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## Therefore I Am: Virginia Woolf's Finished Business in "The Yellow Wallpaper," The Diary of a Young Girl, and The Color Purple

Monica Vela

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THEREFORE, I AM: VIRGINIA WOOLF'S FINISHED BUSINESS IN "THE YELLOW  
WALLPAPER," *THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL*, AND *THE COLOR PURPLE*

A Thesis

by

MONICA VELA

Submitted to Texas A&M International University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2019

Major Subject: English

Therefore, I Am: Virginia Woolf's Finished Business in "*The Yellow Wallpaper*,"

*The Diary of a Young Girl*, and *The Color Purple*

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Approved as to style and content by:

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May 2019

Major Subject: English

## ABSTRACT

Therefore, I Am: Virginia Woolf's Finished Business in "The Yellow Wallpaper," *The Diary of a Young Girl*, and *The Color Purple* (May 2019)

Monica Vela, B.A., English, Texas A&M International University;

Chair of Committee: Deborah Scaggs

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, embodies her vision, her imagination of what society would be like if women were in possession of money and a room of their own. Her essay has a reassuring effect on the future of women and fiction, for she aspires the female "genius" to acknowledge their realities for what they truly are, the pain of not existing. She declares that when the female engages in the act of writing, it is crucial to dismiss all the hesitations that may impede her ability to write, despite the social conventions she may be detaching herself from.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, convey Woolf's vision that the female identity can only be realized when their hearts and minds open up to confess what is real through the act of writing. When the writer is communicating her experience with perfect fullness, which further attests that freedom and peace coexist within the writer's spirit in order to give rise to a new identity.

Through the supreme act of writing, a sense of the self, with time, results in the emancipation of a newfound persona. Women have actually gained a room, and that space must not be wasted; it ought to be "put in the form of fiction" (Woolf 115) because true

beauty lies in the ways that the female persona writes herself—it is those creative forces that invigorate a whole new way of being, of existing, and there is nothing in the universe that can ever take its place.

## DEDICATION

At a young age, I learned that life was an interesting obstacle course, for the experiences I endured were not always favorable. I learned that pain can be obscured—hidden—from the rest of the world for a long time, until of course, it demands to be felt and exposed. At a young a young age, I learned that wounds could only be healed through the language that my heart spoke; at a young age, I realized that writing had a transformative power. At a young age, I met an amazing individual that influenced my life in ways she could never even imagine. At a young age—seventh grade—to be exact, Dr. Norma Garcia changed my life forever!

As my writing teacher in seventh grade, Dr. Garcia enabled me to understand who I was through her inspiration about the art of writing as well as teaching it. The peculiar way that she instructed writing was not usual, for she compelled me to believe that it was an art that painted my voice, an art that gave me my own space to exist and to be. Every time I found myself writing, I was able to express the feelings of insecurity that I had suppressed for so long. At the time, little did I know that I too, had found my own room. It was by writing, confessing of my pains and sorrows that I found solace.

Writing has never ceased to abandon my soul, for I know exactly how to be found, whole, and complete. Dr. Garcia's passion for writing left an imprint in my heart and will forever be the reason that I exist. She made me realize the truth in Virginia Woolf's words: "Every secret of a writer's soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind, is written large in his works." I am certain that every part of me exists in every word that I have written, and every experience in my life is manifested in my writing.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Deborah Scaggs, for her unwavering support, her knowledge and expertise, for the influence she has had on me as a teacher, a mentor, and a writer. And, I would also like to give much praise and thanks to my committee members, Dr. Manuel Broncano, Dr. Bernice Sanchez, and Dr. Charlene Summers for their guidance and unwavering support throughout the course of this research.

I would also like to express my most sincere gratitude to the English department faculty and staff for making my time at Texas A&M International University such a profound experience, especially Dr. Katherine Klein and Dr. Ula Klein, for they enabled me to acquire extensive knowledge within the realm of literature—the study of the human condition in ways I had never perceived possible. I also want to extend my gratitude to Texas A&M International University, which provided the foundation and intellectual beings, my professors.

I want to thank my mother, Karoline, who never gave up on me, my dreams. Thank you for listening to my words as I tried to put this project together (even though you always believed my writing was amazing). I also want to thank my daughter, Helga who knows me better than I know myself. Without your encouragement, I would have never been able to complete this. And, last, but not least, I want to give thanks and praise to the man that expects me to be the best that he knows I can be—my husband—Jesse. I will forever be indebted to him, for lifting me up every time I fell, for loving me unconditionally, for accepting me for who I am. I want to thank him for simply letting me be, for allowing me to exist in my very own world, in my own room, always writing.

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## CHAPTER I

## CREATING A SPACE FOR THE FEMININE VOICE

It is often said that writing is the painting of the voice—the air that consents the soul and the spirit to breathe—it is the echo of a yearning heart that revitalizes what is felt, and women, when silenced, rely on the stroke of their pens to set their souls at ease. The female persona has incessantly been the gender positioned at the forefront of oppression, bearing a ceaseless desire to be, to exist, a desire that demands to be lessened as it reconciles through writing about what is personal. The woman's voice, obscured and dismissed, is the voice that bears what is considered to be the striking gift of longing that ultimately helps them find themselves, longing to escape from the role that it has been assigned, for when females are dominated, there are forces that unremittingly work against her, impeding her from being able to break free from all social constraints, especially from the dominance of men. As a result of such defeat, women have obtained a limited understanding of their own faculties as well as their identification of self, leaving them without the voice and agency that is deserved. And, women that have found themselves on the opposite side of men, the oppressed dichotomy, have been dictated to submit themselves to the societal expectations that deem them to be victims of intimidation, tradition, violence, and even abuse. However, there are always powerful tools, such as personal experience, that inspire the female persona to escape from their designated role in hopes of finding a transformative space to exist, to discover, and to simply be.

To advance the perspective of how women were able to overcome their subjugation,

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This thesis follows the model of *Publications of the Modern Language Association*.

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* implements a sense of possibility that reveals an opportunity for change, an opportunity for progress, and the prospect, that the future of women and fiction will be influenced significantly by accessing a reality that may have remained dormant otherwise. If Woolf had not obtained this vision, no one would have ever acknowledged it in such a way. In her essay, Woolf points out that women's writing—their stories—are absent from history and she requests warrant to envision the women who did not make it into history books, since their roles and ordinary domestic lives were considered slight and were barred, in one way or another, from pursuing the more audacious courses that they may have imagined for themselves as women. Randi Saloman's "Unsolved Problems: Essayism, Counterfactuals, and the Futures of *A Room of One's Own*" avows that "only by adopting the essay's sense of possibility—and of the value of that which has not yet been determined—can the young women before Woolf see their way to the as-yet-undecided future she desires for them" (54), and it is her speculation of counterfactuals that elects to see how it really is, and that there is another way to perceive it. Woolf, as well as her audience, runs a course of trials that enable a number of futures to arise from the various precedents she envisages and reinvents; it is the power of the future's potentiality that welcomes outcomes that were not otherwise visible.

Women and fiction are the heart of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, for she takes into consideration the alternative lives of women as well as the ways of being, and in doing so her speculative writing significantly considers several paths in which a story might lead to. The story of women, specifically, in Woolf's essay, does not offer any preparations or directives, it instead, serves as a weapon for her audience to determine their realities as well as their future, and so, when Saloman proclaims that Woolf's "work

must demonstrate, rather than define, the process of self-realization” (56), Woolf does not disappoint her readers, for it is how conclusions are reached about women and writing. Ironically, it is those assertions about the counterfactual lives that are observed by Woolf’s essay that bid the greatest chance of providing entrance to realistic possibilities. One of the most imperative possibilities that is conducive to Woolf’s main subject, women and fiction, is to acknowledge that her efforts embody and give voice to the women whose lives have been unrecorded—masked and obscured. She bears the peculiar gift of sound, tracking the “potential lives of [women], what they might have done under other circumstances or conditions, and what presumably, their successors might yet do” (Saloman 59) if they did in fact have their own space to exist, a room of their own. *A Room of One’s Own* serves as the model vehicle that substantiates the innovativeness of not only the women she addresses, but also those that reflect the past and future generations.

In light of three texts, one can see the significant value of Virginia Woolf’s ability to simplify and denote women’s bearings amidst all societal expectations, and assumes a profound, significant value in works of literature such as “The Yellow Wallpaper,” *The Diary of a Young Girl*, and *The Color Purple*, for they exemplify exactly how a silenced woman is able to “roll up the crumpled skin of the day, with its arguments and its impressions and its anger and its laughter, and cast it into the hedge” (Woolf 24). The female protagonists of these notable texts reveal that there is a moment in every woman’s life, an occasion of private reflection that allows them to reconsider their feelings of despair, it enables them to create a space, an “alternative way of life and thought”

(Saloman 64). It is through the act of writing that feelings are expressed and an identity is constructed.

The unnamed protagonist of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” prohibited from writing in order to cure her state of mental anguish, is confined to a room with yellow wallpaper that seemingly forces her to write about its descriptions that enable the emergence of a new text—an identification of the self, Anne Frank, in her *Diary*, afflicted by the atrocities of the Holocaust, bears her conflicted soul by writing her confessions on paper as an inhabitant in a secret annex; and Celie in *The Color Purple*, a victim of sexual, physical, and verbal abuse finds solace in writing herself through the letters that depict her ability to finally exist—to be beyond the abuse. These female characters engage themselves in self-definition through the act of writing, and ultimately, define who and what they truly are. The subdued pain of these female protagonists is the object of their revelations, for when they write, they are subconsciously reinventing their identities; they are the “transitional figures” (Saloman 68) that were inherently directed by Woolf’s observations about women and fiction. What this means is that they represent how the transformative power of writing encourages these female personas to solidify their position as they engaged in a quest to create it: “When I ask you to earn money and have a room of your own, I am asking to live in the presence of reality, an invigorating life, it would appear, whether one can impart it or not” (Woolf 109). The female protagonists of these literary masterpieces are a tribute to Woolf’s envisioned future—the voiceless, bearing the desire to write. They respond to their need of existence by creating a room of their own; it is the space that they create for themselves through the power of writing—of language—that enables them to appreciate and construct a conceivable identity.

## CHAPTER II

## WOOLF'S APPLICATION OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

## Writing to Construct Identity

The female gender, which has been characterized as the voiceless soul, yearns for acknowledgment—the desire to be, finding itself imprisoned by the imaginings of life playing itself out favorably if they were not less than their superior, the man, and Virginia Woolf's, *A Room of One's Own*, which stages the patriarchal confinement that abounds the women of her time, who were considered to not possess the ability to express their talents and gifts artistically, proposes that women have never been granted their own space to create or to write, for they are not deserving of it as long as their inequality to the male gender overthrows them. Because women were expected to fulfill the roles that their domestic duties demanded of them, Woolf's ideas and observations assert that there is always a way to acknowledge what is hidden, masked, and that is that the female persona possesses a creative instinct and ability that initiates a sense of empowerment, and may have signified the defiance of social conventions. With a keen, feminist flavor, Woolf intricately paints a dioramic scene of a luncheon party, in which she takes the liberty of defying conventions by dissecting the realistic nature of what was actually happening, since it was “seldom spare[d] a word” (10). She sets the tone of her convictions with a voluptuous melody that is unsung and quite detached from all social expectations or conventions, for she describes the foods that were consumed: “The partridges, many and various, came with all their retinue of sauces and salads, the sharp and the sweet... their sprouts, foliated as rosebuds but more succulent” (11). Even though the luncheon that she is observing is at the Oxbridge Men's College, she contends that there is still a sensual twist as well as satisfaction in what may be perceived as

simply dining well, and there is indeed a repercussion to await, “No need to hurry. No need to sparkle. No need to be anybody but oneself...” (11). So, as Woolf is breaking away from societal expectations, she is suggesting that it is another possible way seeing what she has so intricately observed. The aftermath that will ensue amongst society over time—women creating artistic masterpieces—will be as pleasing as the “lighting [of] a good cigarette” (11). This lavish meal, one tagged as “immortal in literature” (Woolf 11) intends to envisage that women and literature are not irrational subjects that will sparsely feed the souls of those profound sentences that are waiting to be created; instead, the future of women and literature will be as enchanting and pleasing to the soul as good dining is. The truths that women hold, deep within their pained souls is not an irrational idea. If the female writer is given the space to “think well, love well, sleep well and dine well” (Gordon ix), she will irrefutably bid a lasting impression of self-acceptance and acknowledgement through the words that she has revealed on paper.

Male dominance was the culprit of the female’s struggle to find identity, but the circumstances of their oppressed lives wrought a formidable spectrum that stood within the realm of creativity and language. Woolf interestingly demands attention from her audience as she asks to imagine a table inside a room where there is a “blank sheet of paper on which was written in large letters, WOMEN AND FICTION, but no more” (25). This blank sheet of paper is the guiding question of her exploration, for it leads to questioning the prosperity of men over women—why was it that the man was able to drink fine wine while the woman drank water, why are women so poor that it has an effect on fiction, and what circumstances are necessary to be able to generate works of art—fiction and literature? Realizing that the questions are ceaseless and that answers were scarce, Woolf’s quest commenced at the

British Museum where she intended to find “the essential oil of truth” (27), the main reason why women were so inferior to men—why women were so poor. When she makes her way to a small restaurant nearby, she cannot help but notice that “England is under the rule of patriarchy, [and] nobody could fail to detect the dominance of the professor” (33)—he was the one who controlled all the power, money, and influence because she could plainly read the angered tone that the words on that paper demanded to be realized. Perhaps the anger stemmed not from the perceived notion of the women’s inferiority to men, but from the superiority that his own sex deemed him. A man seems to believe that self-confidence is acquired through the strength that power invokes, so Woolf suggests then that “the enormous importance to a patriarch who has to conquer, who has to rule, of feeling that great numbers of people, half the human race indeed, are by nature inferior to himself.” (35) is what arouse the idea that men are the ones empowered by voice and the woman stands to be dominated, commanded to fulfill particular roles, roles that did not allow them to pursue creating art or writing in a room of their own. Women are poorer than men because all of their time has been spent behind closed doors not making money, and instead, have fallen prey to the domestic scheme of their lives by having children and raising them. They were affianced in their early years, thus, never given the opportunity to educate themselves, much less live a private life. Woolf claims that in the male dominated world, the woman was highly inflicted by “the poison of fear and bitterness” (37) of incessantly having to work like a slave, and then having to bury “the thought of that one gift which it was death to hide—a small one but dear to the possessor—perishing with it [herself], [her] soul”(38) because the fiery desire to write, to have a space to create, destroyed the spirit of their sole existence.

Woolf delves into the roles that women play in a society that is dominated by men, especially through her imagined persona of Shakespeare's sister. This woman, Judith, is just as brilliant and creative as her brother, but unfortunately, never writes because she lives in a sphere where only the man is able to rotate the functionality of its surface, and, thus, Woolf claims that "all [she] could do was to offer [her readers] an opinion upon one minor point—that a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction. She muses about the women that were mothers, unable to detach themselves from their dependence on men; how nice it would have been if indeed, the mothers of past generations as well as future would have "amassed great wealth and laid it under the foundations of college and liberty" (22). Women seemed to be so consumed by their need to fulfill their roles that they failed to realize that there were more compelling ways to exist other than the ones they were expected to adhere to. But, of course, this was just another reverie that fulfilled her illusory impression because women were not granted the right to obtain any money in their possession. If a woman was to write and earn money as a result, every earned penny would be taken from her, for a woman was not as wise as her husband to be able to clutch the fruits of her own, creative labors. Instead, as Woolf argued, the female "talked standing at the window looking, as so many thousands look every night, down on the domes and towers of the famous city beneath" (23), the room that they dreamed of one day finding in order to satisfy the artistic cravings that were buried deep down in the fondest spaces of their hearts.

Because women, in Woolf's time, were unable to find their own space, their own room to create, writing, fiction, and women are unsolved problems. Woolf captures the essence of the unexpressed writer, the woman that could not create because she could never be equal to her "immortal sibling," through her examination of the imbalanced world that she

sees around her. Woolf realized that it was not important for women to be creative, especially through the “discouragement and criticism” that existed “upon their writing” (76), but her thoughts would forever flummox her, and that is why she knew that despite the inequality, the lack of space to write, there would be “no gate, no lock, no bolt that [could] set upon the freedom of [her] mind” (76). The art of writing stems from the desire to freely and fully express oneself, and that is what encapsulates the essence of the art of writing. From Woolf’s perspective, if women were in fact the sole possessors of their own room, a space, marveled by infinite thought and creativity, they too, like men, would be the heirs of the necessary tradition of creating divine sentences. In this room, there would be no “lack of tradition [...] scarcity and inadequacy of tools” (77). And, although Shakespeare’s sister may have died young without ever having written in her own room, she still thrives within the yearning souls of all the brilliant women Woolf foresees to come after Judith that have the desire to create, to write. A true writer never ceases to think, to believe and form, since the “great poets do not die; they are [indeed] continuing presences,” (113), which is why it is known that there are pens that still refuse to terminate the idea of living with the hope of being brought into the woman’s room to write. There are women out there that have not given up on the idea of being immortal for the art of writing.

The culmination of Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* sets into view the imagined spaces that she professed for the future of women and fiction. This looming vision of the woman’s ability to create and express the self through the act of writing was manifested in her profound language that spoke directly to the silenced, pain-stricken heart, for it was the interconnectedness of obscured pain and the form of expressing it infused by the life experiences they had borne as inferior beings in a patriarchal society, a world that

ultimately forced them to engage in “the habit of freedom and the courage to write” (113) as they found a room of their own. Dominated by the male figures of their time, women may have been too busy washing dishes after cooking a meal for their families or simply putting their beloved children to bed, but they never ceased to walk amongst the literary world that was deeply-rooted in their flesh; their continuing presence was enlivened by the infinite longing for that peculiar space that would empower them to come to terms with the self. Woolf did not imagine that all women would acquire the freedom to write, and she also believed that not all women were gifted writers, so she may have been short-sighted in thinking that only the “gifted” had a general idea that women ought to be worthy of discovery. And, she believed all women possessed the natural ability to express themselves, and that is why she turns to Shakespeare’s “wonderfully gifted sister” (46), Judith, to give voice to the unexpressed, masterminded female that is left to build her own room to create. Had Judith been in possession of her own room and the means of creating, her intellectual, moral, and physical inferiority to men would not have been the prominent contributor of her unfulfilled wishes. However, included in Woolf’s vision was confirmation that through the desire and need of that space, the aching spirit of the female persona was flooded by harsh realities that were inevitable to shut out of sight, which is why their dormant, artistic passions sought a way to propel themselves out of their subdued positions.

Woolf thought that the female writer, despite her undeclared talents, had the opportunity to live more than others because this writer would, in retrospect, release herself from despair by writing, creating—standing in close proximity to her realities. This reality consisted of the unhealed wounds and suppressed pain that lingered for so long as a result of their silence, and it is that throbbing pain that aids in expressing what is truly felt. Her reality,

consisting of inferiority and hopelessness, would cease exaltation once the female spirit would embrace, not the truth that they lack money or education—but instead, that she possesses a gift of divine genius that has the ability to think of “things in themselves” (111) by doing what it wants, what it desires the most, because after all, it is “[her] business to find it and collect it and communicate it” (110). To collect and communicate that certain “it” meant that women would bear the need to free their genius selves by letting go of their fear to not be dependent upon man, and dependent upon social approval, but instead, to form their own legacies as they release themselves of all the resentments that encumbered their existence. So, regardless of the female’s scarcity of money and space, if they truly believe in the power of their creative instincts, it is only then that they would readily come to the realization that they have been summoned by the command of the pen to revolutionize an everlasting sentiment of “peroration” through their own reality, the reality that men have incessantly hindered their life-long quest for existence, but nonetheless, as a result, could have been able to find the determination to succumb to the social limitations that inhibited their mere existence.

The most viable supposition is to understand that women have lived for almost another century after Woolf and that there are literary masterpieces that have been created and attest to the truth that “Shakespeare’s sister [has] put on the body which she [had]...laid down” (114) by signifying a genius tradition that was to be followed and pursued by the desirable woman writer. Women that have the desire to write are going to put on that body in order to express themselves. The room that has been effectuated to create by the power that women have given to Shakespeare’s sister and her legacy has enabled the genius of the woman to evolve over time, since they have maintained, as Woolf advised, “that she would

come if we worked for her, ...even in poverty and obscurity” (114). The oppressed woman created her own sentences—sentences that would shape her into the woman that she aspired to be. Undoubtedly, the impoverished, masked condition of the woman has given her the strength to write—the inspiration to accept and know who she really is. Woolf’s imagination supported the idea that women ought to be fearless of dispelling themselves from the belief of having to be influential, for what truly matters is that they are true to themselves, and in this truth, lies their ability to transform, ultimately creating the self. When women write, they are constructing that identity that represents exactly how they have been able to “escape from the common little sitting-room [to] see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality...or whatever it may be in themselves” (113). They have come to the consensus that it is their very own soul that has to be illuminated in order to become a part of “the great tradition of immortal literature” (Gordon xiii) because the self is an integral element that substantiates why writing is vital when concealed—ceaseless pain dawdles on. When a woman expresses how they feel, their written words are unforgettable, for they analyze the true nature of their inhibited pain, thus, acquiring thorough understanding of what is real. Women now live in the incidence of reality because they have learned to circumvent those that may have blocked their view of themselves, their desire to express the pain that was often buried deep within, pain that could only be suppressed by confronting it through the art of writing. This room has been effectuated by the power that women have given to Shakespeare’s sister and her legacy.

Woolf emits a sense of relief as she comes to terms with the inference that there is no definite answer to the questions that her observations pursue, for they seem to be useless at the time; there seems to be no specific means of measuring the value of the domestic woman

and her work versus the man that has made money—“they rise and fall from decade to decade” (40). With this revelation, she does insist upon the idea that “if one could state the value of one gift at the moment, those values [would] change...completely” (40). The “gift” she is referring to is the one of writing, of fulfilling the aspiring female writer’s desire to fill that blank, imagined page on the table in the room with the paintings of the voice that has been silenced for so long. Money and power will not be the determinant agent of the woman’s ability to captivate the human spirit through the art of writing because women will “take part in all the activities and exertions that were once denied [to] them” (40); they will find a way to create a room of their own, and that way will evolve once the imaginative work that fiction embodies is webbed and “attached to [their] life...” (41), and even though the attachment will barely be traceable, it will be the sole constituent of the transformation that will ensue for the female writer of fiction. The oppressed and obscured woman, the “incorporeal creatures,” will create a space, a room that exclusively belongs to them, in which they will identify the self on the basis of their suffering as human beings as they confess how the pain of living in a male dominated world had them “locked up, beaten and flung” (43), in a room that detached them from the world of creativity and art.

When Woolf proclaimed that “good books [were] desired” (109), she was certain that women were the good writers, and that their experiences, which were on a spectrum of subjugation, those that displayed a variability of human obscurity, were the necessary transformative tool of empowerment, for they would eventually find their own space—their room to write. The creative power of the female differs vastly from the creative power of the male, since the woman writes from the emotions that stem from the heart. Woolf’s exploration of Mary Carmichael’s writing compelled her to acknowledge that the human heart demands one to

write about what she claims to be “very serious, very profound and very humane underneath” (92), for the unconscious mind cannot control the emotions that are felt. Using Carmichael’s writing, Woolf evidenced just how social constraints had been broken, and how they no longer determined how or what women should write about; she had “gone further and broken the sequence—the expected order” (91); she wrote like a woman desired to write by expressing the natural order of the feelings that had perhaps pained her for so long. The effect of her writing was arcane to Woolf, but it nonetheless proved that she possessed that peculiar gift that would open a space for her writing. She had done what other women may have been afraid to do a century prior to her time—Woolf had discovered that Carmichael’s writing “brought buried things to light and made one wonder what need there had been to bury them” (92). She truly believed that writing as a female, writing about what pained her, brought solace to the unidentified female persona, for she demonstrated that the pages she had written were insensible and detached from the ideals demanded by sexual quality and the male persona. As a result, she had created a room to write, and Woolf confirmed that a curtain had been shuddered in the drawing room—in another hundred years better novels would be written.

Woolf’s imagination has a consoling effect on the future of women and fiction; it declares that when the female engages in the act of writing, it is crucial to dismiss all the reservations that may impede her ability to write. Manifested in its obscurity, the female identity can only be realized when the whole of the mind lies wide open, and the writer is communicating her experience with perfect fullness, which further attests that freedom and peace coexist within the writer’s spirit in order to give rise to a new identity. The curtains must be closely drawn to be able to discover that as a woman that has endured pain and

suffering, a room of their own will allow them to do what Woolf suggested: “pluck the petals from a rose or watch the swans float calmly down the river” (Woolf 104)—pain can be beautiful, like a rose, when it is expressed through the supreme act of writing, and it is only when that is done that a sense of the self, with time, will result in the emancipation of a newfound persona. Women have actually gained a room, and that space must not be wasted; it ought to be “put in the form of fiction” (Woolf 115) because true beauty lies in the ways that the female persona writes herself—it is those creative forces that invigorate a whole new way of being, of existing, and there is nothing in the universe that can ever take its place.

### Woolf’s Vision

Woolf’s visions were already perceived in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” and then evolved furthermore in *The Diary of a Young Girl*, and *The Color Purple* through her evaluation of women and fiction, since they are valuable texts that convey how a female has the ability to break free from the forces of her subjugation through the process of writing, and thus, create an identity for themselves. These three compelling texts withhold the test of time that Woolf aimed at expounding because they identify how women found a room of their own, and how in that room, they were able to find the space they had sought and deserved to live and write—to free themselves from all limitations, from getting fearfully depressed. Women’s lives are encompassed, and the ideals of identity construction of a female through the act of writing, reveal that as a healing mechanism, the female characters progressed from their silenced stance to finding a voice, a voice that expressed their deepest thoughts and feelings. Through writing, confessing their heartbreaking stories, the unnamed narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” Anne in the *Diary*, and Celie in *The Color Purple* were able to initiate the process of negotiating their own identity as artistic human beings that had found

their place in the world. They were no longer the passive spectator that was frightened into submission as a result of male dominance; instead, these female characters took the opportunity to declare their truths, mold their own identity, and commence the feeble process of reclaiming a long-lived dream—to exist.

*“The Yellow Wallpaper”*

Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story, “The Yellow Wallpaper,” lies at the heart of early American feminist literature due to its depiction of the insolences that pervaded the mental and physical health of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Told through a series of collected journal entries, “The Yellow Wallpaper” is narrated in the first person by a woman that has a husband, John, who is a physician, and who has rented an antiquated mansion for the summer as a means of treating his wives presumed “depression.” The unnamed narrator divulges a desire to write but is forbidden to do so, since her husband feels that it is in her best interest to rest as much as possible for the sake of her wellbeing. In the upstairs room that the couple has occupied, and that the narrator has described as “queer,” the walls are covered by torn wallpaper that is yellow—shapeless and patterned by missing patches that ultimately become captivating to the narrator. In hopes of not being discovered, the narrator writes about the wallpaper, analyzing the woman that she sees “creeping” behind its peculiar pattern. The narrator’s imaginings provoke her to further read into the design of the yellow wallpaper that emits a representation of a female that is trapped behind the bars of confinement, and ultimately, enable her to construct a new identity.

Exploring the role of women in America during the 1800’s and early 1900’s, Gilman highlighted issues that stood within the realm of the repressive forces of the patriarchal society through her writing of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” for the narrator’s presumed insanity

may have supposed the medical, professional, and societal oppression against women at the time. Perceived as acting on the basis of their best interest for women in mind, men seemed to have viewed women as mentally weak, delicate and unable to function in a male dominated society. As evidenced in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” women were even discouraged from writing because it would perhaps create an identity, a persona that would in turn signify a woman’s defiance—breaking away from social constraints. Consequently, the narrator of Gilman’s story finds a space to create, despite the confinement that her husband has subjected her to, for she reads into the designs of the paper, and is able to create her own text—her identity. She creates an artistic masterpiece through what she imagines she is reading on the wall. As the narrator writes and describes the feelings that the wallpaper evokes, she is able to escape from her reality, thus validating Woolf’s predictions about women and fiction—writing was a form of existence for women at a time when rights were limited to them.

#### *The Diary of a Young Girl*

Anne Frank, the protagonist of the infamous Holocaust tragic story, who is forced to hide in a secret annex in hopes of not falling prey to Hitler’s destructive powers, paints a portrait of the lasting feelings of loneliness and being misunderstood at a time of upheaval by writing in her diary. As a victim of Hitler’s organization to eradicate all the Jews, Anne felt compelled to express sincere thankfulness to her diary for being the confidant with whom she was able to share her innermost thoughts. Anne often explained that she was not at ease when she expressed her inner emotions, even around those that may have been the closest to her, which clearly signified a perplexed state of mind and understanding of the self.

Despite the excitement that Anne felt over maturing into a woman, and the menace of war that permeated her surroundings, Anne realized that she and her friends talk only about insignificant topics. It is those trivial conversations and ideals that force her to feel imprisoned, unable to come to terms with who she really is as a young, teenage girl. The only way that Anne can cope with the dire circumstances that she and her family have been subjected to as a result of the Holocaust is by forming an authentic space for writing in the diary that was gifted to her for her fourteenth birthday. Anne realizes that the pen is indeed mightier than the sword, for she inadvertently constructs her identity. As a victim of the Nazi Regime, Anne's existence was banished when she was forced to remain hidden in confined space, the annex; and therefore, her identity is forced to be closed off. Left with no other choice but to defeat the obstructions that inflicted her state of depravation, Anne found that expanse, a room of her own that enabled her to create a more favorable world than the one she was actually living in as a prisoner. The secret annex, a punitive space that she was obligated to live in consisted of a secret entrance that was hidden by a revolving bookcase, which ironically served as a portal of entry to the world of artistic creativity. Woolf's speculative eye would have observed that the secret annex was a private space where the "vision of loneliness and riot" (Woolf 62) by the Nazis would consume the female spirit. However, she would also have a keen idea of how Anne could alleviate her despair; she would oppose Anne's silenced voice by imploring her to take one of the thousands of pens that are ready to advocate what having a room of one's own to write fiction because she would indefinitely discover a new self in relation to her reality. Even though her present world consisted of harsh realities that forbade her from being able to live a normal life, the life that would not be dominated by a male dominated world, she

incessantly refined her state of mind and heart by believing that she could change her present through the power of language. Writing in her diary serves as a testament to one truth: the truth that the human soul, when aggrieved by the inevitable forces of an evil being can open a space to create and identify the self. Anne is able to transform from the fearful and depressed, young girl consumed by dissipation, silence, and misery to a hopeful human being that sees her existence through her ceaseless desire to write, which is the sole constituent of her ability to change her world.

### *The Color Purple*

Alice Walker's conception of the poor, unschooled fourteen-year-old, Celie, who lives in a rural area of the South—the Jim Crow South, has never been afforded an opportunity to expose herself to the outside world that she subsists in. As a victim of violence—sexual, physical, and emotional abuse by her father, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, Celie is unauthoritative and quite the passive female that has learned to accede to her heart-rending circumstances. In order to escape from the unpleasant life and the violent abuse from her father, Celie finds solace in writing letters to God, letters that give her the fierce strength to confront her fraught condition as a woman, mother, sister, and daughter. At the onset of her story, Celie addressed her letters to God, since she is oblivious to what He truly is or represents. In her mind, the only person she can confess her aching and discomfort to is to this spiritual being that she thinks she knows but does not truly understand. For Celie, writing represents the process of healing from a nonexistent state of being, and it also determines that an identity has been erected on the basis of ceaseless pain. What this means is that writing has enabled her to confront the demons that have ceased her existence. She discovers that she is not ugly, and that she can be loved when the beautiful, Shug Avery,

befriends her. When Celie confesses her thoughts and feelings about the disapproving life that has been afforded to her, she discovers who she really is as a woman, for not only has she found and created a space to confront the aching pain that forsakes her to exist in the world, she has learned that as a female she does not have to succumb to abuse—that she can fulfill her desire to be if she writes about what has ailed her for so long. The letter writing that Celie has apprehended evolves into something more grandeur—not only a room, but a house with the foundation that allows for her to awaken from her state of anguish and isolation.

Through the newly constructed identification of the self, Celie articulates a new-found persona that is constructed with powerful words that have emerged from her disparity. The emancipation of Celie is a mere representation of that female artist that often struggles to exist, to be. Celie is the black, female artist that created a history for herself by meeting her past experiences through her writing. The house she creates, which represents her identity, is formed from what was not taken from her—the pain of being oppressed, which was never written, and then becomes an original discourse—her experiences in her own language, and a new text emerges, a text that in retrospect constructs her identity. By writing such a modernist text, the author of *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker, has displayed a text in the epistolary form, which ultimately establishes itself as a production of art in which language is a critical element that aides in influencing the vision of constructing an identity through the profound act of writing. Alice Walker is, undoubtedly, the full manifestation of Woolf's “gifted” woman who has been able to discover a world of her own. She is that female that embodies the gift of language that has the power to give a voice to those who are masked, silenced—she has instilled the value of Woolf's vision by being in possession of money and

a room of her own to have the freedom to create magical characters, characters like Celie that demonstrate how the act of writing constructs an identity.

## CHAPTER III

## THE BARRED WOMAN'S ESCAPE ROOM

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's, "The Yellow Wallpaper," is a rich text that has often been read in different, contradictory ways, and according to Jurgen Walter's, "The Yellow Wallpaper: The Ambivalence of Changing Discourse," the richness that this text embodies stems from the fact that it has consistently been approached from varying perspectives. Knowing this fact about this work of fiction, Walter argues that the uncertainties and contradictions continue to remain an unresolved issue because Gilman wrote at a time "when major issues raised by her story were at the center of changing discourse" (195), and she focuses on the change in the use of wallpaper in interior decoration, the debate about the significance of the color yellow, and the controversial effects that circulate around the "intellectual activity" on women's health.

Of these three pertinent issues that consistently seem to be a topic of discussion for Perkins Gilman's: "The Yellow Wallpaper," it is imperative to hone in on Wolter's section "Writing and Reading: A Text of One's Own," for it may be perceived as a supportive element in the theorization of women and their inability to create, to write. Wolter cites various males and their views of women and their state of mind to further attest that "the increase in insanity is due to [their] increase in education" (202), which George Savage mentioned in his 1884 *Analysis of Insanity and Allied Neuroses*. Gilman has raised her voice about this opinion through her very own writing as "diarists" seem to be working with "the dead paper of her journal and the living paper on the wall" (203), since she is brilliantly able to read the wallpaper with a code that only she understands and then writes two "subversive stories"—one on her diary and the other on the wall. It is through this peculiar coding that

Gilman is able to develop a profound possession toward the new text she has now written because according to Wolter, “she learns to see the paper as a surface used by her husband and by society for concealment” (203). What this means is that as a woman chained by the demands of a patriarchal society, she has perhaps been able to identify herself through this new text she is now reading, the yellow paper on the wall. At the beginning, the narrator of Gilman’s story read the yellow paper as an “enemy,” but then as she delves into its significance, it becomes a more “meaningful signifier” for her as she is able to “turn her reading of the other into a knowledge of herself, a knowledge that gives power” (203). Wolter’s analysis then suggests that Gilman’s narrator has in fact been able to write her own story, a story of her suffering and her liberation, which in turn, “restores life to her as a female reader who can then become a writer of her own text” (204). When the narrator writes her text on the wall, she is then able to gain control of herself, thus she develops the strong willingness and determination to write, which implies, according to Wolter, that her husband refuses to allow her to express her innermost thoughts and feelings. So, the reader is finally able to map out how she, the narrator, has found her identity as the story moves forward because her sentences initiate more and more, with “I,” which is questionable, since “I” is not the only characteristic that her language embodies; there are more pertinent elements beyond her sentences that indicate who and what she has constructed through what the wallpaper reverberates.

In “The Reading Habit and ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’,” Barbara Hochman points out that there has been a lot of writing about Gilman and her relation to the writing discourse, but that her relation to reading is deserving of much more attention than it has gotten in the past, and that at the ending of the nineteenth century, critics were more concerned with the “pros

and cons of what was known as the reading habit” (89). This reading habit embodies those uncertainties that exist and are “deeply ingrained” in the culture of the literature that Gilman wrote. Hochman, suggests, that *The Yellow Wallpaper* represents the common anxiety that arouses from certain kinds of fiction reading. This fiction reading in regards to “The Yellow Wallpaper” is one of an imagined female persona that stands behind bars, representing the “patriarchal text in which literary women [ ... ] are trapped” (91), and when read, it is read to escape through the ability to project and identify. Hochman believes that Gilman’s very own, conflicted relation to the art of reading as well as her “painful inability to read at all during the emotional upheaval on which the story is based” (91) is reflected through the narrator’s protagonist.

Throughout the course of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the narrator does become a reader herself as she reads the paper on the walls that surround and consume her, and as it is known, the story initiates with a clear focus on what the narrator has written herself. However, Hochman dismisses the importance of the discussions of the story that do emphasize the narrator’s yearning to be a writer, and instead, claims that “the narrator turns out to be far more persistent as a reader than she has been as a writer, and her commitment only increases as the story continues” (95). This idea is debatable because one could argue that as an effective reader, the narrator is creating, writing, her very own text in hopes of freeing herself from the confined walls that encapsulate her mere existence. Readers do know that as “She becomes fond of the room...because of the paper” (95), she is determined to identify herself as the writer she longs to be. Once again, the notion of a woman’s depravity in the realm of self-expression through writing is reflected as readers see that the narrator’s husband, John, views his wife as “fanciful,” and as a result, often aims at dismissing all of her ideas in order

to prohibit her from creating a space for her to create, to write. Hochman concludes that “The Yellow Wallpaper” “reflects the destructive consequences of solitary reading for purposes of escape and for the vicarious satisfactions of identification... and at the same time, the story, ... attests to a transformative potential of reading” (103), which is agreeable, but most important is still the fact that this fictional masterpiece has the potential to be read as a forceful element that very well manifests itself in the reality of its true nature—its ability to transform the self by empowering its narrator, a woman, to free herself through her capability of finding a space or a room to draft a new text; this text is the one that will heal her and set her free of all boundaries once she writes it.

There is no doubt that Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” has consistently found its place in literary studies, omitting it from an American Literature Anthology is inconceivable. In “But One Expects That Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” and the Shifting Light of Scholarship,” Julie Bates Dock has started an interesting conversation about the shifts in criticism that have transpired over the course of time from one era to another, which sheds some light on the evidence that borders the story. In her article, Dock substantiates how the textual variants and diary entries of the *Wallpaper* are signifiers of the critical elements it seems to embody. For example, the “hyphen in wallpaper” (54) may seem like a minor variant of the text, but it does seem to still have consequences for the way it may be interpreted, just as something more grandeur, like the issues that stem around gender throughout the story.

Dock’s conversation about Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” may be vital to the theoretical assumptions about the role of women in a patriarchal society and how through their desire to write, to create their text, or their identity, they are able to find a space for

themselves. Because Dock points out that “The story is presented as if it were the narrator’s private journal, and the section breaks demarcate entries” (55), and that these breaks are utilized to illustrate the narrator’s dire circumstances as well as her state of mind, one may concur that the idea of writing in itself is depleted from the nature of the woman that has the desire to write. The constant disruptions in the narrator’s quest to write indicate that her husband “hates to have [her] write a word” (55). It is quite clear then that the narrator has no other choice, but to create her own writing on the yellow wallpaper that permeates her confined existence. Dock also suggests that some of the other section breaks in the story indicate the narrator’s fluctuating moods, and these moods, however, are indicative, in my opinion, of her enthusiasm as she is able to liberate herself by immersing in pure contentment through her newly created text, the wallpaper. To end her conversation about Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper,” she suggests that world of American literature would not be the same without it, and in order to be able to understand such stories and the culture that produced them, initially, “requires careful scrutiny of assumptions made by critics and by texts and writers of the past” (62). Interestingly, Dock suggests that the motives as well as the methods that authors and scholars use to study literature need to be reassessed, and that “the cycle of revaluation will continue as long as the vitality of literary texts endures” (63), which she expects to be found in scholarship. Her point of view can only further attest to the opinion that even though critical literary texts, such as “The Yellow Wallpaper,” although interpreted over and over again, can consistently be interpreted in a new, profound way that may be uncommon to the world of criticism.

Criticism about “The Yellow Wallpaper” consistently stems around the same ideas—mental instability and emotional distress. It seems that literary critics are persistent about the

approach they take to analyze Gilman's story. However, in "The Writing Cure: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Anna O., and Hysterical Writing," Diane Price Hall writes about her exploration of the relationship that coexists amongst hysteria and feminist writing, and in order to conduct a thorough exploration of her subject matter, she worked with the theories about feminine sexuality that identified the "roles of language and silence" (53) in Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" as well as Pappenheim's illnesses and cures, which enabled her to further explore the role that writing played in relieving women of their illnesses. Hall discovered that when a woman is the writing subject, a "revision of metaphors" ensues, thus validating a historical truth that in the male dominant system, the woman that has been known to be the subject and inspiration for literature cannot be the actual subject that writes, so in becoming a writer, a woman becomes a "subject who produces that which is visible" (53), ensuring that as a subject that is now speaking, using language, she is a writer that has inhabited a new and different position. This position, in return, executes an open door to opportunities and possibilities.

Hall's theories are a testament to Virginia Woolf's ideas in *A Room of One's Own* about women and fiction, since the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is prohibited from creating a space for herself, a room of her own to write. Even though the narrator's husband believes that she should refrain from "touch[ing] a pen...or pencil again" (52) due to her state of "hysteria," she is a reflection of the ways that women were able to escape from their confinement, because it is through her own reading of the wallpaper that the creation of a new text occurs, this form of writing executes a newfound identity for herself, thus visibly representing her place in a society that has misrepresented her gender. The "work that [the narrator] has been forbidden to do is writing" (69), but nonetheless, she is able to "maintain

her subjectivity” (70). Hall’s final notes revolve around the notion that Gilman was able to make a position for herself in the literary world by writing “The Yellow Wallpaper,” for she made it a visible subject as writing could take her places and free her of her own hysterical state of mind. Hall’s assertion that Gilman herself was able to cure her illness through writing may be valid, but what is more crucial and arguable is the belief that Gilman’s narrator, too, found freedom in her ability to write through her way of reading into the yellow wallpaper on her secluded walls; that writing or newly created text was her space, perhaps her “metaphorical place.”

Interestingly, in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” a room is assigned to its narrator, but in this room, she is prohibited from doing what she often desires to do the most, to write. However, the unnamed narrator seems to embody these “certain advantages which women of far greater gift lacked... [her husband was] no longer the opposing faction” (Woolf 92) in her state of not being; she, indeed, did not waste any of her time alone in that room on fencing against her husband’s commands. And, despite her silenced stance amongst the male dominated society that she was trapped in, she blatantly validates Woolf’s assertions about seeing things in of themselves, seeing them for the reality that they impose on the self, undermining what may result as a consequence of their boldness. The narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” did not “ruin her peace of mind longing for travel, experience and a knowledge of the world and character that were denied [to] her” (Woolf 92) by her husband; she found freedom in expressing what she saw through the wallpaper by writing in her journal—she created a space for herself in the room that was already designated for her. Seeing the formation of a woman that seems to “creep” about the bars that confined her, the narrator displays what Woolf analyzed in Carmichael’s writing: “small things [that] showed

that perhaps they were not small after all” (92). Suddenly, the wallpaper was not insignificant, or repulsing to her; it inspired her to identify herself as a woman that is able to set herself free. The narrator’s ability to write, in her mind, despite the unfavorable circumstance that she was forced to endure by her husband, substantiate Woolf’s explorations about the “buried things” (92) that are brought to light, and how there is no need to bury them deep within the soul, because it is often what ails the depraved and disheartened human being that drives them to find themselves. Hall asserts that in her essay, “Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper,’” Gilman claimed that her short story “was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked,” which is agreeable, since it flagged the way for other voiceless female writers that wanted to establish a room of their own in a male dominated society. The confessions that Gilman’s narrator accomplishes on the pages of her journal allowed her to stand amongst the “crowd at the fence on the race-course” (Woolf 93) of women and literature; she was a living presence of Woolf’s imagining of Shakespeare’s sister, for she lived and managed to survive through the newly constructed self.

For the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the blank paper in her journal is anything but dead, for she uses it as a protective shield that allows her to remain undisclosed about her decision to “write for a while in spite of [her husband, John]” (Gilman 10); she is able to live—to be—through the powerful, descriptive words that she writes about the “stripped off...paper—in great patches” (Gilman 10) on the wall of the room that has been assigned to her; and consequently creates her own language and identity. The narrator has a strong willingness and desire to write, despite the mere fact that John forbids her “imaginative power and habit of story-making” (Gilman 10), which ultimately drive her to

seek for that intimate space that will consent her to cross the threshold onto a zone of acknowledgement, of being able to fully understand the dire circumstances that she is being subjected to as a woman; she is deprived of expressing her feelings through the art of writing. A room with a peculiar designed wallpaper has already been assigned to her by her husband, and in retrospect, it is that room that he believes will cease her “nervous weakness,” and that will eventually aid in her ability to “get well faster” (Gilman 10). With its recurrence of patterned spots, the wallpaper and its “sub-pattern[s] in different shades” (10) ought to assure that she abides by the roles and expectations that society has set for her as a woman, but ironically, it is its particularity and “irritating” demeanor that empower her to set herself free as she writes her confessions about the “strange, provoking, formless sort of figure” (Gilman 15) she sees through the paper. The nameless narrator admits that the wallpaper is “one of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin” (Gilman 12), and with this admission, she has inadvertently declared that her way of reading the wallpaper is beyond what is permissible for her to perceive as a female living in a male dominated society. She reads the pattern on the wall in a way that it has perhaps never been configured before with “each breadth [standing] alone, the bloated curves and flourishes... go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity” (Gilman 17), and it is its complacency that initially gives rise to what is an unconscious construction of her newfound persona. But, even though at first, the wall paper seems to have a “vicious influence” on her, the narrator unconsciously finds solace in the blank pages of her journal, and it is then that she begins to confess her inner most thoughts and feelings. Consequently, the negative influence that the brash, yellow wallpaper assumes is what compels her to find an authentic space to confess what she cannot reveal to anyone, for she is not allowed “to have any advice

and companionship about [her] work” (Gilman 10). The narrator takes it upon herself to find the only available means of space to create, and to look at things as they are in and of themselves, as Woolf had suggested. Therefore, the blank pages of the narrator’s journal initiate an “everlastingness” within the spirit of this yearning writer as she takes reign of what she feels has the power to set her free—her own language, the words that she is willing to write in order to confess what she truly sees behind what seems to be an insignificant pattern. She immediately confesses that the yellow paper embodies a pattern that seems to “stare at her up and down” (Gilman 10), a pattern that manifests itself in the affluence of its expression—it is an “inanimate” thing that seems to be directing her toward her plan of escape from her dominating husband, John.

The pattern that the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” has formulated is one that routs her oppressed state, for she writes her way out of the room in hopes of becoming the other, and the only way that she is able to exist is to use language as a means of transformation—what she sees through the designs of the yellow wallpaper is what she has written herself to become. As she reads more into the wallpaper, the narrator considers herself “lucky that John kept [her there]” (Gilman 18) because she can see that “there are things in that paper that nobody knows but [her], or ever will” (Gilman 19). What she sees has an unconventional attribute that she knows is very unusual; but nonetheless, its consistent shape of a woman that seems to be “stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern” (Gilman 19) is that “I” that she has found the space to create. As she fills the pages of her journal with the description of what she reads on the wall, “the faint figure behind [the wallpaper] that seems to shake the pattern” (Gilman 19) clearly represents her own pursuit of escape as it proves that all she wanted was to get out of her subdued position.

The language that she wields upon her own writing confesses a hidden truth—"On a pattern like [the one she has created], by daylight, there is a lack of sequence, a defiance of law, that is a constant irritant to a normal mind" (Gilman 20). Her desire to write, to be, is being fulfilled as she recognizes that when the sun glares upon the windows of the room, there is a sudden change that quickly ensues as the light sets on the yellow wallpaper. When she confesses that the paper changes completely as "the moon shines in all night when there is a moon" (Gilman 21), the narrator comes to terms with the reality of what she has in fact created; and that is an outside pattern that posits itself as the "bars"—an outside pattern that demonstrates a plain woman behind them. She reveals that she "didn't realize for a long time what the thing was that showed behind" (Gilman 21), and then, with certainty, she claims it is in fact a woman. She is that female character that "by daylights is subdued, quiet" (21), for it is only at night that she can freely be engaged in the marveling act of writing in her own space.

The unnamed narrator finally discovers through her incessant watching at all hours of the night that the front pattern, the bars that she has been seeing, move because it is the woman, the female character that she has formulated that "shakes" those bars of imprisonment, which is her own confinement. When she says that the woman "crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes all over," (Gilman 24), she is validating that her new construction of the self has reached the potentiality of breaking away from all social conventions, for the figure that she sees climbing through the pattern of the wall is her way of expressing what she truly feels; and that is that writing has enabled her to heal from the pain of being silenced—it is her way with words and language that have allowed her to break away from what no other female may have been able to—the dominance of men. The pattern

that she is reading is in fact representative of the male persona that has often depleted the sole existence of the woman, since she claims that “the pattern strangles [the woman] off and turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white” (Gilman 24). However, soon, thereafter, the narrator confesses that she can see the woman creeping out into the outside world at daylight, at all times as she “creeps faster than she can turn” (Gilman 25), which ultimately validates the reality of her now fortunate circumstances—the language that enables her to write about the woman she has created is her very own transformation of the unidentified self.

In the end, with desperation to finally revel in her desirable state of liberation that is manifested in the female identity she has created, the narrator confirms that the pattern of “the bars are too strong” (Gilman 27), men have dominated the freedoms and existence of the gifted woman for far too long, and maybe not all women will be able to identify themselves as she has been able to. When the narrator decides to peel the paper off of the wall, despite the patriarchal, “strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths [that] just shriek with derision!” (Gilman 27), she has ultimately demonstrated what Woolf had observed all along; and that is that as a female, forbidden to write in a room that has been assigned to her, “her gift [of writing, creating], is all grown about with weeds and bound with briars...[and] it had no chance of showing itself for the fine distinguished gift it was” (Woolf 61); until, of course, she creates a space for herself through the powerful language that she imparts on the blank, and now lively pages of her journal. In *Signifying Pain: Constructing and Healing the Self through Writing*, Judith Harris suggests that writers have been able to use “their literary expression as a means of signifying their pain and, through that signification, have found a better way to construct and heal themselves” (xi), and the narrator

of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is no stranger to this assertion, since she conveys just how literary expression is a self-renovating constituent, a form of therapy for her as she transforms a blank journal page into a powerful element of her own language once she comes to the realization that she has “never [seen] so much expression in an inanimate thing before” (Gilman 14). The narrator herself, doubts her instincts, her motivations to write, she says, “I don’t know why I should write this. I don’t want to. I don’t feel able. And I know John would think it absurd. But I must say what I feel and think in some way—it is such a relief!” (Gilman 17). Undoubtedly, the narrator has found a comforting space in her mind for her to write down what she feels because it is the ceaseless pain of her silenced voice that she can no longer bear. Harris believes that when writing through pain, one is engaged in a vital process that compromises liberation for the writer as well as society as a whole. Much emphasis is placed on the unconscious and what is unknown about the self until it is spoken or actually written down, and confessional writing is often a “complicated interplay of subject and object positions” (Gordon xiv), which means that personal writing can definitely be a way of creating identity that consequently results in being able to regain the necessary strength in ego when it is lost due to crisis or unfavorable circumstances.

## CHAPTER IV

## ANNE FRANK'S SECRET SPACE

*The Diary of a Young Girl* has been critically precepted in various ways, and before a thorough analysis can be applied of how it is a text that represents Woolf's visions, it is important to explore the varying ways in which the *Diary* has been studied. In "Writing Herself Against History: Anne Frank's Self-Portrait as A Young Artist" by Rachel Feldhay Brenner, the idea of the female as an artist, despite all limitations is presented. She proposes that Anne Frank's *Diary* is not a testament of the Holocaust carnages when compared to the diaries and concentration camp memoirs that have been written; Frank's text demonstrates the keenness of the Holocaust torture. While Brenner introduces the varying critical receptions that Anne's diary received, she suggests that John Berryman's analysis of the text, the diary, is the most thoughtful and relevant, since he considers it for what it truly is—"an extraordinary piece of writing produced by an extraordinary writer under extraordinary circumstances" (Brenner 108), and that he is also astonished to see that the artistic, as well as the ethical elements it embodies, have often been ignored. By dismissing the idea that the diary is the work of a young girl, he is able to consider it to be an inimitable literary event created by a person that acquires extensive maturity; he perceives the diary as a "narrative of developmental conversion" (108), the transformation of a child that becomes a person as he focuses on understanding the psychological facets of Anne Frank's development. He points out Frank's emotional growth, but primarily focuses on identifying how she develops as a talented writer. Interestingly, Berryman asserts that there is no close parallel to the *Diary*, for its peculiarity is apprising; and therefore, it ought to be placed in its very own category because it is a narrative of life that has the ability to struggle and at the same time is created

by the expected narrative of the anticipation of tragedy. Berryman's reading of Anne Frank's writing indicates that she becomes aware of her impossibility to communicate the dire circumstances that she faces, so consequently, it is that exact consciousness that forges her moral and creative skills, ultimately representing a quest for a 'new narrative form' (109). Her accomplishments as an artist as well as her brave moral ideas allow the reader to defeat the battle against all fears and despair.

"The Apocalyptic Stillness and the Voice of Art," an essential segment in Brenner's argument, rests upon the ideas that have been anticipated about women, literature, and writing— "autobiographers write their lives in order to understand their motivations and attain an extent of self-understanding" (116). Female writers that are able to find their own rooms to create rely upon their past experiences in order to irradiate the current situations and acquire a degree of what may be anticipated. Anne Frank was quite young and could not rely on a past, so she got her strength and support from her desire to be an artist, for despite the nearness of death, writing gave her the hope she sought in order to foresee a future. Her persistence to create signified perhaps her "constant struggle with despair" (116), the pain of being deprived of a room to create.

However, Frank sustains faith in the power of writing because it serves as the element that keeps her alive in her times of despair; being able to create art through language asserts that writing enables her to tolerate her agonizing situation. Undoubtedly, Anne Frank's diary is an heirloom of optimism, of hope, for it exemplifies the battles of despair and pain that are often represented in art by the women that possess the desire to write themselves, ultimately enabling the reader to experience and understand what Woolf had envisioned—a "new form of a life narrative...as it redefines the heroism of resistance" (Woolf 131). The resistance

that Frank experienced serves as a validation of the unfortunate reality that inhibited most of the women that had the desire to express their artistic skill, the desire to write when they find themselves entrapped by a particular system of beliefs. Anne Frank's freedom to express may have been impeded by Hitler's idea of the eradication of all Jews, for she was confined to a limited space in the annex but nonetheless, writing was the sole proprietor of her ability to still exist in a male dominated world, after all.

Barbara Chiarello's opinion of Anne Frank's diary is demonstrated in "The Utopian Space of a Nightmare: *The Diary of Anne Frank*," and it is an interesting sector of the critical reception for Anne Frank's diary when considering the ideals of women, writing, and finding the space to create, since it raises an argument about defining a utopia that at the same time is being endangered by an ever impinging dystopia, which may represent a transformative means of survival for a victim of the Holocaust, Anne Frank. Her diary is evaluated by Chiarello for possible inclusion in a category of utopian literature, but she points out that the task would be more feasible if there was a clearer definition for utopia. She suggests that "the emphasis has changed from the presentation of finished perfection to a more open exploration in which the construction of the individual, and thus the question of another way of being, has become the central issue" (128), and the *Diary* obviously is a creation of the self that does address 'the question of another way of being' (129).

In her diary, Anne mapped out a much better world than the one that was spoken by her reality, which validates the idea that sometimes, a utopia includes more than a picture of what a good life would consist of as well as a claim about what it could and should be—to simply wish what it ought to be becomes a belief that it does not have to be the way it is. The mere fact that Anne insists on changing her present—only in her diary—justifies that she

is able to transform her reality, which is one of depravity, silence, and despair. Anne's desire to write in her diary is the sole constituent of her ability to change her world. "Anne not only could but had to write utopian literature as an affirmation of her 'ideals, dreams, and cherished hopes'" (Chiarello 139), which meant that she had found a unique space to create, to invent herself. Again, it is the females desire to write that enables her to withstand the test of time and cope with the unfavorable experiences endured.

Amidst of the horrific events of the Holocaust, Anne Frank assumed a perfect world through her writing, a world that consisted of being able to survive as it afforded her the hope that she despaired of finding. Anne Frank's diary confirms that when the yearning, female artist finds a room of her own, she has found the freedom that empowers her to fulfill her quest for reinventing herself, or perhaps resisting what Nazi Germany was imposing on her. And, it is always the concealed pain and traumatic experiences that serve as a passage into the world of language and what begs to be understood about it. When Anne is first subjected to live in hiding, her reality consists of grappling with the anxieties of not being discovered, and she is silenced by the fears that consume her obscured existence, but she is immediately on the verge of instilling an immense revolution, deep within her soul the moment she gets the diary. She confesses, "the moment I saw the diary lying on the table among my other birthday presents, I found someone that I can confide in, and hope that it will be a great source of comfort and support" (Frank 1). Anne's longing to engage in the act of writing branches from the desolation that she feels, for she claims that she does not have a friend, and that "no one will believe that a thirteen-year-old girl is completely alone in the world" (Frank 6). Her unfavorable circumstances, suffering under Hitler's anti-Jewish laws, leave her no choice but to create a space for herself where she can emanate what Woolf envisioned

as “the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what [she thinks]” (Woolf 113). Frank admits that “writing in a diary is a really strange experience for someone like me...not only because I have never written anything before, but also because it seems to me that later on neither I nor anyone else will be interested” (6). Anne’s written confessions exemplifies how she is using the diary to create a space for herself. Anne bears an untold story in her heart and mind, a story that compels her to use the power of writing to escape from her “common sitting room” (Woolf 113)—the secret annex—in order to survive, despite the realistic nature of her voiceless stance.

In her diary, Anne Frank admits that her world, which is dominated by the subjugation that Hitler has subjected her to, there is no one that she can entrust to cure her of all ailments; she confirms that writing has the power to set her free, to console her, since “paper has more patience than people” (Frank 6). When she writes, she feels welcomed by the words that she uses to express how she truly feels—in her space, when she is “feeling a little depressed and [sits] at home with [her] chin in [her] hands, bored and listless, wondering” (Frank 6) what will become of her, it is the paper in her diary that offers the serenity she needs to make her feel that she does exist, that she, too, can be. As a young female, with no money or education, Anne bears a true gift, for she “enhances the image of [that] long awaited friend in [her] imagination” (Frank 7) by personifying the diary—she asserts that she has the necessary means of creating, and consequently the diary becomes her confidant—her supporter and friend—Kitty. This denotes Woolf’s vision “that a lock on the door means the power to think for oneself, [and] still [...] the mind [will] rise above [the] things” (Woolf 106) that may be intended to have an adverse, but profound effect on the self, which is exactly what happens to Anne.

Anne confirms that she is a female that possesses an artistic ability within her spirit to create, even if it is in the most inopportune of times. She confesses that when she gets in trouble for talking too much during class time, and after being warned several times, she is assigned extra homework, an essay on the subject of being a “chatterbox.” Confident within the bounds of her limited space, Anne settles on her own flair for the art of writing, even identifying herself as a female when she boasts that “anyone can ramble on and leave big spaces between the words, but the trick [is] to come up with convincing arguments to prove the necessity of talking” (Frank 11), which implicitly indicates that she is in total control of who she is. Anne’s inclination to not leave extensive spaces between words are indicative of the opposition she has placed upon her concealment as a Jewish female; her arguments are the mere words that she is confessing--talking as she writes—convincing herself that what she is forbidden to do is the vehicle that has transposed her from her dejected space onto a more favorable one, which is her own room. She confirms that after the application of much thought, an idea arouses in her, thus permitting her to write three complete pages for her teacher, Mr. Keesing. She “argued that talking [was] a female trait and [she] would do her best to keep it under control, but that [she] would never be able to break [herself] of the habit” (Frank 11). This female trait, talking, manifests itself in Anne’s new-found identity as a voiceless being and a genius writer that embodies the creative, forces of being a female. In the culmination of what she has so intricately observed, Woolf proclaimed that every speech ought to end with inspiration, a peroration that is all together, “particularly exalting and ennobling” (Woolf 110), and in her diary, Anne Frank proves that her identity, which has been formulated on the basis of the room she has created for herself by writing in her diary, is one that is highly dependent upon herself as well as the influence that writing has exerted

on her immediate as well as realistic future. The diary and the secret space, together, create a room of her own where she free's herself. Anne's speech, her confessions on the papers of her diary, demonstrate that she has come to terms with who and what she is at the time. She admits that she is "becoming more and more independent [...] Young as [she] is, [she] face[s] life with more courage and [has] a better and truer sense" (Frank 262) of life, itself. Anne's words declare an unconceivable truth that modes her ability to exist as she learns to believe and understand that she can be herself, which is more important than anything else. Thinking of "things" in themselves, which is what Woolf suggested, is Anne's way of doing what she wants, what she often desires—to write-to create; and in doing so, she suggests an enthusiastic influence upon the future of other silenced women, for she expresses, "I know what I want, I have a goal, I have opinions, a religion and love...I know that I'm a woman, a woman with inner strength and a great deal of courage" (Frank 263). The only way that Anne has been able to circumvent the anguish and pain of being hidden in a forbidden space is by creating a room, which she found by writing, confessing her reality. Anne's future is not an integral constituent of her newly created self, because she found a way to exist by living in the moment—she is confident that regardless of what happens to her, in the end, [she'll] make her voice heard, [she'll] go out into the world and work for mankind!" (Frank 263).

As Anne is approaching the ending of her written story in her diary, she makes a bold statement that may be considered improper, even unconventional, but that coherently validates Woolf's assertion that "the creative powers of [the woman] differs greatly from the creative power of men" (Woolf 87). Anne confesses that one of the facets of life that ponders heavily in her mind and bothers her is "why women have been, and still are thought

to be so inferior to men” (Frank 319); she claims that it is “easy to say it is unfair, but that’s not enough for [her]; [she’d] really like to know the reason for [such] great injustice!” (Frank 319), which signifies that she is living in the existence and presence of her own room. The identity that she has constructed through her ability to write have enabled her to actually question such notions, and there is no doubt that she was willing and ready to find a way to assure that all the women of the universe ought to find their space to create, despite the restrictive powers she had to endure. Virginia Woolf’s visions, her observations about women and fiction, did surface a way for Anne Frank to identify herself, not only as a writer, but as a woman that recognized and validated her genius and superiority as a result. Anne now identifies herself as that modern woman that has every right and ability to be independent, regardless of those that may inhibit her existence. She admits that her new identity, takes precedence when and only if she is alone, since she “knows exactly how [she’d] like to be, how she [is...] on the inside [...she] is only like that with herself. And perhaps that’s why—[she] thinks of [herself] happy on the inside” (Frank 336). If admitting that she is guided by the Anne that lives within, the one she has been able to create herself through writing in a room of her own, “but that on the outside [she] is nothing but a frolicsome little goat tugging at its tether” (Frank 337) is not a testament of what Woolf had maintained—that Judith, Shakespeare’s sister, would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in...obscurity is worthwhile” (Woolf 114), then what is? Anne has become an occupant of Woolf’s room, for she “believe[s] that in the course of the next century the notion that it’s a woman’s duty to have children will change and make way for the respect and admiration of all women, who bear their burdens without complaint or a lot of pompous words!” (Frank 320). She is Anne Frank, a young girl that has written in her diary in order to

be, not Anne Frank, the young, Jewish girl that has to “keep trying to find a way to become what [she’d] like to be and what could be if...if only there were no other people in the world” (Frank 337).

From her very own conception of a merely, private space, she discovers that she has risen beyond all societal expectations, and creates who she, instead, truly is. The nature of her confinement has facilitated Anne Frank’s construction of the self, since the hidden space behind a bookshelf summons her to accept that “her freedom was severely restricted” (Frank 8); as a human being that places herself in a space that she has created for herself, she makes sure that she has the necessary action to become—to exist, even if it means that she has to make it by writing herself, since she cannot find it in her immediate, ominous circumstance. When Anne writes that “After May 1940 the good times were few and far between.... [and] Jews were required to wear a yellow star” (Frank 8), she epitomizes what Woolf had observed of those individuals—women—that stood against the “many rebellions [that would] be fermented in the masses of life” (Woolf 69). For Anne, the yellow star signified her inferiority, not only as a Jew, but as a female, and in her own, created space, she did find a way to express how she truly felt. Writing, over and over, the words, “Jews were required to...and Jews were forbidden to...but life went on” (Frank 8) evidenced exactly how she fulfilled her need of “exercise for [her] faculties” (Woolf 69). The faculties that she entertained by writing allowed her to dismiss her “suffering from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation” (Woolf 67); and thus, gave rise to the female genius that she was wholly and entirely.

When Woolf claimed that “women had been sitting indoors for ...millions of years, [and that] the very walls [that inhibited their existence were] permeated by their creative

force” (Woolf 87), she had inherently proclaimed what Anne was identifying through her construction of the self; writing did “overcharge the capacity of [the] bricks and mortar” that stood upon the indignation of her desire to write, for she “harnessed [herself] to [the pen]” (Woolf 87), and discovered her own room to exist, freely, without ever having to remain conscious of who or what could thwart her presence. Even though Anne is “chained to one spot, without any rights, but with a thousand obligations” (Frank 262), she confirms that writing in her diary has enabled her to “put [her] feelings aside; [she] must be brave and strong, bear discomfort without complaint, do whatever in [her] power” (Frank 262) to trust that one day, the war will cease, and her realistic life will not be forsaken.

## CHAPTER V

## THE EMANCIPATION OF CELIE

The feminist novel, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker is also deemed as a literary masterpiece that depicts the female artists struggle to exist, to be, for it is merely symbolic of the female writer's "room" where it stands to be recognized as the broader concept of how Walker, herself, has become that female that has a loud voice, is read, and ultimately studied. Lindsey Tucker's article, "Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*: Emergent Woman, Emergent Text" asserts that the black female artist must create a history for herself by initially "re-possessing the past" (82), and what she creates must be formed from what was not taken from her—what was never written, so that it then becomes an original discourse, her experiences in her own language. By writing such a modernist text, Walker has displayed a text that establishes itself as a production of art in which language is critical in influencing the vision. According to Tucker, she has definitely "created a text that shows language as power and has also demonstrated through this work what the nature of black women's discourse might be" (82), for its epistolary form is quite effective and appropriate when considering the following: the setup of the speakers (Celie and Nettie), the combination of their texts, which create a much larger text that enhances the readers ability to see the disruption that exists between the speaker and the listener, and the ways that the patriarchal society assumes black discourse, the way that women have often been muted and their language skills fitted.

According to Tucker, the epistolary form of this novel is effective because it serves as a "convention that is used mostly by women" (82), in which Josephine Donovan has described as being a genre that is private because of the woman's inferiority in education and

the mere fact that such writings were not expected to be publicized. The letter form was more of a form of writing that described the domesticity of life, informal, and not artistic. *The Color Purple*'s protagonist, Celie, is sexually abused and illiterate when she is fourteen, so the letters that she writes to God are her way of expressing the pain she endures. Celie is provoked to articulate her experiences because it is Walker's way of revealing that there is a need for language; it is because she can write that "Celie is saved from that 'numb and bleeding madness' (Tucker 83). Also, three different types of black women are described by Tucker, the suspended woman, which is immobile, the assimilated woman, which is "ready to move, but without real space to move into" (83), and the emergent woman, which means that a woman is taking the first steps into an unfamiliar area. In *The Color Purple*, Walker incorporates "suspension and assimilation through to emergence" (84) as several voices are constructed based on the letter writing that exists among the sisters, which means that in the end what is created is an emerging black female text.

Tucker's assertions are conducive to the conclusions that have been made about the female writer and her inability to reveal her artistic skills through the power of writing or language, because even though she highlights the notion that as a black woman Celie is representative of the silenced, uneducated, inferior woman, she still presents a strong case for the intent of this study—finding or creating a space, a room of one's own to write. And, the only way to fulfill the female's desires to write is through the language that she uses to reveal pain. As an illiterate, sexually violated, black female, all odds are against Celie in regards to her need to exist, so when she takes the initiative to write to God, the only male figure that she feels she can express her pain to, she has been able to find an outlet that will then allow her to heal, to move forward. The reader can see Celie's emergence as a woman once she

ceases to write to God; and instead, writes to her sister, Nettie. The epistolary form of this novel is one that uniquely serves a critical purpose for the sake of its meaning, for it is the letters that are exchanged that represent the development of Celie's persona—she can exist and consciously uses language to unmute the pain she has been unable to terminate all along. If Virginia Woolf would have picked this novel from the bookcase of literature written by women, she would have definitely been proud of her validations about women and fiction, because *The Color Purple* is the epitome of her vision; Alice Walker is that female novelist whose aspirations of excellence have come to fruition “by courageously acknowledging the limitations of [her] sex” (Woolf 75), she has revealed that it is only the woman that can write about her mind and what it possesses. If she is to be the bearer of despair, then she has earned the right, the space to create the language that will set her free.

Wendy Wall's essay, “Lettered Bodies and Corporeal Texts in *The Color Purple*,” examines the epistolary format of Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*, in which an argument is raised about the protagonist, Celie. Wall suggests she gains strength by using writing as an outlet, but her emotional growth is hampered due to the creation of a private discourse that keeps her from verbalizing her emotions. In the novel, the powerful forces that are maintained by a patriarchy are exemplified as Celie is forced to grapple with “powerlessness” every time her body is subjected to rape and beatings, which, consequently, deny her the ability to form an identity. Because she is subjected to varied forms of abuse, she has never been able to identify who she really is other than a silenced woman. Wall points out that throughout the course of the novel, Celie is able to learn just how to restructure the forces of her oppressed state and to ultimately express herself through the letters that she writes, thus confirming that the letters are a “second body that mediate her

relationship to the power structure in such a way as to give her a voice” (83). It is through the act of writing that Celie develops the ability to define herself against the dominant male persona, allowing her to reestablish the sores and pain inflicted on her body by Mr.

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Wall offers a contradictory assertion in her essay as she claims that although Celie does write her letters in her diary to heal from the sexual violations that she has endured, at the same time, it is that form of text that divides and unifies, for her letters consist of a sequence of detached entries that create a whole. Similarly, then, the ‘self’ that emerges from Celie’s evolvment is what she calls a “decentered” one, since it is unsteadily composed against and split with a “sense of otherness” (83). With these ideas, what Wall is suggesting then is that Celie writes in order to realize the defilement that has often threatened her sense of self, and “her texts seek to recover that ‘goodness’ that would allow her to state her existence without the mark of erasure” (83). And, although it is known that the letters that she writes do not incite a mutual communication, what she is pleading through her letters forms a way for her to identify who she is. It is a complex means of reconstructing herself; but nonetheless, she is able to move toward realizing who she really is through the intervention of language, and it is her letters that give way to reforming the internal experiences that are private.

What is important to understand is that through the act of writing, Celie is able to move forward, to escape form the pain of sexual violence and abuse, thus creating an identity for herself. From the initiation of her letter writing, the words she writes, “He beat me today cause he say I winked at a boy in church [...] I don’t even look at men’s. That’s the truth. I look at women, tho, cause I’m not scared of them” (Walker 5), it is evident that she begins to

find solace and a sense of self through her ability to write. She has used language as her space, her room to create herself. The letters that Celie writes are perhaps the replacement body for Celie as she is able to dismiss the ailments that have deprived her from existing for so long. She emphasizes her male-dominated stance by repeatedly confessing that “He never had a kine word to say to me. Just say you gonna do what your mammy wouldn’t. First he put his thing up against my hip and sort of wiggle it around my pussy. Then he grab hold of my titties. Then he push his thing inside” (Walker 1). The powerful words, the language that Celie uses to describe the dreadful circumstances that she had been subjected to, denote her ability to create herself; it is the pain that she bears deep, within that have given her the fortitude to confess and write. Celie’s wounds are reopened every time she writes about the painful experiences she has endured as a female in a male-dominated space, but it is those resurfaced wounds that give her the courage to release herself from her imprisoned persona by writing about her pain. As the letter writing takes its course, Celie finds herself exposing what had been obscured within her soul for so long. When she writes, “she ugly. He say. But she aint no stranger to hard work. And she clean. And God done fixed her. You can do everything just like you want to and she aint gonna make you feed it or clothe it” (Walker 8), she is also validating how writing has given her the strength to “think of things in themselves” (Woolf 111); the sexual and verbal abuse that has masked her position as a woman has actually given her the strength to engage in the unconventionality and nature of writing to create the self. Once Celie is able to take control of who she is, reunifying herself, transforming from ugly to beautiful, from being stable to an evolved softness, the external forces that had fragmented her are the elements that give her the confidence to reform the confinements that had quieted her all along. These ideas then do justify the belief that the

female persona, when silenced and dismissed, is able to transform into a position of being, of merely existing through the act of writing the self. The silences of the female gendered soul are the powerful force that serves as the passage to a new beginning—it is the language that is spoken to detach themselves from what once was and to recognize what it is now.

For most of the course of Celie's story, established in the letters she writes to God, there is a perceived notion that she has an intimate, unique relationship with God, since she incessantly addresses all of her letters to that being; however, it is not until she starts to write to Nettie, that one discovers the true nature of her over all transformation. She confesses that "she don't write to God no more. I write to [Nettie]... [because God gave her] a lynched daddy, a crazy mama, a lowdown dog of a step pa and a sister [she] probably won't ever see again...the God [she] been praying and writing to is a man. And acts just like all the other mens [she] know. Trifling, forgetful, and lowdown" (Walker 192). This admission suggests that in her newly constructed identity, she has also formulated a conception of what only she believes that God truly is—a man that also dismisses her and ignores her pleas. But, her feelings toward God are resurrected once she realizes that He does, in fact exist. She admits that deep in her heart, she does actually care about God, what He thinks, despite her belief that he "just sit up there glorifying in being deaf" (Walker 193). It is not until she puts into perspective that God is not an actual white man that does not seem to listen to her prayers that she is dumbfounded by the reality that she has just discovered. She recognizes that God is not an actual person, but an existing presence in everything that she is and aspires to be. She knows that "God love everything I love—and a mess of stuff I don't. But more than anything else, God love admiration" (Walker 196), which is how she can determine that she has been able to defeat all of her despair because all hope is restored as she writes and

confesses that God is the one that is “always making little surprises and springing them on [her] when [she] least expect” (Walker 196). Finding a room of her own, an identity that allows her to exist within the realm of all the pain that she has endured as a female is indeed the surprise that she did not expect to find manifested in the power of language, of writing. Having found this room to create, to exist—becomes an even more extensive component of Celie’s newly constructed identity, for she literally creates a house for herself through her imagination of what her life is going to be like once she is able to live in her own actual house, the house that she hopes to obtain one day with rooms, equipped to achieve her artistic desires. Celie writes, “Us talk about houses a lot. How they built, what kind of wood people use. Talk about how to make the outside around your house something that you can use” (Walker 209), which substantiates how Celie’s confidence has evolved to a more promising future for herself as a woman. That something that Celie believes she can use is a space, a room that will house her pant shop, since she has spent quite a bit of time “making pants after pants. [she] got pants in every color and size under the sun. Since [she] started making pants down home, [she] hasn’t been able to stop” (Walker 211), for she is able to acknowledge that she has a genius, artistic ability to create a tangible object that certifies that she is “the dead poet who was Shakespeare’s sister [that has] put on the body which she [had] often laid down” (Woolf 114).

Celie’s palpable talents have come to life on the grounds of the stage that she has set for herself. She realizes that she has got to go out and make a living for herself once the “orders start to come in from everywhere” (Walker 213) for pairs of pants. Celie soon, thereafter, builds a factory to make her pants, and even gets some women to “cut and sew, while [she] sit back and design” (214). She is making her living, and is well on her way.

Celie has definitely found it possible to live and write her “poetry,” as Woolf once said, her story, herself, through what she worked for as a woman that now is—that exists. In her poverty, despair, and obscurity, it was always worth her while to maintain the courage to escape from that common sitting room by writing to confront her reality.

## CHAPTER VI

## WOMEN AND FICTION ARE WOOLF'S FINISHED BUSINESS

Writing, a complex art that enhances one's ability to discover, has certainly served as a means of persuasion. It persuades the human soul to acknowledge its mere existence from a unique perspective that in turn, executes a glorified awakening—a transformation that can only commence by writing consistently. While the individual human can attest to this truth, the exploration and discovery of the self is often manifested within the deprived lives of the female literary characters who more often than not, convey just how the human condition endures life, itself. Some of the most notable literary works embody such truths, a realization of the self by the characters that aim at writing to conceive—to become. “The Yellow Wallpaper,” Anne Frank’s *The Diary of a Young Girl*, and Alice Walker’s feminist novel, *The Color Purple*, demonstrate the power of writing and how it possesses the necessary elements that result in the consummation of a rebirth through its female heroines that have been fettered by the patriarchal constraints of their peculiar world. It is through the act of writing that the women in these literary schemes find out who and what they are, what they are capable of, and that all wounds, when having written, can be healed as a result. Once the female characters recognize that a fierce strength develops within themselves, their conception of being, of existing, revolutionizes the healed soul by empowering the mind, body, and spirit to welcome that newfound identity that had remained dormant for so long. Engaging in the act of writing serves as a transformative mechanism that unties the knotted heartstrings of the soul; it is a window of opportunities that eventually lead to everlasting self-contentment.

When writing represents the process of healing, it demonstrates that the self has found or created a space to confront the pain, thus writing a way out of the anguish and or isolation, which articulates a new beginning through the powerful words that despair demands. “Words can serve to allay anxiety and dread; they can begin to lift the oppressive weight of dolorous moods and infirmity” (Harris 2), which solidifies the proposed circumspection about women and their depravity of creating or expressing through the art of writing—finding a room of their own. In the notable works of literature, “The Yellow Wallpaper,” *The Diary of a Young Girl*, and *The Color Purple*, the female protagonists write about the painful, tragic experiences that have hindered their lively hood as a result of living in a bubble that is confined by the demands of men, which substantiates how writing about the personal translates the “physical world into the world of language where there is interplay between disorder and order, wounding and repair” (Harris 2). In her chapter, “Writing to confess,” from *Remembered Rapture: The Writer at Work*, Bell Hooks points out that the feminist mindset insisted that what is often personal is political; and therefore, encouraged women to self-reflect on their “meaning of life, especially in relation to sexism and male dominance” (60), thus initializing a reawakening in the autobiographical writing of the female. Confessional writing by women evolved as it welcomed a space for “personal confession[s]” (60), but due to the nature of the topics—child abuse, violence, rape, and sexual harassment, the mass media of the patriarchal society belittled its existence because they claimed it was self-absorbed and braggart, if anything. However, despite the variances that exist amongst the circumstances of each of the female protagonists, the female writer, as well as her life, is brought into a state of equipoise in which their life, deprived of all hope, is sustained by “the art that has always informed, if not consecrated life” (Harris 2), writing to

confess. Through their ability to write in their own space, these women have retrieved the necessary confidence to find themselves; it is through words that manifest themselves in painful experiences that they discover just how the female is powerful enough to fly, even though her wings may be fragile, the “monarch butterfly” has indeed found the “leverage in the midst of its migratory climbs” (Harris 2) to free itself of all social constraints and expectations.

The identity that Anne Frank in *The Diary of a Young Girl*, the unnamed narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” and of Celie in *The Color Purple* is constructed on the sole basis of their desire to be; it is the imagined space—the room—the impending lives that consequently bind Woolf to these females’ newly constructed identities. Woolf’s aspirations did assume a task that extended beyond her own talents and expectations, so to assume that *A Room of One’s Own* topic is “inconclusive, that the problem is intrinsically paradoxical or insoluble, ... [that] there is no logical stopping point is inconsistent, for her speculations that if women were given their own rooms—their space to create—they would seek and find an alternative way of life evolves into more definitive results—the truths of who they are. The decent of Judith Shakespeare’s story is not that the lack of money and opportunities hinders the creative genius of the female persona; it is that stories such as hers are recovered and manifested through the female writers that have evolved over time. Woolf’s work sets free the imaginative thought of those that possess the artistic gift of writing and allows the un-lived—and unimagined lives—the interminably obscured woman to endure and to be verified in their own room.

It is the openness of Woolf’s ideal vision that allows one to think about the possible meanings of her subject; it is indeed that vision’s process and command of reflection that

enable future events to reveal themselves, and in doing so, there is a self-realization when women turn to writing as a form of expressing what is felt—when pain is endured, a space must be created in order to heal all wounds—a space to write, and thus, create the self. These healing spaces that the female writer comes in contact with, or creates, arouse a personal understanding of the unfavorable world that surrounds her, thus empowering an everlasting pursuit of self-acceptance. And, in this construction of the self, there is a full manifestation of the movement from a space in a room to an actual house. The unnamed narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” formulates a space in her mind as she writes about the paper on the wall, Anne Frank creates a space to exist, to be, in the secret annex as she confesses, in writing, about her unfavorable circumstances, and Celie in *The Color Purple*, not only forms an identity but creates a home for herself, which is Alice Walker, a female black writer’s realization of Woolf.

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## VITA

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