

## A Gender of One's Own: Examining Queer Theory in Virginia Woolf

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This study examines queer and feminist theories in Virginia Woolf's writing, and seeks to answer some of the questions brought forth in her writing: how do women navigate social spheres traditionally dominated by men? What impact does it have on mental health to live in a society which treats queerness as an abomination and women as second-class citizens? How do queerness and feminism intertwine? And finally, what is the interplay between gender identity and sexual orientation?

A brilliant writer, Virginia Woolf was a queer woman and had a passionate love affair with Vita Sackville-West, who was the inspiration behind her novel *Orlando*. Queer themes are prevalent in many of Woolf's works, from a gender-bending hero/heroine in *Orlando* to an admission in *A Room of One's Own* that "sometimes women do like women<sup>1</sup>." Woolf was also mentally ill, and struggled with a "madness<sup>2</sup>," something which had a great impact on her writing and eventually led her to take her own life. These themes of trauma and mental illness also appear in her works, most noticeably in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*.

I explore these topics through a close reading of several of Woolf's key works: *Orlando*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, with supplemental readings of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and secondary criticism on Woolf. By working through these sources, I present insights into Woolf's own thoughts on feminism and queerness in a patriarchal society, and argue that many of the points she addresses are still relevant to society today.

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<sup>1</sup> Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Harcourt, Inc, 1929.

<sup>2</sup> Lee, Hermione. *Virginia Woolf*. Random House, 1996,