

The hindrances of female writers as depicted in Virginia Woolf's book, A Room of ...

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



In Chapter 3, Woolf takes up the question of why have there not been many great female writers, starting with the Elizabethan age. What are the external obstacles that stand in the way of a woman who might want to write? What are the internal obstacles? How are these two sets of obstacles related?

In the previous chapter, chapter 2, Virginia Woolf came upon the realization that there were very few books written by women about men however the contrary was quite popular. She starts questioning why it might be that men write so much about women and comes up with the idea that men use women to make themselves look greater in comparison. In chapter 3, Woolf seems to broaden her question and ask why is it that women in general just do not write as much? She mentions many obstacles that women face when it comes to creating their own forms of literature. These include both external and internal ones. The external obstacles deal with the way that women of this time are viewed and treated by men.

For example, on pages 43 and 44 Woolf speaks about the way women were treated like objects that men could treat in any way they pleased. She quotes Trevelyan where he says " Wife beating was a recognized right of man, and was practised without shame by high as well as low.... Similarly, the daughter who refused to marry the gentleman of her parents' choice was liable to be locked up, beaten and flung about the room, without any shock being inflicted upon public opinion." Woolf comments on this saying that a woman was to be considered " property of her husband" (45). This external obstacle must have played an internal role as well, contributing to the

discouragement that women were shown in terms of going against social normalities, which is what a woman writing literature would be considered to be doing. That was not something that the average woman of the time would have been seen doing and it is not at all what they were expected to be doing. Rather, as Woolf said in previous chapters, they were to stay at home, having children and taking care of them while their husbands made all the money. A large external obstacle presented to women of this time was their inability to gain the knowledge necessary to become great writers, the way that men did. When talking about Shakespeare's metaphorical sister, Woolf says that she "remained at home. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning" (48-49). On page 50, Woolf seems to sum up three of the main obstacles that women had that were preventing them from writing when she says "it is unthinkable that any woman in Shakespeare's day should have had Shakespeare's genius. For genius like Shakespeare's is not born among labouring, uneducated, servile people."

In addition to their lack of education and expected duty to serve and work for their family from home, the other important obstacle the women faced were interruptions that seem so common in this book. "Dogs will bark; people will interrupt; money must be made; health will break down" (53). The interruptions that women are faced with are results of their restrictions in life because of their sex. These interruptions, as we see, are almost always by men. Men provided the greater internal obstacles that women were faced with in this time because they thought of women as so much lesser. It was

needless to say this outloud because that was something so commonly known, understood, and accepted. Woolf says that “ there was an enormous body of masculine opinion to the effect that nothing could be done by women intellectually. Even if her father did not read out loud these opinions, any girl could read them for herself; and the reading, even in the nineteenth century, must have lowered her vitality, and told profoundly upon her work. There would always have been that assertion – you cannot do this, you are incapable of doing that – to protest against, to overcome” (55-56). The fact that women were immediately viewed of as incapable of performing the tasks that men could is what must have discouraged them so much from writing.