood mimicked the strategies that are occurring inside Gilead, where the truth is often blurred and twisted. According to Barbara Rigney Atwood's protagonists tend to trick the reader and "the paradoxical relation between truth and fabrication, fact and fiction, are at the center of all of Atwood's narratives" (61). Therefore, Aunt Lydia's account of life in Gilead needs careful analysis.

Aunt Lydia maintains a close relationship with the most influential Commander, Commander Judd. Together they discuss everything that happens inside as well as outside Gilead that is of importance to their society and regime. The most important matter they discuss is how to retrieve baby Nicole. The Gilead regime has people outside Gilead who help them with that. In one of their conversations, Commander Judd says to Aunt Lydia "our agents in Canada have succeeded in identifying and eliminating two of the most active Mayday operatives ... a preliminary search of the premises suggested that they'd been playing a key role in aiding and abetting the Underground Femaleroad" (63-64). It is evident that Atwood took examples from real historical events when building the fictional world of Gilead. The Underground Femaleroad is obviously inspired by the Underground Railroad, the routes that escaped slaves took in order to reach a safe dwelling in the north of America or Canada (Concklin 25). In *The Testaments* the Underground Femaleroad was specifically for women who escaped from Gilead and sought protection in other states in America and Canada. This shows that living in Gilead can have such a terrible effect on women that they have to use a secret and extremely dangerous trail to flee from the place. The reference to the Underground Femaleroad reinforces the existence of female oppression in Gilead.

An additional striking element that Atwood has implemented is the name of the café where the Aunts often come, the Schlafly Café. The café is named after Phyllis Schlafly, who

was a public figure and an author that was active in the political field. She opposed to feminism, abortion, and same-sex marriage, and therefore it is a very deliberate choice for Atwood to use her name. The café is often a meeting point for the Aunts, who have a lot of power when it comes to the rights of women, and the rights of Handmaids in particular. They train the Handmaids and guide them through pregnancy. In addition, they would do everything in their power to save a baby, even if that means that the mother dies. It seems that by using that particular name for a place that is important to the Aunts, Atwood hints at the similarities between the Aunts' strident "pro-life" attitude, and Phyllis Schlafly. Furthermore, by using these real events and names the cruelties that happen within the regime are reinforced since the reader is reminded of the possibility that a Gilead-like regime could occur in reality.

In the introduction and the first chapter of this thesis, the distinction between the public and the private sphere is mentioned and analysed, this contrast between the spheres is also present in *The Testaments*. One could argue that the Aunts and the Commanders are representative of the public sphere, since they execute numerous jobs and missions, whereas the Econowives, the Wives, and the Handmaids occupy the private sphere. However, within the private sphere a hierarchy exists, because the Wives have more authority than the Handmaids. The cruel aspect is that Aunt Lydia helped to create the Gilead society and the distinction between the spheres, and thus created a very unsafe space for the Handmaids and their daughters. For them there is no function outside of the family and the domestic sphere, which mimics the position of women in the private sphere during the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

Aunt Lydia is one of the few women who has a place in the public sphere and is aware of the authority that it gives her. In comparison to the other women in Gilead she has a lot of power. Furthermore, the Aunts are the only women in Gilead who fulfil a position in the

public sphere, and it gives them rights other women can only dream about. However, they still have to adhere to very strict rules: they are not allowed to marry and they can never have a position in the private sphere. Therefore, the distinction between the spheres becomes very apparent throughout *The Testaments*, both spheres have positive and negative sides. However, the public sphere is more dominant than the private and is simultaneously regarded as the more important sphere.

In Gilead writing has a special position, since the Aunts are the only women who are allowed to write. Aunt Lydia is risking her life while writing her manuscript, because it is forbidden to write for pleasure. She states: “I write these words in my private sanctum within the library of Ardua Hall – one of the few libraries remaining after the enthusiastic book burnings that have been going on across our land” (4). She has to be very careful in hiding the manuscript because once it is found she will be executed. Still, she has a private space in which she resides when she is writing. Woolf’s idea that women should have a room to their own is alluded to by Atwood; however, the content of what is written should remain top-secret which causes that she, figuratively, has to go underground in order to write. Though, she cannot be seen as a victim, since she helped creating the extremely totalitarian regime of Gilead, and the point of her writing is to betray the regime. By making room for Aunt Lydia to write, Atwood shows how important it is that women are allowed to write, so that they can take up space in that way. In addition, through allowing her to write Atwood immediately positions Aunt Lydia as an one of the most important characters.

Apart from a private room for writing, Woolf also explores other ways in which women can take up space. For example, she shows that having a job, such as painting, is also accessible for a woman as in Lily’s case. However, in Gilead most women do not have this opportunity. According to Woolf, education is extremely important in the emancipation of women’s rights. Despite the fact that women are not taught to write, there is a different form

of education available to women in Gilead. Furthermore, the importance of motherhood that Woolf challenges through the opposing views of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, is complicated in *The Testaments*, because the value of family life is completely different in Gilead. In Gilead, families are concerned with status rather than the wellbeing of their children. Despite the fact that children are very important in Gilead, they do not have many choices, especially when they are female. They either become a vessel through which powerful people get children, or they become Aunts and are never allowed to have a family life. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan argued against the ideal picture of family life that is presented to women as the most valuable. Atwood essentially mimics this perfect family bond by creating a hollow relationship between the parents and the children. Thus, Atwood's feminism is clearly in line with her feminist predecessors.

Aunt Lydia's authority is closely linked to her authorship. Since she is able to read and write she cannot only write laws and regulations for the Gilead regime, but she is also able to document the utterly dark side of the society she has helped to create. Thus, authorship grants the author power. When Woolf created her theory on the position of women with *A Room* she had already written numerous novels. Thus, by then she had gained authority as a renowned writer. Furthermore, Woolf stated that women should have a room of their own in order to develop themselves. In other words, women need authority so that they can improve their position within society. Likewise Aunt Lydia's influence is reinforced through the authority she is given by Atwood throughout the whole novel. Similarly Atwood also has a lot of authority in her field of expertise which makes her analogous to Woolf. Both authors are greatly skilled in voicing female oppression. It could be argued that Aunt Lydia could represent Atwood, because both women use their authorship to bring atrocities to light. Catharine Grant states that questions concerning authority and authorship "have remained fairly central ones for feminists in theorizing and teaching about women's activities in the

field of cultural production, because of their connections with broader feminist debates about different kinds of subjectivity and agency under patriarchy” (Grant 113). Thus, authority is a very important topic within gender studies and it is no surprise that both Atwood and Woolf advocate for it in their novels. In my reading of Atwood, she certainly found inspiration in Woolf’s novels when it comes to authority and authorship and she likewise seems aware of the authority she has because of her position as a famous writer.

3.3 The Testimonies: Agnes and Daisy

There is a huge difference between the perceptions and ideas about the world between Transcript of Witness Testimony 369A, Agnes, and Transcript of Witness Testimony 369B, Daisy. In relation to one another Agnes is more conservative, because she is raised in Gilead and she never knew any other reality. From a very early age the girls in Gilead learn that they should fear men and their actions. They are taught that men cannot control themselves and that, therefore, they need to dress modestly: “arms covered, hair covered, skirts down to the knee before you were five and no more than two inches above the ankle after that, because the urges of men were terrible things and those urges need to be curbed” (9). It is striking that women have to dress or act according to a set of rules so that men can control their behaviour. By looking at the experiences of both Agnes and Daisy in relation to the Gilead regime, it becomes clear how distorted the Gilead society with regards to female rights is.

Agnes and her classmates are told one particular type of story about women, womanhood, and life in general. They are ‘protected’ against any kind of bad influences:

we were precious flowers that had to be kept safely inside glass houses, or else would be ambushed and our petals would be torn off and our treasures would be stolen and

we would be ripped apart and trampled by the ravenous men who might lurk around any corner, out there in the wide sharp-edged sin-ridden world (10).

If girls are taught that every man has bad intentions and that a normal relationship between men and women is impossible, it is very hard to believe that it can also be different.

Throughout the whole novel the difficulty of believing otherwise is apparent in the way how Agnes speaks about men.

Another distinction between men and women in Gilead concerns education. From an early age the girls learn that men do valuable and substantial things whereas women are particularly suited to remain unaware of the bigger issues in life. Agnes mentions that they were told they were the lesser sex: “the important things that men did, too important for females to meddle with because they had smaller brains that were incapable of thinking large thoughts, according to Aunt Vidala” (15). If girls are told they cannot achieve anything, they eventually start to believe it. In addition, since the girls have few examples of women who break out of the regime, they are not encouraged to think for themselves. In *A Room* Woolf clearly expressed how important education was for girls and women; in *The Testaments* it is evident that the Gilead regime tries to prevent the girls from developing themselves. Thus, there is no room for female growth and progression.

The position of the Handmaids within the totalitarian society is very bad, since they are mostly talked about in a very negative and derogatory manner. Shunnamite, a friend of Agnes, says “they get passed around until they have a baby. They’re all sluts anyway, they don’t need real names” (81). Every Handmaid gets the name of the Commander she belongs to, with the prefix of-, that ensures that it is clear to whom the Handmaid belongs. The opinions about Handmaids are contradictory; on the one hand the Handmaids are celebrated because they are still the most fertile, but on the other hand they are called sluts for sleeping

with more than one man, however involuntarily. Atwood tries to make a statement about female sexuality for female sexuality always receives a heightened form of criticism. According to Baumeister and Twenge “the double standard, for example, has consisted of judgments that many specific sexual behaviors are acceptable for men but unacceptable for women” (167). Thus, for example, it is accepted for men to sleep with many women, but women are criticised when doing the same. In the case of the Handmaids there is another layer of complication, because they are *forced* to sleep with the Commanders. Such criticism and slut shaming is already humiliating to experience for a woman who can make independent choices, let alone for a woman without self-determination.

It is evident that Atwood found inspiration in other feminist authors is evident. One of those influential feminists is Germaine Greer, who wrote *The Female Eunuch* in 1970. In this book Greer argues that women are robbed of their sense of self, their autonomy, sexuality, and power because of the “oppressive models of normality” that live in patriarchal society (Lidström Brock 80). In other words, women have lost their true identity as a result of strains that were put on them by men. The girls and women in Gilead are taught that everything they do is either for men to enjoy or to prevent men from crossing boundaries. The girls grow up with the knowledge that their whole life will be devoted to the wants and needs of the men in their lives. This is similar to Greer’s argument since she tries to advocate for a different way of living for women. It is clear that Atwood used this idea to reinforce the horrible truth that women in Gilead face. Furthermore, Atwood used a similar idea to Greer’s argument to continue her line of feminism.

One example of a horrible truth that the women in Gilead face is assault. Agnes was sexually assaulted by her dentist, the father of one of her friends. In Gilead, it was out of the question that she could testify, and she kept her mouth shut. This confirms the idea about men that the girls are taught, for Agnes thinks “it was all true then, about men and their rampaging,

fiery urges, and merely by sitting in the dentist chair I was the cause” (96). The worst part of it is that the girls are taught, and also believe, that it is their fault. Agnes thinks that only by sitting in that chair she causes the inappropriate behaviour of her dentist. Atwood is critical towards the views that exist within society in which women are often blamed when they are raped or sexually assaulted. As is stated by Melanie Randall victim-blaming is one of the most important aspects of the incredibility of sexually assaulted women. She calls these women “bad” victims because they do not adhere to the picture of ideal victims (408). Randall argues that incredibility “is inextricably tied with the pervasiveness of victim-blaming, the idea that women are, and should be, responsible for navigating their own safety, for managing men's sexual attention and aggression, and also for accurately assessing and avoiding risk” (409). All these (female) expectations are exactly what the girls in Gilead learn. However, the frequent violation of women’s bodies by men for their own pleasure is utterly wrong, by using these examples Atwood shows that society’s principles need re-evaluation.

Despite the fact that women are supposedly often competing with each other and bring each other down, Atwood also shows friendships between characters, namely between Agnes and Becka. According to Rigney “Atwood also restores women to women as friends, ultimately, though they may have suffered horrors at one another’s hands. In every novel, a friendship between two, or among a group, forms a center” (65). This is certainly true for Becka and Agnes: without one another it would have been far more difficult for them to survive. They supported each other and trusted each other as Supplicants, and together they obtained more rights within the system of Ardua Hall. Furthermore, their friendship shows that there is also room for female bonding, and it encourages women to invest in positive relationships rather than negative relationships.

There is a big contrast between the lives of Agnes and Daisy. Daisy only knows about Gilead through news reports and her education, therefore she views Gilead from an outside perspective. However, Daisy was smuggled out of Gilead when she was a baby. She lives in Toronto with adoptive parents and is unaware of the truth about her early childhood and the fact that she is the daughter of a Handmaid. She obviously knows about Gilead, but she has no idea that her roots find their origin in the totalitarian state. The first account that Daisy gives of Gilead is very negative: “We’d had three modules in school on Gilead: it was a terrible, terrible place, where women couldn’t have jobs or drive cars, and where the Handmaids were forced to get pregnant like cows, except cows had a better deal” (46). In comparison with Agnes, Daisy is a lot more progressive in her views and outlook on life as well as on the Gilead regime. From this quote it becomes apparent that Daisy feels strongly about women’s rights, and she cannot imagine what it would be like to be living in a place where women have no rights. In addition, she even thinks that Handmaids are treated worse than cows and states that the animals in Gilead are better off than the Handmaids.

In order to complete Aunt Lydia’s plan to bring down the Gilead regime from within, Daisy needs to be smuggled into Gilead. Daisy has to pretend that she gets assaulted by Garth, the man that accompanies her, in order for the Pearl Girls to save her. The plan Daisy and Garth are performing succeeds as the Pearl Girls notice that Daisy needs saving. The Pearl Girls anticipate on the weak state of mind of the girls they meet in order to persuade them to join. Despite the fact that Daisy only acts as if she is treated badly, the words spoken to her do comfort her in a way: “Gilead would cherish me too because I was a precious flower, every woman was a precious flower, and especially every girl of my age, and if I was in Gilead I would be treated like the special girl I was, and protect me, and no one – no man – would ever be able to hurt me” (266). If a girl or woman is truly desperate and sees no future for herself,

it is not surprising that the soothing words of the Pearl Girls appeal to them, Gilead knows exactly that they can salvage desperate women and use them for their totalitarian purposes.

However, the reality within Gilead is far from safe and protective, and the men who are in charge are to be feared because they misuse their power. The Pearl Girls use false pretences to collect already vulnerable women only for the benefit of Gilead. Although the Pearl Girls seem perfect in their behaviour they also use words they are not allowed to use: “then Aunt Dove reminded her that she should not use the word *export* as girls were not commodities; and Aunt Beatrice apologized and said she had meant to say ‘the facilitating of cross-border movement.’ And they both smiled” (268). From the intertextual interpretation it becomes apparent that among themselves it is difficult to keep up the appearances. Furthermore, it shows that strict manners and restrictions are not healthy, and even impossible, for people to constantly live with.

3.4 Common ground

Mukti Upadhyay states Atwood’s novels often revolve around survival and endurance as these themes are mostly projected through the female protagonists (30). In *The Testaments* all three protagonists share the story of their survival and the ways in which they try to fight for their freedom, as far as freedom exists for them. For Aunt Lydia survival first means that she has to endure hardships that diminish her self-worth as a woman; however, she quickly realises that by obeying the rules she can obtain power that entitles her to eventually bring to light certain aspects of the Gilead regime that will cause its downfall.

Agnes knows a different form of survival, since she grew up in Gilead she has a different perception of what is considered normal and what is not. Arranged marriages between a very young girl and a man in his forties or fifties are the norm in Gilead. It bothers Agnes that she has to marry somebody only because her parents want her to, so in order to

avoid marriage she becomes a Supplicant. Living as a Supplicant also means sacrificing certain things, but it is bearable for Agnes. For Daisy survival starts when her adoptive parents are murdered and she learns that she is Baby Nicole, and shares a history with Gilead. In order to successfully complete the plan Aunt Lydia and the Mayday operators have crafted Daisy has to change her identity to be credible. Often women ought to change parts of their identity to gain credibility. For example, female writers often used male pseudonyms to publish books so that they would be judged in the same way as their male counterparts. Furthermore, according to Upadhyay “Atwood also depicts the internal urge of women to break all conventional identities in order to live with freedom” (30). Each protagonist tries to find a way of living in the absurd customs of Gilead and each proves to be inventive enough to break through barriers to eventually weaken the Gilead regime.

Gilead is extremely misogynistic and even the idea of feminism is out of the question. Despite the fact that the Gilead regime is the opposite of female friendly, the three protagonists still try, each in their own way, to make the lives of women more tolerable. In comparison to Woolf’s feminism, Atwood has a contrasting method. Admittedly, both expose the unequal treatment of women, but they have different approaches to doing so. Atwood is very explicit in describing the horrors that women in Gilead experience, whereas Woolf used subtle language and intertextuality to gradually make her point. One of the benchmarks Woolf used to elevate her point of view, was the idea that all women should have a room of their own in order to write. By creating Aunt Lydia, and the way in which she secretly writes her manuscript in her private place, Atwood echoes the idea of having a room to work in.

Nevertheless, Aunt Lydia’s still faces forms of oppression since she is not allowed to write freely. However, apart from the Aunts, no women are allowed to write in Gilead, so Aunt Lydia is already in a fortunate position. It works in her favour in two ways: on the one hand she can create rules through writing, thus her ideas and knowledge will remain in the

archives forever. On the other hand, in order to write, one must also be able to read. This means that Aunt Lydia is able to develop and educate herself on matters of importance, which inevitably ensures that she can always stay ahead of the rest of the women in Gilead.

Within Gilead there is a strict distinction between classes and everyone knows their place within society. By referring to the Underground Femaleroad Atwood draws a parallel between the slaves that used the Underground Railroad to find their freedom and the women that escaped Gilead. Although race is not the main topic and priority of the novel, Atwood still subtly includes it in her writing. For Woolf it was not common to do so, because at the beginning of the twentieth century intersectional feminism, as a means to inclusively analyse feminist issues, did not exist. Yet, people could obviously think intersectionally, but it would not have been labelled as such. During Atwood's career intersectionality started to gain more recognition and it is somewhat striking that no attention is given to it. Yet, she makes no distinction whatsoever about race which might indicate that she includes each and every ethnicity.

Another common aspect between *The Testaments* and *To The Lighthouse* is the similarity between the main female characters, which invites for close comparison. In the second chapter the differences and similarities between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe are analysed and the women are different in many ways. Something similar is true for Agnes and Daisy, who were brought up in completely different worlds, therefore their attitudes towards important aspects in life differ greatly. Daisy feels very strongly about female rights and compared to Agnes she is a feminist character, whereas Agnes grew up with extremely different beliefs and ideas about womanhood. By putting the two characters alongside each other, Atwood mirrors Woolf's portrayal of the two women in *To the Lighthouse*. Their contrasting identities show that there is not one type of woman that can be favoured over the

other and can be seen as the perfect feminist character, because such character and such woman does not exist.

Woolf has undoubtedly planted a seed with her views on feminism, though Atwood uses her own views and ideas to appeal to a society that has already changed drastically since Woolf's era. Atwood really shows that in a society where a small group of people have all the power, there is an imbalance within the societal structure. In Gilead's case women experience the most hardships and are essentially deprived of all their rights. Furthermore, the lack of any access to education or personal growth makes women vulnerable which is what Woolf already argued for. In addition, Friedan argued that having one image of women is harmful to the representation of women. Friedan's idea is visible in Gilead, since society's one-sided view of the Handmaids is extremely harmful to them.

Conclusion

This thesis examined Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and *To the Lighthouse* and Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* within the framework of feminism in the Anglophone context. Feminism is complex and has been subject to change ever since its conception, and will continue to change in the future to pertain to the needs of female empowerment.

The aim of my thesis was to determine whether the line of feminism created by Woolf had found its way into Atwood's writing. I used *A Room of One's Own* and *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan to create a theoretical framework and to establish the feminist grounds on which these novels were built. In *A Room* Woolf expressed two main ideas of how women can gain more independence and agency. The first one is that women need a room of their own in which they can write in peace. The second idea is that all women need five hundred pounds a year to provide for themselves. Although the first idea is primarily aimed at female writers, any woman benefits from a personal space in which she can develop herself so the arguments in *A Room* are still valuable today.

The Feminine Mystique raised important questions about the lives of women in the United States as Friedan discovered that many women were unhappy with their current lives. Friedan criticises the image of the perfect housewife that is promoted in magazines and in popular culture in the 1950s and 1960s. She claimed that all the steps that were taken in the late 19th and early 20th century by the women's movement were nullified by the idea that women should all strive to be mothers and housewives. Friedan created an influential piece of literature that was pivotal in the rise of second-wave feminism.

Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* can be considered feminist by way of subtle language use and intertextuality. The novel explores feminism through creating two main characters who differ in their feminist views. The biggest similarity between Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay is probably that both women receive a lot of criticism and resistance when it comes to the

choices they make in their lives. The analyses in *A Room* were a logical extension of the fictionalised points Woolf had made in *To the Lighthouse*. A similar thing happens in *The Testaments*, in which the characters are unlike each other in many ways, but nonetheless are universal in their suffering and their quest for agency. Through Aunt Lydia Atwood created a woman who was able to write, in a world in which very few women were allowed to write, which lead to a disproportionate power balance. Furthermore, the female characters in both Woolf's and Atwood's novels investigate how women can take up space, but also can be deprived of space.

Woolf paved the way for many female authors and for women in general to claim more space in a world that was dominated by male power. After Woolf, Friedan and later Atwood continued to advocate for female empowerment and women's rights. The importance of the relationship between authorship and authority or agency which was initiated by Woolf in her novels, was continued and further developed by Atwood. In Atwood's novel the feminist seed that was planted by Woolf has grown and advanced into a strand of feminism that speaks to women nowadays. The feminist movement will continue to grow and evolve as the needs of women change.

This thesis does not intend to claim that by analysing one of Atwood's novels the whole breadth of Atwood's feminism can be determined. Analysing other novels by Atwood is beyond the scope of this research, but it would be beneficial to give a more complete study. Similarly, two of Woolf's works are not enough to fully determine her feminist point of view. Since feminism is characterised through its complexity, one all-encompassing definition of feminism is impossible to achieve for anyone in any given era.

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