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The Book and the Separate Room

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Abstract: Books seduce, as words distract the reader from reality, absorbing them in the imaginary of its pages and transforming them. Books offer pleasure immersed in intelligence, creativity, open-mindedness and, often times, in happiness. The experience of the book can be attained through two perspectives: that of the creator, who escapes, in a separate room, from his/her social, professional, or familial issues; and the perspective of the reader in libraries, in more complex and isolated, “separate rooms.”¹ As each reader has a “Shakespeare’s sister” with her own identity (such as the sister with whose assistance Virginia Woolf pleaded that it is possible to sustain one’s own vision on life), reading is bound to become “the art of lecture.” Furthermore, the book has an interior life flow and forms a clear perspective on life, which can be poetic or even aesthetic. Apparently, the book, the word, and the library are unable to maintain a determined place anymore. But the future is born from the present in which the number of printed books raises constantly and the number of readers stays the same.

Keywords: Book; separate room; Shakespeare’s sister; writing; library; literature.

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¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929). Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929).

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The Book and the Separate Room

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Introduction

Books seduce, as words distract the reader from reality, absorbing them in the imaginary of its pages and transforming them. Books offer pleasure immersed in intelligence, creativity, open-mindedness and, often times, in happiness. The experience of the book can be attained through two perspectives: that of the creator, who escapes, in a separate room, from his/her social, professional, or familial issues; and the perspective of the reader in libraries, in more complex and isolated, “separate rooms.” As each reader has a “Shakespeare’s sister” with her own identity (such as the sister with whose assistance Virginia Woolf pleaded that it is possible to sustain one’s own vision on life), reading is bound to become “the art of lecture.” Furthermore, the book has an interior life flow and forms a clear perspective on life, which can be poetic or even aesthetic. Apparently, the book, the word, and the library are unable to maintain a determined place anymore. But the future is born from the present in which the number of printed books raises constantly and the number of readers stays the same.

The book seduces

In 1927, Virginia Woolf, together with her husband Leonard, were invited to answer the following question: *Are there too many written and published books?*¹ Launched on air by BBC London Radio Station, by nightfall, the topic led to another unspoken question: *Is Europe somehow going to survive through books and through those who write them?* Although the two of them were book makers (Virginia was the writer and Leonard was the publisher), or maybe particularly because of this reason, they were among the 2,300 people on the execution list to be enforced as soon as the Nazis invaded Great Britain. With such a complicated historical background, in which the ascension of the Nazi Party permitted the “black shirts” to get out on the streets of London, was this an issue of interest to the public? It seems so.

80 years later, how much has this question decreased in essence? Not at all. Today’s world, the world led by words, is also pursued by this dilemma: are we going to continue producing books or not?

Apparently, too many books are produced. The reader is not able to consume them anymore, as the number of readers is constant, but there is an increasing number of books. Those who are seduced by books will try to keep up to this trend, and keep all types of books in their houses.

The book is presented, launched, bought, promoted, read, borrowed, commented upon, recommended, re-found, re-read, revised, supplemented and added -- it has the seemingly

¹ https://www.jstor.org/stable/25486300?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.
<http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/44b9567e384b48a8bbd31ccab2ea0093>

perfect life of a seducer. Fearless, even undaunted, those passionate of books abandon themselves in the written word in order to travel through times and junctures, rivers and images, feelings, emotions, and games of ideas.

Should it be true that women love books more than men, a single reason can be brought up for this at a first look, public libraries seem to be especially visited by women. Would this be a type of “revenge” from the times when women were not allowed in libraries unless accompanied by a male student of the respective college or entered with a recommendation letter? Public libraries should be kept like a “separate room” for our days’ women, especially as the majority seek the book for the pleasure of holding it in their hands? Seduction pheromones should exist and are activated during the reading process, stimulating elements like intelligence, talent, literary art, the genuine or unique perspective of what is told in the story -- all of these elements being capable of creating an aesthetic vortex which will absorb the reader. Pleasure produces happiness, the kind of happiness that wraps our thoughts and, sometimes, profoundly affects us. Therefore, the book is never sufficient.

Shakespeare’s sister and the “separate room”

“In Virginia Woolf’s vision, Shakespeare’s sister is the creator who was never visible because of contextual, external reasons. She is the creator sitting in a famous man’s shadow,” noted a contemporary writer.

Even since Virginia Woolf launched the idea of Judith Shakespeare in the 1900s’ London scenery as someone who might write books in the “separate room,” she noted, amused, in her journal: “I thought of that old gentleman...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. Women cannot write the plays of William Shakespeare.”

Judith was a fiction which created dispute. As her spiritual mother, “she had to stay at home, watch her brother go off to school, and become imprisoned in domesticity. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. Eventually, Judith is shamed into a marriage by her family. Her brother, William, makes his way in the world, while Judith is trapped at home, her genius unfulfilled.”

Thus, as per the period’s opinion, Shakespeare’s sister could not have written good books, not even if she had a “separate room” used for either writing or reading books (assuming that she could have had the opportunity of solitude).

From the perspective of the “separate room,” Virginia Woolf was successful, as she owned such a room, not only because of her marriage to Leonard Woolf, but also because of being recognized as part of Bloomsbury’s vanguard Set. Although she worked in a separate room, she remained connected to the family life. In the middle of perfectly-elaborated phrases and minutely-processed mornings, she had to instruct the cook on how much butter to add to the recipe, or what to be served to the nephews if they visited. Here she is, this Shakespeare’s sister, who wrote between 1907 and 1941, who although had her own room, had to uphold the foundation of the English family, and not only.

Her condition was just like her life, divided between sitting in her armchair in the “separate room,” being the mistress of her writing, and being the mistress of the house.

At the same time, she was in an uncommon condition, because of her permanent depression and disease. She wrote in her journal “Not having children, being far from friends, not managing to write well, makes me spend too much on food, get old, ask myself too many questions. I do not like time warning his wings around me.” The solution she found was: “Then, work!” with the following addition (author’s note): “You have a ‘separate room!’” This contradiction grinded Virginia Woolf’s life, although she had won her status as a writer. She was happy because she wrote, and she was unhappy because she wrote. “All

writers are unhappy. The world's image mirrored in books this way is too dark. People who do not have this gift are happy, the women in the garden in front of Mr. Chavasse's house. It is not an accurate image of the world, just a canvas painted by a writer. Is their world happier than ours? Are musicians, painters, indeed happier?"

Books in the "separate room"

Should we conduct an analysis of randomly-chosen books from the first shelf of a bookcase (the one which we named the "separate room"), would it show that this concept is up-to-date, either as a way of affirming the independence of Romanian or international female authors, or as a way of keeping a safe haven for writing and reading in the universal cultural landscape?

Let us remember that books written in the "separate room" are meant to be "good books," as amusingly suggested Virginia Woolf in 1927.

Two well-known Romanian authors wrote the following books: Rodica Ojog Brasoveanu² focused on detective books and Virginia Faur³ wrote books reflecting the professional experience of scientific research materialised in recipes for soul. Their public recognition is given by the out of print circulation of their books and by the highly topical issues faced by the characters and their mysterious actions. Furthermore, it is given by the remedies suggested for personal defeats suffered by many, whether they are fictional characters or not.

*Mrs. Dalloway*⁴ is perpetuating its authority as "good book" because of Virginia Woolf's decisive contribution to the development of literature, while *The Sacred and Profane Loving Machine*⁵ also remains a "good book" because of Iris Murdoch's power of analysis and observation. The intellectual novelty, the experiment, and the study of characters from these books can be seen as criteria for their classification in the category of "good books," meaning books written in the "separate room."

Doina Rusti's book *The Ghost at the Mill*⁶ a novel published in 2008 and recently translated in German, tells a story on the consequences of communism, in which the love for books went through fire in a literal way and was pierced by sword. This is a fragment from the book:

Ion Nicolescu slowly followed the guardians... but did not dare to tell them to let him have the books he loved, at least Eminescu's leather-bound edition, or *Memories from Childhood*.⁷ How could this book be hostile? When they see the books from his bookcase, they will leave without destroying anything. Not to mention that he could not imagine how they would do that... (p. 416).

Finally, what can two writings such as *The Pig's Story*⁸ by Ion Creanga and with Umberto Eco's *Confessions of a Young Novelist*⁹? Besides the fact that they are both in the category of "good books." *Confessions...* should be first of all analysed beside *King's Mystery. On Writing*.¹⁰

² Rodica Ojog-Brasoveanu, *Buna seara, Melania* (Bucharest: Ed. Nemira, 2013).

³ Virginia Faur, *Retete pentru trup si suflet* (Bucharest: Gutenberg Univers, 2011).

⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925).

⁵ Iris Murdoch, *The Sacred and Profane Loving Machine* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1974).

⁶ Doina Rusti, *The Ghost at the Mill* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2008).

⁷ Ion Creanga, *Memories of Childhood* (Bucharest: Herra, 2011).

⁸ Ion Creanga, *The Pig's Story* (Bucharest: Ager, 2011).

⁹ Umberto Eco, *Confessions of a Young Novelist* (Harvard University Press: 2011).

¹⁰ Stephen King, *King's Mystery. On Writing* (New York: Scribner, 2000).

by Stephen King, an essay summarizing almost his entire experience on literature, from the writer's tool kit, up to his compulsory readings' list and readers' requests, in a foray through his methods of books writing. Does he remind us of the "separate room"? Yes, there is no doubt about it. Similarly, Eco pampers in the pages of his essays, among memories of his first writing attempts, his juncture from writing speciality books to novels, respectively the manner in which his master degree represented the seed that created the sentence "a monk was poisoned while reading a mysterious book" and gave birth to *The Name of the Rose*.¹¹ Is this about the university becoming or being recognized as the "separate room" of academic completion?

The Pig's Story has the charm of a vintage jewellery, with a brilliance perpetuated up until today.¹² Published in 1876, the love story between a princess and a domestic animal, speaks about love and faith, about determination and the satisfaction of not giving up, about patience and deprivation with a view to a higher goal, the recovery of love, family, of the golden dream released from an evil spell. However, it also speaks about parents and their children. Whether they are poor peasants, emperors or empresses, they are linked by the golden bridge blown through the charmed pig's nostrils, former and current Prince Charming. The female character of the story had a "separate room," but until she achieved the real one, she had to undertake a long initiating journey.

Conclusions

In the end, can one consider *100 Forbidden Books*,¹³ a summary of 100 books with apparent issues, as a "good book"? Would books labelled as "good" still be forbidden? Or were they forbidden because they were "bad"? Good or bad, according to whom? This highlights that, at a given moment, political, religious, social, or sexual reasons were criteria for classifying books as "not good." *Mrs. Chatterley's Lover*¹⁴, *Men and Mice*¹⁵, *Dr. Jivago*¹⁶ or *Oliver Twist*¹⁷, would then be on the list of books not written in the "separate room."

The analysis above does not destroy potentialities. It remains open and endless. Labelling is as difficult as writing a book, as deciding upon a book's content, or just as difficult as capturing the infinite ways in which a book is received by its readers. Nevertheless, we approach libraries as places in which books are arranged and classified.

"One day I read a book and my entire life changed". It does not matter if the book was one written in the "separate room." It does not matter anymore if too many books are written and published. The "separate room" is perpetual, as well as the books in it.

¹¹ Umberto Eco. *The Name of the Rose* (Boston: Harcourt, 1983).

¹² See also: D. Sorea, "Complexitatea individuatoare a vieții de cuplu" [The Individuative Complexity of Couple Life] in *Familia creștină. Fundamente antropologice, iubire și sexualitate în celibat și căsătorie* [The Christian Family. Anthropological fundamentals, love and sexuality in celibacy and marriage], ed. Andrei Buzalic and Ioan Dușe (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2016), 249-266. D. Sorea, "Accesibilitate și ocultare în era cunoașterii informatizate." *Biblio 2009, Conferința internațională de Biblioteconomie și Știința Informării* (2009): 65-68.

¹³ Nicholas Karolidis, Margaret Bald, Dawn Sova. *100 Forbidden Books* (Bucharest: Paralela 45, 2007).

¹⁴ D.H. Lawrence, *Mrs. Chatterley's Lover* (Florence: Giuntina, 1928).

¹⁵ John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* (New York: Covici Friede, 1937).

¹⁶ Boris Pasternak, *Dr. Zhivago* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1957).

¹⁷ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Richard Bentley, 1838).

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