Available Online: 6 June 2025 DOI: 10.54254/2753-7080/2025.23445

A comparative analysis of Woolf's androgynous theory and Beauvoir's feminist theory

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Abstract. This paper takes Virginia Woolf's theory of the androgynous mind and Simone de Beauvoir's feminist doctrine as entry points to dissect the convergences and divergences in the evolution of their feminist thought. Through an analysis of the original texts *A Room of One's Own* and *The Second Sex*, it compares their distinctive interpretations of the paths to female awakening: Woolf regards economic autonomy and creative freedom as means to break free from the shackles of patriarchal society, while Beauvoir employs the scalpel of existentialism to expose women's construction as the "Other." Both unveil the intricate web of patriarchal oppression, yet their strategies for deconstruction diverge—Woolf builds an imagined utopia within literary space, while Beauvoir launches a philosophical offensive against entrenched structures. This trans-Channel dialogue not only highlights the cognitive gulf between Anglo-American empiricism and Continental rationalism but also reveals the complementary potential among different currents within the feminist movement, offering dual decoding strategies for contemporary gender dilemmas.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, androgynous mind theory, feminist theory

1. Introduction

In the landscape of twentieth-century feminist theory, Virginia Woolf's poetics of the androgynous mind and Simone de Beauvoir's existential phenomenology represent complementary paradigms of thought. Woolf, by deconstructing the gender binary, proposes in *A Room of One's Own* a pathway to transcend gender essentialism through creative practice—the metaphor of "five hundred pounds a year" not only points to the material basis of autonomy but also constructs a cognitive framework beyond gender discipline. De Beauvoir, through the phenomenological dissection in *The Second Sex*, reveals how patriarchy constructs women as the "absolute Other" via cultural symbol systems [1], proposing a dual strategy of economic empowerment and systemic reform for women's liberation. Although they anchor their methodologies respectively in literary imagination and philosophical critique, both converge in a critical dialogue over the material foundations of gender politics, jointly affirming economic independence as a precondition for dismantling gendered structures of oppression. Their theoretical tension continues to shape the epistemological contours of contemporary feminism [2]. This paper seeks to construct a dialogue between the androgynous utopia envisioned through Woolf's pen and the existentialist feminism developed by de Beauvoir. It begins with Woolf's poetics of androgyny flowing through Orlando—where the protagonist's four-century journey across gender lines stages a literary experiment in transcending gender boundaries. It then moves to de Beauvoir's dissection table in *The Second Sex*, observing how she strips away the socially imposed second-sex identity through the concept of "Otherness." Unexpectedly, during the course of research, a hidden resonance emerges: Woolf's 1928 call for "five hundred pounds a year and a room with a lock" and de Beauvoir's later assertion that "economic independence is the first step to liberation" echo each other across the morning mists of London and Paris. Juxtaposing these two theoretical frameworks reveals not only their shared critique of patriarchy but also the intellectual temperature difference between Anglo-American empiricism and Continental existentialism—while Woolf blurs gender boundaries through stream of consciousness, de Beauvoir dismantles gender essentialism through phenomenology. This cross-temporal intellectual contest refracts the multifaceted spectrum of feminism, offering a dual decoding tool for contemporary gender dilemmas. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) fully articulates her feminist perspective. As a landmark in the history of feminist thought, the work systematically deconstructs mechanisms of gender oppression under patriarchy and, through its groundbreaking theoretical constructs, provides a crucial paradigm for modern gender studies. Central to Woolf's feminist framework is the concept of the "androgynous mind," [3] a bold theoretical innovation that transcends traditional gender essentialism. She advocates that artistic creation should abandon rigid gender divisions, dynamically fusing masculine and feminine qualities to form a complete creative

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subjectivity beyond binary oppositions. Through close readings of Shakespeare's plays, Woolf demonstrates that great art often arises from a transcendence of gender dualism—only when writers shed the constraints of gendered identity can they reach true creative freedom. This transcendence of gender consciousness constitutes the very foundation of artistic timelessness.Woolf's strategy of linking gender politics to aesthetic value deepens the theoretical dimensions of feminist criticism and provides a highly productive epistemological tool for deconstructing traditional gender orders. She contends that it is precisely this "androgynous" mind that enabled Shakespeare to capture the full, rich dimensions of human nature. When *A Room of One's Own* stirred the London literary scene in 1929, few could have foreseen that this slim silver-spined volume would become a golden key to unlocking the codes of gender. With a feathered pen dipped in the London fog, Woolf planted the seeds of the androgynous mind—not as a mere blending of genders, but as a literary revolution. She transformed Shakespeare's quill into a scalpel: when Hamlet soliloquizes on the wooden stage of the Globe Theatre, who can discern whether the voice that pierces time emanates from a male chest or a female throat? Just as in Orlando, where the poet transcends four centuries and switches genders, Woolf builds an experimental laboratory within her pages, exchanging gender traits like chemical elements in reaction. She reminds us that when Jane Austen had to hide her manuscripts at the creak of the drawing-room door, and the Brontë sisters were forced to wear the mask of male pseudonyms, literature had already become a prisoner of gender. Only by breaking these cognitive cages—by allowing masculinity and femininity to intertwine like twin flames in creation—can timeless art be forged. Woolf's "androgynous mind" theory thus carries a dual critical significance: it deconstructs traditional gender binaries and directly confronts the historical marginalization of women in the field of literary production. By tracing the deprivation of women's access to education and creative space, Woolf reveals the mechanisms through which male discursive hegemony was established in literature. Her theory not only provides a foundational argument for women's equal participation in creative work but also opens new perspectives for rethinking the relationship between gender and artistic production. It has profoundly influenced subsequent feminist literary criticism and gender studies, becoming an essential theoretical paradigm for interrogating the intersections of creation and gender.

Simone de Beauvoir, in her seminal work *The Second Sex*, systematically elaborates her feminist philosophy [4]. Drawing on phenomenology and existentialism, and engaging Hegel's master-slave dialectic, Heidegger's ontology, and Sartre's theory of freedom, she constructs a multidimensional framework for feminist analysis. De Beauvoir insists that only by situating the question of women within the totality of human existence can we grasp the true nature of gender differences. She insightfully demonstrates how patriarchal society, through constructing men as "Self" and women as "Other," strips women of their subjectivity. Her analysis not only unveils the socially constructed nature of gender roles but also dissects how institutions such as marriage and motherhood serve as mechanisms of discipline and oppression. De Beauvoir advocates that the path to women's liberation lies in achieving intellectual independence through education, economic autonomy through employment, and self-affirmation through existential realization. Even today, her deep insights into the structural roots of gender inequality continue to offer vital theoretical guidance and practical inspiration for global efforts toward gender equality.

2. Literature review

2.1. Introduction

Virginia Woolf's theory of androgyny and Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory in *The Second Sex* each represent major strands of twentieth-century feminist thought [1]. Woolf deconstructs gender binary oppositions through her concept of androgyny, advocating for gender integration and transcendence. In contrast, Beauvoir, from an existentialist perspective, exposes the roots of women's "otherness," emphasizing the socially constructed nature of female oppression. Although both theorists are concerned with gender equality, existing research primarily focuses on each theory in isolation, lacking systematic comparative studies. Furthermore, the formation mechanism of Woolf's theory of androgyny and its potential connections with Beauvoir's theory remain largely unexplored [5]. This paper reviews existing literature, offering a comprehensive discussion on their theoretical content, methodological differences, practical significance, and influencing factors, aiming to provide a new perspective for future research.

2.2. Theoretical core and differences: Woolf's "androgyny" vs. Beauvoir's "otherness"

2.2.1. Woolf's theory of androgyny: a gender utopia beyond binary opposition

2.2.1.1. In-depth elaboration of the theoretical core

Woolf's concept of androgyny, proposed in *A Room of One's Own* [6], constitutes a sharp rebuttal to nineteenth-century biological determinism. Through the fictional figure of "Shakespeare's Sister," Woolf reveals how society systematically excludes women from creative fields through educational deprivation, economic dependence, and cultural regulation. At its core, her theory asserts that cultural encodings of gender far outweigh biological essence. When Woolf declares that "a great mind is androgynous," she is not simply advocating for the combination of masculine and feminine traits. Rather, she aims to dismantle the cognitive shackles that equate masculinity with rationality and femininity with emotionality—binary divisions that themselves serve as tools of patriarchal cognitive violence.

Nearly two decades before *The Second Sex* was published, Woolf had already perceptively captured the performative characteristics of gender [7]. Through everyday observations, she reveals the micro-mechanisms of gender discipline: scenes such as women being expelled from libraries or reprimanded for stepping on lawns hint at the topography of gendered power relations in public spaces. Her famous assertion that "a woman must have five hundred pounds a year"points not only to economic independence but also metaphorically to the possibility of transcending gendered modes of existence—money, as a material foundation, enables individuals to break free from lives confined by gender scripts.

Woolf's ideal model of personality is inherently paradoxical: on the one hand, she seeks to dissolve gender binaries; on the other, her concept of "fusion" still operates within an existing framework that acknowledges gender traits. This theoretical dilemma reflects a common challenge faced by early feminist thought—how to deconstruct gender essentialism without inadvertently reinforcing it. The "third sex" imagined in her works resembles a modern reinterpretation of Plato's myth of the androgynous being: a pursuit of a complete human nature, yet still limited by the imaginative boundaries set by a patriarchal framework [8].

2.2.1.2. Subversive strategies in literary practice

The gender transformation in Orlando is far from mere fantasy—it constitutes a precise narrative experiment. As the protagonist transitions from a sixteenth-century male nobleman to a twentieth-century female writer, Woolf dissolves biological determinism through the continuity of a single body bearing radically different social significances. The scene where Orlando, now female, spends three hours selecting petticoats in the morning is highly symbolic—suggesting that gender is a kind of cultural clothing donned upon the body [9]. This literary device, preceding Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity by half a century, powerfully illustrates the fluidity of gender identity.

The novel's four-century span serves as a dual deconstruction of gender essentialism. Historically, it juxtaposes the knightly ideals of the Elizabethan era with the "angel in the house" ideal of the Victorian age, demonstrating how gender norms are continually reconstructed across eras. Experientially, Orlando's evolving gender consciousness over centuries implies that gender identity is a dynamic process rather than a fixed essence.

This reflects the subversive power of metafiction. Woolf mischievously inserts a "biographer" narrator who claims that Orlando's gender change was merely a clerical error in the historical record. This self-referential narrative technique not only undermines the authority of traditional biography but also hints that gender narratives themselves are constructs of power. As the narrator struggles to explain Orlando's multiple identities, the inherent fissures within all gender discourses are laid bare.

2.2.2. Beauvoir's The Second Sex: a critique of "otherness" from an existentialist perspective

Simone de Beauvoir famously asserted that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," emphasizing that women are socially, economically, and culturally constructed as the "Other" of men. She argued that patriarchy, through institutional structures and ideological apparatuses, confines women to the domestic sphere and deprives them of subjectivity [10].

Drawing upon Sartre's existentialist axiom that "existence precedes essence," Beauvoir applied this principle to the realm of gender. She contended that femininity is not an innate biological destiny but rather a socially constructed "second sex," shaped through institutional discipline, cultural symbolism, and economic oppression. As she meticulously illustrates in her work: when a young girl is first taught to "act like a lady," when a teenager is forbidden from climbing trees or running freely, when an adult woman is expected to find her ultimate fulfillment in family life—patriarchy is systematically carrying out a "manufacture of women" project.

Beauvoir uniquely exposed the political strategy through which patriarchal society secures male dominance by constructing women as the "absolute Other." This process of othering manifests itself in multiple ways: Spatial confinement: women are expelled from the public sphere and restricted to the "sacred domestic" spaces of the kitchen, the birthing bed, and the dressing table; Knowledge deprivation: women's contributions are erased from historical narratives, and philosophical traditions exclude women from the domain of rational subjectivity; Economic dependence: by stripping women of property rights and labor opportunities, they are forced into parasitic reliance on men. This systemic objectification ultimately entraps women in a paradoxical existence—"neither slaves nor tyrants"—thus depriving them of full autonomy.

Distinct from many of her contemporaries, Beauvoir did not merely expose the mechanisms of oppression; she also emphasized the possibility of individual transcendence. She proposed that genuine liberation requires: Economic independence, to shatter the myth of the "housewife" and reclaim freedom to participate in social production; Spiritual awakening, to refuse to become the "woman in bad faith" and to rebuild subjectivity through the existentialist pursuit of authenticity; Political struggle, to dismantle the patriarchal institutional foundations through collective action.

Beauvoir's insights remain strikingly relevant today. When "stay-at-home moms" are idealized anew through the collusion of capitalism and patriarchy, and when consumerism distorts women's liberation into a false freedom of endless shopping, her warnings still ring loud and clear: true emancipation does not lie in choosing between high heels or flats, but in breaking free from the structural cages that define women as the "Other." As she stated, "One is not born submissive but is trained into submission,"—a process that continues subtly through social media, workplace norms, and the gendered division of domestic labor. Revisiting Beauvoir's thought thus serves as an ongoing project of deconstructing all forms of invisible oppression.

While Beauvoir advocated for women to break their dependent status through economic independence and political participation, she was critical of traditional feminist movements that over-glorified "feminine traits," seeing such romanticization as yet another form of self-entrapment. *The Second Sex* became a foundational text for the second wave of feminism, yet Beauvoir's denial of gender essence stands in sharp contrast to Woolf's ideal of gender "fusion."

2.2.3. Fundamental differences: contrasting methodologies and conceptions of gender

While Virginia Woolf acknowledged biological differences, she placed greater emphasis on the plasticity of gender roles, centering her thought on a form of gender essentialism. She advocated for equality through individual awakening and gender fusion, imbuing her vision with a strong idealistic undertone. In contrast, Simone de Beauvoir categorically rejected gender essentialism, asserting that all gender traits are socially constructed. Her core theoretical framework lies in social constructivism, emphasizing the necessity of institutional transformation and class struggle as pathways to genuine liberation.

Moreover, Woolf's blueprint for gender equality reflects the aesthetic redemptive ethos characteristic of the Bloomsbury Group. In A Room of One's Own, she concretized freedom through the symbolic "five hundred pounds and a lock on the door," representing economic independence and private space [11]. In To the Lighthouse, Lily Briscoe's act of painting becomes a vehicle for spiritual transcendence and a symbolic dismantling of the patriarchal family structure. Beauvoir, by contrast, consistently stressed the need to dismantle structural violence. In *The Second Sex*, she systematically demonstrated the collusion between capitalism and patriarchy: unpaid domestic labor sustains the reproduction of labor power, and gendered divisions of labor reinforce capital accumulation [12]. She exposed how the ideology of "romantic love" alienates women into mere objects of affection to sustain patriarchal control. In her later years, Beauvoir explicitly aligned herself with socialist feminism, actively participating in concrete political struggles such as the campaign for abortion rights. This divergence fundamentally reflects the broader tension between British liberalism and Continental radicalism as projected onto feminist thought.

2.3. Conclusion

Woolf's notion of the "androgynous mind" and Beauvoir's critique of "otherness" each propelled feminist thought forward—one through a utopian idealism, the other through a realist critique. Comparative study of these two thinkers not only illuminates the diversity within gender theory but also offers a dual pathway for contemporary gender equality practices: deconstruction and reconstruction. Future research should adopt an interdisciplinary framework that integrates literary criticism, sociology, and political philosophy to further explore the complementarity and enduring significance of their ideas.

3. A comparative analysis of feminist perspectives in woolf and beauvoir

3.1. Woolf's feminist perspective: "androgyny"

Unlike traditional feminists, Virginia Woolf did not emphasize "women's rights," nor did she advocate for a formal "-ism." Instead, she introduced the concept of "androgyny." Originally coined by Coleridge, Woolf appropriated this term as the cornerstone of her literary theory.

According to Woolf, every individual is influenced by two inner forces: one masculine and the other feminine. In men's consciousness, masculine traits tend to predominate, while in women's consciousness, feminine traits are usually more prominent. The ideal state is one where these two forces coexist harmoniously, intertwining to create a balanced and pleasurable mode of life. If you are a man, you should allow your inner feminine force to flourish; if you are a woman, you should maintain a dialogue with your inner masculine force. This inner equilibrium enables a deeper understanding of oneself and fosters more profound connections with others [6].

Woolf believed that every person embodies a fusion of masculine and feminine qualities. Only when these traits coexist in harmony and complement each other can the "jewels of truth" be born [7].

3.2. Beauvoir's feminist perspective: "otherness" and "femininity"

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir constructs an existentialist feminist theory centered around the notion of "Otherness," [8] systematically deconstructing the gendered cognitive structures of patriarchal civilization. Her revolutionary proposition—"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"—constitutes a symbolic coup against essentialist conceptions of gender. Through phenomenological reduction, she strips away the cultural artifices that cloak the so-called "essence" of womanhood, exposing its violent nature as a social construct.

Beauvoir's theory of "Otherness" originates from her gendered reinterpretation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic [13]. Within the epistemological framework of patriarchy, men establish women as the "absolute Other," completing a violent cycle of subject-formation: women's physiological differences (such as menstruation and reproductive functions) are alienated into signifiers of "defect" and, through mechanisms of discipline—religion, medicine, law—are reified as ontological evidence of inferiority. This

process of "othering" is not a natural evolution but a meticulously engineered operation of power. When Beauvoir asserts that "femininity is a product of situation," she unveils how patriarchy, through everyday practices (such as the division of domestic labor and double standards of sexual morality), transforms physiological differences into the cognitive foundation of cultural hierarchies.

Within this theoretical framework, "femininity" exhibits a dual form of violence: it is both the product and the instrument of discipline. Through the lens of existentialism, Beauvoir analyzes how so-called feminine virtues—gentleness, submissiveness—are survival strategies (bad faith) formed under structural violence. This mechanism of self-alienation turns women into accomplices of their own oppression, internalizing the identity of "Other" in exchange for symbolic legitimacy within the social order. The profundity of Beauvoir's analysis lies in its transcendence of the simplistic binary of oppression and resistance, exposing instead the cognitive colonization intrinsic to gender oppression: when women internalize discipline as "natural instinct," patriarchy achieves its most perfect form of domination.

Beauvoir's blueprint for liberation demands a dual revolution: ontologically, women must break free from the prison of "immanence" through practices of "transcendence," reconstructing traditionally female domains like reproduction and emotional labor into sites of creative existence; on the level of symbolic order, it is necessary to launch a radical assault on the cognitive apparatus of "femininity." When women refuse to play the mythologized role of the "eternal feminine" and instead re-script gender narratives by "becoming subjects," they effectively dismantle the epistemological foundation of patriarchy. This path to liberation not only rejects essentialist determinism but also critiques the illusion of formal equality under liberalism, demanding a comprehensive reconstruction of civilization's cognitive paradigm.

The theoretical legacy of *The Second Sex* lies in its inexhaustible critical potential: Beauvoir not only mapped the topological structure of gender oppression—from biopolitics to symbolic violence—but also provided a toolbox for cognitive revolution: through "situational analysis," one can deconstruct the naturalized gender order; through "embodied practice," one can reconstruct the field of subjectivity formation. This intellectual force rendered her work a precursor to poststructuralist gender critique: from Judith Butler's "gender performativity" to Donna Haraway's "cyborg manifesto," all inherit Beauvoir's existentialist revolution. In today's algorithm-driven new patriarchy, her call for a radical reconfiguration of cognitive structures remains a vital compass pointing toward freedom.

3.3. Divergences between Woolf and Beauvoir in their feminist thought

3.3.1. Two modes of critique: the "Room" Metaphor and the "Other" theory

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* represent two fundamentally different paradigms of knowledge production in the history of feminist theory [14]. The former, a manifesto of literary modernism, focuses on the dialectical relationship between gender and creative freedom; the latter, with encyclopedic theoretical ambition, launches a comprehensive critique of patriarchal civilization. The difference between the two lies not only in the breadth of their research scopes but also reflects a broader paradigm shift in twentieth-century feminist theory—from a cultural poetics to a philosophy-sociology integrated critique.

Woolf's text was produced within a specific discursive context—namely, lectures delivered at a women's college at Cambridge—an environment that inherently shaped the strategic limits of her discourse. Using "women and fiction" as a prism, Woolf deconstructs gendered cognitive violence: by reconstructing the fictional genealogy of Shakespeare's sister, she reveals how economic dependency systematically deprives women of their creative rights. However, this literary-centric critique is, in essence, a form of metaphorical politics—symbolizing the study room as a battlefield for cognitive sovereignty and employing the aesthetics of stream-of-consciousness to resist the symbolic order of patriarchy. Its limitation lies precisely in its historicist methodology: Woolf largely suspends considerations of class and race dimensions and overlooks non-Western experiences [9]. Her choice of examples—such as Jane Austen's writing predicaments—functions more as rhetorical devices aimed at penetrating institutional violence through "poetic truth," rather than offering positivist social analysis.

In contrast, Beauvoir's *The Second Se*x can be regarded as a phenomenologized ethnography of gender [15]. She integrates diverse resources—biology, psychoanalysis, historical materialism—within an existentialist framework, constructing a multidisciplinary matrix of critique: from the totemic taboos of primitive societies to the alienation of female factory workers in the industrial era, from the ascetic ethics of convents to the fleshly politics of brothels, Beauvoir's writing traverses the folds of civilization's history. The radical nature of this panoramic critique lies in its methodological revolution: by gendering Heidegger's concept of "being-in-the-world" through the notion of "situation," she reveals how patriarchy, via religious doctrines, medical discourses, and familial ethics, operationalizes micro-technologies of power to transform biological differences into the cognitive foundations of cultural hierarchies.

In terms of empirical material richness, *The Second Sex* demonstrates a dialectical unity of theoretical violence and empirical rigor. Beauvoir's ethnographic studies of lesbian communities, her class analysis of the alienated labor of female workers, and her critique of the double oppression of colonized women are all grounded in archival research and field investigations. This mode of knowledge production dissolves the disciplinary boundaries between philosophy and the social sciences, endowing feminist critique with an embodied empiricism.

Moreover, her use of psychiatric case studies (such as analyses of sadomasochistic relationships) transforms Freudian theoretical tools into critical instruments for deconstructing the myth of the "eternal feminine."

The essential divergence between the two works reflects two modalities of modernity critique [16]: Woolf unveils the poetic truth of cognitive colonization through literary modernism, her "room" metaphor serving as an allegory of the incomplete Enlightenment; Beauvoir, by contrast, launches an existentialist-phenomenological "total war" diagnostic of civilization, with her "Other" theory prefiguring poststructuralist gender critique. Woolf, writing by the dim light of the attic, records a repressed history of subjectivity; Beauvoir, mapping across the wasteland of existence, charts the cognitive topography of gender politics. Rather than a shortcoming, this difference constitutes a dialectical field of tension through which feminist theory continually renews itself.

3.3.2. Gender critique pathways: "Disciplinary Dissolution" and "Embodied Subjectivity"

The gender critique pathways of Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir constitute mirrored cognitive paradigms within the spectrum of twentieth-century feminist theory. Their divergence is by no means a mere methodological dispute between "external causes" and "internal causes," but rather reflects two fundamentally different ontological choices in the critique of modernity—Woolf's spatial politics and Beauvoir's embodied phenomenology—together tearing open cognitive fissures in patriarchal civilization.

Woolf's critical edge is directed squarely at the spatial violence inherent in the capitalist-patriarchal system. Using *A Room of One's Own* as her theoretical prism, she reveals how social structures achieve cognitive colonization through the gendered allocation of physical spaces (confining women to kitchens, nurseries, and other spheres of reproduction). The core proposition of this spatial politics is: when women are deprived of the material foundations necessary for writing (an annual income of five hundred pounds and a private room), their cognitive paradigms inevitably suffer symbolic disciplining by male discourse. Woolf's profundity lies in decoding economic dependency as an apparatus of cognitive violence—poverty is not merely a lack of material resources, but an invisible scalpel of spiritual castration, which, through institutionalized deprivation, dissolves the potential for female subjectivity to emerge.

In contrast, Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* launches an ontological revolution against gender essentialism. Employing the scalpel of phenomenological reduction, she strips away the cultural ornamentation of "feminine qualities," exposing their nature as constructs of biopolitical engineering. It is crucial to clarify that Beauvoir is by no means a biological determinist—her discussions on estrogen/testosterone differences aim precisely to deconstruct the cognitive violence of "naturalization." Through the existentialist proposition of "becoming woman," she reveals that biological differences merely constitute the material interface of gendering, while it is the symbolic codification of biological sex (such as the stigmatization of menstruation as a marker of fragility, or the alienation of childbirth into a moral obligation) that truly shapes women's destinies. This critical approach transcends the traditional dichotomy between internal and external causes, reconstructing the cognitive map of gender oppression at the dimension of embodiment.

The methodological differences between the two thinkers are deeply rooted in the genealogies of their theoretical foundations. Woolf inherits the British empiricist tradition; her spatial critique echoes Marx's theory of alienation, viewing material conditions as the a priori framework for consciousness production. Beauvoir, meanwhile, synthesizes phenomenology and Hegelian dialectics, using the concept of "alterity" to reveal the ontological basis of gender oppression. This difference manifests concretely in their critical foci: while Woolf dissects how external structures compress women's creative spaces, Beauvoir anatomizes how power, through medical discourses, family ethics, and aesthetic standards, transforms biological differences into micro-technologies for disciplining the female body.

Notably, Beauvoir's "strategic revisiting" of biological factors marks the most revolutionary breakthrough in her theoretical edifice. She does not simply acknowledge physiological differences, but, through the lens of existentialism, reconstructs them as a dialectical field for liberation struggles—where the uterus is no longer a shackle of fate, but an incubator of possibilities; where menopause is not a sign of decline, but an ontological opportunity to transcend gender roles. This phenomenological reconstruction of biological realities overturns the hierarchical order of mind-body dualism entrenched in traditional philosophy, opening a new battleground for feminist "embodied subjectivity."

In essence, the differences between Woolf and Beauvoir embody two distinct modes of modernity critique: Woolf deconstructs spatial politics through literary modernism, while Beauvoir detonates biopolitics through existentialist phenomenology. The former tears apart the material shackles of patriarchy, while the latter destroys its cognitive prisons—this dual resonance of critique forms the dialectical engine driving feminist theory's continual self-renewal. From Woolf's focus on the external societal and familial constraints on women, to Beauvoir's deep analysis of the internal physiological and psychological dynamics of femininity, this trajectory not only illustrates a shift in research perspective from external to internal, but also reflects the evolution of Western feminist thought from simple external critique to an integrated consideration of both internal and external factors. Such an academic development indicates that achieving genuine gender equality requires a comprehensive analysis that simultaneously addresses multiple internal and external dimensions.

3.3.3. The ideal state of gender coexistence: dialectical complementarity

The question of how the sexes might coexist to achieve an ideal state has long been a central concern for feminists. Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir each offered distinctive insights into this issue through their respective works.

Woolf's theory of androgyny essentially constitutes a poetic ontological revolution [17]. Through a metaphorical rereading of Shakespeare's plays, she reveals the fluid nature of the human spiritual structure—when she asserts that "the great mind is androgynous," it is in fact an act of literary alchemy that deconstructs the cognitive violence of gender binarism. This theoretical strategy carries three critical dimensions: first, it rejects the Enlightenment rationality's gendered division of subjectivity; second, it subverts the hierarchy of Idea over body as depicted in Plato's allegory of the cave; and third, through aesthetic experimentation with stream-of-consciousness narratives—such as the gender transformations in Orlando—it reconstructs intersubjectivity beyond gender barriers at an artistic level. The depth of Woolf's thought lies in her revelation that gender oppression stems from structural flaws within the cognitive system itself, rather than being merely a matter of institutional injustice.

In contrast, Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* launches a theoretical explosion grounded in existential phenomenology [18]. Using "otherness" as her scalpel, Beauvoir dissects the deep-seated gender cognition apparatus embedded within the body of civilization. When she declares that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," she exposes how patriarchy, through the fine-tuned operations of biopolitics, transforms physiological differences into a violent machinery of cultural hierarchy. Beauvoir's radicalism lies in her simultaneous rejection of essentialist romanticizations of "natural differences" and her critique of liberalism's naive belief in "formal equality." Instead, she proposes a liberation project based on "situated ethics"—only through embodied praxis can gendered existential situations be reconstructed, thereby enabling the ontological leap from "being-in-itself" to "being-for-itself."

The theoretical divergence between Woolf and Beauvoir materializes into two distinct paradigms of liberation strategies: Woolf's cultural poetics advocates dissolving gender violence through a reconstruction of the symbolic order—her proposition of "five hundred pounds and a room" is essentially an economic antidote to cognitive colonization; whereas Beauvoir demands a total revolution at the ontological level, seeking to dismantle the myth of the "eternal feminine" and re-encode traditional female domains such as reproduction and emotional labor into arenas of political struggle. This divergence mirrors different facets of modernity critique—Woolf addresses the cultural remnants of Victorian patriarchalism, while Beauvoir confronts the new collusion between capitalism and patriarchy emerging after World War II.

Yet, the intellectual tension between the two thinkers precisely constitutes a dialectical complementarity: Woolf preserves a utopian dimension of aesthetic redemption for gender liberation—her theory of androgyny, much like Walter Benjamin's dialectical images, salvages unalienated fragments of subjectivity from the ruins of history; whereas Beauvoir arms the movement with the critical edge of phenomenology, dissecting the capillary networks of disciplinary power in a manner reminiscent of Foucault's archaeology of knowledge. When Woolf, in To the Lighthouse, writes the tidal movements of female consciousness, Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, charts the cognitive topography of gender politics—the former illuminates the abyss of oppression, while the latter maps the coordinates of liberation.

This theoretical polyphony demonstrates that the ultimate vision of gender equality requires both Woolf's poetic wisdom to transcend cognitive boundaries and Beauvoir's philosophical scalpel to deconstruct systemic foundations. Their resonant thought continues to strike at the frontier of gender cognition in the post-human era.

3.4. The reasons behind the differences between Woolf's and Beauvoir's feminist thought

The intellectual dialogue between Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Woolf essentially marks a paradigmatic shift in twentieth-century feminist theory—from a poetic awakening to a philosophical revolution. From the perspective of archaeological epistemology, *The Second Sex*'s transcendence and sublation of Woolf's thought is akin to the theoretical detonation that phenomenology unleashed upon the aesthetics of stream of consciousness: the former, wielding the scalpel of existentialism, elevates Woolf's metaphorical critique of gender into a comprehensive deconstruction of the very foundations of civilization. Their divergence is not merely an academic distinction but reflects a deeper conflict between two fundamentally different epistemic apparatuses within the broader critique of modernity.

In terms of theoretical genealogy, Woolf's theory of "androgyny" essentially constitutes a poetic ontological project. She attempts, through a kind of literary alchemy, to dissolve the cognitive violence of gender binaries and to achieve an aesthetic transcendence over gender essentialism within the space-time metamorphoses of Orlando. This strategy is deeply rooted in the Bloomsbury Group's legacy of aestheticism, entrusting the vision of liberation to the reconstruction of cultural symbol systems. In contrast, Beauvoir's critique of "otherness" represents a philosophical coup at the level of ontology: drawing on Hegel's master-slave dialectic as theoretical dynamite, she exposes gender oppression as the primal wound of the civilizational order. While Woolf, through the prolongation of stream of consciousness, captures the subtle folds of gendered cognition, Beauvoir enacts a phenomenological epoché, deconstructing the myth of the "eternal feminine" as a power-constructed epistemic apparatus.

The methodological confrontation between the two further reveals a profound disciplinary rupture. Woolf's practice of literary modernism—such as her spatio-temporal experiments in To the Lighthouse—constitutes a poetic guerrilla warfare against logocentrism, wherein the fluidity of narrative form dissolves the ossified structures of gender essentialism. By contrast, Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* engages in a gendered rewriting of Husserl's concept of the "lifeworld" (Lebenswelt)—through existential-

phenomenological triple reduction (biological, historical, and existential), she strips away "femininity" as an inscription of disciplinary power upon the flesh. This disciplinary violence results in a shift of critical focus: while Woolf, by the light of her solitary lamp, deconstructs the symbolic order of patriarchy, Beauvoir stands atop the seismic fault lines of structuralism, leveraging the gendered epistemic bedrock of the entire civilizational edifice.

In terms of liberation politics, their divergence embodies the tension between "cultural poetics" and "ontological engineering." Woolf's proposition of "five hundred pounds and a room of one's own" fundamentally critiques the political economy forged through the collusion of capitalism and patriarchy, seeking to open a material conduit for a cognitive revolution through the establishment of economic sovereignty. Meanwhile, Beauvoir's concept of "transcendence" points toward a more radical ontological transformation: she demands that women not only break free from economic dependence but also dismantle the internalized matrix of otherness. On the level of practice, this difference materializes into two revolutionary paths: Woolf reconstructs the symbolic order by building a female literary tradition, while Beauvoir calls for an embodied praxis to overturn gendered existential situations.

The genesis of this intellectual rift is deeply rooted in their differentiated épistémè and historical horizons. Woolf's theoretical roots entwine with the vines of the modernist literary movement and British empiricism, her critique always carrying the utopian genes of aesthetic redemption; Beauvoir's theoretical arsenal, by contrast, is a hybrid product of continental phenomenology, Marxism, and psychoanalysis—this cross-disciplinary cognitive violence endows her theory with greater systemic deconstructive force. More crucially, the differences in their historical horizons shaped the urgency of their critiques: Woolf faced the residual cultural patriarchy of the Victorian era, her critique bearing the anxiety of an unfinished Enlightenment; Beauvoir, immersed in the post-World War II existentialist crisis and the rise of structuralism, was compelled to respond to a collective yearning for ideological reconstruction.

Their differences are not theoretical fissures but rather constitute the dialectical dynamism of feminist self-renewal. Woolf's poetic critique preserves the aesthetic and imaginative dimension of gender liberation—like Proust's madeleine, it seals within sensory memory the unalienated possibilities of subjectivity; Beauvoir's philosophical deconstruction, on the other hand, injects a cold epistemological rationality into the movement—like Foucault's "archaeology of knowledge," it dissects the capillaries of power coursing through the body of civilization. This tension proves that true liberation requires both Woolfian metaphorical lightning to illuminate the abyss of oppression and Beauvoirian phenomenological microscopes to anatomize institutional structures. The intellectual web they have jointly woven continues to ensnare every mutation and backlash of patriarchy to this day. Woolf and Beauvoir both endeavored to advance gender equality. Yet, owing to their distinct perspectives and research methods, their thoughts display deep resonances while also revealing significant divergences in practical pathways. These differences reflect the continual enrichment and evolution of feminist theory over time, adapting to the varying demands for gender equality across different historical periods and social contexts. So how exactly do these differences arise?

3.4.1. The attic experience and the philosophical laboratory: Woolf's sensory breakthrough and Beauvoir's cognitive coup in the intellectual history of feminist thought

Although only two decades separated Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir, and pioneering works such as Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman had already been published in 1792 prior to Woolf's A Room of One's Own, the early feminist writings largely focused on advocating for women's equal rights in political, economic, educational, and marital domains [19]. These early efforts spurred a series of movements striving for women's economic independence and marital autonomy, resulting in tangible progress in these areas [10]. However, early feminist movements remained primarily concerned with direct struggles for rights and paid little attention to probing the deeper structural causes of women's inequality. As a result, when Woolf wrote A Room of One's Own, she lacked a fully developed theoretical framework and a wealth of historical materials to draw upon [20].

Thus, in A Room of One's Own, Woolf predominantly relied on personal experience and sensuous expression to convey her core ideas. While this approach endowed her work with a unique perspective and strong personal flavor, it also limited the analytical scope of her inquiry. In contrast, Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, published nearly forty years later in the late 1960s, emerged after the feminist movements in Europe and America had undergone significant development [19]. During this period, feminist theory had gradually become systematized, leading to the formation of distinct intellectual factions such as the "French school" and the "Anglo-American school." Drawing on her profound philosophical training and a synthesis of knowledge from sociology, psychology, and other disciplines—along with her deep insights into the thoughts and practices of early feminists—Beauvoir ultimately produced *The Second Sex*, a landmark work in feminist theory.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, with its interdisciplinary intellectual genealogy and thoroughgoing critical force, undertakes an archaeological deconstruction of the mechanisms of gender oppression. Far from a mere manifesto of rights, it employs phenomenological epoché to strip away the myth of "eternal femininity" and, on the level of ontology, reveals the socially constructed nature of gender difference. With the precision of a surgeon, Beauvoir dissects three dialectical structures: the cognitive trap of biological determinism, the institutional critique rooted in historical materialism, and the existential predicament of subjectivity. This multidimensional analytical framework elevates the discussion of women's issues from mere experiential description to an ontological philosophical inquiry, signaling feminism's formal entry into the core battleground of modern critical theory.

As a cognitive apparatus for deconstructing patriarchal civilization, *The Second Sex* achieves a triple paradigmatic revolution: first, through the philosophical reconstruction of the concept of "the Other," it anchors gender oppression within the violent logic of intersubjectivity; second, through the existentialist proposition of "becoming woman," it shatters the essentialist myth of gender destiny; third, by critically examining the political economy of reproduction, it exposes how the institution of motherhood serves as a biopolitical apparatus disciplining women's bodies. This explosive theoretical power allows *The Second Sex* to transcend the realm of a mere "movement guide" and ascend into an epistemological revolution at the heart of contemporary gender studies—when Beauvoir proclaimed that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," she effectively launched a symbolic coup against the very foundations of civilization.

From the perspective of intellectual history, Beauvoir's breakthrough lies in transforming Woolf's metaphor of a "room" into a dynamic political science of liberation. If Woolf, with her poetic language, unveiled the material foundation of women's economic independence, then Beauvoir, through existentialist ethics, propelled gender emancipation into a field of practical urgency: she not only critiqued institutional oppression but also revealed how individuals internalize oppressive logic through bad faith. This theoretical deepening marked a paradigmatic shift in feminism—from experiential narration to philosophical critique. While Woolf captured the fluid currents of female consciousness in her attic writings, Beauvoir, armed with the lens of phenomenology, deconstructed the gendered cognitive apparatus underpinning the entire edifice of civilization.

The legacy of *The Second Sex* lies in its inexhaustible theoretical potential: it is not only a surgical table for dissecting gender oppression but also a laboratory for reconstructing subjectivity. With this "intellectual sledgehammer," Beauvoir shattered the illusion of equality fabricated by Enlightenment rationality, forcing modernity to confront its gendered violence at its core. This intensity of critique has made *The Second Sex* a central weapon in contemporary theoretical struggles—from queer theory's deconstruction of gender performativity to postcolonial feminism's revelation of intersectional oppression, all stand on the shoulders of this intellectual giant. In this sense, *The Second Sex* has long transcended the category of a "feminist bible," becoming the ultimate diagnostic manual for the ailments of modernity.

3.4.2. Traumatic memory and knowledge topology: the existential contexts and cognitive apparatuses underlying the divergence between Woolf and Beauvoir's thought

Virginia Woolf was born into a family rich in cultural heritage, which she described as a "typical Victorian" household. Her living conditions were privileged, belonging to the upper middle class. However, influenced by her father's traditional patriarchal ideology, Woolf, unlike her brothers, did not receive a formal school education and had to rely on private tutors for her studies [10]. Although the family had an extensive library, the lack of systematic education to some extent limited her perspective and accumulation of knowledge. After her mother's death, Woolf suffered sexual abuse at the hands of her half-brother, a traumatic experience that had a profound impact on her physical and mental health. These unique personal experiences provided a crucial backdrop for the later development of her feminist thought and ensured that her writing remained closely tied to personal experience and emotional expression. Due to the limitations in her education and social interactions, Woolf's social circle was largely confined to members of her own class, making it difficult for her to fully grasp the lives of women from other social classes, professions, and racial backgrounds. This experience rendered her feminist thought relatively moderate in its spirit of resistance and revolutionary fervor. Consequently, she proposed the notion of an "androgynous mind," attempting to achieve equality by dissolving gender boundaries. Elaine Showalter pointed out that Woolf's approach represents a form of compromise feminism, and may even be seen as a retreat within the feminist movement [11].

In contrast, Simone de Beauvoir's life trajectory opened an ontological rupture from Woolf's, a rupture that reflects the multifaceted nature of twentieth-century feminist thought. Although both bore the imprint of a bourgeois upbringing, Beauvoir's experience of "capital rupture" at the age of six—when her family's financial collapse shattered their class identity—infused her thought with a unique critical dimension. When the material foundations of life gave way, she was forced to confront the structural violence of capitalist society at the existential level. This early traumatic experience fostered a dual negativity in her: the rejection of the patriarchal authority embodied by her father (as she dared to question his household dominance), and the rejection of the cognitive hegemony of religious metaphysics (as seen in her theological debates with priests). Notably, her father's "contradictory affection" encapsulates a microcosm of modernity's paradox: despite material constraints, he continued to invest in her elite education, propelling her toward intellectual prominence. This continuity within rupture foreshadowed the intellectual tension that would define her later work.

Beauvoir's construction of her knowledge system exhibits a distinct interdisciplinary topology: from psychological explorations of subjectivity, to philosophical inquiries into existence, to historical analyses of social structures. This multidimensional cognitive apparatus endowed her feminist theory with an explanatory power that transcended the literary domain. Her mode of professional existence further materialized the theoretical framework Woolf envisioned in A Room of One's Own: while Woolf constructed her theories from the attic in literary solitude, Beauvoir embodied feminist critique through embodied practices in the flow of public spaces—on the street, in cafés, and in university lecture halls—anchoring feminist critique within concrete historical contexts. This existential divergence resulted in a fundamental cognitive split: Woolf's metaphorical poetics encountered Beauvoir's phenomenological deconstruction. Woolf's critique of the spatial politics of the "room" was elevated in Beauvoir's work into an ontological analysis of "situation".

Essentially, the difference between the two thinkers represents distinct modalities of modernity's critique: Woolf deconstructed the symbolic order of patriarchy through a stream-of-consciousness aesthetic, while Beauvoir challenged the epistemological foundations of gender essentialism through existentialist ethics. Woolf, confined in her attic, heard the silent cries of "Shakespeare's sister," whereas Beauvoir, amid the existential anxiety of Parisian streets, captured the lived predicaments of "the second sex." This divergence in cognitive pathways reveals the polyphony within feminist theory: when Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, forged the concept of "the Other" into a theoretical weapon, she did so while standing on the material foundation Woolf had articulated—the "five hundred pounds and a room." Thus, she completed a paradigm shift from poetic critique to philosophical system-building. The cognitive network woven by the two thinkers demonstrates that the truth of gender liberation flickers not only in the metaphorical space of the attic but also grows in the embodied practices of the street.

4. A comparative analysis of feminist theoretical commonalities in *A Room of One's Own* and *The Second Sex*

Unlike Virginia Woolf's modernist novels, characterized by the technique of "stream of consciousness," *A Room of One's Own* is a uniquely styled work of feminist literary criticism [7]. Originating from two lectures Woolf delivered on the topic of "Women and Fiction," the book was later carefully revised, expanded, and polished by the author. Although it employs some stream-of-consciousness techniques, its core lies in a profound reflection on literature and the social realities behind it. In contrast, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* leans more toward a philosophical treatise, exploring the nature of gender differences and their manifestations in society.

Despite their different emphases in feminist positions, close reading and comparative analysis reveal multiple points of convergence between these two outstanding women writers. This paper will select several comparable dimensions from their works to explore in depth the following three shared characteristics:

4.1. Material autonomy: a core element in feminist theory

In A Room of One's Own, Woolf constructs an ontological critique that exposes the dual mechanisms through which patriarchal civilization besieges female subjectivity. With phenomenological precision, she identifies the foundational significance of an annual income of £500 and an independent physical space: not merely as preconditions for literary creation, but as revolutionary apparatuses for transcending gendered structures of existence. This assertion fundamentally subverts the traditional feminist framework that prioritized "rights emancipation," positing instead that economic autonomy constitutes the material bedrock of women's liberation, far outweighing the strategic value of symbolic political capital such as suffrage within formal democratic systems. Woolf insightfully perceives that when women are trapped in the exploitative cycle of "emotional labor and domestic reproduction," their cognitive dimensions inevitably fall prey to the epistemological colonization of patriarchy. Only through the establishment of economic sovereignty can women reconstruct an intersubjective space that is truly productive.

Here, Woolf's theory of spatial politics manifests a dual dimension: the "room" at the physical level serves as a stronghold against gendered spatial discipline, metaphorically representing the topological transformation from women as "objects of the gaze" to "subjects of speech"; while economic independence, in essence, represents a cognitive revolution against the patriarchal system of property distribution. Woolf sharply points out that traditional society systematically confined women to the margins of symbolic order through institutionalized poverty—when women must struggle for basic survival, their intellectual potentials, unrecognized within the male-dominated discursive system, inevitably wither in material deprivation. This critique not only deconstructs the ideological illusion of the "angel in the house," but also exposes the collusive violence between capitalism and patriarchy: reducing women's creative powers into lubricants for the machinery of familial reproduction.

Within this theoretical framework, Woolf reconstructs the dialectics of women's liberation: economic independence is not merely about wealth accumulation, but entails a total negation of the gendered division of labor. When women break free from the economic dependencies that perpetuate their "otherness," they simultaneously dismantle the patriarchal cognitive apparatus—the naturalized gendered spatial arrangements of kitchens, nurseries, and other such spaces are essentially biopolitical machines designed to discipline female modes of thinking. This path of liberation reveals a profound truth: genuine creative freedom arises from a dual revolution of both material foundations and symbolic orders. Only through securing economic sovereignty can women gain the symbolic power necessary to rewrite the narratives of civilization, thus challenging the epistemological foundations of patriarchal aesthetics. Woolf's theoretical legacy continues to reverberate against the cognitive iron curtain of modern society.

Simone de Beauvoir's classic existentialist feminist work, *The Second Sex*, unveils through diachronic analysis the socially constructed nature of gender. In the book, Beauvoir maps the development of a woman's life trajectory from childhood to old age, pointing out that existing social mechanisms continuously implant the identity of the "Other" into women's consciousness from infancy through cultural symbols and educational discipline. While acknowledging that individuals can, through knowledge acquisition and career development, partially transcend gender barriers, Beauvoir emphasizes within an existentialist framework that only by breaking the gender monopoly over the means of production and establishing collective economic autonomy can a material basis for women's liberation be secured. Her theory, while recognizing biological differences between the sexes, stresses that only institutional transformation can eliminate the hierarchical differences culturally constructed upon those differences,

advocating for intersubjective equality built upon the recognition of diversity. This theoretical trajectory, combining economic foundations with ideological critique, resonates across time and space with Woolf's emphasis on the "£500 annual income" in A Room of One's Own, jointly affirming the core position of material autonomy in feminist theory.

4.2. Dissolving the cognitive violence of binary oppositions and constructing a fluid paradigm of subjectivity

In traditional perceptions, women have often been regarded as appendages to men, with their roles largely confined to domestic affairs such as marriage, child-rearing, and supporting their husbands. Their value was frequently reduced to their ability to maintain family order and care for relatives. Within this framework, women were rarely encouraged to participate in the workforce, let alone engage in creative fields such as writing. Literature, music, and the arts often imposed barriers that systematically excluded women, resulting in the marginalization or erasure of their contributions. This phenomenon has prompted profound reflections on women's rights and social status.

As a foundational text of twentieth-century feminist theory, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* employs poetic and philosophical reflection to reveal the systemic mechanisms of patriarchal oppression. Woolf's analysis penetrates social appearances and targets the deeper structure of collusion between capitalism and patriarchy. Under the framework of civilization founded on phallocentrism, women were forcibly incorporated into a cognitive paradigm of "otherness," leading to a dual mutilation of their subjectivity: deprivation of the material foundation for knowledge production (economic independence) and the erasure of the legitimacy of their spiritual existence (the right to create). Woolf incisively pointed out that when social discipline anchors female value exclusively to the ideal of the "angel in the house," it essentially manufactures cognitive closure through institutionalized poverty, relegating women to the status of the "voiceless" within the symbolic order. This structural violence manifests not only in the deprivation of physical space (the lack of a private study) but more profoundly in the colonization of women's cognitive paradigms by symbolic violence—where modes of cognition not certified by the male-dominated discourse are ultimately obliterated in the dark night of history.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir employed a phenomenological approach to deconstruct the myth of "eternal femininity." Her existentialist feminism revealed that the so-called "essence of woman" is in fact a historical and cultural construct, shaped through the triple disciplinary mechanisms of marriage institutions, maternal ethics, and gender performance, confining women within the cage of "immanence." De Beauvoir specifically analyzed the dialectics of motherhood—when childbirth is alienated into a moral obligation, the womb becomes a biopolitical apparatus of discipline, and the experience of "becoming a mother" degenerates into institutionalized violence. Her analysis transcends mere institutional critique and strikes at the epistemological roots of patriarchal civilization's instrumentalization of the female body.

In envisioning the path to liberation, de Beauvoir proposed the revolutionary project of a "situated ethics," rejecting both essentialist gender determinism and the abstract illusions of liberalism. She advocated for the reconstruction of gender politics through "embodied praxis"—when women achieve economic participation in the public sphere, deconstruct emotional labor in the private sphere, and subvert gender scripts at the cognitive level, they undertake an ontological "second birth." Such a revolutionary transformation demands the radical restructuring of the political economy of social reproduction: reconfiguring childcare from a privatized burden into a collective responsibility and reevaluating the political and economic value of care labor.

The theories of these two intellectual giants form a profound dialogue: Woolf's metaphor of the "room" and Beauvoir's theory of "the Other" jointly expose the spatial politics and ontological dilemmas inherent in gender oppression; meanwhile, the concepts of "androgyny" and "transcendence" point toward the ultimate vision of gender liberation from different dimensions—dissolving the cognitive violence of binary oppositions and constructing a fluid paradigm of subjectivity. Their theoretical legacy continues to inspire contemporary gender studies: true liberation demands not only institutional transformation but also a cognitive revolution that deconstructs the gendered cognitive apparatus at the level of symbolic order, ultimately realizing a poetic reconstruction of human modes of existence.

4.3. Challenging the authority of traditional patriarchal theories and emphasizing the importance of women's discourse and writing

In A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf adopts the first-person pronoun "I" as the core of narration, presenting a female-centered perspective imbued with a strong feminist sensibility. However, this "I" does not merely represent Woolf herself; rather, it symbolizes the collective experiences of countless women throughout history: "You may call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael, or by any name you please—it is all the same." The name "Mary," laden with feminine connotations, signifies that this work is dedicated to giving voice to women. Meanwhile, Woolf deliberately avoids the use of "we," the first-person plural, suggesting her emphasis on the differences among subjects of discourse. In doing so, she seeks to dismantle the authority of traditional patriarchal narratives and challenge their universalizing tendency to assimilate the other and suppress difference. At the conclusion of A Room of One's Own, Woolf issues a heartfelt appeal to all women: "I beg you earnestly to write all kinds of books, hesitating at no subject, however trivial or however vast. I would ask you to earn your own living so that you can travel and live leisurely, to think about the past and the future of the world, to immerse yourself in books, to walk the streets, letting your thoughts flow with the movement and noise of the crowd." [7].

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir expressed similar views, although her arguments—integrating physiological, sociological, and psychological insights—were more profound and systematic [7]. She pointed out that from birth, women are told by their parents that they are fundamentally different from men; many activities permitted to boys are deemed taboo for girls, who are expected to imitate their mothers and embody traditional feminine virtues. As time passes, women gradually internalize and accept the conventional prejudices of "becoming a woman," sacrificing personal interests and autonomy, and assuming the roles of the "obedient daughter" and the "virtuous wife and good mother." Such has been the historical trajectory of women's existence: even those with extraordinary talent have often been doomed to obscurity. Under the shadow of patriarchy, the vitality of women's lives has long been stifled.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir points out that for men, women are "the Other." [12] Women construct their sense of self through definitions imposed by men; men are regarded as beings of essential existence, whereas women are denied an independent essence and are thus relegated to a subordinate position, dependent upon men. Consequently, women are reduced to the status of "object," "the Other," and "the second sex." [6] Whether women can transcend their condition as objects through writing and thus become true subjects, in a profound sense, determines whether they can embark on the journey toward achieving gender equality. At the conclusion of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir expresses her beautiful vision for women's discourse: "It is to be hoped that one day, both men and women will enjoy personal dignity and the hard-won gift of freedom [9]. Women will be able to voice their own thoughts, raise questions, harbor doubts and hopes, and, in the journey of life, seek out their own missions—not merely for a narrow sense of self, but for the collective destiny of humankind." [21].

5. Conclusion

The intellectual legacies of Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir constitute dual constellations of theoretical coordinates in the intellectual history of twentieth-century feminism. Their differences are not merely disciplinary—literary modernism versus existentialist phenomenology—but also reflect a paradigmatic shift in the gender liberation movement from cultural enlightenment to philosophical revolution. Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is, in essence, a manifesto of cognitive geography [22]. Through the prism of literary creation, Woolf exposes how patriarchy disciplines women's cognitive paradigms via spatial confinement: when women are deprived of a study—a "spiritual womb"—their consciousness is inevitably subjected to the castration of the symbolic order. Her groundbreaking contribution lies in decoding economic dependency as a form of cognitive violence: an annual income of five hundred pounds serves not merely as material security but as a ransom for breaking free from gendered cognitive colonization. This poetic critique implicitly diagnoses modernity itself: how Victorian "drawing-room culture," through the politics of spatial allocation, alienated female creativity into a lubricant for domestic reproduction. Woolf's avant-garde achievement lies in her use of stream-of-consciousness narrative to reconstruct the topology of female subjectivity, elevating the private attic space into a revolutionary stronghold against patriarchal aesthetics

De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, by contrast, launched a philosophical total war against the very foundations of civilization [23]. Employing the scalpel of phenomenology, she dissects the myth of the "eternal feminine," exposing how gender differences are alienated into cultural hierarchies. Her theory of "Otherness" subverts the violent logic of Hegel's master-slave dialectic: when patriarchy designates women as absolute Others, it effectuates the pathological expansion of male subjectivity through a negating mirror image. De Beauvoir's radical breakthrough lies in gendering the existentialist notion of "situation"—from menstrual stigma to maternal ethics, from sexual objectification to emotional labor—demonstrating that so-called "female essence" is in fact a corporeal inscription of power discipline. This critical force positions *The Second Sex* as a precursor to the deconstruction of biopolitics and foreshadows poststructuralist explorations of gender performativity.

The theoretical tension between Woolf and Beauvoir forms a dialectical engine of feminist thought: Woolf, through literary alchemy, melts down the cognitive violence of gender binarism; her theory of "androgyny" opens an aesthetic path to redemption. Beauvoir, through existentialist ethics, detonates the institutional foundations of gendered naturalization, politicizing domains such as childbirth and domestic labor. Woolf preserves emancipatory potential in metaphorical space, while Beauvoir sketches revolutionary blueprints in lived reality—this complementarity itself testifies to the necessity of both poetic flashes to illuminate the cognitive night and philosophical hammers to smash institutional shackles in the struggle for gender liberation.

Their respective limitations and transcendences also serve as an intellectual revelation: Woolf's elitist perspective neglected the intersectionality of class and race oppression. Beauvoir's Eurocentrism constrained her vision of global gender politics. Yet precisely these historical fissures created critical space for new paradigms such as postcolonial feminism and queer theory. In an era where algorithmic patriarchy intertwines with biocapitalism, revisiting these two intellectual constellations becomes a vital endeavor—to salvage the unregulated sparks of subjectivity from the ruins of cognitive apparatuses.

This paper selects A Room of One's Own and *The Second Sex*—two milestone feminist texts—as the primary research objects, aiming to systematically analyze and compare the consensus and divergences between Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir in their feminist thought. Through detailed exploration, this study particularly synthesizes points of resonance between the two writers, building a bridge for readers to more comprehensively and profoundly grasp the core essence of their feminist ideologies. Despite the distinctive feminist perspectives each articulates, Woolf and Beauvoir exhibit remarkable consensus on key issues such as advocating for women's economic independence, striving for gender equality, and defending women's discursive rights. Most importantly, while both authors emphasize the necessity of women establishing self-consciousness, neither falls into the trap of

wholesale denial or exclusion of men. Rather, they clearly argue that, in the pursuit of gender equality, relying solely on male or female consciousness is inherently one-sided [6]. Only through the harmonious coexistence of both male and female consciousness can true progress toward gender equality be achieved. They advocate for a relational model based on mutual understanding and respect, which remains crucial for advancing gender equality today.

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