

III B.A. ENGLISH
Women's Writings in English
17UENC52

Unit-II –Prose

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PROFESSIONS FOR WOMEN

VIRGINIA WOOLF






Women's Writings


- Deals with women's lives and experiences
- Examines social and cultural constructs of gender
- Analyses systems of privilege and oppression




Virginia Woolf

- Born on January 5, 1882
- London, England, UK
- Death - March 28, 1941 (59 years old)
- Drowned herself in the River Ouse
- Recognized as a feminist writer

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- **Parents - Sir Leslie Stephen and Julia Prinsep Jackson**
 - **mother's death suddenly in 1895, caused several nervous breakdowns**
 - **father's death in 1904 caused the most alarming collapse**


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- 1912 - married Leonard Woolf
 - 1912 - Virginia Woolf met and fell in love with Vita Sackville – West and soon began an affair
 - The World War II increased her anxiety and fear


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- first novel - *The Voyage* (1915)
 - wrote nine novels
 - one of the leaders in the Literary movement of modernism
 - used the stream of consciousness technique



Professions for Women

- a speech delivered before a branch of the National Society for Women's Service on Jan 21, 1931
- published posthumously in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*


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- In the profession of literature, fewer experiences peculiar for women
 - Earlier women writers have made the road smooth
 - Fanny Burney , Aphra Behn, Harriet Martineau, Jane Austin, George Eliot.


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- **Material obstacles very few for women writers**
 - **Writing - a reputable and harmless occupation for women**
 - **Family peace not broken**
 - **No demand on the family purse**
 - **Cheapness of writing paper, the reason for the success of women writers**



Virginia Woolf

- Became a journalist by writing articles
- Rewarded on the first day of the following month with a cheque for one pound ten shillings and six pence
- Bought a Persian cat

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- Review of a novel by a famous man
 - Battle with the Angel in the House(a phantom)
 - Description of the Angel in the House :
 - intensely sympathetic, immensely charming, utterly unselfish, excelled in the difficult arts of family life, sacrificed herself daily, never had a mind or wish of her own
 - Her purity - her chief beauty

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- **The Angel in the House's warning to Virginia:**
 - **Be sympathetic, tender**
 - **Flatter & deceive**
 - **Use all the arts and wiles of our sex**
 - **Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own**
 - **Be pure**



Virginia's opinion:

You cannot review a novel without having a mind of your own, without expressing what you think to be true about human relations, morality, sex.

- According to the Angel in the House, a women must
 - charm
 - conciliate
 - tell lies in order to succeed.
- Killing the Angel in the house considered
 - a real experience
 - part of the occupation of a woman writer





- **What is a woman?**

Woolf does not believe that anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill


Next strange experience

- novelist's state of mind
 - to be unconscious
 - a state of perpetual lethargy
 - nothing breaking the illusion
- Comparison to the image of a fisherman lying sunk in dreams
- Telling the truth about her own experience as a body.

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- **Men sensibly allow themselves great freedom in these respects**
 - **Men, her reason told her, would be shocked**
 - **The consciousness of - what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist's state of unconsciousness**



Woman has still many ghosts to fight , many prejudices to overcome. Indeed it will be a longtime still , I (Woolf) think before a woman can sit down to write a book without finding a phantom to be slain, a rock to be dashed against

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- It is necessary
to discuss the ends and the
aims for which we are
fighting
 - Though
rooms have been won
money is being earned
 - Freedom
only a beginning



Discussion and Queries