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### Professions for Women: Analysis

In January of 1931 Virginia Woolf presented a speech for the National Society for Women's Service (Leaska). She had been to share some of her own experiences from professional life and did some of that but more adequately she conveyed ideas that would better prepare women for the journey they were to face and instill a sense of excitement at the discoveries and questions they would have to face.

From Woolf's text, which was not published until after her death (Leaska), she begins by expressing her own concern that she does not have many professional experiences to share as her profession is writing and "in that profession there are fewer experiences for women than in any other" (Woolf). Woolf does share an idea of needing to kill the Angel in the House in order to be true to herself and her gender. Michele Beller provides this insight, "Years after Patmore penned this tribute to his wife Emily, it is clear that Woolf saw this ideal -- written by a man -- of how a woman should conduct herself (the "Angel"), as a threat to women, and especially "professional women" (Beller). As we read about this Angel in the House we learn that she is the stereotype of what women should be and the rules that they should abide: intensely sympathetic, immensely charming, utterly unselfish, "in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others" (Woolf). Being women entering the workforce in professions not previously held by women the Angel in

the House would be something that they all would have to encounter since “any men believed that a woman’s place was to do everything in her power to please her man” (Online Guide to Women in the Workforce: Past and Present).

We continue into the identity and inequality that Woolf speaks of with a story of a female fisherman dreaming at the edge of a lake when in an instant “her imagination had rushed away. It had sought the pools, the depths, the dark places...There was an explosion...She had thought something about the body, about the passions which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say” (Woolf). The experiences that Virginia Woolf chose are important as she states, “I have laid stress upon these professional experiences of mine because I believe that they are, though in different forms, yours also” (Woolf). By these stories and evoking the emotions and thoughts attached to them Woolf is preparing her audience to face the stereotype of the Angel in the House and realize that they will be breaking through the barriers placed by men. Experiences like these are not uncommon even today; let us take J.K. Rowling, author of the famous Harry Potter series as an example, “[Harry Potter] was first published by Bloomsbury Children’s Books in June 1997, under the name J.K. Rowling. The “K”, for Kathleen, her paternal grandmother’s name was added at her publisher’s request who thought that a woman’s name would not appeal to the target audience of young boys” (Biography: J.K. Rowling). Thus we see that nearly seventy years later some aspect of the “House Angel” and the subsequent, stereotypical, identity of women are still playing a role in our global society today.

Moving into Woolf’s closing to her speech she lights a flame of excitement within her audience and empowers them to go out into the workforce and discover for themselves, ask the questions and find or become the answers. By stating the achievements thus far Woolf congratulates and commends her audience for the progress they have made, “you have won

rooms of your own house...you are able, though not without great labour and effort, to pay the rent [sic]" (Woolf). The empowering and excitement comes from encouragement offered by Woolf as she presents these questions that relate to the quote above, "how are you going to furnish it, how are you are you going to decorate it? With whom are you going to share it, and upon what terms" (Woolf). "For the first time in history you are able to ask them; for the first time you are able to decide for yourselves what the answers should be" (Woolf). With those closing sentiments Woolf empowered the women in her audience and, by the publication of this article, women of the world, to explore their chosen fields, discover their abilities and break into the professional world where men have previously impeded progress of women by their "extreme conventionality" (Woolf).

The effects of empowerment, hope, and excitement that speeches like Woolf's are wonderful. While women still had a huge, uphill battle ahead of them to gain equality in the work force progress has been made. "Today, women account for over 45% of the world's workforce. Women account for about 46% of the total U.S. labor force. In 2006 there were 67 million women employed in the U.S. and the labor participation rate was up to 59.4%" (Online Guide to Women in the Workforce: Past and Present). In addition to the increase of women in the workplace it is difficult today to picture a professional position which could not include women.

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