

Those who break free

Throughout the short story, *A Society* by Virginia Woolf, we are presented with an array of women who come to a mutual agreement on their state in society. There is an agreement that they have been lessened through the practices men convey in their writings and their daily actions. They agree to visit this “man's world”, each choosing a different aspect to visit, either that be at oxbridge, a british museum, a royal academy, or a king's navy. What they make of their personal and distinct experiences leads them to choose a diverting path which once seemed to be a straightforward one. While most choose to continue their daily cycle of life, relinquishing any self importance to serve in the man's world, some choose to break free from the repeated cycle of belittlement and mistreatment.

After a meeting had been abruptly ended by the start of World War 1, Cassandra and Castalia find themselves discussing their past writings in the meeting room four years after the war had broken out. While before the room would fill up with members, now we find ourselves with two members, and soon to be third with Castalias daughter. Up to this point, we have read how Castalia had become pregnant during her expedition to Oxbridge, but what is to be made out of it. No mention is made of the father, but it can be implied throughout conversation that he is either out of the picture, or Castalia chooses to stay away from home whenever she is not needed. Their discussion boils down to how she should raise her daughter in a “land and they will all tell you that men are much cleverer than women”(Woolf, *A Society*). While there is a joking remark to teach her daughter to believe women's intellect is far superior than that of a mans, they choose to approach this in a differing perspective. What they choose to do is something never thought of before, something so arbitrary that even in a million lifetimes it wouldn't be guaranteed to be a thought to come across someone's mind in this time. They choose

to teach the child to believe in herself. A simple concept, that to this day seems to be devoid from many people's lives.

Throughout the short story, we read of a time where women couldn't make the world what they wanted. In the end of the short story, both Castalia and Cassandra run through differing ideas, ideologies they can base the raising of their daughter Ann on. There is a lack of assurance in any one of these ideas, feeling as if any would result in any substantial way to Ann's way of life. Every idea they come up with, they slowly falter from until they come to the final conclusion. This presents an overlying theme presented throughout the story as a whole. There lies an underlying veil of self doubt looking through the woman's actions. A question is presented towards the back end of the story, that being if it was worth acquiring this knowledge that has left them exposed to the impossibility that change can occur. They ask themselves if life would've been better bearing children in ignorance, going against the beliefs that have carried them to this point. When faced with the effects of their cause, they begin to doubt what they once cried out for.

As mentioned in the previous body, they ate what was given to them. That is to say, they had no choice in the information they were given, no voice towards the ideologies put forth to them. Simply people, who would bear the children of men, without any other distinct characterization. In this sense, they were never taught the idea of self belief. The ability to believe in yourself even when it seemed the cards were stacked against you, the ability to pick yourself up when pushed down. Rather they were children, brought up in a world where a gleam of light from a jewel is met with a beatdown, leaving nothing but sparks with a faint shine that is then slathered with a deaf mud. Ann will eventually learn to read, ideals instilled in her by her mother, but from there it is up to her to make of it what she chooses, differing now from her

predecessors in having the ability to have this unwavering belief in her line of reasoning. The future generations will no longer allow men to dictate their beliefs, but moreover, they will no longer lack the self confidence in their own ability to think, which has caused Castalia and cassandra to abandon their cause and appoint Ann, a poor little girl, as the president of the society of the future. What more can be done than teach their daughter the same value halting them from continuing their cause. A belief in herself, that what she believes in is right, not because a book supports it, or even because a room of women rally behind your cause, but simply because you believe in your own ability.