

le joue l'apprentissage dans le parcours de l'émancipation des femmes ?
ntissage au féminin demeure un sujet de débat complexe, car il se situe au cœur
matiques littéraires, politiques, culturelles, économiques et historiques. Si les
s ont souvent été mises à l'écart du milieu éducatif, elles ont toutefois réussi
basculer l'histoire à travers les luttes constantes et incessantes pour le droit à
tion et donc à l'émancipation. Contrairement à la politique et à la société dont
t à ce sujet est passé sous le silence, les études littéraires lui ont en revanche
ré un espace privilégié. La littérature est l'un des outils indispensables et
aires pour les femmes, leur permettant de s'avancer constamment sur la voie de
endance. C'est ainsi que les récits composés **pour** les femmes et **sur** les femmes
âmî, Corneille, Dostoïevski, Aleramo, Pardo Bazan, Colette, Cervon, Campagne,
Wolf, Lessing, ont trouvé leur écho dans les pages du présent ouvrage. Ce
e propose une approche pluridisciplinaire et multiculturelle autour d'un thème qui
ctualité.

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dans les poèmes de Ferdowsi (935-1020) et Nezâmi (1141-1209). Le projet de thèse est dirigé par Greta Komur
et Michael Barry (Princeton University).

ISBN : 978-2-37496-049-4
22 € TTC



Apprentissages au féminin

l'épure

Apprenties Sages

Apprentissages au féminin

sous la direction de Frédérique Toudoire-Surlapierre,
Alessandra Ballotti et Inkar Kuramayeva

l'épure

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Préface

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« L'apprentissage au féminin » : l'un des paradoxes de ce beau titre consiste à rappeler les contraintes et les limitations sociales et historiques qui ont marqué l'éducation des femmes en même temps qu'il suggère les stratégies indirectes d'adaptation et les modes de résistance qui en ont découlé. Choisir l'expression « au féminin » n'est pas innocente, en un moment où le terme même de « féminin » est de plus en plus sujet à caution, et où on peut considérer au fond que les différences entre hommes et femmes sont finalement minimales (par rapport à des différences entre individus de même sexe). Erving Goffmann soulignait déjà en 1977 dans *L'arrangement des sexes* combien ces différences sont minimales biologiquement et pourraient n'avoir aucun impact social :

Les femmes mettent au monde et non les hommes, elles allaitent leurs enfants, ont des règles, et cela fait partie de leur caractère biologique. De même dans l'ensemble, les femmes sont plus petites, leurs os et leurs muscles sont plus fins que ceux des hommes. Pour que ces faits matériels de la vie n'aient pas d'appréciables conséquences sociales, il suffirait d'un peu d'organisation, mais relativement peu, selon les normes modernes [...]. De plus, appréhender ces très légères différences biologiques – si on les compare à toutes les autres différences existantes – comme étant à l'origine des conséquences sociales qui, semblent-ils, en découlent d'une manière intelligible, suppose tout un ensemble intégré de croyances et de pratiques sociales, ensemble suffisamment vaste et cohérent pour justifier, aux fins de l'analyse, la résurgence de paradigmes fonctionnalistes indémodables¹.

Le titre même de cet ouvrage évoque/invoque donc une historicité qui a vu triompher la suprématie masculine, acculant les femmes à un apprentissage marginalisé des arts ou de la science (et

¹ Goffmann, Erving. *Arrangement des sexes* [*The Arrangement between the Sexes*, 1977], trad. Hervé Maury, présenté par Claude Zaidman. Paris : La Dispute/Snédit, 2002, pp. 42-43.

The Education that Made Them: Virginia Woolf's, Alice Rivaz's and Doris Lessing's Perceptions of Space as a Gateway for Women's Freedom and Emancipation

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Though distanced in time, as well as culturally and linguistically, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), Alice Rivaz (1901-1998) and Doris Lessing (1919-2013) had similar expectations regarding women's access to intellectual freedom and private space. Despite the fact that their literary products encompass multiple contexts and differ formally as well as thematically, areas of shared concerns are identified. Experiencing the same conflicts or struggles caused the authors to have a unique commonality. It is because of such similar experiences that this type of "communication" between the writers appears to have no cultural boundaries. For instance, the idea that talent had been killed for centuries due to the way women were treated in the past is expressed in the writings of Virginia Woolf (*A Room of One's Own*¹), Alice Rivaz (*La Paix des ruches*²) and Doris Lessing (*Martha Quest*³). It was their literary mind, critical insight and the ability to take the perspective of an "outsider", that allowed these women writers to reject the androcentric cultural heritage. While perceiving tradition as an impediment to women's personal growth and emancipation, they equally supported the idea that women's voices need to be heard as forcefully as the men's. Their commitment to art did not prevent them from being active and giving their own account of life. Furthermore, their

¹ Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own* (1929). London : Penguin Books, 2004.

² Rivaz, Alice. *La Paix des ruches* (1947) suivi de *Comptez vos jours* (1966). Lausanne : Société de la Feuille d'Avis, 1970.

³ Lessing, Doris. *Martha Quest* (1952). London : Flamingo, 1993.

personal experiences gave them a more realistic insight in dealing with various social problems and challenging the traditional understanding of gender and race.

The era in which they lived afforded them fertile ground for freedom of speech and self-expression; for, in 20th century, a woman's individual talent became more respected and women found easier access to education than ever before. This was also the moment when "the daughters", unlike their "mothers", could come out of the shadow and break through the barriers of the convention that considered a woman incapable, since « le XX^e siècle est [...] l'époque qui impose un regard neuf sur le passé, ouvrant les chemins à la réécriture d'une histoire... L'idée que la Grande Guerre a bouleversé les rapports de sexe et a émancipé les femmes bien plus que des années ou même des siècles de combats antérieurs est très répandue pendant et au lendemain du conflit⁴. » Until then, ordinary women were limited in their thoughts and actions, had very few opportunities to engage in intellectual activities and express their academic and creative potential. Instead, they mostly lived in the shadows and led a monotonous life. Under the given circumstances, modern female novelists, totally aware of cause and effect relationships, endeavoured to reevaluate the past and break the silence in order to shape a better future for generations to come. Breaking the stereotypical boundaries constructed through centuries of patriarchy, only for the benefit of men, was no longer "utopian". Yet, they were aware of the risks that followed with the transition from a modest, child caretaker and obedient housewife to a modern, emancipated woman.

⁴ Thébaud, Françoise (éd.). *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, vol. 5. Paris : Plon, 1970, p. 31. My translation : "The 20th Century is [...] the age which imposes a new look at the past, opening paths to the rewriting of history... The belief, that the Great War has modified gender relations and emancipated women more than the years or even the centuries of earlier fights, is very widespread during and in the aftermath of the conflict."

This article reviews the role and significance of education and private space in women's emancipation, as well as a transition from the role of the "outsider" to that of a capable woman as it is shown in Virginia Woolf's (*A Room of One's Own*), Alice Rivaz's (*La Paix des ruches*) and Doris Lessing's (*Martha Quest*) writings. Apart from the study of the writers' personal story, the paper explores their ideologies regarding the status of a woman (mainly with a woman writer's one) and her relationship with space.

Currently, there is no critical comparative study encompassing the works of all three novelists. Yet, previous writings have dwelled into the works of Virginia Woolf and Alice Rivaz, as well as, Woolf and Lessing. Valérie Cossy (2002)⁵ draws Woolf and Rivaz together to point out what it means to show resistance under a regime and under the status of an outsider. Her other article *L'ange du foyer et ses avatars chez Virginia Woolf, Catherine Colomb et Alice Rivaz : du sacrifice à l'écriture au féminin*⁶ underlines the joint critical importance of Woolf's, Colomb's and Rivaz's efforts for the development of the women's literature.

Feminist criticism of Woolf's and Lessing's works has been introduced to academia following Elaine Showalter's⁷ *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* in 1970s. As a result, nearly two decades later, Saxton's and Tobin's collection of essays (1994)⁸ explored the novelists' narrative and thematic strategies and celebrate the connection between them in

⁵ Cossy, Valérie. « Dire "nous" au temps du fascisme ; voix de femmes, voix d'outsiders chez Alice Rivaz et Virginia Woolf ». *Le genre de la voix. Equinoxe*, automne 2002, n° 23.

⁶ Cossy, Valérie. « L'ange du foyer et ses avatars chez Virginia Woolf, Alice Rivaz et Catherine Colomb : du sacrifice à l'écriture au féminin ». In Kunz Westerhoff, Dominique (éd.). *Mnémosynes, La réinvention des mythes chez les femmes écrivains*. Genève : Georg, 2008.

⁷ Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton : University Press, 1977.

⁸ Saxton, Ruth. Tobin, Jean. *Woolf and Lessing: Breaking the Mold*. New York : St. Martin's Press, 1994.

view of the female writing tradition driven forward by their critical impulses. Alongside the feminist critique of Woolf and Lessing, by Shawelster, the articles appearing in the 1970s explore the philosophical and psychoanalytical dimensions of their novels. For instance, while examining Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, Nancy Joyner's (1974)⁹ "*The Underside of the Butterfly: Lessing's Debt to Woolf*" reveals the novelists' philosophical and aesthetic principles to be similar, particularly in relation with the representation of time, and at the same time diverse, regarding the development of their themes. Likewise, Barbara Hill Rigney (1979)¹⁰, by adopting psychoanalytic theories in her study of Brontë, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood, focuses on the traumas which the writers' female characters experienced as a result of patriarchal dominance and rigid social norms.

More recent publications examine the novelists' texts in relation with their biographies. Angela Hague (2003)¹¹ studies the impact of external forces on Woolf's and Lessing's writings while emphasizing the importance the novelists gave to intuition. Likewise, Stefanie Winther (2004)¹² draws parallels between Doris Lessing and Virginia Woolf to point out female forms of initiation in Woolf's *Voyage Out* (1915), and in Lessing's *Martha Quest* (1952) and *A Proper Marriage* (1954). While emphasizing the social context introduced by the writers, and the young women's limited chances for self-development, the critic also brings into question the impact of personal experiences on their writings.

⁹ Joyner, Nancy. « The Underside of the Butterfly: Lessing's Debt to Woolf ». *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, September 1974, vol. IV, n° 3, p. 204-211.

¹⁰ Rigney, Barbara Hill. *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist novel: Studies in Brontë, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979.

¹¹ Hague, Angela. *Fiction, Intuition, and Creativity: Studies in Brontë, James, Woolf, and Lessing*. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2003.

¹² Winther, Stefanie. *Weibliche Initiation in den Romanen von Virginia Woolf und Doris Lessing*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2005.

Despite the critics' attempts to acknowledge the similarities between Lessing's and Woolf's narrative strategies or feminist ideas, very few studies focus on the diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives within their texts.

The autobiographical writings and the fragments of the novels discussed in this article support the idea that none of the three writers Virginia Woolf, Alice Rivaz or Doris Lessing would accept to engage in a dialogue with patriarchal society. The writers insisted that a modern woman was faced with a challenge; she had no knowledge passed on from her female predecessors to guide her through her work because as Woolf puts it, "the experience of the mass is behind the single voice", which in the case of these female writers was absent. Virginia Woolf believed that the "masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people"¹³. This brings to light the importance that the writer gave to the representation of reality by thinking through multiple minds, i.e. by conveying multiple perceptions in a single artistic product in order to give birth to a *masterpiece*. The writer herself made an effort to fill the gap in literature under the conditions of the absence of a female "model". She used particular aesthetic methods in order to adopt different ways of speaking and thinking and, consequently, to reveal "the experience of the mass" by folding multiple viewpoints in her narrative (in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*). In this regard, Michael Tratner (1995)¹⁴ insists that Woolf's attempt to do so was aimed at detaching herself from the nineteenth century individualist philosophy and bringing literature into line with political reality, i.e. with the "collectivist political theories, the theories of the mass mind"¹⁵. Antony

¹³ Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, op. cit., p. 65.

¹⁴ Tratner, Michael. *Modernism and Mass Politics: Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Yeats*. Stanford: The University Press, 1995.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Uhlmann¹⁶, on the other hand, puts emphasis on “how the Modernist novel might be understood as a machine for thinking¹⁷” and examines the particularity of Woolf’s aesthetics (together with Joyce’s and Nabokov’s ones) in light with Leibniz’s and Spinoza’s philosophical theories. By analyzing the relationship of logic and sensation in *To the Lighthouse*, the critic comes to the conclusion that “[l]iterature allows an overview that is capable of mixing various viewpoints and drawing them together into the unified perception that is the work. It does this by showing and passing between representations of the multitude of ‘possible worlds’ that inhabit the real¹⁸”. Therefore, literature can use the power of sensation in order to interconnect multiple viewpoints. Uhlmann’s theory explains what Woolf implied when claiming the importance of “thinking by the body of the people¹⁹”. Yet, her primary concern was the lack of female thinkers in literature and the limited chances of women to demonstrate outstanding artistic skills due to the absence of a “model [...] to turn about this way or that” while “[thinking] back through our mothers²⁰”.

While the fragments chosen from Virginia Woolf’s and Alice Rivaz’s fiction and non-fiction show the writers’ feminist perceptions in relation to women’s limited access to financial and intellectual freedom, Doris Lessing’s novel focuses on emancipation and the birth of a rebellious, modern and intellectual woman. The texts analysed here not only help us to understand the role of education and private space in women’s emancipation, but also to observe how these women began to empower themselves by turning from an “outsider” (Alice Rivaz,

¹⁶ Uhlmann, Anthony. *Thinking in Literature: Joyce, Woolf, Nabokov*. London : Bloomsbury Academic, 2011.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

²⁰ Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own*, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

Virginia Woolf) into a “capable woman” (Doris Lessing, *Martha Quest*).

Despite the fact that Virginia Woolf was a frequent guest of the artistic and intellectual salon hosted by Lady Ottoline Morrell, and actively collaborated with the Hogarth Press, as well as with the Bloomsbury Group (as mentioned in her husband Leonard Woolf’s autobiography²¹), the feeling of being excluded from the world had never left her. She expresses it in her own words as such: “I’m fundamentally, I think, an outsider. I do my best work and feel most braced with my back to the wall. It’s an odd feeling though, writing against the current: difficult entirely to disregard the current. Yet of course I shall²².”

When it comes to personal life and its influence on her writings, it is impossible to neglect the childhood traumas which ultimately contributed to Virginia Woolf’s final decision of committing suicide. Her *Early Journals* (1897-1909)²³ are perhaps the best illustration of the mental breakdown she was going through, following the death of her mother when she was fifteen (in 1895), as well as of the “shocks” she experienced as a result of the sudden deaths of her stepmother Stella (in 1897), her father (in 1904) and her brother Thoby (in 1906). After these accumulated tragedies, as an orphan with “no father, no mother, no work” – as she puts it in her own words, she at least had access to “room of [her] own”. The place where she lived before 1904 and which belonged to her family – 22 Hyde Park Gate, had turned into a place of traumatic memories for her, but, a few years later it would become the inspiration for her novel *Jacob’s Room*.

²¹ Woolf, Leonard. *Downhill all the Way: an Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939*. London : The Hogarth Press, 1967.

²² Woolf, Virginia. *A Writer’s Diary*. Woolf, Leonard (éd.). London: The Hogarth Press, 1953, p. 308.

²³ Woolf, Virginia. *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals and “Carlyle’s House and Other Sketches”*. Leaska, Mitchell A. (éd.). London : Pimlico, 2003.

But how exactly did these painful personal experiences shape Woolf as a novelist? Was education the only factor that shaped her development as a writer? Undoubtedly, it was also the voracious reading of numerous novels, essays, articles or biographies, as well as, being a daughter of a literary critic, historian and editor Leslie Stephen, and a member of an upper middle-class English family which gave her the advantage of having a nurturing environment for her intellectual development. Besides this, she studied in King's College at a time when women had not yet gained free access to education. Most importantly, however, Virginia had her father's full support in shaping her intellectual and artistic ambitions unlike in most cases within British society at the time. In *A Room of One's Own* she invites the reader to imagine the dim perspective in a woman's life if such support were absent: "let us suppose that a father from the highest motives did not wish his daughter to leave home and become writer, painter or scholar... there was an enormous body of masculine opinion to the effect that nothing could be expected of women intellectually²⁴." In her own case there is sufficient proof in her *Early Journals* or in her sister Vanessa's papers of an affectionate reception of her writings from both her parents, especially from her father:

I cannot remember a time when Virginia did not mean to be a writer... She was very sensitive to criticism and the opinion of the grown-ups. I remember putting the paper on the table by my mother's sofa while they were at dinner. As they waited in hiding for their parents' verdict, Virginia trembled "with excitement"²⁵.

Virginia Woolf's strong determination from an early age to become a novelist drove her to continuously exercise her writing skills by producing novels and essays as well as keeping personal diaries.

²⁴ Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

²⁵ Bell, Vanessa. *Notes on Virginia's Childhood*. New York : F. Hallman, 1974, pp. 10-11.

However, education was certainly not the only factor that shaped her as a writer capable of making a difference in 20th century literature and forming new critical literary perspectives. The answer to the question I posed above is given by Virginia Woolf herself in *Moments of Being*.

As one gets older one has a great power through reason to provide an explanation; and that this explanation blunts the sledge-hammer force of the blow. I think this is true, because though I still have the peculiarity that I receive these sudden shocks, they are now always welcome... And I go on to suppose that the shock-receiving capacity is what makes me a writer. I hazard the explanation that a shock is at once in my case followed by the desire to explain it. I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton-wool of daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me²⁶.

This fragment illustrates that for Virginia Woolf, the act of writing had a therapeutic role in reducing her stress and limiting unhappy memories. Her critics Hermione Lee²⁷ and John Mepham²⁸ assume the fact that the writer's personal life is inseparable from her fiction. Woolf herself supports the embodiment of an author's proper experiences and sentiments in writing. Moreover, the process of composing novels, along with the investigation of her artistic abilities, was also accompanied by the constant search for her identity and an attempt to recover from painful experiences, namely: traumas, confusions, obsessions and mental breakdown.

²⁶ Woolf, Virginia. *Moments of Being*. Sussex : The University Press, 1976, pp. 72-73.

²⁷ Lee, Hermione. « Préface ». In Woolf, Virginia. *A Passionate Apprentice*, *op. cit.*

²⁸ Mepham, John. *Criticism in Focus. Virginia Woolf*. New York : St. Martin's Press, 1992.

If sometimes Woolf felt alienation, it was primarily attributed to her exclusion from the male territory. As long as patriarchal institutions were guarded by men who prevented the "other sex" from crossing the borders, women could not enjoy a sense of being insiders.

According to Virginia Woolf's discourse in regard to the establishment of *feminine* writing standards in literature, having a *room of one's own* is of crucial importance. The role of material space and financial means, synonyms for power and autonomy, is underlined in her famous essay. The central idea is that: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction²⁹". The anonymous narrator speaks in the name of all women and asks questions about why female literature is underrepresented in today's world. Virginia Woolf totally disagrees with the idea that women should have the same writing style as men. However in her essay she explains why they could not demonstrate a different creative ability. After inserting multiple examples of the women who failed to test their intellectual potential throughout history, she concludes that "intellectual freedom depends upon material things³⁰". If women could not demonstrate their talent in poetry, that was probably due to the fact that the middle-class women before 18th century England "had [no] sitting-rooms to themselves³¹", and that "women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time³²". Hence, it is clear to her that "women have had less intellectual freedom than the sons of Athenian slaves [and] a dog's chance for writing poetry³³".

Virginia Woolf did not support the idea of being "locked in", nor did she consider all types of education to be "healthy".

²⁹ Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 125.

³³ *Ibid.*

According to her, a combination of material and intellectual freedom offers the best alternative for the interpretation of reality. Both of them are required *only if* we are trying to reexamine our perceptions of the world with new awareness, *if* we are trying to achieve the altered vision of reality and *if* we are questioning the conventional beliefs, because "life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small³⁴". Again, in *A Room of One's Own* she introduces the idea that we can make the difference "if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation of reality³⁵". More importantly, she sums up the importance of material freedom in the last pages of the novel as she explains that "when I ask you to earn money and have a room of your own, I am asking you to live in the presence of reality, an invigorating life, it would appear, whether one can impart or not³⁶".

Thus, a room itself has double meaning here. On the one hand, it is the material space, a necessary condition for focusing on one's self; while, on the other hand, it is the reality that a woman needs to face, to see the things hidden behind appearances, that Virginia Woolf herself tried to achieve through writing. She urged females to wake up and "discover the world" because during centuries women were forced to live in illusion and in darkness.

In various cases, the British essayist's idea of having a material and symbolic place, resonates with the sentiments expressed in the literary products of the Swiss francophone novelist Alice Rivaz.

The significance of a "room of one's own" for Alice Rivaz is shown in her *The Peace of the Beehive* (*La Paix des ruches*), written in an intimate journal style, whereas her autobiographical

³⁴ Woolf, Virginia. *The Common Reader*. Wilmington : Mariner Books, 2002, p. 155.

³⁵ Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

novel *Comptez vos jours* (*Count your Days*³⁷) offers an account of the price a writer pays for her personal journey to success.

In *The Peace of the Beehive* (*La Paix des ruches*), influenced more by feministic ideas, Alice Rivaz draws the reader's attention to the vulnerability of a woman in an androcentric culture as the woman from her childhood on has been made aware of the superiority of the male gender. The reader hears the story about the monotonous life of her heroine Jeanne, who cannot find peace and consolation among her friends, family members and colleagues; instead she meditates on writing, expressing her feelings, problems and emotions in her intimate diary.

The novel starts with a paradoxical phrase, when considering the cultural taboos in Switzerland at that time. The character, a young Swiss lady, opens her intimate journal announcing: "Je crois que je n'aime plus mon mari"³⁸. Hence, marriage shows the differences between the sexes and closes the doors to the fantasies and illusions which women might have had of the opposite sex previously. The only time when she feels happy is when her husband, an officer, is about to leave, sometimes for several weeks. Only then does she gain access to her private space. Exiled, she finds reconciliation in writing about her own experiences and the disappointment that she discovered in a marriage without love.

Nous rattachons chaque idée à une expérience vécue, à un fait, tandis que vous, c'est votre cerveau qui fonctionne. Vous [les hommes] édifiez vos jugements dans l'abstrait. Pour nous, au contraire, reste lettre morte tout ce que nous ne pouvons rattacher à la vie, à notre vie, et même à notre vie du moment³⁹.

³⁷ Rivaz, Alice. *La Paix des ruches suivi de Comptez vos jours*, op. cit.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3. My translation: "I think I do not love my husband any more."

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 143. My translation: "We relate each idea to an experience, to a fact; while for you, it is your brain that works. You [men] construct your judgments in the abstract. For us, on the contrary, anything we cannot relate to life, to our lives, and even to our lives at the present moment, remains dead letter."

The act of writing, hence, is a kind of therapy to observe her own misfortune. She sees that she is not the exception and that every woman she knows, from her grandmother to her mother and even her friends at work, is more or less in the same position. Although many of them avoid speaking of their personal feelings, she realizes that none of them are happy and that one cannot expect to find emotional stability in marriage.

Under such circumstances, a "room of her own" can give a woman some independence and protect her privacy and intimacy. Yet, writing a diary while living with « quelqu'un qui interroge mais comme un conférencier, ou un officier qui donne des ordres⁴⁰ », not only implies continuous distraction, but it can also be inappropriate and suspicious as well.

Therefore, Alice Rivaz is trying to point out to the reader the frustration in a struggling marriage, as well as the confinement of a woman which brings limited access to writing. A woman, whose intellectual abilities have been doubted by men, is not welcomed by the opposite sex to write anything, even for herself. Having discovered his wife's act of writing in secret, the husband ridicules her intellectual abilities: « Ainsi Ma-da-me-écrit-son-journal... Ou bien si c'est un roman par hasard que tu t'es mis en tête d'écrire⁴¹ ? » Here, the wife asks herself « Pourquoi une femme ne pourrait-elle écrire, elle aussi, pour elle, sans susciter la moquerie de son époux⁴² ? » Secretly writing a journal is her way of speaking up in the name of all women – the victims of the culture which praises solely the male gender:

Ce que nous n'aimons pas, c'est l'injustice... Ce que nous n'avons pas, c'est cette absence de solidarité entre eux et nous... Quand donc apprendront-ils

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106. My translation: "someone who inquires like a lecturer; or like an officer, who gives orders."

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82. My translation: "So Ma-dam-is-wri-ting-her-diary... Or by any chance is it a novel that you have planned to write?"

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 83. My translation: "Why it is considered that a woman cannot write, 'for herself, without being laughed at by her husband?'"

le sens de la justice qui pourtant enfle parfois leurs voix dans les parlements, les cathédrales ; qui les fait descendre dans la rue et élever des barricades ? Cependant c'est quand nous sommes victimes que nous élevons la voix, comme je le fais en ce moment, dans le secret de ce cahier, non pas seulement en mon nom, mais en celui de toutes les ménagères du monde, et pas seulement des ménagères vivantes, mais de celles qui ne sont plus que poussière et os...couchées maintenant sous des pierres froides. Et plus personne pour leur parler dans leur sommeil, pour fouler l'herbe de leurs tombes, essayer de capter leurs voix, d'écouter leurs plaintes comme le faisait Victor Hugo avec ses chères mortes, mais lui ce n'était pas comme ménagères qu'il les interrogeait, mais comme femmes⁴³...

Is she not calling here for revising the perspectives of a tradition created to accommodate only men's needs? The private material space itself is essential to a woman's life as it serves as a refuge for producing some writing which is the only means of dialoguing with her gender secretly.

What matters to Alice Rivaz, according to Valérie Cossy, is "devenir plutôt que de l'être"⁴⁴. Since "Alice Rivaz n'a pas toujours été Alice Rivaz mais l'est devenue au moment de la publication de son premier roman, *Nuages dans la main*, en 1940"⁴⁵. By changing her original surname Rivaz refuses to introduce herself to the

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92. My translation : "It is injustice that we do not like... What we lack is the solidarity between us and them... When will they learn the meaning of that justice which sometimes makes them vocal in parliaments and cathedrals; which makes them take the streets and raise barricades? And yet we raise our voices only when we are victims as I do in this notebook at this moment, secretly, not only in my name, but in the name of all the housewives of the world; and, not only in the name of those who are alive, but in the name of those who are nothing more than dust and bones ... lying under cold stones. And there is no one who will speak to them in their sleep, who will tread the grass of their graves, who will try to catch their voices and listen to their complaints as Victor Hugo did with his dead loved ones, but he did not question them as housewives, rather as women..."

⁴⁴ Cossy, Valérie. *Alice Rivaz. Devenir Romancière*. Genève : Suzanne Hurter, 2015, p. 17. My translation : "to become rather than to be".

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* My translation : "Alice Rivaz had not always been Alice Rivaz, but became known as such as from the publication of her first novel *Clouds in your Hands*."

reader as the daughter of the famous political figure Paul Golay. At the same time she wants to be identified with her artistic capacities, as she considers her first publication as the moment of her emancipation and rebirth as a novelist. Education in her personal case has played a crucial role for gaining recognition. She was granted the medal "Madame Alice Rivaz. Écrivain. 1997, Genève reconnaissante" and the "Grand Prix Ramuz"⁴⁶ in 1980. Yet, while evaluating the role of education in her personal case, in her autobiographical novel *Comptez vos jours Rivaz* gives an account of the disadvantages that come with financial security and intellectual freedom, as well as of the price she paid for her own emancipation.

Je ne suis qu'une vieille orpheline à la recherche de trésors perdus... Ce n'est pas aujourd'hui que j'éprouve la venue de l'âge comme une nouvelle sorte de séparation. Ne me suis-je pas toujours sentie séparée ? D'abord, parce que j'étais cette enfant unique que sa mauvaise santé et l'humeur inquiète des grandes personnes qui l'entouraient éloignaient des jeux de ses pairs ; puis, parce que mon père professait des idées alors bien menaçantes pour la société établie et qui, pendant toutes mes années scolaires, coulaient frayer et glace dans les esprits effrayés des parents de mes camarades d'école. Séparée parce que je ne me suis pas mariée, parce que je n'ai pas eu d'enfants. Séparée aussi par mon appartenance à ce petit pays, immobile moyeu d'une roue qui a nom Europe, pays en marge de l'Histoire de ce temps et qui, depuis plusieurs générations a échappé au malheur dans la mesure où il échappait à l'Histoire, alors que le malheur n'a cessé de frapper à la porte de mes voisins. Séparée de mes compatriotes parce que j'ai gagné ma vie non parmi eux, mais au milieu d'étrangers. Séparée aussi, parce que dans un monde où des millions d'hommes, de femmes et d'enfants ont faim, où des peuples vivent sans toit, je suis bien abritée, de nuit et de jour, bien pourrie et correctement vêtue. Séparée parce que je ne vais guère à l'église qui fut celle de notre famille, ni au parti qui, pour mon père, la remplaça. Et me voici, de plus, séparée des jeunes parce que, jeune, je ne le suis plus, et séparée de moi-même parce

⁴⁶ *Fonds Alice Rivaz*, Archives littéraires suisses, available at ead.nb.admin.ch [last consulted 22 April 2017].

qu'arrachée à celle que j'étais, tout en n'étant pas encore celle que je deviendrai quand j'en aurai fini de faire peau neuve – mais il faudrait dire ici « peau vieille⁴⁷ ».

Marcel Raymond⁴⁸, a critic of Alice Rivaz, speaks of the importance of *Time* as an important topic of this novel. Here the reader understands the fragility of human life and a person's vulnerability to reality. Time is an important factor in this case, however, it is not the only aspect that separates us from ourselves.

Based on this fragment we can conclude that intellectual development helps us see the world through alternative perspectives, notice things which might never have been the subject of observation and, ultimately, be more sensitive to reality.

⁴⁷ Rivaz, Alice. *Comptez vos jours*, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-178. My translation: "I am nothing more than an old orphan in search of lost treasures... It is not today that I consider age as a new type of **disconnection**. Have I not always felt disconnected? Firstly, because I was that only child whose poor health and the restless mood of the adults, who surrounded her, kept away from her classmates' games. Besides, my father professed ideas which were then really threatening for the established society, and which, during all my school years, chilled the frightened minds of my schoolmates' parents. I am disconnected because I have not been married, I have not had any children. Again, I am disconnected because I belong to this small country, a motionless hub of a wheel named 'Europe', a country on the margin of the history of its time and which for several generations has escaped from misfortune in so far as it escaped from History, whereas misfortune never ceased knocking next door. I am disconnected from my compatriots because I have not earned my living among them, but among strangers. And, I am disconnected also because in the world where millions of men, women and children are starving, where a whole people have no roof over their heads, I am sheltered, day and night, spoiled and properly dressed. Disconnected, because I hardly go to the church that our family used to attend; nor to that Party group which replaced the church for my father. And, what is more, I am disconnected from the young people, because precisely, I am no longer young. I am also disconnected from myself because I have teared myself away from the one I used to be, while I am not yet the one I will become when I will have finished putting on my new skin – but here we should say 'an old skin'."

⁴⁸ Raymond, Marcel. « Préface ». In *Ibid.*, pp. 7-17.

Intellectual development allows one to be aware of the inequalities in life and see the gap between "you" and the "other".

Unlike Alice Rivaz and Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing learns to come out of an "outsider's" position and to turn herself into a "capable woman".

Born in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), the writer has always tried to escape from her provincial homeland, which could not offer her sufficient grounds for emancipation. There, in comparison with the local people, she felt alienated because of her higher level of awareness. She endeavoured to test her potential in London. In the end, her strong determination and intelligence enabled her to gain recognition both in the cultural (she was the 2007 Nobel Prize winner for literature) and political arena. At the age of 19 she joined the Marxist Group and later, the Communist Party.

Among the vast literary heritage of Doris Lessing, her novel *Martha Quest*, belonging to the *Children of Violence* series and which is largely based on her own experience and reflects her personal journey towards emancipation, stands out the most.

There are many common elements shared by the author and the main character in the novel. Both have suffered from restlessness and experienced the feeling of being an "outsider" and not belonging to the "homeland" – deserted Southern Rhodesia. The sensation of being a wandering spirit, an exile of her own family is equally experienced by Doris Lessing and Martha Quest (the main character). The protagonist is constantly looking for more than her limited world could offer her. The more she reads, the more she feels exiled, distant, expatriated. She dreams of escaping from such a dull life and living in a big city, like London, New York or Moscow. She cannot find peace in observing the vast landscapes surrounding her family's poor house in Africa as they give her "only the prickling feeling of claustrophobia⁴⁹". In addition, both

⁴⁹ Lessing, Doris. *Martha Quest*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

the author and the character consider marriage to be an old-fashioned institution. They also show a lack of interest in having children and cannot free themselves from *Electra's complex*: they favour the father, whose "life is so weighted with dreams and ideas and imaginings"⁵⁰ (unlike her mother's dull existence). They "battle" against their mother, who is only endowed with "the ordinary sense"⁵¹, as Doris Lessing claims in her essay "Afterword to *The Story of an African Farm* by Olive Schreiner".

Nonetheless, like Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing also emphasizes the existence of a gap in women's writings. The idea she develops in *Martha Quest* echoes the sentiment which Woolf was announcing in *A Room of One's Own* about the lack of women's experiences in literature, partially because "a woman writing thinks back through her mothers"⁵². Being a voracious and intelligent reader, a young protagonist has a critical eye on everything. She is aware that "this collection of interesting facts seemed to have so little to do with her own problems"⁵³, which is why Martha, being in constant dialogue with literature, is looking for books which can help her gain some balance in life and raise her awareness of "herself". Not only does she maintain a critical perspective of the books she reads, but she also stands against the system of education by refusing to continue her studies in an educational institution. Her willingness to learn more and read something more related to herself matches with the desire to be different from her mother by not turning into a dull creature, as she sees her. Therefore she tries, "to make her mother as unhappy as possible...she would *not* be bitter and nagging and dissatisfied like her mother. But then, who was she to be like? Her mind

⁵⁰ Lessing, Doris. *A Small Personal Voice*. New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1974, p. 108.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁵³ Lessing, Doris. *Martha Quest*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

turned towards the heroines she had been offered, and discarded them. There seemed to be a gap between herself and the past⁵⁴."

Martha Quest realizes that she has to fight, to be a rebel and to take her destiny in her own hands. This is the only way for her to make a change and shape a better future. To Doris Lessing an individual can always find her way no matter what obstacles she faces and Martha Quest is the best exemplification of that individual.

In the writings analysed above, "a room" is a prism through which Virginia Woolf and Alice Rivaz examine the concept of space and explore its interconnection with gender. Woolf brings various examples in order to stress the importance of a private, intimate space in the development of female creativity. While in Rivaz's writing, it figuratively also functions as a barrier between a woman writer and the outside world. In *Comptez vos jours* a female character has involuntarily cut herself from the surrounding world and "take[n] refuge" in literature, as Maurice Blanchot (1955)⁵⁵ puts it in *The Spaces of Literature*.

Blanchot explores the phenomenon of isolation in literature, introduced in the initial part of *The Essential Solitude*, and views literature as a completely independent segment, isolated from the rest of the world. The French literary theorist imagines a literary space to be constructed by an author, a work of art and a reader. Therefore, an artist's work should not be treated as a product; nor should it contain any social or ideological elements. Instead, the author (a writer, an artist) is exposed to the threat of living in exile, within the boundaries of the space of literature:

C'est alors que Rimbaud fuit jusque dans le désert les responsabilités de la décision poétique. Il enterre son imagination et sa gloire. Il dit « adieu » à « l'impossible » de la même manière que Léonard de Vinci et presque dans les mêmes termes. Il ne revient pas au monde, il s'y réfugie, et peu à peu ses

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵⁵ Blanchot, Maurice. *The Space of Literature [L'espace littéraire, 1955]*, trad. Ann Smock. London : University of Nebraska Press Lincoln, 1982.

jours voués désormais à l'aridité de l'or étendent au-dessus de sa tête la protection de l'oubli⁵⁶.

Considering Blanchot's notion, Woolf's and Rivaz's portrayal of a room evokes different interpretations. The boundaries of a room are not only material, – spatial, but also symbolical – social. In *A Room of One's Own* and *La Paix des ruches* it appears as an intimate space, vital to achieve interior freedom and focus on self-improvement. Whereas, in *Comptez vos jours* a room is a factor of exclusion, dissociating a woman writer from social engagement and putting her in the position of an "outsider".

Doris Lessing, in opposition to Blanchot's beliefs about the spaces, has taken literature out from its limited artistic realm and put it in relationship with the surrounding world. Taking into account the other writings analysed here, *Martha Quest* marks the difference in the representation of space-character relationships. The dimension of space that a female character can have access to within the novel enlarges alongside the progress she achieves in her life. The female character is willing to abandon the domestic space and provincial monotony, and instead, discover the unknown world. The desire to move to the large cities of the world is representative of her willingness for active social participation, from which women were excluded previously. As a result, if Woolf and Rivaz were supporting the construction of material spaces to protect women from the hostility of the outside world Lessing demands the deconstruction of any kind of boundaries, particularly social ones.

In conclusion what we can learn from the writings of Woolf, Rivaz and Lessing is that these female writers were very much

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54. English translation, p. 52: "It is then that Rimbaud flees into the desert from the responsibilities of the poetic decision. He buries his imagination and his glory. He says "adieu" to "the impossible" in the same way that Leonardo da Vinci does and almost in the same terms. He does not come back to the world; he takes refuge in it; and bit by bit his days, devoted henceforth to the aridity of gold, make a shelter for him of protective forgetfulness."

ahead of their time. They used their pen to revolt against social and cultural taboos and confronted the injustices that others accepted or ignored. The fragments analyzed above reveal the similarity of their aspirations for the emancipation and autonomy of women. Not only do they break away from the stereotypes in understanding women's roles from different cultural settings, but they also challenge themselves for self-progression, self education and development in order to develop role models for future generations. Furthermore, we can observe a divergence in understanding the concept of "a room". To Virginia Woolf an educated woman should take on the criticism of the 'current' and offer a realistic vision. Therefore the 'room' she speaks of in her essay metaphorically could be interpreted as reality that a writer ought to question and unveil. The concept of a woman's "own room" in Alice Rivaz's *Paix des ruches* is associated with the privacy and intimacy of married women within their material space. The heroine of Doris Lessing's novel goes one stage further. She learns to come out of the 'room' and to make an effort to discover the world on a wider scale.