International Journal of Linguistics and Literature (IJLL)
ISSN(P): 2319-3956; ISSN(E): 2319-3964
Vol. 14, Issue 1, Jan – Jun 2025; 67–74
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International Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
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GENDER, POWER, AND WOMEN'S AGENCY: THE CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN* AND MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the conditions under which women can make consequential choices in Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own and Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale. Through comparative close reading, it distinguishes independent entitlements from opportunities granted at another person's discretion. Woolf's account of income and intellectual access is placed beside Atwood's representations of confiscated resources, restricted reading, and reproductive coercion. A feminist framework informed by Naila Kabeer, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Alice Walker directs attention to the unequal distribution of resources and recognition. The analysis finds that female visibility, private concessions, and the survival of testimony do not necessarily confer authority. Differences of genre also matter: Woolf reconstructs the conditions of cultural exclusion, while Atwood explores the loss of established freedoms and the uncertain reception of a woman's account. Their contemporary relevance lies in making the quality and security of choice available for scrutiny, without treating different historical societies as interchangeable.

KEYWORDS: *Women's Agency; Material Independence; Bodily Autonomy; Literary Authority; Conditional Privilege; Feminist Criticism.*

Article History

Received: *10 Apr 2025* | ***Revised:*** *15 Apr 2025* | ***Accepted:*** *19 Apr 2025*