A Body of One’s Own
A Comparison Between Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* and Moran’s *How To Be a Woman*

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Abstract

In this essay the author compares Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1928) to Caitlin Moran’s *How To Be a Woman* (2012). The two texts have both been described as feminist manifests of their time. The essay focuses on differences and similarities between the two texts, mainly focusing on the authors’ reasons for writing their texts and on the rhetoric they use to reach the audience.

The comparison shows that there are many similarities between the texts, given the historical context they were written in. For instance, both Woolf and Moran use humor as rhetorical means and they both see cooperation between women and men as the solution for a better future.
It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause; in any way to speak consciously as a woman. (Virginia Woolf 1928, 120)

Imagine if, in the 1960’s, it had become fashionable for black people to say they ‘weren’t into’ civil rights. ‘No! I’m not into civil rights! That Martin Luther King is too shouty. He just needs to chill out, to be honest’. (Caitlin Moran 2012, 81)
Introduction

On the 6th of September 2013, on the Swedish public television morning news show Gomorron Sverige, Swedish author Göran Hägg made a very sexist utterance about the fact that Barack Obama was accompanied to the airport by six female ministers. He said that it was a proof of how unimportant Obama’s visit to Sweden was. This made me think about something I read in Virginia Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own (1928):

I thought of that old gentleman, who is dead now, but was a bishop, I think, who declared that it was impossible for any woman, past, present, or to come, to have the genius of Shakespeare. He wrote to the papers about it. He also told a lady who applied to him for information that cats do not as a matter of fact go to heaven, though they have, he added, souls of a sort. (53-54)

A well-known author and a bishop both have rather powerful positions in society and great possibilities to influence people’s opinions. I started to think about Woolf’s essay (her own term) and her audience of women listening to her when she gave the lectures to them about women and fiction on which the essay is based. The essay has lasted vivid and clear as an example of early feminist literature. For the great masses it is probably most famous for its rhetorical question what would have happened if Shakespeare had a sister.

I think Woolf’s speeches had a great impact on the audience, and on many women and men who have read the essay since. “What has changed since then”, I thought, “and what is still the same?” Woolf was a prominent feminist author of her time. Are the feminist authors of our time dealing with the same topics, and have new topics emerged on the way during the 85 years that have passed since A Room of One’s Own was published? This is the reason for the focus of this essay: a comparison between Woolf’s text from 1928 and a modern feminist text. My interest was directed towards Caitlin Moran, a British author and columnist and her autobiographical text How To Be a Woman (2012), written as something I experience as a series of magazine or newspaper columns at the same time as it is a coherent text. Moran has a very clear feminist focus. She uses a mostly humoristic language that stands out, seemingly unafraid of any subject. I chose How To Be a Woman because it represents in a way what I think Woolf’s essay was in the 1920s: brave, new and something women talked about when there were no men around.

It may seem strange to compare two such different texts. Woolf with her well-structured prose, perfectly worked through by a skilled author, professionally placing the narrator’s voice in different characters in her novels. And Moran with her spontaneous writing, swearing and making up new words along with her writing. She also holds unapologetically liberal views on the use of drugs and alcohol. At first sight two very different books, but, on closer inspection, very much the same and both have been described as feminist manifests (Castillo n. pag.; Allen 41). The most important difference between the two is the historical situation. Woolf is an explorer; she is breaking new ground as an early feminist author. When Moran

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1 However, Anne Fernald claims that it was not until the 1970s that Woolf was increasingly seen as a feminist writer among literature critics, probably because her diaries were published then, enabling other people to read her opinions about the surrounding society.
wrote her text, feminism was not something new, but still a movement that encounters a lot of skepticism.

By comparing Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* to Moran’s *How To be a Woman* I will argue that they are very similar in many ways and that the main differences between them have to do with them being written in different time periods. I intend to look at the two texts mainly from the perspectives of motivation and rhetorics.

Both Woolf and Moran deliberately situate themselves in a feminist tradition. For instance, they both mention the Suffragettes, an early feminist organization demanding women’s right to vote. The organization was active in the beginning of the 20th century and is described as the first wave of feminism. The Suffragettes used quite radical means in their struggle. The most radical move was probably when a woman, called Emily Wilding Davison, threw herself in front of one of the king’s horses on a race track with one of the Suffragettes’ flags in her hand. She was severely injured and died a few days later. In her funeral programme it was said that “She Died for Women” (Cochrane 18). Many of the Suffragettes that were imprisoned due to for example vandalism protested by hunger strike. They were then force fed in prison and when people heard of that, many turned their sympathy to the Suffragettes (Henry & Bergström 157). The right to vote was not the only topic discussed among feminist organizations at that time, but it was a key component for most of them since it was “a basic measure of equal citizenship that needed to be won” (Cochrane 18). The First World War ended most of the Suffragettes’ protests (Henry & Bergström 157).

About the Suffrage campaign Woolf writes that “It must have roused in men an extraordinary desire for self-assertion; it must have made them lay an emphasis upon their own sex and its characteristics which they would not have troubled to think about had they not been challenged. And when one is challenged, even by a few women in black bonnets, one retaliates, if one has never been challenged before, rather excessively” (Woolf 114-15). She draws the conclusion that that the Suffrage campaign might be one of the greatest causes why the time she lived in was so “stridently sex-conscious” (Woolf 114). Moran writes that in our time we do not have to be as drastic as the Suffragettes, there are easier ways to handle patriarchy: “in the 21st century, we don’t need to march against size zero models, risible pornography, lap-dancing clubs and Botox. We don’t need to riot, or go under hunger strike. There’s no need to throw ourselves under a horse, or even a donkey. We just need to look it in the eye, squarely, for a minute, and then start laughing at it” (Moran 14). The fact that derision is an option for women at this time shows the development of women’s position in society.

Both Woolf and Moran encountered feminism through literature. In the late 19th century, female authors writing about strong women were seen as a great threat to society (Weber n. pag.). This was the time Woolf grew up in. In 1928 she was asked to hold lectures for a group of young women. The subject she was asked to talk about was “Women and fiction”. In *A Room of One’s Own* she describes how she started her research on the subject, and one of the first things she discovered was that she could not trust the books she found at the library. Most of them were written by men, men writing about women. When she had read some of
these books, Woolf noticed that what they presented was not fact: “They had been written in the red light of emotion and not in the white light of truth” (Woolf 38). Out of the texts she had read she drew the conclusion that men are angry, and she asked herself of the reason for this. Woolf argues that every human being wants to have self-confidence and one way to earn a better self-confidence is to make oneself feel and seem superior to other people: “Hence 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” (Woolf 40-41).

When Moran was 15 years old, she encountered feminism and embraced it completely. She saw a show with Germaine Greer and that was the moment she understood feminism: “Greer uses the words ‘liberation’ and ‘feminism’ and I realize –at the age of 15 –that she is the first I’ve ever seen who doesn’t say them sarcastically, or tempered with invisible quote marks. She doesn’t say them like they are words that are both slightly distasteful, and slightly dangerous, and should be handled only at the end of tongs, like night soil, or typhus” (Moran 76). Greer’s text *The Female Eunuch*, written in 1970, inspired Moran to write *How To Be a Woman* (Moran 310). Greer was not satisfied with the way the Suffragettes had tried to change the world. In her summary in the beginning of *The Female Eunuch* Greer writes that “The cage door had been opened but the canary had refused to fly out. The conclusion was that the cage door ought never to have been opened because canaries are made for captivity; the suggestion of an alternative had only confused and saddened them” (14). Greer appreciates the intentions the Suffragettes had, but she thinks that they withdrew too soon and thus sent signals to society that they were not ready to take the fight. This is very similar to Moran’s thoughts about how women sometimes do not use the possibilities we have. We just conform to society without even reflecting about it. This acting sends signals to patriarchy that everything is ok. In the acknowledgements, at the end of the book, Moran tells the reader that her goal from the beginning was to write “‘A funny, but polemic, book about feminism! Like *The Female Eunuch* –but with jokes about my knickers!’” (Moran 310).

After all, there is a big difference in Woolf’s and Moran’s feelings when they start to think about feminist questions. Woolf was frustrated, angry and confused about the fact that men strive to keep their superiority. Moran, on the other hand, was thrilled: “at 15, by the time I have finished reading *The Female Eunuch*, I am so excited about being a woman that, had I been a boy, I think I would have switched sides” (Moran 79).

The way society has developed during the time between the publications of the two texts has facilitated a different kind of empiricism. According to Cochrane, the fourth wave of feminism is here now. It has appeared and grown on the internet in the form of discussion sites, for example *Mumsnet* and *Everyday Sexism Project*. Discussion forums where women share their experiences of sexism give many women “the evidence that what we face isn’t individual, but collective” (Cochrane 41). When Woolf was going to investigate the topic “Women and Fiction” she visited the library and went through all the books that had to do with the topic. In contrast, when Moran wants an answer to a question she is reflecting on, she asks the question on Twitter, and she gives us some of the reactions she gets there in her book. In this way, she uses Twitter as a tool to do a quick, up-to-date investigation of her
followers’ opinions and experiences. An example of one of her Twitter investigations is when she asks if anyone of her followers had met any “outrageous sexism”, and she gets overwhelmed by the answers (Moran 129-130).

As written above, Woolf was living and writing in a time when feminism was something new. When Moran wrote her book, there was a vast history of feminism, but men and women were still not equal. Moran chooses to focus on things that may seem smaller. She explains this by the broken window metaphor: if a house has a broken window, this will be seen as an entitlement to break the other windows too and vandalize the house (Moran 13). By this Moran means we have to be aware even of the smallest things that show patriarchy’s exercise of power. In at least one aspect Moran stands out from most feminist opinions. This aspect is pornography; seen by many feminists as something that teaches men how to be violent against women (Dines 306-307). Moran thinks that “Pornography isn’t the problem. Strident feminists are fine with pornography. It’s the porn industry that’s the problem” (Moran 35). More specific, in pornographic movies Moran wants women to feel pleasure, not inferiority. One of the biggest concerns she ascribes to the porn industry is that it gives women the impression that they have to remove all body hair.

In conclusion, using Cochrane’s distinction of the waves of feminism, Woolf can be seen as a part of/product of the first wave and Moran, on the other hand, can be seen as a representation of the fourth wave. This difference drives them to have partly different aims with their texts and therefore to use different styles. Moran writes about her hopes for the next wave of feminism. She hopes it will be the wave when women can just laugh at all the crazy assumptions there are about women (Moran 14). As will be discussed below, Moran looks upon humor as a powerful tool against patriarchy.

Motivation
In this section the focus is on Woolf’s and Moran’s motivation; that is, their own reasons for writing and what they wanted to accomplish with their texts.

Woolf explicitly tells us what she wants: she wants women to be able to write, to be creative. In order to do that, they need a room of their own with a lock on the door. They also need time and money. One example of a subject that Woolf was engaged in was women’s economy. Bechtold points out that many of Woolf’s thoughts about women’s economy are “similar to those occupying the minds of feminist economists today” (n. pag.). Woolf was very clear in her argument that money is a key component of women’s independence.

Moran wrote her text motivated by her hopes that people would open up their eyes to the power patriarchy has on our everyday life. She says in her postscript “I want CHOICE. I want VARIETY. I want MORE. I want WOMEN. I want women to have more of the world, not just because it would be fairer, but because it would be better” (Moran 309). To help people discover patriarchy’s impact on their lives, she uses examples from her own life.

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2 Usually referred to as the broken windows theory in sociological discussions about criminality.
In an interview with Freedman Moran elaborates on her motivation:

My books tell my story. How To Be a Woman is not just a book about feminism. It’s someone going ‘I’m a bit weird and unusual and I want to tell you my story.’ And I hope other people go ‘I could tell my story as well’ so we have all these stories out there because it’s control of the idea of normal that I think is the key thing there. Normal, if you think about it for thirty seconds, just means ‘straight white man.’ That’s what normal is. Women don’t feel normal still. (n. pag.)

So, while Moran wants to tell her story to inspire other people to do the same, it was in Woolf’s time something extraordinary for a woman to even have the possibility to write: “Woolf’s desire to be a great writer with no humiliating qualification of ‘for a woman’ not only conflicts with contemporary feminism’s communitarian aspirations, but also marks the first time in English literature that a woman stated her ambitions without apology, the screen of a persona, or the protection of a pseudonym” (Fernald 2). To enable women to be creative, Woolf’s solution is “Give her another hundred years /…/ give her a room of her own and five hundred a year, let her speak her mind…” (109). This is also the conclusion that she gives to the audience listening to her. She tells them that taste is individual, and therefore no one can tell them what is right or wrong: “So long as you write what you wish to write, that is all that matters” (Woolf 123). Woolf ignored society’s expectations on her as a woman, not only in her choice of profession but also in other parts of life. In this aspect Woolf and Moran are very similar. Also, they both write freely about topics that not many people dare to discuss in public. For instance, one such topic in the 1920s was homosexuality. During her presentation, Woolf stops in the middle of a sentence, and says:

I am sorry to break off so abruptly. Are there no men present? Do you promise me that behind that red curtain over there the figure of Sir Chartres Biron is not concealed? We are all women you assure me? Then I may tell you that the very next words I read were these-‘Chloe liked Olivia…’ Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women. (Woolf 95)

This shows her willingness to tell her opinions to her audience, but at the same time it shows a feeling that what she says may not appeal to everyone. In her diary, Woolf writes before publishing A Room of One’s Own that she suspects that “there is a shrill feminine tone in it which my intimate friends will dislike” (Bell 268). She also writes that she is “afraid it will not be taken seriously. I doubt that I mind very much. It is a trifle, I shall say; so it is, but I wrote it with ardour and conviction” (Bell 269). She seems fully aware of the fact that the essay would certainly be criticized by the readers. It may be that describing it in her own diary as a trifle and writing that she will not mind much if it is not taken seriously is a way to defend her self-confidence. Or maybe she really thought it was a trifle. She had already done much of the work while preparing the lectures, and compared to many of her other texts this essay is rather short.

Moreover, in the time Woolf lived in, the beginning of the 20th century, sexism was overt and easy to discover. Today we have laws demanding equality. But the changes have not deleted all sexist opinions. Since those opinions are not looked upon as correct today, one of the
changes is that they are shown in a more subtle way.\(^3\) The fact that sexism is often covered in, for instance, sarcasm has caused the feeling of insecurity whether something said or done really is sexist. As Moran humorously illustrates the matter:

> Very often, a woman can have left a party, caught the bus home, washed her face, got into bed, read 20 minutes of *The Female Eunuch* and put the light out before she puts the light back on again, sits bolt upright and shouts, ‘Hang on- I’VE JUST HAD SOME SEXISM ON ME. THAT WAS SOME SEXISM! WHEN THAT MAN CALLED ME ‘SUGAR TITS’-THAT WAS NOT AN HONEST MISPRONUNCIATION OF THE NAME “ANDREA”!’ (Moran 128)

When looking back at old-fashioned sexism, Moran writes that “in some ways, however ghastly, depressing and enervating it is, I miss it” (130). In a way, I understand what she means. It consumes a lot of energy to be on one’s guard on what can be meant as a way to make women feel inferior. As she writes, “These days, a plethora of shitty attitudes to women have become diffuse, indistinct or almost entirely concealed. Fighting them feels like trying to combat a mouldy, mildew smell in the hallway, using only a breadknife” (Moran 130).

However, Moran feels that feminism is no longer what it has been. From the start, it was a strong movement, a revolution. Now it is, according to Moran, mostly “a series of exclusionary academic arguments and sweeping stereotypes” (Castillo n. pag.). Here is another strong motivational factor in Moran. She wants to take feminism out from the academic sphere. This and the broken window metaphor mentioned above are the reasons she gives for not focusing more on, for instance, salaries and power positions. Instead she focuses on, for example, how much women and men care about women’s looks. In an interview with Lindqvist Moran says that reaching people through politics takes a long time, and that the way through popular culture is much faster and more effective. Moran draws parallels to The Beatles and Charles Dickens that also changed the world through popular culture (Lindqvist n. pag.).

Additionally, both Wolf and Moran move around in cultural environments, and they use this environment as reference. Moran started her career at a music magazine, soon becoming a popular music critic. Working as a journalist, she has interviewed many of the most famous music artists around the world. Woolf has a vast knowledge of literature. She was also a member of the Bloomsbury group, a group of authors, artists and other intellectual and creative persons. Woolf’s interest in literature is for example shown in *A Room of One’s Own*, when she asks the reader to imagine what it would have been like if Shakespeare had a sister. (read more about this below), but also in many other examples. Moran, on her part, uses her musical interest to give examples. One of the most used examples (except for her family) is Lady Gaga. Lady Gaga is according to Moran a perfect example of an independent person choosing her own way of life and thereby inspiring others. She is a woman who does not care about whether people are born as women or men because it has no importance. The important thing is to be free and to follow your own dreams. Moran writes that what Lady Gaga gives her audience is a “sympathetic, non-judgemental arena /…/ just as important as getting the right to vote” (Moran 261).

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\(^3\) But sometimes it pops up very clear and honest to us, like the utterance of Hägg mentioned in the introduction of this essay. At those times there is usually a really strong reaction in media.
Moran does not use the word androgynous when describing Lady Gaga, but the word is implied and often used in other descriptions of her. The fact that she deliberately crosses and breaks the borders of society’s expectations on how women and men should act can be compared with Woolf’s opinion about the best mind having to be androgynous. As an example of an androgynous mind, Woolf mentions William Shakespeare. Woolf writes that “it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or a woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly” (Woolf 120). She talks about women and men, or more precisely, the female part and the masculine part of the brain, cooperating: “It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties” (Woolf 113-14). This fusion that Woolf describes symbolizes something the two authors of this study have in common: the belief in the necessity of men and women completing each other. They both argue that women should work their way to more power in society and, even more important, that success for humankind relies on women and men cooperating. Woolf writes that “It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause; in any way to speak consciously as a woman” (Woolf 120). Moran expresses a similar opinion when she is hoping for a world where we all are “the Guys.” By this, she does not mean that we are all going to act like men; she uses the expression to symbolize fellowship and the same values: “Seeing the world as ‘The Guys’ is important. The idea that we’re all, at the end of the day, just a bunch of well-meaning schlumps, trying to get along, is the basic alpha and omega of my world view. I’m neither ‘pro-women’ nor ‘anti-men’. I’m just ‘Thumb’s up for the six billion’” (Moran 133).

When the female narrator in A Room of One’s Own catches herself feeling anger against the male part of human kind, Woolf states: “It was absurd to blame any class or any sex, as a whole. Great bodies of people are never responsible for what they do. They are driven by instincts which are not within their control. They too, the patriarchs, the professors, had endless difficulties, terrible drawbacks to contend with” (Woolf 44). This shows both authors’ awareness of the drawbacks caused by inherited opinions from the past.

On the whole, both Woolf and Moran give the impression of having positive expectations on the future of humankind. Maybe that sounds like a strange thing to say about Woolf since she ended her life intentionally. But although maybe not seeing herself in future, she seems to have hope for humankind.

**Rhetorics**

In this section I will compare the two texts from a rhetorical perspective. The two books belong to a genre quite similar if one takes into account the many years that passed between them being published. Woolf calls her text an essay and starts by writing “This essay is based upon two papers read to the Arts Society at Newnham and the Odtaa (One Damn Thing After Another) Society at Girton on October 1928. The papers were too long to be read in full, and have since been altered and expanded” (Woolf 1). Moran on the other hand has written her book almost like a series of magazine or newspaper columns. Moran’s book is autobiographical, but to categorize Woolf’s text is harder. She balances on a thin line between fiction and fact.
There is a difference in the complexity of the two works. Moran’s language and form are clear and easy to follow. At first sight, the same can be said about Woolf’s essay, but the more times you read it, the more complicated the disposition appears. They differ in syntactic complexity and style. Woolf’s sentences are short and precise. Although easy to understand, the language Woolf uses is formal and correct. Moran varies her sentences between very long, often with a joke or two embedded in them, and very short. Her language is as close to spoken language as possible. The two texts compared are both written in first person singular, turning directly to the reader. This makes them both close to the reader, almost like a friend or an older sister helping the reader with some good pieces of advice.

Another rhetorical means both authors use is to stay close to everyday life in their examples. Moran gives examples from her life and Woolf is known to be “advocating a return to small things and daily experience” (Sim 14). Woolf has a more formal language because the text was originally lectures and the thought receiver of Moran’s novel is the public masses. I am not sure that the genre of the works is the only reason for the difference in the formality of language. After having read other examples of work written by Woolf and Moran, I think the way they write in the texts compared in this essay characterizes their usual level of formality in language rather well. Moran writes her texts for a popular audience (most of her texts are published as magazine columns or blog posts) and Woolf writes more artistically in all her texts.

Also, they both have a rather educational approach. It is quite obvious in Woolf’s text, since it after all is based on lectures, but Moran does it frequently too. For instance, she gives the reader the good advice to, when the reader feels unsure of whether something shows inequality, to stop and think about if this is something that happens to men too.

I have a rule of thumb that allows me to judge- when time is pressing, and one needs to make a snap judgement- whether some sexist bullshit is afoot. Obviously it’s not 100 per cent infallible but, by and large, it definitely points you in the right direction. And it’s asking this question: ‘Are men doing it? Are men worrying about this as well? Is this taking up the men’s time? Are the men told not to do this, as it’s ‘letting the side down’? Are the men having to write bloody books about this exasperating, retarded, time-wasting bullshit? Is this making Jeremy Clarkson feel insecure?’ Almost always, the answer is: ‘No. The boys are not being told they have to be a certain way. They’re just getting on with stuff’. (Moran 86)

This piece of advice is an example of how Moran, similarly to Woolf, speaks to the reader in a way that signals teaching, that is, the author educating the reader. At times, Moran turns the focus around compared to traditional feminist argumentation and that can also be seen as a way to educate the reader. For instance, she claims that we, in trying to state that there has always been women creating masterpieces although they have been put in the shadow of men, say that women have had the same possibilities, but did not measure up to the men: “Let’s stop exhaustingly pretending that there is a parallel history women being victorious and creative, on an equal with men, that’s just been comprehensively covered up by The Man. There isn’t” (Moran134-35). It is, according to Moran, a better starting point to say that women have not yet begun to be as creative as men and that is the reason why there are not as many women as there are men in the history books.
In comparison with this Woolf, being very interested in the history of literature, searched for earlier examples of feminist literature, or at least literature written by women: “Again and again, Woolf tried to see whether writing might be able to do what talk still could not: allow women a chance to participate in rational critical debate. As her success in so doing increased, so too did her awareness of the obstacles faced by the women writers who preceded her” (Fernald 95). Probably Woolf’s conviction that writing was at that time a better way for a woman to make her point made her accept the invitation to make a speech to young female students. She wanted to help them not just to have the opportunity to write, but also to take part of the debates in society. To sum up, Moran wants women’s creativity to have a fresh start while Woolf used history to find examples of how women could find ways to be creative.

Woolf draws a parallel to what would have happened if Shakespeare had a sister. The young woman, Judith Shakespeare, described by Woolf as a talented writer, did not have any support from her parents or society. Her brother was encouraged to read and write, but when Judith’s parents found her reading books, they told her to do housework instead. When Judith’s parents decided it was time for her to get married, “She cried out that marriage was hateful to her, and for that she was severely beaten by her father” (Woolf 55). After that, the father tried to bribe her. She ran away from home, tried to join a theatre but was rejected because of her sex. The story of the imagined Judith Shakespeare has a tragic end, she became pregnant and “killed herself one winter’s night and lies buried at some cross-roads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle” (Woolf 56). In this example Woolf brilliantly illustrates the difference in possibilities to choose the way of living depending on whether you are a man or a woman.

Moran, in contrast, does not make up an example but, in a way, she does something a bit similar. She uses herself as a young girl as an example of how children and adolescents are trained into a patriarchal society. As a young girl, she tried to figure out how to be a woman. In her teens she read many texts about women who had strived for their rights, and Moran finds that many of these stories ended sadly, often with a suicide, as in the case of Woolf.

Using the made up example of Judith Shakespeare is a rhetorical means that is quite easy to follow for the broader audience. On the other hand, adding to the complexity of Woolf’s text is her writing somewhere between fiction and fact and her use of the narrator’s voice. She wrote the essay after having had her oral presentation at two schools, but in the essay she has made up the names of the schools. The essay feels autobiographical, because it has so many parallels to Woolf’s own life and surroundings, but at the same time, the narrator’s voice comes from someone else in most of the essay. Tracy Lemaster suggests that Woolf uses the word “woman” when she theorizes and the word “girl” when she is writing fiction. Woolf puts the narrator’s voice in a fictionalized character, but at the same time she stays close to her own experience:
I need not say that what I am about to describe has no existence; Oxbridge is an invention; so is Fernham; ‘I’ is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being. Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping. /…/ Here then was I (call me Mary Beaton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please - it is not a matter of any importance) sitting on the banks of a river a week or two ago in fine October weather…

(Woolf 4-5)

When the reader has probably forgotten or even missed that it is not Woolf who is speaking, we find the sentence “Here, then, Mary Beton ceases to speak” (Woolf 121). Judith Allen remarks that this was a new way to write in that time; to make something appear as fact but still being partly fictional. In her writing, Woolf shows a “resistance to genre, to ranks, and to labels of all kinds” (Allen 46). This also makes Woolf’s essay a bit harder to compare to other texts in the same genre. I have chosen to look at the opinions of the narrator as the opinions of Woolf, since I find no reason or proof to believe the opposite. One of the strengths of Woolf’s writing is that, although it has the depth of a complex disposition, it is available for all readers.

Woolf and Moran are both using humor, for instance sarcasm and irony, as rhetorical means, but in different ways. This is a difference I think has a lot to do with the society they lived in. The sarcasm they use probably caused about the same reactions in their times. For example, they both criticize patriarchy, but Woolf is more subtle in her expression. For instance, when speaking about a man, reading a book, who suddenly erupts “The arrant feminist! She says that men are snobs!’ The exclamation, to me surprising –for why was Miss West an arrant feminist for making a possibly true if uncomplimentary statement about the other sex?-was not merely the cry of wounded vanity; it was a protest against some infringement of his power to believe in himself.” (Woolf 41). The way Woolf has interpolated the words “possibly true but uncomplimentary” is an example of her subtlety. Another example of Woolf’s subtle humor is when she is describing a dinner, and writes “and here the water-jug was liberally passed round, for it is the nature of biscuits to be dry, and these were biscuits to the core” (20).

Moran, on the other hand, when she is telling the female reader how to know whether she is a feminist or not, explains it in an easier manner, using her bold humor as a rhetorical strategy:

Put your hand in your pants.

a) Do you have a vagina? and

b) Do you want to be in charge of it?

If you said yes to both, then congratulations! You’re a feminist. (80)

Moran also explains her humoristic approach to things that actually make her very angry. She says that if the anger shines through the text, some readers react with anger and then they miss the point. If a writer expresses his or her opinions in a humoristic way, people tend to listen, according to Moran. Cochrane writes that humor is used quite often to get feminist opinions to the public in our days, and that it has also been used historically. Humor is described by Cochrane as a way to transform anger to a more effective way to reach an audience. She also
writes that “It also sometimes seems the only possible response to sexism” (Cochrane 55). Moran’s humor is more overt than Woolf’s and it crosses the borders of what we are used to read in books. It has the element of recognition and also lack of limits. She makes jokes about the female body, for example she writes about her sister’s reaction when they both start their periods: “I don’t want children anyway,’ Caz says. ‘So I am getting nothing out of this whatsoever. I want my entire reproductive system taken out, and replaced with spare lungs, for when I start smoking. I want that option. This is pointless”’ (Moran 20). Another example of a joke about the female body is when she writes about bras and concludes: “These days I simply coil up my shattered tits like a fire hose, and rely on a fierce piece of engineering from Rigby & Peller to put them in roughly the anatomically correct place. On their own, I’d just be kicking them in front of me, like an overly long dress” (Moran 100).

Conclusion
In this comparison between Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own and Moran’s How To Be a Woman I have found many similarities between the two texts. I have argued that most of the differences are mainly due to the different time periods of the two authors and the historical development of feminism, although there may be other reasons for some of the differences. Examples of such reasons may be inspiration, influence and, of course, the personality of the author.

There are surprisingly many similarities between the two texts in this study, given the long period of time that separates them and the very different situations of the two authors in relation to the literary establishment –Woolf is a canonical writer, while Moran writes in a popular idiom for a popular audience. Both Woolf and Moran are skilled critics of culture and the society they live in. Woolf was a literature critic while Moran focuses a lot on music. But most of all they criticize the society they live in and search for solutions to help humankind in general and young women in particular to a better future. They use humor, irony and sarcasm as rhetorical means. They are both brave and upsetting the reader can be seen as a rhetorical means they both use.

What Woolf wants for women is money and the possibility to have a place and some time for their own creativity. Moran wants more. She wants complete equality in every respect. This reflects women’s situation in the different time periods. One should also have in mind that neither of them would have written their texts if they thought that their goals were close. To express things simply: they both aim quite high.

Although Moran is more straight forward and demanding in her way, they are both strident feminists, looking back at the history of feminism but not only with content. They criticize patriarchy without blaming men individually. They see patriarchy as a system that we all have to break. They both draw the conclusion that women and men have to cooperate to make society work.

In the end of her presentation, Woolf brings up the memories of Judith Shakespeare to conclude her message, telling the audience that “this poet who never wrote a word and was buried at the cross-roads still lives. She lives in you and in me, and in many other women who
are not here tonight, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed” (Woolf 131). That is a conclusion I would like to adapt, because we have to be aware that what is written in this essay has to do with the conditions of women in our benefit part of the world. There are many women in other parts of the world who still struggle to be able to speak their mind and to have a body of their own.
Works cited


