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THE MONOMYTH OF LOVE IN MAY SARTON'S *SMALL ROOM*

Love in *The Small Room* is like the destiny met by mythic heroes. They sought immortality but suffered fate and took their places in the pageantry of human existence. May Sarton's heroes are women. They discover themselves first as students of love, then as its teachers to other women. The discoveries are struggles as hard as being born or giving birth.

Before the novel begins, Sarton whispers in John Donne's words where she is taking the reader:

Teach me to heare Mermaides singing,
Or to keep off envies stinging,
 And finde
 What winde
Serves to advance an honest minde.

In the novel a mentor, Jennifer Finch, quotes some of these lines as instruction to another, and to the reader who is being called to follow. Donne's poem as a whole appropriately foreshadows some features of the novel.

Song

Go and catch a falling star,
 Get with child a mandrake root,
Tell me where all past years are,
 Or who cleft the Devil's foot,
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,
Or to keep off envy's stinging,
 And find
 What wind
Serves to advance an honest mind.

If thou beest born to strange sights,
 Things invisible to see,
Ride ten thousand days and nights,
 Till age snow white hairs on thee,
Thou, when thou return'st, wilt tell me
All strange wonders that befell thee,
 And swear
 No where
Lives a woman true, and fair.

If thou find'st one, let me know,
 Such a pilgrimage were sweet;
 Yet do not, I would not go,
 Though at next door we might meet;
 Though she were true when you met her,
 And last till you write your letter,
 Yet she
 Will be
 False, ere I come, to two, or three.¹

Donne's poem alludes not only to impregnating mandrakes but to other impossibilities, ideals. The mermaids should be identified with the sirens whose song lures sailors to their death. Only the clever Odysseus escaped. The term "wind", an image of subtle foreboding, is mentioned early in Sarton's novel in a conversation between Professor Beveridge and Lucy Winter, the main heroine of a journey paralleling Donne's.² There are two allusions later containing the idea of mermaids singing; Jennifer Finch tells a colleague that she had committed a fundamental, tragic error of not listening. It is no accident that the song leads men to their death but one of Sarton's characters recommends it to another as a remedy. The Greek root of "medicine" means equally and alternatively poison and cure. Sarton re-envisioned the singing of the mermaids for her counter-traditional feminist goals. The same idea occurs at the end of her revisionist poem "The Muse as Medusa":

It is all fluid still, that world of feeling
 Where thoughts, those fishes, silent, feed and rove;
 And, fluid, it is also full of healing,
 For love is healing, even rootless love.

I turn your face around! It is my face.
 That frozen rage is what I must explore —
 Oh secret, self-enclosed, and ravaged place!
 This is the gift I thank Medusa for.³

Homero erotic love is a medicine in the poem as it is in *The Small Room*. In her poem Sarton reverses the meaning from poisoning to healing and

1. John Donne, *John Donne: The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (Middlesex: Penguin, 1982), pp. 77-8.

2. May Sarton, *The Small Room* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), p. 19.

3. May Sarton, "The Muse as Medusa," *A Grain of Mustard Seed* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), p. 38.

reverses the image of Medusa looking to being looked at; the poet looks at and becomes her muse in a kind of yoga identification with the object.

In the second stanza of Donne's poem a person goes on a very long journey and sees strange wonders. Lucy Winter in the novel encounters strange, new people and feelings. Donne says the man, as Donne must have meant, will not find a woman true and fair. Lucy on her existential journey encounters an iconography of love with all its postures of yearning, pleasing, and failing in two women — a student, Jane Seaman, who is untrue, or who cheats, and a teacher, Carryl Cope, who is fair in behavior.

Donne's last stanza assures the reader that a woman who was true when she was met, will become false to two or three other men in a very short time. Sarton's novel shows a change of loves that Carryl Cope experiences; the love then seems to become false, lost - changed.

If Donne's cynical pronouncement relates to certain themes of the novel, what processes were involved in the shaping of the work? To compose a novel is to negotiate with questions like what is felt to be narratable by both literary and social conventions. What could be used as subtext? To understand a novel is to explore questions such as, how did *The Small Room* take shape? What was its origin? What were the conflicting materials that have been processed within it? Harold Bloom has a valuable theory about literary origins, in which he asks, "But who, what is the poetic father [or mother]? The voice of the other, of the *daimon*, is always speaking in one; the voice that cannot die because already it has survived death - *the dead poet lives in one*. In the last phase of strong [great] poets, they attempt to join the undying by living in the dead poets who are already alive in them"⁴. Sarton wrote a piece of autobiographical nonfiction entitled *I Knew a Phoenix*, and she does write of a sexual-artistic daimon in *The Small Room*: "Something streamed out of her [Lucy] that was absolutely open, passionate, of an intensity that made shivers go up and down Lucy's spine. It was the freeing of a *daimon*, as surely as the writing of a poem springs from the freeing of the poet's *daimon*."⁵

The dead poet who lives in Sarton must of course be Woolf. *A Room of One's Own* becomes *The Small Room* where women have won some place for writing, as Woolf called the need for, and where women have made a small place to discover peer-to-peer bonds — an additional use of the room not explicitly called for by Woolf.

Woolf believed that a book continues a previous book⁶, and in this belief she foreshadowed Bloom's idea: "poems... are neither about 'subjects' nor

4. Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press. 1975), p. 19.

5. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 116.

6. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1957), p. 84.

about 'themselves' ". They are necessarily about *other poems*; a poem is a response to a poem, as a poet is a response to a poet, or a person to his parent."⁷ Woolf called the need for a room of one's own. Sarton heard that call, as if Woolf were a mermaid, met the need, and remodelled Woolf's plan for a room.

That Woolf served as a literary parent to Sarton is easy but also important to see. In *The Small Room*, besides the title, there are obvious allusions to *A Room of One's Own*, such as the male image of an intellectual woman as a dog dancing on hind legs. — Woolf's reference to Dr. Johnson's famous remark⁸ Sarton also uses Woolf's image of a spider's web as the pattern or being of a narrative.⁹ Moreover, Sarton realizes and reverses some practices of male-centered fiction pointed out by Woolf. For example, early in the novel three women professors state that the college [and the reader can infer the novel also] was not founded to give society, i.e. the male establishment, what it wants.¹⁰ Woolf wrote how slightly female characters had been drawn by male nineteenth-century writers in their monistic discourses. Sarton reverses this social and linguistic practice, making male characters virtually nonexistent, invisible, valorizing the oppositional in contrast to the dominant. Woolf wrote that in literature up to her time men had reported or conveyed women's feelings or ideas; just as in *The Small Room* women report men's feelings.¹¹ According to Woolf male authors muffled female characters to like or dislike — let alone love or hate — other women; they valorized heterosexual as opposed to homosexual ties:

All these relationships between women, I thought, rapidly recalling the splendid gallery of fictitious women, are too simple. So much has been left out, unattempted. And I tried to remember any case in the course of my reading when two women are represented as friends... They are now and then mothers and daughters. But almost without exception they are shown in their relations to men.¹²

In contradistinction Sarton had her characters, who were almost exclusively female, be predominantly absorbed with female kinship networks.

Even though Sarton's writing grew out of Woolf's, it eventually grew away. "Sarton," Woolf might have said, "developed an overt gendered voice,

7. Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, p. 18.

8. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 75.

9. See Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 238 and also Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 43.

10. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 23.

11. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 82.

12. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 222.

painted a stronger tableau of social marginality". In contrast, Woolf must have seemed to Sarton to have done a telescoped critique of heterosexual relations. Some feminist critics do not believe Woolf was a genuinely "feminist" writer, one who supported the social, political, and sexual rights of women to the degree that she should have. Elaine Showalter believes Woolf did not speak out sufficiently in anger:

What is most striking about the book texturally and structurally is its strenuous charm, its playfulness, its conversational surface... The techniques of *Room* are like those of Woolf's fiction, particularly *Orlando*, which she was writing at the same time: repetition, exaggeration, parody, whimsy, and multiple viewpoint. On the other hand, despite its illusions of spontaneity and intimacy, *A Room of One's Own* is an extremely impersonal and defensive book.¹³

Woolf, of course, thought that fighting a personal cause or venting discontent in fiction is distressing, as if the reader's attention were split by it, an idea which suggests that fiction is one matter and social discourse or diatribe, quite another.¹⁴ That the sex of the writer is best left unconscious, uninvolved is a much disputed idea of Woolf's. Would it interfere with or kill the writing?¹⁵ Her statement — one must be careful — does *not* mean that women are incompetent to write great works in a distinctly non-masculine way.¹⁶ In a deservedly noted statement Rachel Blau DuPlessis sums up Woolf's intention:

A 'woman's sentence' is Woolf's shorthand term for a writing unafraid of gender as an issue, undeferential to male judgment while not unaware of the complex relations between male and female. A 'woman's sentence' will thus be constructed in considered indifference to the fact that the writer's vision is seen as peculiar, incompetent, marginal. So Woolf summarizes 'the first great lesson' mastered by Mary Carmichael: 'she wrote as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman...' The doubled emphasis on woman, yet on forgetting woman, is a significant manoeuvre, claiming freedom from a 'tyranny of sex' that is nonetheless palpable and dominant, both negated and affirmed.¹⁷

13. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), p. 282.

14. Virginia Woolf, *Women Writing* (London: The Women's Press, 1979), p. 47.

15. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 96.

16. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, pp. 77-8.

17. Rachel Blau DuPlessis *Writing Beyond the Ending* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985), p. 33.

Sarton wrote in the manner a woman would, yet she went beyond the limits Woolf prescribed. Woolf defined the traditional setting of womanly writing. Sarton moves female characters out of the sitting room to a larger but still "safe little world" of academia¹⁸ to a community of education, knowledge and adventure, which Woolf felt had been denied to women. In this alternative safety zone created by Sarton, women were free to express their love for one another, and did not repress their *Bildung*. Yet in this enclosure the sensualism of the quest becomes a playful erotic indulgence, and so the author ignored Woolf's warnings that personal interest could become confused with the literary.

The Small Room is set in a small college, where sexuality is not transparent but is felt by the very intellectual and social life of the characters. Her teachers have a great repository of personal energy and capacity for insight and romance. They teach literature and love develops. Sarton extends the idea of pure education to include the personal. This extension resembles the classical male Greek practice of a master teaching a young man who then becomes his lover. Allusions abound in Plato's *Symposium*, a banquet about love. Sarton educates her readers about homoeroticism, its games of power and powerlessness, and offers them an alternative romance plot.

This theme of love amongst women is Sarton's main narrative strategy designed to determine — perhaps more than any other factor — the feel of *The Small Room* when it is read. In Woolf's opinion there can be no mistake about an author's gender. The reader feels the presence, the world as feminine or masculine. Nevertheless, many scholarly articles debate gender differences in style. As male critic Brimley Johnson realizes, it is hard to describe what is feminine about writing; Johnson can only definitely isolate the trait: "emotional."¹⁹ Woolf did write that there was a difference between a man's sentence and a woman's. She left it open what a woman's sentence would be in contrast to the excessively loose, heavy, pompous sentence of many male writers, though she did mention that Austen had found her sentence and stuck to it throughout her writings. Modern feminist critics are firm in their beliefs about the difference between "female" and "male" sentences and find it central in literature. Namely, Josephine Donovan claims, "...differences exist in the tone of authority, the declaration of the insider in one, the under - the - surface life in the other, which rejects the authoritarian."²⁰ Woolf states how the construction of fiction can differ from

18. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 122.

19. Woolf, *Women & Writing*, p. 71.

20. Josephine Donovan "Feminist Style Criticism," *Images in Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Susan Koppelman Cornillon (Bowling Green: Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, 1972), pp. 339-52.

person to person, from man to woman. Since values differ, different incidents and details are selected. Even if the "same" events were linked into a narrative, an author would create a unique plot line, much as a person's signature would differ from another's even when the names were identical. Woolf pointed out the fact of gender difference in writing; the selection of content, method, and style all differ,²¹ although she did not define how. DuPlessis in her undaunted book entitled *Writing beyond the Ending* makes a discovery:

Twentieth - century women writers undertake a reassessment of the processes of gendering by inventing narrative strategies, especially involving sequence, character, and relationship... This occurs by a recognition in various elements of narrative of the 'bisexual oscillation' in the psychic makeup of characters, in the relationships portrayed, in the resolutions of texts, and in the style of the prose.²²

Gender differences can appear in absolutely every feature of prose and call for considerable scrutiny of the style. Style is as unique as a person's voice or walk. Some features of the way women walk are characteristic, and yet a familiar person can usually be identified from afar by the posture and the walk. Likewise, gender traits of writing are evident, as Woolf noticed, from the author's very first words.²³

How do the first words of *The Small Room* give us the sense of a woman's presence? How can we isolate its particular resources? The Prologue begins with "Lucy Winter," the name of the protagonist. Woolf notes each sex tends to describe itself.²⁴ On a journey, and Lucy's quest for consciousness, Lucy sees her face reflected in the train window: the image is seen by her as a stranger coming out of the New England landscape, a future self. The reader raises the question, what will the journey bring for her? How will she change? Sarton reinforces such queries with explicit questions "What had she got herself into? What indeed?" These words promise that the narrative will reveal the change in Lucy's inner workmanship. Lucy had been launched into an education, only to occupy herself while her fiancé attended the medical school at Harvard. The tension the plot delineates is between Lucy's selfless love toward her doctor - fiancé — and at the same time the protection of living for others — and the burden of her self-definition.

21. Woolf, *Women & Writing*, p. 71.

22. DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending*, p. 103.

23. Woolf, *Women & Writing*, p. 71.

24. Woolf, *Women & Writing*, p. 71.

In the Prologue, on her way to her teaching position at a small college named Appleton, Lucy recalls being asked at her job interview the question: "You are not planning to marry in the immediate future?" To which she answers, "I have just broken my engagement" — a phrase carrying three implicit meanings. First the heroine's dispossession of hero/husband, i.e. the dispossession of a world of modest normalcy (as in the traditional romance story), second her acting as an individual, free agent, and third a kind of job failure, a failure at the job of marriage (to be), perhaps as much as if she had been fired. The "question" is in form not a question at all, but a command. The interviewer, a woman, continues: "We are rather a close community and the personal element counts. Whether you are happy with us, and how you get on the first year will show us the way." The statement confirms and further defines the reader's orientation: how will Lucy get along in her new workplace, new life? The deciding factor is not productivity, not efficiency, but "closeness." Perhaps the fact of her coming to Appleton by train is significant, for Freud regarded such rides as subconsciously sexual for women. The reader learns that the fast approaching landscape felt to Lucy like a home — a home with the father absent; her father had come from a similar place and had been too absorbed in his own work to be a father. He is the first male disappointment for Lucy, and together with her fiancé the two most important male relationships in the life of any woman; but the interviewer had promised a "personal element" and a "close" community, or rather a humane network. Lucy's father had performed "surgical operations on the heart"; painful, cold to Lucy's feeling. Sarton includes the question, "Would she at last come to terms with her father?" If she hasn't come to terms yet with him, the reader may sense how the emotional path to being on close terms with her (or a) mother probably is less obstructed; a figure like the older female interviewer might do. In this critical climate the Prologue reveals the feminist consideration of a woman on a pilgrimage of life. Her inner selfhood will change — stripped of a father's or a husband's presence.

Some more specific questions about the feminist semiology of the text remain. Now we feel the presence of a woman, with her point of view, but what is she like? What is Sarton's presence as a writer, her style? How does she accompany the reader through the remaining chapters? How does she walk, write?

One narrative strategy for the depiction of gender institution is characterization. In *The Small Room* male characters countermatch female heroines. Lucy's father — that is the symbolic figure of love, desire and authority in a woman's life — is dead. Lucy's fiancé is no longer loving. A student's father died and left her (Pippa Brentwood) troubled with the relationship. The founder of the college got revenge on her dead father by using the inheritance to found it, after he had not allowed her to go to Radcliffe.

Another student, Jane Seaman, searches for a father substitute. Alternate figures replace the father. The first man appearing in the flesh is a professor, Henry Atwood, whom Sarton describes as feeling his own presence at Appleton to be important. His own wife shows how important: she reports that he feels "like a small cock in a yard full of huge hens."²⁵ From a limited perspective the cock may think he is important. Sarton reports Henry's feelings through his wife just as, Woolf pointed out, male writers reported women's feelings through men. Sarton's men are merely husbands in the same way that women were thought of being merely in relation to their husbands. Such reporting can at times make the person whose view is reported seem handicapped or lower in social position. The use of the word "small" is diminutive, belittling, and the epithet is significant: Henry, the cock. He is identified in this way; what is most important or most offensive is isolated, announced. What unites the women is their common difference from the cock. Due to the effects — reductionist, sexual segregation — superiority is felt by the hens. They are, moreover, independent, outspoken, purposeful without financial or sexual dependence on the mate. The use of "huge" hens definitely predescribes Cope's timely entrance. Carryl Cope, a famous critic and professor at Appleton, whom Lucy had expected to have magnitude in the manner of size ["big hens"], instead had it as personal force, presence: "My name's Cope. Who are you?" — manifesting a spontaneous, authoritative nature. Later in the novel Cope is described by Olive Hunt, her lover, as being like a man, a father figure. Cope is an explicitly female teacher speaking of and from dominance.

Carryl is like a man, of course. She has been wonderfully stimulating to her students: she adopted them like orphans, pushed them [like a mother hen], wrangled them, forced them to grow — and they never forget her.²⁶

Furthermore, Sarton's strategy of virtual exclusion of male character is presented in other ways. The appearance of men is ignored, whereas the features of all women are known. Also, there aren't many male professors at the college. Henry felt like a cock in a yard full of hens. The men, when they do speak, hold insignificant views, as women in traditional romance plots were thought not to have opinions about politics, the world, or anything serious or interesting. Sarton's male figures show themselves to be weak. In one passage of Chapter I the men try to speak; their repeated attempts are discounted as not valuable in content and are regarded as interruptions. The

25. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 17.

26. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 204.

treatment of their comments as interruptions is a dramatic way of showing their nonbelonging to the society of "hens" talking, of female ideas and argument.

But is Sarton trapped in the male-female crossfire? Is she trying to trap her reader in it? Perhaps in her attempt to write a new script for female growth and action she uses typical (and exaggerated) language to reveal how conventional gender roles in the traditional telling repress human growth. The cock-hen imagery suggests an anatomy by turning from the narrative to the biological. Conventional sexual asymmetry here is in dialogue with marginality. The omnipotent cock in the garden of powerless hens is surrounded by an aura of specialness. The small cock in the garden of huge hens is timid. His apparent banality is underscored and stands for the male culture at its most vulnerable. The hens, however, are destined for a productive center, a new cultural stance their lives can embody. The male monexistence might be in DuPlessis' words "a symbolic way of making him experience the passivity, dependency, and powerlessness associated with women's experiences of gender."²⁷

A second strategy of Sarton's own unmistakably feminine discourse is her development of the physical environment. According to Susanne Langer's philosophy of art, writers use images of the environment only to further define a character who is at the scene.²⁸ The environment must be consistent with the personality, while not transcending its level of intelligence (from an authorial superiority). Some theorists of narrative call the physical environment the "phenomenal structure" (John Holloway in *Narrative Structure*). Sarton's unique use is to present the scene especially when characters change location and otherwise to present voices almost from nowhere. Dialogue has more importance, more space in *The Small Room* than it does in many novels. When there is description it is obviously being designed. For example, Lucy recalled the "romantic" image of the college's buildings she had had as she was walking across campus upon her arrival. In a romance novel, this double entendre and the use of trains help to create a certain mood and meaning. Carryl Cope's cigarette case is tortoise shell, as if Carryl were an animal, a predator. The house of Summerson is Victorian, and she is old-fashioned. She offers muffins to the new professors and washes dishes. The text of *The Small Room* is irrepressibly rich in imagery evoking the physical female.

A third strategy is the use of juxtaposition to guide the reader's imagination, to give the sense of something, to invoke an attitude

27. DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending*, p. 6.

28. Susanne Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 293.

suggestively. In one case Cope is known by Lucy to have a "peculiar ferocity" before she witnesses it.²⁹ The next words are "Tiger, tiger, burning bright." The elision of "ferocity" into "tiger" (due to their sharing of meaning) and the proximity of "peculiar" to "tiger" add up to a "peculiar tiger." Lovers are often referred to affectionately as tigers, and Carryl's love is richly sensual, articulated, and dominant.

In a similar case of juxtaposition, Lucy is told that Jane registered for her American Renaissance (rebirth) class, to which statement Lucy replies, "'Oh dear.' Then Lucy's dismay turned to embarrassment when everyone laughed."³⁰ The "dear" is a double entendre literally showing dismay but figuratively by juxtaposition expressing affection for Jane. The female professors realize the double entendre and laugh. One's sense of humor reveals one's unconscious. The reader becomes tuned to the novel's sexual leitmotif. Word play, especially sexual, is abundant in the novel. Through it Sarton's alternative narrative, or subtext, explodes. It calls for attention to her frustration with convention, her constant attempt to articulate her knowledge — the nature and locus of love amongst women — the way she ripples it, and to cancel out all her stereotypes. In this way she'll elaborate on a personal catharsis.

A fourth stylistic distinguishing trait is more complex. A process described by Woolf, fiction always incorporates a new word, event, or character and at the same time it re-adjusts the meaning of all previous events, however slightly. The whole story's meaning thus constantly evolves. This feature was accounted for by Jacques Derrida's philosophy of language in which a word becomes different from itself and its original meaning is enlarged. This may be called the "differential nature of fiction". An example characteristic of Sarton occurs when Miss Finch remarks how odd it is that nurturing brilliance would set Appleton apart. The missing term to make her remark intelligible is the fact that Appleton fosters brilliant women. Lucy cannot supply the missing term in her mind and so asks whether this is a society in which brilliance in women is considered desirable. Now, society may mean the world of which Appleton is a part, or only Appleton. If it means only Appleton, then one permissible reading is the question whether the (secret) society is aroused by brilliance (as Cope later proves to be true). To Lucy's question, three women professors respond in unison, with Cope's voice being heard above the rest, that "the college was not founded to give society what it wants." Here society takes on an even more feminist nuance, and serves to correct, adjust, overlap the use of "society" in Lucy's question, for now Lucy has put into the reader's mind, thanks to the last usage of the word "society"

29. See references to the tiger imagery in Sarton, *The Small Room*, pp. 16, 26, and 111.

30. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 16.

the idea that the male establishment may not desire brilliance in women. Harriet Summerson corrects or further defines the word brilliance; it is power, leadership that Appleton builds. With regard to brilliance as power it is to be remembered that Lucy had the impression of Cope as a "star," of a person not muted but potent, gifted, unique. Appleton, and particularly Cope, makes students become like Cope, if we take into consideration the fact that "teaching, curiously enough, is one of the human concerns in which power is nearly absolute... for someone who knows is watching and criticizing, kindly or unkindly, the fumbles of someone who does not know" (p. 194). However, the major emphasis is always on the positive, on people who, "like every great teacher... taught more than... subject" (p. 108).

Above all, the most unusual, unique feature of Sarton's style is the degree of emotional charge some terms have. It may be negative, or positive. An example of each occurs just after Carryl's self revelation, the climax of the novel. Jack Beveridge, an elderly professor, says to Carryl: "We honor you, Carryl."³¹ Sarton gives him "a queer little bow" as he says it. "Honor" is the term with negative charge — a supercharge. The feeling is too strong for the situation, for Jack's persona, for immediately prior he had tried to make a joke to break the dramatic tension. The negative effect consists in Jack's looking "queer." Carryl had not done anything worthy of public celebration. Sarton is justified, however, in using the term if one considers that Carryl may have felt for the student Jane a Platonic twinship. The self-realization of the love exposed to Carryl the harshness of her personality, the over-drive, the over-discipline; such a realization changes the personality, as a psychoanalyst hopes for in therapy: knowing, remembering cures. The public nature of the revelation might also give legitimate emotional charge to the word "honor," if Carryl's act is like coming out of the closet, of refusing any longer to hide nonheterosexual relations from society.

In Sarton's oppositional narrative politics, other terms during the course of the novel are super-charged, overcharged, or *specially* charged. For example, Sarton several times refers to the "crisis" at Appleton.³² A student's plagiarism is hardly a crisis for an entire college and undoubtedly the writer does not want to explore academic ethics. What gives the act the meaning of a crisis is the accompanying deep-seated feelings of Carryl for her student Jane. Without recognizing Carryl's desires, several other terms or descriptions would feel far too strong for their context. Other words are specially charged with feeling, but this time positively. Sarton writes: "Dear room, Lucy thought, 'dear room', and dear, tormented, *great* people. Her thoughts were interrupted by Carryl's commanding, 'I'll take you home,

31. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 25.

32. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 204.

Lucy!" ". The dear room is the small room, after which the novel is named. A room where women's desire resonates and is amplified, not silenced. Sarton treats this room as an echo chamber where we can listen to their voices. Room is equated by parallelism to the people. The "tormented *great* person" is Carryl. The positive words "tormented" (positive because showing sympathy for) and "great" are overcharged beyond what the situation merits, unless one empathizes with Lucy's "astonishingly powerful feelings" of love for Carryl, feelings which Lucy admitted to herself in the middle of the novel.³³ Psychologists have often written about the overvaluation of the love object, the loved person; the valuation is only excessive to those who do not love the person or who cannot see it. The sexuality in *The Small Room* shoots out of the text like a whale pushing itself out of the sea into full view, spraying its water high into the air and leaving behind her the smell of the accidental and the unexpected. Lucy's appreciative words do this.

In the same vein, earlier in the novel, when the professors were being introduced to one another, Harriet Summerson remarked that there should be no more discussion of Jane Seaman, for the new professors did not even know "who Jane Seaman is."³⁴ This structure, using "who," suggests that Jane Seaman is a very important person. If Jane were merely a good student, the structure would suggest more importance than is deserved. But, if Carryl, a professor, falls in love with Jane, if Jane has potency, then she is a person important enough to reckon with.

In summary, then, Sarton's feminist discourse is distinctively her own, as this discussion of five of her stylistic and narrative strategies shows. *The Small Room* is a hot and flowing spider's web of feminist perspective. While Jennifer Finch catches Carryl in her own web, Lucy (the quester) and the reader are similarly caught.

However, narrative is more than a lesson learned from Woolf and one given to the reader. To recall once again Bloom's idea of influence, the precursor of a writer [of Sarton] lives in Sarton; it is equally true that Sarton attempts to join the ranks of undying, immortal writers by living in them, in Woolf as the primary parent.³⁵ Sarton attempts to embody — to her utmost — what a great writer does, to bring into existence the form of great writing. About the formative role of tradition, great writers agree. T. S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" felt that the quality of new literature is measured by the old standards and itself offers a new standard; this measuring can only be earned through great labor. Thereafter, he claimed that "no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His

33. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 185.

34. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 25.

35. Harold Bloom *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975). p. 19.

significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists."³⁶

The literary mother of Sarton, Woolf, defined how great writing can work or have its effect:

...Nature, in her most irrational mood, has traced in invisible ink on the walls of the mind a premonition which these [any] great artists confirm; a sketch which only needs to be held to the fire of genius to become visible. When one so exposes it and sees it come to life one exclaims in rapture. But this is what I have always felt and known and desired! And one boils over with excitement, and, shutting the book even with a kind of reverence as if it were something very precious...³⁷

To consider the meaning or value of a novel, one must consider its form, sequence and resolution. Many other twentieth-century narratives by women have supported a sociocultural situation basic to the development of female identity but have lacked the archetype of literary form. Marilyn French's *Women's Room* is advertised as a novel that changes lives.³⁸ The question is by contrast, what kind of change would be expected from *The Small Room*? If the novel is a social-existential comment, then perhaps it is an exploration of a homoeroticism nourished by the healthy vocation of women, or its exhortation. Sarton constructs *The Small Room* as a formal aesthetic creation. The contemporary philosopher of art, Susanne Langer, presents a detailed view of the formal nature of literary meaning.³⁹ A novel is "formulated feeling," not sociological, nor psychological theory. It is not a commentary on actual problems, nor advice from a friend, a sister. It is not a confession, merely, of one's own feelings. A novel also cannot be viewed as an example from individual human life to illustrate a general social condition; its value and meaning cannot be measured by relevance to actual problems, political, psychic, or moral. No doubt readers might very well argue against Langer's view by saying that there is no reason why literature cannot be relevant, cannot change lives, also by expressing their desire for this type of writing. Langer's aesthetic theory, in contrast, is not a statement of what could occur, does occur, or what some readers might want to find. Rather, resulting from a reflection on literary tradition, it is a statement of basic principles that are needed to make the tradition continuous and consistent.

36. T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. Abrams, 5th Edition, Vol. 2 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), p. 2234.

37. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 75.

38. Marilyn French, *The Women's Room* (London: Sphere Books, 1981).

39. Langer, *Feeling and Form*, p. 287.

Another theorist who agrees with a formal theory of literary meaning is Clive Bell. His idea in general draws out Langer's and Woolf's ideas more fully:

His [Proust's] psychology can hardly be overpraised, but it is the easiest thing in the world to overpraise psychology. Psychology is not the most important thing in the literary or any other art. On the contrary, the supreme masterpieces deserve their splendor, their supernatural power, not from flashes of insight, nor yet from characterization, nor from an understanding of the human heart even, but from form — I use the word in its richest sense, I mean the thing that artists create, their expression. Whether you call it "significant form" or something else, the supreme quality in art is formal; it has to do with order, sequence, movement and shape...⁴⁰

In other words, literature has the power to create, reveal a new truth; to do so, it presents its objects in their emotional significance. A meaningful totality emerges in what E. M. Forster (in *Aspects of the Novel*) called the "Cathedral Effect"; all new details change the meaning of previous ones up to a point at the end when all are seen to belong to a totality like the beautiful, infinite richness of a cathedral. This idea of a totality is similarly held by Woolf, who calls it "integrity."⁴¹ Certainly these ideas apply to *The Small Room* and help to structure its depths of meaning. A truth is revealed or created in it. It is a "simple truth", remarked Jack Beveridge after the emotional climax.⁴² Hence, a new vision of reality emerges, a new self.

Myths provide women writers with material that is indifferent to historical consideration of gender, claiming universal, humanistic, natural status. Subsequently, women writers turn to myths and "revise" them to include themselves, deconstruct them to visualize themselves "as an act of survival." In Adrienne Rich's words:

Re-vision — the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves... We need to know the writing of the past, and know

40. Langer, *Feeling and Form*, p. 30.

41. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 74.

42. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 240.

it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us.⁴³

In a general way the form that Sartre designed for *The Small Room* echoes the form of great epics and myths dating long before Homer. Joyce used the term "monomyth" to describe the tendency of the myths to become a single form and a story, and argued that the monomyth remains in literature, however transfigured.⁴⁴ Mythologist Joseph Campbell wrote extensively on the monomyth. He defined it as the mythological adventure of a hero, which he also believed to be transformed by literature. In *The Small Room* there is a hero, a quest, a treasure: the hero is a woman; the quest is her consciousness; the treasure is the whole buried knowledge of the relations amongst women and an altered self-definition through the act of criticism. There are always three acts in the monomyth, allowing for some variations of each act, around which all other events crystallize: separation, initiation (which often is a struggle to the death), and return (rebirth). These three phases definitely apply to *The Small Room* and it is through them that one can see its meaning and depth as literature.

In the first act of adventure the hero "ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder." Lucy goes to an Appleton, full of specialness, where she lives among members of a "secret" society. Strange, powerful Carryl is encountered, who arouses in Lucy a feeling "astonishing in its intensity".⁴⁵ Lucy had left the common heterosexual world, having broken her engagement to John, thus making a critique of it. She starts her quest at Appleton, where sacred mystery is encountered: And Lucy

...felt sure that only from immense inner reserve, only from the secret life, the dedicated life, could such moments be created. They came from innocence, deep as a well, the innocence of those who have chosen to set themselves apart for a great purpose: "the

43. Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision," in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1962-1978* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company 1973), p. 35. Of further interest here, see also Alicia Ostriker, *Stealing the Language* (London: The Women's Press, 1986), and, more specifically, Chapter 6: "Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythology."

44. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Bollingen Series 17 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1949), p. 30. Here Campbell refers to the "monomyth" suggesting the singularization of forms or the fixation and increasing awareness of the way myths are made. Campbell argues that James Joyce first used the term "monomyth" in *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking Press, 1939), p. 581.

45. Sartre, *The Small Room*, p. 185.

teacher," a voice from a cloud. This power, Lucy suspected, had to be as carefully guarded as the creative power of the artist. What nourished it? Would she herself ever do more than stand at the threshold of the mystery, stand there with awe, but outside? Would she ever herself be a keeper of the sacred fire?⁴⁶

Here Lucy anticipates the second act in the great adventure of the hero in the monomyth. It is her initiation, which is yet to come. Much of the novel presents the changes in Lucy: her constant development after her act of separation by going to Appleton, which goes hand in hand with her increasing readiness to be initiated into the secret society of Appleton. Her bonds toward women become stronger, her feelings more open, affectionate.

The denouement, the most important scene of the novel, is an initiation. The emotion of the climax should be interpreted as that of an initiation, a rite of passage into a different order or phase of life. Primitive initiation rites taught the hunter the mysteries of the hunted animal, or some were initiation into adulthood by sexual acts, circumcision, or the infliction of pain used on boys to bring them into manhood. The act is a painful, emotional self-realization by Carryl in a small room of her colleagues. Because of all the difficulties for many people at the college, Jennifer Finch asks a series of questions to break down Carryl's defences. Carryl had driven a student so hard toward perfection that Jane plagiarised an essay just to please her teacher. The exposure of the plagiarism nearly caused Jane, a senior, to be expelled; it did result in her seeking psychiatric treatment. For a long time Carryl had been the protégée of the older trustee Olive Hunt, who, jealous at the attention Carryl gave the student, threatened to stop contributing money to the college. Also, Carryl's reputation as a teacher was at stake; she had endorsed the student strongly. Jennifer calls the series of questions and the situation leading to that moment of the text a "spider's web with a long fine-spun thread" (a description of fiction given by Woolf). Jennifer starts the most painful questions by pointing out that "there is an intangible communion between a teacher and a student which is not, I am prepared to grant, wholly intellectual"⁴⁷ — a phrase that resonates textual primacy. Alternatively, absolute separation of love and vocation leads to sheer power and ambition. Carryl's ecstatic commitment to the vocation of teacher-critic serves the ideology of striving and success that Carryl embodies. But in Jennifer's words teaching is intricately bound with the power of love relations. Then Jennifer repeats the motto preceding the book: "Teach me to

46. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 117.

47. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 238.

heare mermaids singing...; Perhaps quite simply you did not hear the mermaids singing, you and Jane."⁴⁸ Some moments later Carryl was forced to realize that she had created a power vacuum around her and had withheld love from Jane Seaman. She blushed — something so out of character for the tiger. (Carryl exhibits a trait of her foil: Lucy).

Indeed, in this act Carryl is initiated in a complex way. Her identity develops. A new phase of experience will begin. Prior to Carryl's painful self revelation and public revelation, she had been the student/lover of an older woman successfully, though not the successful teacher/lover of a younger woman (Jane Seaman). Since Olive Hunt became jealous at Carryl's new involvement, the relationship broke. Carryl found her new role in life as teacher-lover destabilizing and devastating, as opposed to her former role as student-lover. Olive had placed Carryl in a nexus of money, helped her acquire a privileged bourgeois self. In other words, she provided Carryl with a room — an institutional and financial space — which Carryl no longer needed. Carryl in the end resisted Olive's sexual colonization; such love was possessive. And through Carryl, Sarton rejects the specific lesbian romance as another version of power and dominance. Now, Carryl is being initiated to a new role as lover-teacher. The role is opened, the pleasure suspended. She passes on to a new phase of her life.

But she cannot do so unless there will be a "student" lover of hers. So Lucy [and the reader] is initiated at the same time that Carryl is; their destinies are intertwined. During the course of *The Small Room* Lucy's infatuation with Carryl becomes explicit, even passionate. The mystery of Carryl for Lucy is apparent before they meet. Carryl is a woman whom other women "gravitate" to. It grows until Lucy feels her yearning for Carryl.⁴⁹ Lucy and Carryl, true equals through common vocational vision and emotional life, are left at the end of their quest together to create a new psychological space. Through them, Sarton valorizes lesbianism as a nondominant form of the erotic.

Carryl tells Lucy and the Atwoods, after her emotional self - discovery, "Well, you Atwoods and Lucy, perhaps now your initiation is complete. As usual, it turns out to be an anticlimax: we have certainly taken our hair down in this small room."⁵⁰ The next words are in Lucy's thoughts "dear room... dear tormented *great* perople."⁵¹ Doubtlessly, here the title of the novel has its meaning as do the people and in particular the tormented great person Carryl. The words "tormented" and "great" help to intensify and reveal

48. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 238.

49. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 185.

50. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 240.

51. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 240.

Lucy's strong emotional state. Her height of emotion should, by parallelism of selection in the text, be equal to Carryl's.

It is just as important that Lucy be initiated as Carryl — perhaps more so because the novel begins with Lucy's separation and adventure, not with Carryl's. At the point of the initiation or the victory of the hero against a monster, each combatant becomes the other or is united with the other. The hero, according to Cambell, assimilates his opposite, his own unsuspected self.⁵² Carryl did not expect she would blush; Lucy did not realize she could be like Carryl. In a later passage the change in personality of Lucy becomes more obvious, for she seems even to herself "violent" — a trait of the old Carryl. In initiations there often is a bowing or submission, as the humbling of Carryl. Often in myths the hero who had set out on an adventure is a lover; what is won is symbolized as a woman; in Sarton's mythopoesis, she is the other portion of the hero himself, as Lucy and Carryl complement one another: the new teacher of love and the new student of love. Carryl acknowledges Lucy's fusion of role and vocation, Lucy Carryl's power of learning. The victory of the hero is usually accomplished by superhuman traits, which Carryl had manifested throughout and which Lucy had sensed, felt, coveted, "gravitated toward." Lucy calls Carryl "great."⁵³ Furthermore, Lucy feels odd new sensations, ecstatic joy. These mark the points or degrees from her separation to her initiation. Throughout the novel Lucy had been experiencing new sensations, feelings. For example, when together in the same room with Olive Hunt and Carryl Cope, the two lovers, Lucy "felt they had rubbed her the wrong way, ... made her feel sparky and tense, like a cat whose fur is full of electricity... It was not an unpleasant sensation."⁵⁴ Lucy liked the new feeling. At a later point, when Lucy was near Miss Summerson, something streamed out of Lucy that was "absolutely open and passionate"; a daimon was freed, one not like that creative energy of the artist; in fact the *Bildung* of Carryl as an artist is put aside for the interests of the romance plot. Later still, Lucy is astonished at how powerful her feelings for Carryl are:

Was Carryl Cope herself not incorruptible? Lucy could now see the lights in the upper windows of the old mansion. She felt acutely again the humiliation the faculty meeting must have meant for the woman up there; the little ironies, the overt resentment, these had been met with wonderful grace and self-control, but would there not be a reaction? She rang the bell, feeling dread and something like awe, not toward

52. Cambell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, p. 108.

53. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 240.

54. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 85.

the famous Professor Cope, but toward the suffering, endearing, conflicted, noble human being. 'I love her,' she thought, astonished at the intensity of the emotion she was experiencing."⁵⁵

The act of initiation itself reveals in Lucy a new feeling: the feeling of being a member of the small room of people, and its internalized ideology, of being like Carryl Cope, of belonging at last to that secret society that prepares women for life and sexuality through educating them.

Lucy's new sensations do not stop after her initiation, but continue. Sitting in Carryl's home, after Carryl's self-revelation, Lucy realizes, "I have the strongest sensation as if I were coming back all the time." "Back where?" asks Carryl. "Well, at Hallie's for instance, it was coming back to the room where I first met you all, feeling so new and strange. Here I am coming back, too. I've never told you what it meant to be invited up here when you asked me that first time."⁵⁶ The changes of feeling signify changes in vision of reality, as Langer points out.⁵⁷ The changes continued after the initiation. Lucy felt as if she had returned home, to Carryl's room. Carryl's new feeling, her feeling of return, differs. When speaking about the loss of Olive, whose belongings were still in her apartment, being seen by Lucy as they talked, Carryl says she will be fine alone; she will work hard; she has "metal fatigue," the wearing away and weakening of one's substance, in this case of "the machinery of feeling." Carryl felt Jane had taken something out of her for good, as if it had been the exhaustion of a birth. This feeling of independence, the bravado, the mask of courage, not totally genuine as noticed by Lucy, is a trait of the hero after initiation. The hero is as "wife unto himself."⁵⁸ Carryl's initiation had been a catharsis, a purification of one's feeling, a humbling, and as Cambell notes the "passing of forms we have loved" — in this case, the end to the affair with Olive as well as the unrequited love of Jane.

This return of the mythological hero is explained by Cambell to be necessary, to be the reason for the adventure, whether the prize can be brought back by the hero or not. The third act in the monomyth of human existence is the completion of the journey, the return of the hero to his homeland with the knowledge, the prize, perhaps the bride, the golden fleece, or the power over all creation. As in the Epic of Gilgamesh, in which

55. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 185.

56. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 243.

57. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 287.

58. Cambell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, p. 154, fn. 94. Cambell here quotes the following words from Joyce's *Ulysses*: "...in the economy of heaven... there are no more marriages, glorified man, and androgynous angel, being a wife unto himself (p.210)."

the pattern of the monomyth was already firmly established as early as 1.800 B. C., the hero, Gilgamesh, crosses strange, dangerous waters seeking the plant of immortality. This is his separation from ordinary life and the ordinary world. He must be initiated to the secret and, if there are to be adventures for someone in the future, must return home, just as some hero must have returned home before Gilgamesh could have set out on his journey, or else he would not have known about the plant of immortality across the dangerous waters. The return of Gilgamesh is his obligation. He must share the adventure, pass it on, continue the tradition. The hero must teach others about the mystery. The hero must leave his solitude and rejoin the community.

In Sarton's narrative Lucy will leave her monologue, for she has joined the secret society in spirit; Carryl will give up her self-protective independence, bravado and will realize the centrality of love. Then she will become the teacher of love, a role she had not played, while Lucy will become the student of love, likewise a new role. They could not fulfill these new roles unless they were members in a community, in a medium of relationships, unless they helped each other to obtain the other's goals.

And in further support of the return to the community, Woolf acknowledges this obligation of literature: "the experience of the mass is behind the single voice."⁵⁹ Feminist literature, which has been personal, confessional, vituperative, Woolf believes will become increasingly better, increasingly impersonal, or increasingly communal, to include all of human nature.

On the whole, Sarton's novel gains power by envisioning the separation, initiation, and return of Lucy, the protagonist, to be an epic as fundamental as any struggle in human existence, as fundamental as the rising and falling of empires, the birth and death of each successive generation of humanity. She rises to a source of power through Carryl, who loses a previous lover and will gain a new one: Lucy. Lucy inherits the elemental process of the universe. The generations of lovers come, they go. Through her pilgrimage she renews and re-centers her life. Myths do this: they explore the art of life and "supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward in counteraction to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back."⁶⁰ Lucy was initiated into the seemingly unmonumental small room.

Finally, she feels at home in Carryl Cope's small room. In it new sensations were felt; a new self emerged, was uncovered and admitted.

In a poem entitled "My Sisters, O My Sisters" May Sarton attempts again to unravel a submerged self and challenges writers to follow her:

59. Sarton, *The Small Room*, p. 69.

60. Cambell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, p. 11.

And how we who are writing women and strange monsters
Still search our hearts to find difficult answers,

Still hope that we may learn to lay our hands
More gently and more subtly on the burning sands.

To be through what we make more simply human,
To come to the deep place where poet becomes woman,

Where nothing has to be renounced or given over
In the pure light that shines out from the lover,

In the warm light that brings forth fruit and flower
And that great sanity, that sun, the feminine power.⁶¹

In the resolution of her novel, after all the psychic make-up and the relationships of the characters had been portrayed, Sarton locates and enframes once again the room where a "poet becomes woman." In this way the desire of having a room of one's own becomes now a control. In its interlocked realms the artist generated and contained taboo emotions, power and failure; finally she deterritorialized it to make it a rupture from the establishment, a talisman of freedom. Finally, Appleton — the all women's college, the 'self-enclosed' society of professors, the 'ravaged place' of the heroines — takes on the form of a communal protagonist. This central female character engages the reader to participate in a play of potential, fecundity, power, to acquire the "Medusan gaze of the panoptic eye."⁶²

61. May Sarton, "My Sisters, O My Sisters," *Selected Poems* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), pp. 192-3.

62. William V. Spanos, "Foreword to Jim Stark's Works," *boundary 2* 16, 2/3 (Winter/Spring 1989), p. 176.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Λιάνα Σακελλίου-Schultz, *Ο Μονός Μύθος του Έρωτα στο Μικρό Δωμάτιο της May Sarton*

Ο έρωτας στο *Μικρό Δωμάτιο* (The Small Room, έκδ. 1961) είναι σαν το πεπρωμένο που παραδοκούσε τους μυθικούς ήρωες. Έψαχναν την αθανασία, αλλά υπέφεραν το πεπρωμένο και πήραν τη θέση τους στη φαντασμαγορία της ανθρώπινης ύπαρξης. Οι ήρωες της May Sarton είναι γυναίκες, η αναζήτησή τους είναι μία νέα συνείδηση, ενώ ο θησαυρός που ανακαλύπτουν είναι η θαμμένη γνώση των γυναικείων σχέσεων και ένας μεταβαλλόμενος αυτο-προσδιορισμός μέσω της κριτικής πράξης. Οι ανακαλύψεις των χαρακτήρων της May Sarton γίνονται κατόπιν σκληρών δοκιμασιών, σαν να ξαναγεννιούνται ή να γεννούν στο *Μικρό Δωμάτιο*.

Η Virginia Woolf με το έργο της *Ένα Δικό σου Δωμάτιο* (A Room of One's Own) υπήρξε και ο καλλιτεχνικός δαίμων ή η σειρήνα της May Sarton. Αφού προσδιόρισε τον παραδοσιακό φόντο της γυναικείας γραφής, επικαλέστηκε πρώτη την ανάγκη ενός δωματίου για την συγγραφέα. Επίσης ανέφερε ότι το φύλο του/της γράφοντος δεν πρέπει να επεμβαίνει στη γραφή. Η May Sarton άκουσε την Woolf και μετέφερε τους χαρακτήρες της στο *Μικρό Δωμάτιο*, στον ασφαλή πάλι αλλά μεγαλύτερο χώρο της ακαδημαϊκής κοινότητας του Appleton College που η Woolf αισθανόταν ότι τόν είχαν αρνηθεί στις γυναίκες. Σ' αυτήν την εναλλακτική ασφάλεια, οι ηρωίδες δεν απωθούν το *Bildung* τους και είναι ελεύθερες να εκφραστούν και ερωτικά. Όμως η φιληδονία της αναζήτησής τους μεταβάλλεται σε παιχνιδιάρικη ερωτική εντρύφηση, κι έτσι η συγγραφέας αγνοεί την προειδοποίηση της Woolf ότι το φιλολογικό μπορεί να συγχέεται με το προσωπικό ενδιαφέρον.

Στο κείμενό μου ψαύω την αντιθετική κατασκευή του μονού μύθου στο *Μικρό Δωμάτιο* και την αφηγηματική και υφολογική στρατηγική μιας λογοτεχνίας του «περιθωρίου».