

## Beauty as a Myth encircled in the psyche of the characters in Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*

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### Abstract

Beauty had been continually haunting women since centuries and it has its own impact on the social structure of women. Women had their lives under the beauty myth and had connected them to the rituals of the religious world. The market had continually attacked women through the means of lotions and creams in the magazines and the women are ever kept in a guilty set up. This created hype to beauty and women are the victims in the patriarchal set up. The modern men and women are continually into the same issue and are as well sexually affected in their personal lives. This paper is an account of the work of Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* along with Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*.

**Keywords:** Beauty, Beauty Myth, Market, Patriarchy, Women, Men

### 1. Introduction

Beauty has always been following women (in most cases) throughout their lives. Even though they know it is ever changing according to the present trends, women tend to treat it as if it is as inevitable as breathing. As we scroll through the pages of history, it is seen that beauty is mythologized since ages. Beauty rituals and religious rituals go hand in hand and it had been encircled in the minds of the population. The new generation faces a still more of the whole lot. The magazines for women that had come into existence after the revolutionary feminism had created and had been creating an impact in the minds of women especially. "The quality called beauty objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it" (12 Wolf).

Virginia Woolf, the nineteenth century British writer tries to picture a family set up of then England. Her works are used to feminism and had been looked at individualistically, but she had a layer of familial ideals throughout her writing. She had a turbulent life psychically and physically. After the death of the mother, her continual effort to abide to a father made her many a time weak. Even though her father was not oppressive in nature, she had to abide to her stereotypical imprints created by her familial circle. Her step brothers Gerald and George sexually harassed her, which created a mark forever. Her works had coped with the recent trends of feminism with many feminist interpretations. But all she tried to prove was her disability to communicate certain aspects in life. *Jacob's Room* is one of her modernist novels that as well had a depth of certain psychological and feministic imprints.

*Jacob's Room* is a novel that confuses the reader at the first hand. The modernist novel sets itself covering Jacob's room, where Jacob is a well-read man of all literatures, especially Greek literature. A Woman named Florinda flirts with Jacob and sets a view on him and calls him Jacob, without his permission sits on his lap and calls herself his princess. Florinda tries to sexually attract Jacob by her looks and she makes herself over to show off her beauty to him. "Opened her bag and powdered her cheeks in omnibuses" (76 Woolf).

Women generally confuse between being sexually attractive and attracting sexually. A woman paints her face to look good in front of her man and leaves his bed before he wakes up and confuses between sexually felt and looking sexually. The sex organ of a man tends to get evoked as easily that it takes approximately four times much effort for a woman. The necessity to be sexually attractive has no connection to attracting a man sexually, because before he sees the full beauty of the woman through his eyes, he is already evoked by the woman sexually. This confusion extends and the average educated woman tends to apply and mask her face with the new creams that the market tries to sell not to just make them spend from their pocket, but to make them feel guilty of not using creams and lotions that other women use to treat their partners well.

"Inside the majority of the west's controlled, attractive, successful working class women, there is a secret underlife poisoning our freedom, infused with notions of beauty, it is a dark vein of self-hatred, physical obsessions, terror of ageing, and dread of lost control." (10 Wolf)

In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf deals with beauty rather very carefully because the main character Jacob is a man of the society who as well thinks of beauty as a much needed trait for women and after he reads a lot of literature, he turns up against the society then and there proving beauty wrong. "The body is harassed to a brain. Beauty goes hand in hand with stupidity" (80 Woolf). Jacob also stands as an example for stereotypes attached to men as well. He was in a society where he is expected to always woo a woman or attract her in terms of intelligence or physical strength. "Spelling out quite correctly his page of the eternal lesson book, would have moved a woman" (43 Woolf).

The culture in which women and men are subjected to, expects a woman to have either brain or beauty. There is no beauty and brain altogether. She should either think and should not be sexually felt or could sexually feel along with her beauty but cannot think. "Culture Stereotypes women to fit the myth by

flattening the femininity into beauty-without-intelligence or intelligence-without-beauty; women are allowed a mind or a body but not both” (59 Woolf). This is reflected in the novel *Jacob's Room*, where he thinks of Florinda as a package of beauty that had haunted him and he continually keeps looking at her only for the beauty hacks she tried to incorporate for Jacob. “But it did occur Jacob, half-way through the dinner, to wonder whether she had a mind” (78 Woolf).

The Beauty of women is simply man-made, because it is the effect of the patriarchal society that developed a kind of an oppression that they subjected women. The social power of men started declining to an extent after the advent of feminism. The only way to de-motivate women into an ever guilty atmosphere was the Beauty Myth.

“The really crucial function that women serve as aspiring beauties is to buy more things for the body? Somehow, somewhere someone must have figured out that they will buy more things if they are kept into the self-hating, ever-failing, hungry and sexually insecure state of being aspiring beauties.” (66 Woolf)

In *Jacob's Room*, there is a discussion on beauty and Jacob intervenes to talk of beauty as an educated man. “One can reply that beauty is always dumb. Male beauty in association with female beauty breeds in the onlooker a sense of fear” (95 Woolf). The fear is invoked in women as they look at men because the Beauty myth calls in for a woman to be more attractive than men. If the man is more attractive than the woman he is universally accepted to have a beautiful woman next to him avoiding his woman. The fear to be ever beautiful in the minds of their men exists in women that make themselves being marketed. “The myth isolates women by generation, and the magazines seem to offer them the wise advice, tested by experience, of an admirable older relative” (74 Woolf).

The Beauty Myth also states very clearly that a man had to have no worries, be it fat or beauty, it is always with women. “Women's flesh is the evidence of a God-given wrongness whereas fat men are fat Gods” (94 Woolf). The fear, guilt, inferiority complex, ever-failing, insecurities are all always associated with women and men are unaware of the market behind which women are subjected to and are unaware of their part against women. The Beauty myth stealthily shows the male prowess against women in the social structure and this is as well reflected in *Jacob's Room*, where they talk about confidence of a man against the confidence of a woman. “A young man has nothing to fear. On the contrary, though he may not have said anything brilliant, he feels pretty confident he can hold his own” (110 Woolf).

The confusion that persists with beauty is beautifully depicted in *Jacob's Room*, where Sandra shows off her beauty to her husband and he agrees that she is beautiful and thinks that beauty is important and as well inherits the structure that is around the myth. This proves the social patriarchal structure behind the Beauty myth. “I am very beautiful, she thought. She shifted her hat slightly. Her husband saw her looking in the glass; and agreed that beauty is important; it is an inheritance; one cannot ignore it. But it is a barrier; it is in fact rather a bore” (142 Woolf). Sex and beauty according to the social structure go hand in hand but in actuality it is not. “Many women came to believe that they must have that face that body to achieve that ecstasy” (135 Woolf). The patriarchal

society is afraid of woman if they would ask for more because of the animal in her. The expectations exceed if women come to know that they could ask for more in their beds. This fright made the patriarchal society draw a social structure in terms of rituals (inclusive of the Beauty Myth Rituals) to control women and to make them feel ever guilty of wanting to make themselves presentable and honoured before their men. The Beauty Myth is expressed by Woolf in a very subtle manner according to the nineteenth century fashion.

## 2. References

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2. Woolf, Virginia. *Jacob's Room*. London: Harper's Collins Publishers, 2013.