

# Wry Virginia Woolf in 'Room' with internal view

By **JENNIFER FARRAR, Associated Press**

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**D**on't be afraid of Virginia Woolf; her work contains a lot of plainspoken "nuggets of truth."

By now we're pretty familiar with Woolf's oft-repeated opinion that a woman needs a room of her own in which to write. The one-woman play, "Room," now being vividly enacted by Ellen Lauren in a brief, off-Broadway revival by SITI Company at Women's Project, makes it clear that Woolf believed a woman also needed a mind of her own to be a truthful writer.

Combining elegance with stylized, sweeping gestures and quirky mannerisms, Lauren depicts Woolf giving a thoughtful, wide-ranging lecture laced with humor, speaking on the topic of "women and fiction" to a roomful of women, represented by the audience.

The lecture comprises a spare adaptation by Jocelyn Clarke of some of Woolf's writings, weaving together brief literary readings with evocative memories and musings about the effort to create truth in writing fiction. The production is so imaginatively directed by Anne Bogart as to seem almost like a modern dance performance at times.

Fiercely passionate, Lauren moves gracefully about the stage with ritualized deliberation. She slowly stoops when reciting directly from literature, adapting a hand-wringing persona quite distinct from her confident lecturer. Repetitive gestures pull together the disparate subjects covered in Clarke's text.

Attempting to explain the nature of truth, memory, emotion, reality and the workings of a brilliant mind, the text reveals the passion of a writer trying to put on paper things that may be impossible to convey. Philosophical difficulties are interspersed with flashes of colorful childhood memories, such as waves splashing on the beach at St. Ives, or a dress fabric of purple and red flowers.

Eventually, Lauren is swooping and whirling around the stage, her intensity mirroring the joy of a writer engrossed in her work, as she describes the effort to find and decipher "the pattern hid behind the cotton wool," or "nonbeing" of everyday life when creativity is absent.

"Room" is an intellectual work but also visually intriguing. Neil Patel's pale gray set is textured with multiple shadows of Lauren and a faraway window, perhaps representing elusive reality, all carefully illuminated by Christopher Akerlind's lighting design. A dissonant soundscape by Darron L. West adds to the air of inner turmoil.

"Lies will flow from my lips but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them," Lauren's Woolf wryly cautions her audience at the outset. This thought-provoking production is in a very limited run at the Julia Miles Theater through March 27.

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**Online:**

<http://www.womensproject.org/>

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