A Room of One's Own Study Guide

A Room of One's Own by Virginia Woolf

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Introduction

A Room of One's Own is a classic text of the feminist movement. It is an expanded treatment of issues that Woolf presented in two essays she read to audiences at women's colleges in 1928. While the book is focused on women and fiction, its ideas and discussions overlap with larger questions pertinent to women's history.

At the center of the book is its famous thesis, which is echoed in the book's title. In asserting that a woman needs a room of her own to write, Woolf addresses both a historical and a contemporary question regarding women's art and their social status. The historical question is why there have been few great women writers. The contemporary question is how the number of women writers can increase. Woolf s answer□this matter of a room of one's own□is known as a "materialist" answer. That is, Woolf says that there have been few great women in history because material circumstances limited women's lives and achievements. Because women were not educated and were not allowed to control wealth, they necessarily led lives that were less publicly significant than those of men. Until the these material limitations are overcome, women will continue to achieve, publicly, less than men. Woolf s materialist thesis implicitly contests notions that women's inferior social status is a natural outcome of biological inferiority. While most people now accept the materialist position, in Woolf s time, such arguments still had to be put forward with conviction and force.

Author Biography

Adeline Virginia Woolf was born January 25, 1882, into a large family, in London, England. She grew up in an atmosphere conducive to her future career as a writer since her father, Leslie Stephen, was a respected and well-known intellectual and writer. Although she was not sent to a university as were her brothers, she was able to educate herself thoroughly by delving into the volumes of her father's vast library.

Woolf grew up during a period of intense feminist activity in London and was an active member of various women's organizations. By the time she came into her own as a writer, significant advances had been made in women's rights. By 1918, a limited franchise (vote) had been granted to women in England. Also, since World War I (1914-18) had thinned the ranks of working men, women had begun to enter the professions in large numbers.

Woolf began her career by writing literary criticism, published her first novel in 1915, and published both fiction and nonfiction copiously until her suicide in 1941. She is well known internationally for her many superb novels and collections of essays. *A Room of One's Own (1929) and Three Guineas (1938)* are important feminist tracts written by Woolf.

Woolf and the man who would become her husband, Leonard Woolf, were part of a group of artists, writers, and intellectuals known as the Bloomsbury Group. This group met regularly at Woolf and her brother's house in the Bloomsbury neighborhood of London before Woolf married, when she was still known as Virginia Stephen. After their marriage, the Woolfs began a small publishing house, Hogarth Press, in 1917.

Woolf suffered bouts of mental disequilibrium throughout her life. After each bout, especially as her life advanced, she worried that the next time she might not return to full sanity. It was this fear, combined with her sense of horror at the events of World War II (1939-1944), that led her to take her own life. She drowned in Sussex, England, on March 28, 1941.

Plot Summary

Chapter One

Near the start of *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf insists that the "I" of the book is not the author, but rather a narrator persona. ("I is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being"; "call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael, or by any name you please.") So, it is best to say that the book opens with the narrator asserting the book's thesis, which is that for women to write fiction, they must have rooms of their own and five hundred pounds a year income (income that comes from a source other than work). The idea is that a writer needs uninterrupted time to think, and privacy, and cannot spend all of her day working if she is to have the energy and quietude of mind necessary to produce literature.

To illustrate this thesis, this chapter offers a series of anecdotes. In one of these, a lunch to which the narrator is invited at an all-male college is contrasted to a dinner at a nearby women's college. The women eat a very plain and dull dinner while the men (and their guests) are served a rich and sumptuous lunch. The chapter concludes with the narrator noting that for many centuries a great deal of money, public and private, has gone toward the education of men. In contrast, little or no money has been spent on the education of women. Woolf has made a first important point: women are impoverished and under-educated, so if there are few women writers in the history of letters, this should come as no surprise.

Chapter Two

The narrator is now in the British Library, where, she says, she will attempt to discover why it is that women are so poor and men are so rich. She consults some of the literature written about women by men, and she very quickly discerns a common theme, succinctly expressed in the title of one of the books: *The Mental, Moral, and Physical Inferiority of Women.* "England," the narrator concludes, "is under the rule of a patriarchy." What this means is that it is a society governed and controlled by men, and it is such because men are considered the superior and more capable gender. According to the narrator, men write about and constantly reiterate the inferiority of women to maintain their privileged social status and their control of power. Also, she says, by convincing themselves that women are inferior, they build up their self-confidence.

Chapter Three

This chapter begins with a paradox: How is it that history books, when they speak of women, stress how socially limited women have been, but in the literature men have written, female heroines are so interesting? The narrator partly explains this by saying that, for the most part, the history of women has been barely told. There is plenty to

read about how men lived, and plenty about wars and politics, but very little about what women did. So, the gap between literature and history is partly explained by the fact that the history of women is yet to be properly written. But, on the other hand, the narrator believes that while little of detail is known of historical women, these few details are, in their general theme, accurate. That is, despite the fact that a few great women might be uncovered by historical research, the facts are that women hardly led eventful lives compared to those of men. But having touched on this idea of comparison, the narrator then suggests that one social problem women face is that their traditional roles and activities are considered less interesting than those of men.

Chapter Four

In this chapter, the narrator focuses on how the social climate affected the women of the past. Since women were supposed to be intellectually inferior, those few who did put pen to paper ended up writing a great deal of material that dwelled on their limited social roles and prospects. The narrator looks at poetry written by talented women of the seventeenth century and notes that some lines are beautiful but also that the poems as a whole tend to be marred by the writers' sense that they will not be taken seriously. Thus, a major point in this chapter is that great art is produced by those who are free in mind and spirit. If women write knowing that they will be disapproved of or laughed at, this will affect the quality of their work.

Although women were discouraged from being active in public life and letters, nevertheless, in the late eighteenth century, as the narrator says, "The middle-class woman began to write." The novel was invented, and there was a good market for anybody who could produce one. Women wrote and published quite copiously during this period. This earliest writing by women cannot be said to be great, but it created a precedent for later women to follow. And, sure enough, soon after this female entry into letters, a truly great woman writer appeared. The first great woman writer, says the narrator, was Jane Austen. She published her novels in the early decades of the nineteenth century. For the first time, a woman produced first-rate literature, which shows no evidence of a mind disabled by the thought that she will not be taken seriously.

Chapter Five

Having canvassed women's writing up to the nineteenth century in chapter four, in this chapter the narrator considers contemporary (early-twentieth-century) writing by women. She focuses on an imaginary, recently published book. Her remarks indicate that she believes that women, as a group, need another century before they will be on a par with men (individual great women writers aside). The narrator also asserts that women write differently from men in the sense that they tend to compose different types of sentences and stories. But although they write differently, she declares, this is not because they are conscious of their gender when they are writing. Rather, what makes the novel she is looking at good (if not great) is that the writer has transcended her

gender in writing. Woolf s point seems to be that while women express themselves differently, what they write about, ultimately, must transcend matters strictly pertaining to gender.

Chapter Six

This book ends with the narrator looking out her window at an October day. She sees a man and a woman meeting on a nearby corner and then getting into a taxi together. This image of togetherness leads the narrator to her last major point in *A Room of One's Own.* She argues that the truly great literary mind is androgynous. That is, she says that the greatest writers are as great as they are because their minds are never wholly dominated by either masculine or feminine qualities, but by a combination of the two. A writer may be more manly than womanly, or more womanly than manly, but unless the female or male writer is at least partly his or her opposite, he or she will never be truly great. Shakespeare, Austen□all the great writers mentioned in the book□have such androgynous minds, the narrator says.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The narrator has been asked to present a lecture about women and fiction. She opts instead to lecture about a woman's need for a room of her own.

She asks the reader to call her Mary Beton or Mary Seton or Mary Carmichael as she sits on a riverbank and wonders what the words "women and fiction" mean. Maybe it simply means, she thinks, making some remarks about certain women writers. On the other hand, it might mean something about what women are like or even women and the fiction they write. On the other hand, perhaps it means fiction about women. It could mean some of all of these. The problem with any of these possibilities is the difficulty in coming to a conclusion, which is the main responsibility of a speaker. Therefore, she will attempt to explain how she came to the topic of a room of one's own. Any time a subject is controversial, as this one is, one must show how such a conclusion was arrived at. Therefore, she has decided to write about two fictional schools: Oxbridge and Fernham.

She is sitting on this riverbank on a fine October day surrounded by golden and crimson bushes and on the opposite bank are drooping willows. As she walks, she encounters a beadle, a sort of unofficial policeman of a church or a campus of a school, who turns her back from proceeding onto the grounds of Oxbridge. Thoughts of Charles Lamb, who had been at Oxbridge over a hundred years ago, come to mind. She thinks of how he had written a commentary about Milton's Lycidas, the manuscript of which lies in the library of Oxbridge, just a few yards away. Therefore, she proceeds to the library but is turned away, because, as she is told, women may enter there only if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or with a letter of introduction.

Offended that she has been refused entrance, she thinks, "That a famous library has been cursed by a woman is a matter of complete indifference to a famous library. Venerable and calm, with all its treasures safe locked within its breast, it sleeps complacently and will, so far as I am concerned, so sleep for ever. Never will I wake those echoes, never will I ask for that hospitality again."

With an hour before luncheon, she ponders what to do next. She hears the sound of an organ. Because the outside of the buildings is so beautiful, she doesn't try to enter the chapel but watches the congregation assembling—old and young alike, the younger ones reminding her of crabs and crayfish. She recalls the history of the school. She knows that gold and silver were poured out in great measure to build it on what was then a marsh. It was begun in "the age of faith" and continued into the age of reason with money still flowing in, first from the coffers of kings and noblemen and then from merchants and manufacturers to fund chairs, libraries, laboratories, observatories, and delicate instruments. Now it is lunchtime.

She has been invited to lunch at the school, and she describes it in some detail. The luncheon, she writes, features elaborately prepared and expensive food. She ponders the difference in the conversation at a luncheon here now and one before the war (World War I).

After lunch, she walks down the avenue, and gates begin to close behind her with innumerable beadles locking them. She travels along the street to Fernham. She is to have dinner there at half-past seven. As she walks, she thinks of the poetry of the past—of lines from Tennyson and from Christina Rosetti and compares them to post-war poets who express feelings that are not lyrical and are not easily remembered. She reaches Fernham and finds the gate open with no beadle guarding it. Dinner is served in the great hall, and the fare is very plain. She is visiting a friend who teaches science at Fernham, and goes with her to her rooms following dinner for a drink. They gossip about common acquaintances. Then they discuss the differences between the two schools, the wealthy one for men only and Fernham, which had been built after a struggle to raise £30,000. The meager support accounts for the difference in the campuses and in the food served at the two meals she has eaten.

The two women discuss this difference and conclude that the reason is that women have no wealth. Instead of learning to make money, they bring up families. If, instead, they had lived their lives as their fathers, husbands and brothers, they would have had the money to build a great university. If that had happened, then women would be enjoying the life of a liberally endowed profession or perhaps exploring or writing. However, if women live such lives, there will be no one to bring up the children. In addition, even if she had earned money instead of having the children, she could not have possessed it—it would have been her husband's property.

Therefore, she returns to her room at the inn where she is staying and wonders what affect this difference between the poverty and insecurity of the one and the extravagant lifestyle and security of the other has on the individual.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This unusual piece of writing is an interesting blend between fiction and non-fiction. Virginia Woolf did lecture, in fact, to women regarding fiction and women's role as writers. The author alerts us to the fact that while she is fictionalizing, it is not a serious fiction. She does not give her narrator a specific name but gives the reader a choice—"Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or . . . any name you please—it is not a matter of importance." Therefore, we set off on this semi-fictional journey into the realm of women writers of fiction.

First, she must make a decision about what, exactly, she has been asked to do. Is she to write about women who write fiction or about the fiction they write or perhaps even fiction about women? She determines that she will explain how she concluded that if a woman is to succeed as a writer, she must have a room of her own. And in order to make this explanation, she will write about two schools that she gives the invented

names of Oxbridge and Fernham, again reminding us that this is thinly-veiled fiction based on easily recognizable reality: the well-known ancient British universities Oxford and Cambridge and not-so-ancient Newnham, Cambridge's college for women.

As she roams about the campus of Oxbridge, she is reminded repeatedly of the importance that has been given to the education of men through the years. She looks at the magnificence of the buildings and sees in her own mind's eye what it took to construct such an institution. She sees kings and noblemen providing prodigious amounts of money for the hauling of the stones and the construction of the great halls. She also reminds herself that this still goes on—that wealthy and important men still lay their fortunes on the line to maintain this institution designed solely to educate men.

As if she needs to be reminded, the beadle forbids her to enter the campus, not because she does not have papers or is not dressed properly, but solely because she is a woman. And so this background of a wealthy institution of learning devoted only to men and to the exclusion of women prepares her reader (or listener—this was actually a lecture that she presented at women's colleges) for the points that she intends to make, the most important one the title, A Room of One's Own. However, she also makes several other important points about the world of women and literature, as we shall see as we journey with her to another university and the British Museum.

Her description of lunch at the prestigious men's university plays an important role in her plan to contrast the plight of the woman to that of a writer who is a man. The opulence of the setting, the ceremony involved in the gathering at the table and the serving of an extravagantly elegant meal will be compared later in this chapter to the very simple dinner she takes at Fernham, the women's college. She uses comparison and contrast very effectively throughout the essay/lecture to make her point that women do not fare well in the literary world—and for good reason.

The graphic image of the gates being closed behind her by beadles as she leaves the campus of Oxbridge underscores the theme of the essay: the gates are closed to women on the advantages men enjoy that make their success as writers possible. Thinking in pictures is characteristic of Virginia Woolf's style. It can be seen in many of her works of fiction, for example.

Her discussion with her friend, the science teacher at Fernham, gets to the core of the matter. Women do not succeed as writers for two reasons: their life's energies must be spent on bringing up children, and any possessions they have will, by law, belong to their husbands. There are no resources available to the woman who aspires to become a writer.

The bitterness and anger that is characteristic of so much feminist literature is not in this work by Virginia Woolf. She makes a very strong point about the discrimination that women experience, yet she does so in a gentle, pleasant, good-humored way.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The next day she visits London, still trying to write her speech on women and fiction, so she decides to visit the British Museum. She is looking for answers to the questions that were raised by her visits to the two schools. What conditions are necessary for the creation of works of art, she wonders.

Consulting the index, she finds so many books written about women—mostly by men—that she is overwhelmed. On the other hand, she does not find books about men written by women. She decides to limit her search to women and poverty.

She finds a wide disparity in what men think of women. Some think they are incapable of learning. Some find them better learners than men. Some people conclude that women are divine and that they should be worshipped. She concludes that most of the men writers are angry. For that reason, she feels that not much is to be learned that is useful from the books about women that are written by men. She also realizes that England is under the rule of a patrimony. Men rule!

As she ponders why a professor will write a book on the inferiority of women, it occurs to her that his concern is actually his own superiority and the possible loss of it. Then she concludes that all creatures need confidence in their selves. Women provide a mirror for men, and but for that mirror, civilization would not move forward. She makes him seem at least twice the size he really is.

Now we discover that she has been left a legacy of 500 pounds a year forever by her aunt. Before that time, she had been eking out a living at temporary jobs, some using her writing skills. Doing work that she did not want to do and doing it as a slave left bitterness with her. It had been eating away "the bloom of the spring, destroying the tree at its heart." When she is able to pay her own way without working, some of that is rubbed off. Fear and bitterness go. Therefore, she is more understanding even of the men who keep women in their places.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Mary Beton concludes that the writings of men about women are so angry because men have a great need to feel superior. By going to great lengths to prove the inferiority of women, they pump up their own feelings of superiority. The source for the discrimination and exploitation that women are subjected to is revealed in these writings.

She creates a story about being left 500 pounds a year, which she says, as Mary Beton, freed her to fulfill her own destiny. This is not autobiographical; Virginia Woolf actually grew up in a family of comfortable means and married a successful writer/publisher, so she did not have immediate experience with the struggle she is describing here. Her

conviction that a woman needs a room of her own and 500 pounds a year in order to compete as a writer is based on her own observation of women writers, not on her own life experience.

Again, the style is gentle, not vituperative. She does not express anger that men writers have so demeaned women and kept them down. She simply reports on her findings.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

She goes back to her home, disappointed that she still has not found the nugget of truth she is seeking for her presentation on women and fiction. Therefore, she goes back to the British Museum and takes a different tack. Now she probes why no women wrote in the past. She finds that men have always ruled, but that the women of fiction do have their own personalities and seem important. She concludes that the truth is that women have been locked up, beaten and flung about the room. In fiction, women seem heroic and admirable; in real life, they can hardly read and spell and are the property of their husbands. In fact, very little is written about women by the historians.

Then she imagines what would have happened had Shakespeare had a gifted sister called Judith. While the brother, William, is being educated and making a name for his self in the world, she remains at home with no chance of going to school. She is betrothed to a local man, but after she refuses to marry him, she is beaten. Not yet seventeen, she takes a small parcel of her belongings and makes her way to London. She is laughed at when she goes to the theater to seek the opportunity to act. She becomes pregnant by the theater manager and kills herself. That is how the story would run, thinks Woolf, if a woman in Shakespeare's day had had Shakespeare's genius. Such genius is not born among the working class, she believes. Shakespeare emerged from a family of privilege. Women cannot possibly become such geniuses if they must begin to work very young.

It is difficult to write even if one is a man; for a woman, the distractions are too great, she realizes, as she looks at the shelves empty of works by women. To have a room of her own, for instance, is out of the question. However, the greatest deterrent to a woman's becoming a significant writer, poet, or musician, is the prevailing opinion that she is incapable of doing any such thing.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In looking at history books for some illumination as to why women have not become famous writers as men have, she finds a vacuum. So little is written in the history books about women, virtually nothing before the eighteenth century, that she decides to create a history of her own about Shakespeare's sister. She uses this device to illustrate the deprivation that a woman in the Elizabethan era would have experienced.

It's not only the lack of opportunity that keeps women from becoming successful writers, but the damage to her own outlook that comes from being so devalued, suggests Woolf in this chapter. Even if she had a room of her own, the devaluing itself would still be a deterrent to her success.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

She cites Lady Winchilsea from the year 1661 who was noble by both birth and marriage but was childless and wrote poetry. Much of her work expresses indignation and bitterness at the treatment, the sneers and the laughter she was subjected to because, as a woman, she dared write poetry. She also writes about a Margaret of Newcastle, a Duchess, also childless. In addition, in her works there is the same outburst of rage, including the following lines: "Women live like Bats or Owls, labour like Beasts, and die like Worms . . . "

She also mentions Dorothy Osborne, who published a short book of letters that she wrote while sitting by her father's sickbed. The letters display poetic talent that was never realized. She also cites Aphra Behn, a middle-class widow forced to make a living for herself. Her writing demonstrates a freedom of mind not found in the previous writing because she made her own way. As the result of her example, women began to write to make money and changes began to happen toward the end of the eighteenth century. Middle-class women began to write, like Jane Austen, the Brontës and George Eliot. It happened because of all who had gone before, not only Shakespeare and the other masters but also the women who had the courage to challenge the status quo.

By the early nineteenth century, shelves were beginning to fill up with works by women, but they were all novels. The reason for that, believes this narrator, is that these women wrote in the only sitting room in the house, which was used by the rest of the family; and writing poetry, she reasons, requires solitude. In addition, these women novelists had very little experience with life outside the confines of their homes. What they would have produced if they had had money of their own and the ability to go about in the world and gain wider experience, she wonders.

What makes a novel successful is that it is real, that it is believable, and she calls that integrity. Does the fact of her sex in any way affect the integrity of a novel written by a woman? She feels that in Brontë's case, her anger at the limitations of her life do in fact interfere with the integrity of her writing. Rochester, she says, is written without a real-life model and it limits the effect of the novel. On the other hand, both Austen and Brontë managed to rise above the criticisms aimed at women writers, she writes, and were able to produce masterpieces that did, in fact, demonstrate the integrity of which she has spoken—the conviction that what they write about is, in fact, real and possible. It must have taken a very stalwart young woman in those early years of the nineteenth century to disregard the snubs and chidings and the promises of prizes if they would not write.

Another obstacle for the woman writer at that time was a lack of models. She was breaking new ground, and since the novel was a relatively new genre, it was appropriate that she make her name with it rather than with poetry.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Mary Seton has visited the campuses of the men's and women's universities and compared them, she has explored what men have written about women, she has surveyed what the historians have said about women, and now, in this chapter, she is ready to look at the writing of women.

What she finds confirms the conclusions she has drawn up to now: women do not become successful as writers because they have no opportunity to develop their talents, particularly for the writing of poetry.

Good essay writing and effective lecturing require that the writer/lecturer stay on point and this is certainly true in this essay by Virginia Woolf. Repeatedly she supports her conclusion that women need space in which they may write and think without interruption or distraction and the freedom that independent income will provide to free them from the responsibilities that have always prevented them from realizing their potentials.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

The narrator has come now to the shelf that holds books by the living. Women no longer write only novels. They write poems, plays, criticisms and almost any genre that men write. The novels, themselves, are different, no longer only autobiographical.

She takes down a novel by Mary Carmichael called Life's Adventure or some such title and examines it, finding that the style is awkward and uneven. Then she is startled to find the following phrase: "Chloe liked Olivia . . ." This throws her into a long discussion of the role that relations between the sexes have played in the literature of the ages as well as the writers of that literature. That a relationship between a man and a woman is not the basis of Carmichael's novel leads the narrator to examine a whole range of possibilities that she has not considered before.

Chloe and Olivia, it turns out, share a laboratory together with one of them married and with children at home. Men have never been depicted in literature as having such a narrow range of interests and relationships as women have. Why should women? This opens up a completely new way of looking at literature, she feels. Besides, it is difficult to evaluate the work of a woman, because she has until this time, never been evaluated by the universities; one cannot go to the standard compilations of biographies and find information about her. It seems to her that education should bring out and fortify the differences between men and women rather than the similarities. Women, she feels, will inevitably write differently than men.

Women, she feels, the Mary Carmichaels, must record the lives of women of all kinds at all levels of society, and not only women but also men.

She goes back to her examination of the novel by Carmichael and observes that her style is not as distinguished as that of her predecessors, but she has many of the advantages that those women did not have such as wider experience of the world. In addition, she writes as a woman who has achieved that point where sex is unconscious of itself.

She did not have the genius or the capacity, she feels, for writing an outstanding novel, but for an unknown girl writing her first novel in a bed-sitting-room without the supports necessary to provide the freedom a great writer needs, she did not do so badly, the narrator thinks.

Give her another hundred years, she thinks, and give her a room of her own and five hundred a year, let her speak her mind and leave out half of what she now puts in, and she will write a better novel one day. She puts Mary Carmichael's book back on the shelf.

Chapter 5 Analysis

In the introduction to Chapter 1, the writer has offered the reader three different choices for a name for the narrator, one of them Mary Carmichael. Now we find the real Mary Carmichael, a historical figure, an example of a woman whose writing was limited by her circumstances. This seems to suggest that the narrator, herself, is feeling the frustration of deprivation.

Now for the first time, the matter of relationships between the sexes in literature comes up. Strangely, it is introduced in the passage from Carmichael, "Chloe liked Olivia . . ." —two women— and her thoughts turn to literature written by men about relationships between a man and woman. It is in those relationships that men find understanding and creative stimulus; perhaps she is suggesting that friendships between women may serve the same function.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The next morning our writer looks out at the street and realizes that, busy with their daily lives, no one cares about Shakespeare or the future of women and fiction. She sees a man and woman meet beneath her window and both get in a cab. Thinking of one sex as distinct from another as she has been doing these past days is an effort and interferes with the unity of the mind. Somehow or other, seeing the man and woman meet and enter the cab restores that unity in her mind. She ponders that perhaps the mind is made up of male and female components. When the two are fully fused, the mind is most capable of living in harmony.

No age, she feels, has ever been as stridently sex-conscious as the one she is living in. She takes down a new novel by Mr. A., who is in the prime of his life and well thought of. She finds it delightful to read a man's writing after all the reading of women she has done the past few days. It indicates freedom of mind, self-confidence, and such liberty that she relishes his straightforwardness. However, after reading a page or two, she senses a sort of shadow shaped like the letter "I" that hangs over it. Soon she finds herself bored because of the dominance of the letter "I" and the aridity it casts in its shade. Nothing will grow there, she feels. The feminist movement and the effort to gain the vote for women have caused men to feel under threat, and it has affected the literature being produced by them.

Shakespeare, she feels, would have been very different if the women's movement had begun in the sixteenth century. Therefore, if the mind has a female component and a male component, men in the current period are writing with only the male half. The result, she feels, is that the writing no longer communicates. Whereas when a sentence of Coleridge is taken into the mind it explodes and gives birth to all kinds of other ideas, the writing of men like the one she is examining tends to fall plump to the ground—dead. These works lack suggestive power, and without suggestive power, they seem crude and immature. They do not penetrate the mind.

She sees an age to come of pure self-assertive virility; and poetry requires, she believes, both the male and the female expression. She doubts that great poetry will come of this state of affairs. The blame for all this does not fall on either sex but on all seducers and reformers who are responsible for bringing about this state of sex-consciousness. She longs for past ages when writers like Shakespeare used both sides of their brains.

She is now ready to begin writing her speech, and the first point she wishes to make is that in order for a woman to write fiction successfully, she must not think of her sex. She must write with both sides of her brain—that is, from the masculine as well as the feminine side. "Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated," she concludes.

Virginia Woolf, who wrote this book, summarizes where Mary Beton's search has taken her and is now speaking in her own voice about how she concluded that a woman must have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door if she is to write fiction or poetry. Whether men or women are better writers, she will not judge because measuring merit in any writer is futile. One critic likes a book; another rejects it. Besides, she says, pitting sex against sex is childish and as people mature, they become less competitive regarding the achievements of one sex over the other.

Some will accuse her of being too materialistic, she surmises, and some will say that women should rise above their poverty as many of the great poets have. She quotes Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch who cites the major poets of the past and declares that all but one —Keats—was a University man. The poor poet, he says, does not have a chance.

Intellectual freedom depends on material things, Woolf insists, and women are deprived of the opportunity to become successful poets and writers of fiction because of their poverty and because they have not the opportunities that men enjoy of education and travel. She also admonishes her audience of women not to limit themselves to fiction. Other forms of writing enrich fiction; besides, that kind of writing very well may lead a writer to move on to poetry and fiction. Most of all, she encourages them to write.

When she is encouraging women to earn money and to have rooms of their own, she is encouraging them to live an invigorating life in the presence of the kind of reality that makes for great writing.

She also warns them of the hostility and devaluing that men engage in with regard to women, so any woman who chooses to write must expect a certain amount of unpleasantness. To those who ask why they should seek such a life, she reminds them that since 1886 there have been two colleges for women; since 1880, a married woman has been allowed by law to possess property; since 1919, she has had a vote. She also points out that most professions have been available to women for over ten years and that at this moment in time, some two thousand women are capable of earning over five hundred a year. For these reasons, she says, the excuse of lack of opportunity, training, encouragement, leisure, and money no longer holds true.

Shakespeare's sister cannot be found in any listing of great poets. She lies buried where buses now stop. However, she lives in women today who are at home washing the dishes and putting children to bed. In another century or so, if we live real lives and have five hundred a year and rooms of our own, if we have freedom and courage to write what we think, if we see human beings in their relation to reality, if we face that fact that there is no arm to cling to but that we go alone, then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who is Shakespeare's sister "will put on the body which she has so often laid down." She will come if we work for her, and doing that work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worthwhile.

Chapter 6 Analysis

In the first chapter, Woolf alerted us to the mix of fiction and autobiography that she intended to use to make her point in this essay/lecture. Now in the last chapter, she shifts voices again, and we have Virginia Woolf addressing us directly. She pursues her created image of Shakespeare's sister to make her point that women are deprived of the opportunity to be creative and successful as writers, and now she makes an appeal to her listeners/readers to change that, to help women become independent and self-sufficient.

This has sometimes been called a feminist essay. If we define feminist as "an organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests," as Merriam-Webster's Unabridged Dictionary defines it, then A Room of One's Own does not fit the description. Virginia Woolf did not see herself as a member of an organized group to bring about women's liberation. However, this is an important document in the 20th Century movement to achieve those purposes. It provides a clear and compelling argument for opening up opportunities for women to use their talents and abilities in creative and productive ways. It also offers a compelling rationale for the reasons they have been denied opportunities throughout history. These matters are laid out gently, not vituperatively. In some of her later works, her voice became much more strident, but this very reasonable, logical statement of the plight of women as writers contains none of that.

Characters

Jane Austen

Jane Austen (1775-1817) is one of the novelists Woolf discusses in chapter four. Austen's major novels are: *Pride and Prejudice, Emma, Sense and Sensibility, Mansfield Park, and Persuasion.* Austen's greatness has always been acknowledged, and ever since university literary curricula began to include literature other than the ancient classics of Greece and Rome, Austen's writing has been taught. Austen grew up and lived in the milieu of which she writes, the newly-established rural, propertied, middle-class of England.

Beadle

A beadle, historically, had a specific function in the British university system, which was namely to ensure that the protocols of the colleges were upheld, especially by their students. Today, however, they exist at few universities, and where they do, their role is largely ceremonial. For example, they might appear in traditional garb during processions. However, in Woolf s day, beadles still performed their historical function. The beadle in Woolf s book tells the narrator to remove herself from the campus lawns where, since she is a woman and not a member of the college, she is not allowed to be.

Mary Beton

Mary Beton is one of the many fictional personages in Woolf s book. She is the aunt who leaves the narrator an inheritance that allows her the independence and freedom to produce a book such as *A Room of One's Own.* However, Mary Beton's identity is complicated by an assertion made by Woolf: "Call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael, or by any name you please."

Woolf creates a number of fictional characters and then suggests before they are fully introduced that these are names or personae that the reader can associate with the book's narrating voice. So, Mary Beton and these other Marys are both narrators and fictional personages. What Woolf accomplishes by this strategy is to turn herself into a collective entity. This is appropriate since this book pursues the collective project of women's rights.

Charlotte Brontë

Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855), author of *Jane Eyre and Villette,* amongst other novels, is, like Jane Austen, one of the greatest women writers of all time. Charlotte Brontë's most well-known book, *Jane Eyre,* is subject to some criticism from Woolf in chapter four. While Woolf acknowledges the book's many strengths, she laments those

moments when the novel seems to be interrupted by overt or dogmatic pleas for women's rights. While Woolf is obviously interested in women's rights, she does not feel that art should be overtly political. Woolf uses Brontë's book to demonstrate her point that until women have achieved full rights, they will be prone to mar their art.

Mary Carmichael

Mary Carmichael, like Mary Beton and Mary Seton, is a fictional personage. She is the author of the (invented) novel that the narrator ponders and analyzes in chapter five. It is through an analysis of the story and sentences of this imagined book that Woolf presents her theories about the differences between men's and women's art.

George Eliot

George Eliot (1819-1880), whose real name was Mary Ann (or Mary Anne) Evans, is alluded to twice. She was a leading novelist and intellectual of her time who, like many women before the twentieth century, resorted to a male pseudonym in publishing. By adopting a man's name, Eliot deflected critics' attention from her gender so that they would give her books the serious critical attention they deserved. Her most admired novels are *The Mill on the Floss, Middlemarch, and Daniel Deronda.* Like many Victorian novelists, Eliot is eminently concerned in her novels with moral and ethical questions, and with the individual's duties and responsibilities.

J□ H□

'Upon reaching the women's college in chapter one, the narrator thinks she catches sight of ' 'J□ H□herself." This is an allusion to Jane Ellen Harrison (1850-1928), a well-known classics scholar of Woolf s time. Harrison was one of the first women to graduate from Cambridge University's Newnham College where she was a lecturer from 1898 to 1922.

Mary Seton

Mary Seton is, like Mary Beton and Mary Carmichael, a persona whom the reader can assume to be a narrator of Woolf s text. She is also, like these other two Marys, a fictional personage within the book. In fact, Mary Seton is two fictional personages: In her first guise, she is a friend of the narrator in chapter one, a woman with whom the narrator chats after a dinner at the women's college. But, in this same portion of chapter one, Mary Seton is also the name given to the first Mary Seton's mother. As the mother of Mary Seton, she is a typical, traditional woman, who, unlike her daughter, did not attend college or work for women's rights.

Shakespeare's Sister

To dramatize her notion that women bestowed with artistic genius must have gone mad or at least have been terribly thwarted in earlier centuries, Woolf creates a figure she calls Shakespeare's Sister ("Judith"). Woolf then imagines Judith's life. By inventing an equally talented sister for the great British playwright, a woman who could not and did not give voice to her art, Woolf vividly communicates the great waste and loss of talent that is women's history.

William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare (1564-1616), the great British poet and playwright, is a figure whose name is synonymous with literature and artistic genius. In *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf argues that Shakespeare was endowed with an androgynous (having both male and female traits) mind. Woolf holds that all great art is created by persons with androgynous minds because great art cannot be wholly masculine or feminine.

Professor von X

Professor von X. is a composite male imagined by Woolf in chapter two. He is an extreme male chauvinist, a male academic who spends much of his time discoursing on the hows and whys of women's inferiority. He is a ridiculous and an unpleasant character who, Woolf suggests, is driven to his misogyny by personal disappointment.

Themes

Equal Opportunity

Before the mid to late eighteenth century in the West, a person was born into a social class (either the aristocracy or the peasantry, with a few steps in between). It was taken for granted that the individual's class indicated his or her worth. That is, noble men and women were just that□more noble and somehow more fully human than their humbler counterparts. But during the age of democratic revolutions (The Enlightenment), it was asserted that all men are born equal and that social and economic differences between men are the result of differences in education and opportunity. Women immediately recognized the limitations of such theories and began to assert that just as the social system had been invalidated, so should be the gender class system in which women were considered inferior. Women, they said, have as much potential as men if given education and opportunity. These basic democratic ideals constitute the origin and crux of Woolf s argument in *A Room of One's Own.* She argues that there are few great women writers in history only because women were not educated and encouraged to greatness.

Difference

Woolf argues that once a woman of talent receives the same education and opportunities as her male counterpart, she is able to produce art as great as any man's. However, she also hints that this equality of opportunity does not result in the melting away of differences between male and female. This argument for difference is particularly evident in the book's final chapter in which Woolf argues that it is possible to distinguish differences between art produced by men and art produced by women. Whether Woolf believes that gender difference is a matter of biology or a result of social roles is uncertain.

Opinion Versus Truth

At the beginning of *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf says that she ' 'should never be able to fulfill what is ... the first duty of a lecturer□to hand [his or her listeners] after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth." Instead, she writes, all she can offer is "opinion." This humble and provisional stance is highly significant. She wants to underscore that asserting that one is in possession of the truth can be deleterious, and that it is important to distinguish theory or opinion from truth. In chapter two, Woolf points out that men, throughout history, have continuously asserted that they know the truth about women, and this truth is that women are inferior in every way to men. But, as the material circumstances of women have changed, and they have begun to do the same things men have always done, this "truth" has turned out to be only opinion or delusion.

Before these men were disproved, however, many women believed this opinion to be truth, to women's great disadvantage: they internalized what men said about them.

Privilege and Entitlement

In a way, *A Room of One's Own* is a sustained polemic on the power of privilege, confidence, and entitlement. Clearly, Woolf believes that making laws that favor women can only do so much to advance their cause and social position. Equally important to this cause, however, is a woman's sense that she deserves equality, that she is as capable as men are, and that society affirms her efforts to fulfill her potential. Woolf insists that changing both men's attitudes about women and women's attitudes about themselves is crucial. A woman full of doubt about her potential will never get very far, she suggests. Likewise, women will never achieve their full potential as long as they inhabit a world in which beliefs about women's inferiority exist.

Style

Style

Throughout *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf interacts with her readers by addressing them as "you," as if she were giving a lecture. In fact, her first sentence pretends that the members of her audience will object to some of what she is going to say: "But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction□what has that got to do with a room of one's own?" Woolf s conversational style is a crucial component of her message. For Woolf, how a person delivers a lecture is just as important as its content or what it says. And the give-and-take style of *A Room of One's Own* indicates that, as a lecturer writer, Woolf does not place herself above her audience. She does not wish to present herself as a pompous know-it-all who assumes that her listeners are intellectually inferior. By acknowledging the responses of her audience, she does not assume that she is the only one in possession of ideas or knowledge. This is a book about equality, and Woolf makes sure that the way she discusses her ideas is in keeping with the ideas themselves. The style in which she presents her ideas acknowledges that her readers have minds and ideas of their own.

Tone

Much of what is presented in *A Room of One's Own* is put forward playfully or with humor, and this tone accomplishes two things. First, it guards against negative responses to its topic. Woolf knows that women's issues are touchy for many readers: many men feel threatened by feminism, and many women fear losing the love of men if they assert their rights or call themselves feminists. So, by infusing her arguments with humor, Woolf emphasizes debate over anger. Second, the easy tone sets the book apart from the typical lecture in which information is dryly imparted. By departing from typical lecture style, Woolf puts herself into a class of speakers and writers for whom lecturing and essay writing is considered art, not just a means to convey facts or ideas. The varying and often light-hearted tone of the piece is part of its attempt to be a subtle and enjoyable piece of writing, one which will entertain and delight as much as challenge and inform.

Anecdotes

Successful essays use concrete examples and specific details to illustrate general points. Woolf s essay contains a number of fictional anecdotes that serve this purpose. For example, in chapter one, Woolf wishes to dramatize the way in which women have been systematically excluded from doing certain things. She also wishes to dramatize how society favors men at the expense of women. The story of the narrator's day on a university campus illustrates these points very clearly. (The university is divided into men's and women's colleges.) The narrator describes a beadle forcing her off the grass

at a men's college, and, immediately after this, being denied entrance to the men's campus library. Then, she contrasts meals eaten at this men's college and at one of the women's colleges. The narrator's forcible exclusion from real physical locations symbolizes the societal limitations imposed on women in general, and the descriptions of the contrasting meals very entertainingly illustrates how public money is lavished on men but not on women.

Historical Context

British Universities and Women

Cambridge and Oxford universities, each made up of various colleges, are Britain's oldest and most well-known universities. Both universities were established in the early thirteenth century although both institutions had been active as centers of learning well before their official establishment as universities. In 1869, Cambridge's Girton College became the first British college to accept women students. In 1871, Cambridge established a college specifically for women, Newnham College. Girtonand Newnham Colleges are where Woolf delivered the two lectures on women and fiction that grew into *A Room of One's Own.* The' 'Oxbridge" of Woolf s book refers to Cambridge and Oxford, and so refers to bastions of male education in general.' 'Fernham," the fictional women's college depicted in Woolf s book, is an obvious allusion to Newnham.

Feminism

There have always been men and women who have decried women's second-class status in Western societies. But feminism as a viable and broad-scale movement did not take off until democratic ideals pervaded the West during the eighteenth century. Since that time, feminist activity has been consistent, though sometimes more vigorous and sometimes less so. Mary Wollstonecraft, a British woman who was inspired by the events of the democratic revolutions, published the first major feminist tract in English, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women,* in 1797. Feminism gathered force during the nineteenth century as women entered public life as factory workers during the course of the Industrial Revolution. The philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) was an influential British feminist tract of the mid-nineteenth century. Feminism achieved its first major gain in the West when women were granted the vote in 1918 in Britain and in 1920 in the United States. However, since women's social status and opportunities continued to lag behind those of men during the twentieth century, a new women's rights movement was forged in the 1960s.

British Suffragettes

The early decades of the twentieth century, like the 1960s and 1970s, were years of major, particularly intensive feminist action throughout the world. The rise of socialist philosophies, of which a major component is the equality of the sexes, gave impetus to feminist demonstrations in places as diverse as Japan, Mexico, and Russia. Things were no different in the United States and Britain, and the feminists of London, in particular, were known for the vigor and militancy of their actions. Feminists were most often referred to as suffragettes at this time because their primary goal was to gain the vote, or suffrage, for women. And no suffragettes were more creative in their methods than the followers of Emmeline Pankhurst, who was one of the principal British feminist

organizers of the time. British suffragettes would invade parliamentary sessions and create disturbances, march down streets at inconvenient times to disrupt business, or, more typically, engage in peaceful demonstrations. One demonstration that took place in 1908 in London's famous Hyde Park attracted almost half a million people. Some of the more militant acts engaged in by turn-of-the-century feminists were stone throwing and hunger strikes.

World War I

The connection between early-twentieth-century British feminism and World War I (1914) is a complex and mixed one. First, the start of this terrible war cut short feminist activity which was, at the time, vigorous. It seemed, before the start of the war, that women were on the verge of gaining the vote in England. But once the war began, few people had time to attend to the problems of women. Instead, everybody, including feminists, threw themselves into the war effort. These women became nurses, ambulance drivers, intelligence operatives, and the like. In addition, since so many men were off fighting, women were called to take their places in the regular work force. And since this war resulted in the deaths of so many men, many of these same women were able to keep these jobs once the war was over. So, despite the fact that the war cut short organized feminist activity, it ended up advancing women's cause in the long run, because it facilitated women's entry into the professions. Also, since women contributed to the war effort so valiantly and extensively, Parliament passed a bill giving certain women the vote the very year the war ended (the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1918).

Critical Overview

A Room of One's Own is widely acknowledged to be a major work of feminist thought, just as many of Woolf's novels are considered major works of English-language fiction. *A Room of One's Own* is especially admired for its unparalleled breadth of inquiry and for the power of its metaphors. Its story of "Shakespeare's sister," its notion of "aroom of one's own," and its idea that women "think back through [their] mothers," for example, are staple phrases of post-1950s feminist dialogues. The book's reputation rests not only on the way in which it captures the concerns of the author's own time, but also for the way in which it anticipates so much of the thinking and writing of contemporary feminism and literary theory.

Numerous feminists claim that *A Room of One's Own* is the single most important twentieth-century feminist text. In 1983, for example, in "'I Have Bought My Freedom': The Gift of A Room of One's Own," Patricia Joplin states, "It would be hard to find any major work of American feminist theory, particularly literary theory, that is not to some degree indebted to *A Room of One's Own.*" Jane Gallop, in *Around 1981: Academic Literary Theory,* calls Woolf's book "the founding book of feminist literary criticism." In fact, the book that launched academic feminism after World War II, Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics,* is said to be closely modeled after Woolf's book.

While no feminist dismisses Woolf' s book outright, numerous theorists question or contest some of the arguments presented in the book. For example, Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" questions some of the author's assumptions and points to alleged conceptual limitations. Walker, an African-American feminist and fiction writer, says that Woolf's focus on "high art" is a classist position. For Walker, many poor women (i.e., not just women with rooms of their own and inheritances) produce great art; one must simply look "low" as well as "high." By looking "low," Walker means that quilts, beautiful gardens, and other art forms should be valued as much as printed books and formal paintings. Other feminists question the validity of Woolf's notion that there is a difference between men's and women's literature. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out, there seems to be no empirical truth to the claim that women's sentences are different from men's. In their book *No Man's Land: The War of the Words,* they suggest instead that Woolf is presenting a "fantasy about a utopian linguistic structure" that does not describe women's language, but rather their "relation" to language.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Dell'Amico has published numerous essays and articles on twentieth century authors and teaches literature and composition. In the following essay, she considers various settings of the novel, Oxbridge, Fernham, the British Museum, and the streets of London.

The commentary that makes up Virginia Woolf s *A Room of One's Own* is delivered by a female narrator on the move. She is first depicted wandering out-of-doors on the grounds of a university campus. Immediately afterwards, she makes her way indoors into various rooms and halls belonging to two of the many colleges that readers can assume make up this university. Next, she is depicted visiting the British Museum in the heart of London. She ends the book located in her London home. The mobility of this narrator points to the importance of setting in the novel. Setting, the context within which actions and persons are placed in literary works, is an integral means through which authors communicate their ideas. Elements of setting include historical time, location and place, and general environment or social milieu.

The first major setting of the novel is the grounds of a fictitious university the author calls "Oxbridge." As the name of this locale makes clear, the reader is supposed to call to mind Cambridge and Oxford Universities, two of the oldest universities in England. Both were established in the early thirteenth century and both were centers of learning even before they were officially established as universities. Each is made up of numerous, differently named colleges.

During the course of waiting for and keeping her two appointments at Oxbridge, the narrator (who henceforth will be referred to as Mary Beton) does various things and various things happen to her. She sits by the river that runs through the campus thinking about a future lecture she must give on the topic of women and fiction, she walks around (continuing to think) and is told to stay on the paths and keep off the ' 'turf," she tries to go into a library but is not allowed to do so, and she has lunch at one college and then dinner at a second ("Fernham," an all-women's college).

The locale of Oxbridge invokes the entire cultural heritage and history of England. The two universities to which this name refers are the country's two most prestigious centers of learning. Oxford and Cambridge Universities are the places where England as a nation defined itself and where the nation's beliefs and traditions were handed down from generation to generation. These institutions groomed generations of privileged young men for the highest positions of power and leadership in the country. Oxford and Cambridge Universities in Woolf s time symbolized the greatness, promise, and identity of the nation.

In depicting the narrator suffering a series of exclusions on the grounds of Oxbridge, Woolf s polemic for women's access to education is well illustrated. Mary's exclusion from various parts of the university dramatizes the recalcitrance of the status quo, or the difficulty that women face in trying to change society's rules and boundaries for behavior

and opportunity. In first placing the narrator on the grounds of Oxbridge, Woolf indicates how women tend to be associated with nature as opposed to intellect. As outsiders in relation to the inner domains of the nation's major universities, it is as if the women of England have been erased from the story of the nation's past, as if they, in their own historical ways and capacities, did not contribute in any way to the nation's greatness.

Some of the language Woolf uses in the description of how Mary is denied entry into the Oxbridge library is telling. Mary has been thinking about past fiction writers such as William Makepeace Thackeray and past essay writers such as Charles Lamb. When her thoughts light on Charles Lamb, she thinks about one of his essays in particular, on John Milton's *Lycidas* (Milton is an English poet of the seventeenth century and *Lycidas* is one of his poems):

Lamb wrote how it shocked him to think it possible that any word in *Lycidas* could have been different from what it is. To think of Milton changing the words in that poem seemed to him a sort of sacrilege. This led me to remember what I could of *Lycidas* and to amuse myself with guessing which word it could have been that Milton had altered, and why. It then occurred to me that the very manuscript itself which Lamb had looked at was only a few hundred yards away, so that one could follow Lamb's footstep across the quadrangle to that famous library where the treasure is kept. Moreover, I recollected, as I put this planinto execution, it is in this famous library that the manuscript of Thackeray's *Esmond* is also preserved.

The actual library where the manuscript of *Esmond* resides is that of Trinity College, Cambridge. Yet, more important here than this fictional setting's foundation in fact is how these words create the sense of Oxford and Cambridge Universities as repositories of all the cultural ' 'treasure'' of the nation. Everything and anything great and British can be traced back to these two campuses, it seems (original manuscripts, precious artifacts, and authors themselves). Significantly, Mary describes her plan to go view the manuscript as one that will involve her being able to "follow Lamb's footsteps." Literally, Mary imagines herself walking where Lamb himself walked. Metaphorically, Mary suggests how she plans to become a great essayist herself, or how she plans to follow Lamb's writerly example. But, alas, having arrived at the door of the library, Mary is barred from entering:

I must have opened it [the door to the library], for instantly there issued, like a guardian angel barring the way with a flutter of black gown instead of white wing, a deprecating, slivery, kindly gentleman, whoregretted in a low voice as he waved me back that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction.

In being literally prevented from entering the library, Mary becomes, metaphorically, a representative of all women who have been denied an education and entry into the precincts of male power and culture.

In chapter two, a new and similarly evocative setting is introduced into *A Room of One's Own,* the British Museum. The British Museum, located in England's capital city,

London, was founded in 1753 and completed, finally, in 1847. Besides antiquities and art from around the world, it houses the largest public library in England. Attached to this public library is a renowned reading room where anybody who walks its floor follows in the footsteps of numerous illustrious scholars and researchers past and present. The Museum, like the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, is an institution redolent of British history, heritage, and national pride. It is a symbol of the country's greatness whose vast shelves of volumes include those that record the long history of the territory and nation.

Hence, it is particularly significant that in the extensive holdings of this huge library, Mary finds nothing truly useful about the history of women, which is what she wishes to research. What she finds instead is confusing, unsystematic prejudice and opinion: "Wherever one looked men thought about women and thought differently. It was impossible to make head or tail of it all." Mary is sitting in one of the largest and best libraries in the world and can find practically nothing worthwhile that has been said or recorded about women. This void and blank in the extensive holdings of the British Museum underscores Woolf s point about how women are marginalized. By not writing about women, male historians send the message that women lived and continue to live only trivial, unnecessary lives. The dearth of worthwhile books on women also emphasizes Woolf s argument about how women need to be educated. Clearly, women scholars are needed to write the history of their female forebears.

The settings of Oxbridge and the British Museum in *A Room of One's Own* evoke the past and women's exclusion and marginality. In contrast, in choosing to name the fictitious women's college of chapter one "Fernham," Woolf evokes a bright future. Since the name refers to a plant it is suggestive of flourishing growth and new beginnings. Clearly, Woolf predicts that there will be more colleges established for women and that feminists will eventually achieve their goal of having entire universities open to them. This invocation of fresh growth also connotes how good things will come to society when gender equality is embraced.

Like Oxbridge, Fernham also has a factual counterpart. It refers to Newnham College, Cambridge, which was established specifically for women students in 1871. Woolf originally gave the talks that would become *A Room of One's Own* at Newnham and Girton Colleges (the latter also of Cambridge). Girton, originally an all-male college, opened its doors to women in 1869.

Another setting evocative of the future in the novel is the streets of London. In the opening to the final chapter of the book, Mary looks out of her window and watches the city start up:

Next day, the light of the October morning was falling in dusty shafts through the uncurtained windows, and the hum of traffic rose from the street. London then was winding itself up again; the factory was astir; the machines were beginning. It was tempting, after all this reading, to look out of the window and see what London was doing on the morning of the twenty-sixth of October 1928.... Here came an errandboy; here a woman with a dog on a lead.

After some paragraphs describing this varied and bustling scene, Mary relates something in particular that captures her attention. She is imagining that there is an invisible force in the world that acts like a river, moving people and things along:

Now it [the imaginary river] was bringing from one side of the street to the other diagonally a girl in patent leather boots, and then a young man in a maroon overcoat; it was also bringing a taxicab; and it brought all three together at a point directly beneath my window; where the taxi stopped; and the girl and the young man stopped; and they got into the taxi; and then the cab glided off as if it were swept on by the current elsewhere.

The reader, in the opening to the book's final chapter, leaves for a moment the precincts of old and ancient institutions and the pages of books. He or she is invited to contemplate, for a moment, the contemporaneous, everyday, and real world. It is a dynamic and modern world filled with automobile and foot traffic, factories, and businesses. And what this dynamic fast-changing world promises is that for which the author wishes, which is progress. A bright, certain future is expected just as rivers inevitably reach the sea. In this fortuitous and synchronous meeting of young woman, young man, and taxi, Woolf points to a future in which women and men are on an equal footing, meet each other half way, and travel together in a direction of mutual harmony.

Source: Carol Dell'Amico, Critical Essay on *A Room of One's Own,* in *Nonfiction Classics for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Gallagher compares A Room of One's Own to earlier tracts by women on writing, asserting that "the legitimacy" of Woolf's ' 'discourse rests on its being authentically hers."

Like many feminist literary critics, I discovered early modern women writers rather late, sometime in the 1970s, and I immediately understood why they had remained obscure. At that time they did not seem either strange enough to create the *frisson* of the exotic nor generative enough to have initiated a lineage of women writers reaching down to the present. Their obsolete concerns, eccentric assumptions, and bizarre claims, not to mention their generally impenetrable prose, failed to inspire aesthetic, New Historicist, or feminist interest in me. Here is an example of the sort of statement that left me cold: "My persuasion hath bene thus, that it is all one for a woman to pen a storie, as for a man to addresse his storie to a woman." That sentence sums up Margaret Tyler's 1578 justification for translating and publishing Diego Ortuñez de Calahorra's *The Mirrour of Princely Deedes and Knyghthood,* which was the very first printed secular work in which an English woman explicitly claimed the privilege of authorial publication for her sex. Tyler's translation was, in that important sense, unprecedented, and yet the sentence stresses the ordinariness of her achievement: women writing stories and the common practice of men addressing stories to women are, she says,' 'all one." Nothing strange or untoward in her behavior, Tyler explains; she is merely joining a legitimate and accepted enterprise.

This very rhetoric of normalization was foremost among the things that disappointed me. Certain as I was that early modern women were afraid to write, that they felt the lack of antecedents and encouragements, that their writing must therefore be interpreted as resistant or rebellious behavior, Tyler's statement that she was doing nothing new, that existing authorial practice surrounded and enabled her, merely irritated me. It seemed a transparent defensive ruse, a rather pathetic attempt to identify allies where there were none, to see a clear-cut path where there was, in fact, only a trackless and hostile wilderness. My own reaction was, I believe, typical; feminists in the 1970s tended to take signs of self-assurance on the part of early women writers as marks of plucky but ultimately pitiable reality denial. Tyler, in other words, not only failed to be a heroine but also failed for boring and obvious reasons.

Now, however, chastened by a few decades of scholarship on the history of women's authorship in England, one is inclined to treat Tyler's explanation more respectfully, to be interested in its ordinariness as well as its probable sincerity. One is now willing to acknowledge that she may have believed herself entitled to publish by the phenomenon she names□by the contemporary practice of male authors addressing dedications to women□just as one now wishes to uncover such encouragements, rather than concentrating exclusively on the impediments to female authorship. Tyler's claim, that is, now prompts what Paul Ricoeur called a hermeneutics of recollected meaning rather than one of suspicion. Her ' 'Epistle to the Reader" will be my first bit of evidence in describing the changing meanings and status of precedents in women writers' rhetorics

of legitimation. I will be arguing, in relation to Tyler, that when a prevailing notion of the author implies participation in an ongoing, customary activity, women as well as men will present themselves as traditionally entitled. Or, to state the same point somewhat differently, when the discourse of authorship requires precedents, precedents will be adduced, no matter how implausible they may sound to modern ears.

My second and contrasting instance in this capsule history of the precedent will be the preface to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* Reading that preface now, after all the scholarship that has been published on seventeenth-and eighteenth-century women writers, one cannot but be struck by the oddness of the author's "orphan' ' rhetoric, her trepidation at breaking into an entirely masculine discourse, and her justification in the name of transcendent reason. When less was known about the history of women's writing, many of us took Wollstonecraft's fear and trembling at face value; now we are in a position to submit it to a hermeneutics of suspicion. A skeptical reading of Wollstonecraft's preface demonstrates that when the prevailing notion of authorship, requires writers to declare their allegiance to some entity□such as reason, nature, or virtue□considered more compelling than custom, they will tend to stress their hard-won freedom from the shackles of tradition imprisoning the minds of other authors. Or, to rephrase, when the discourse of authorship calls for unprecedented thinking, precedents will be ignored, no matter how copious and obvious they are to the modern literary historian. For authorship is not a stable concept, let alone a stable experience, across the centuries dividing these writers, and although both Tyler and Wollstonecraft engage in self-licensing, neither challenges the common forms of legitimation embracing authorship in her period.

Any reader familiar with Max Weber's types of legitimate authority will no doubt recognize similarities between his first two types and my characterizations of Tyler and Wollstonecraft: Tyler justifies herself on grounds commensurate with traditional authority, and Wollstonecraft on grounds commensurate with rational authority. Since Weber's scheme is the skeleton of this essay, let me briefly describe its status. First, I do not mean to imply, any more than Weber himself did, that the types he identified have any separate or freestanding ontological existence; they are merely aids to analysis, heuristic categories to encourage the systematic study of authority. Second, adjusting for the obvious fact that Weberian authority is merely metaphorical for most authors, who, unlike rulers, do not really command obedience, a study of the conformity of authorial rhetoric to prevailing styles of legitimation in a polity can nevertheless help us to reach a deeper understanding of the impress of political systems on writers. Although the terms *traditional* and *rational-legal* tell us little or nothing about the content of a writer's argument, they help place the formal procedures she is apt to follow in pursuing it. Third, these two types of legitimation are not always mutually exclusive; one might, for example, detect the emergence of rational-legal authorization in some sixteenth-century English writers, but the established traditional mode was still adequate to many purposes, including Tyler's. Finally, readers familiar with Weber are probably now waiting for the third shoe to drop: who will represent his third type□the charismatic, who authorizes herself as the specific and exceptional, sacred, heroic, or visionary individual? You'll have to wait until the last section of this essay to find out who that might be.

In the meantime, let us return to 1578 and the specific sanction Tyler sought in the practice of male writers addressing their stories to women. "My defense," she writes, "is by example of the best [authors], amongst which, many have dedicated their labours, some stories, some of warre, some Phisicke, some Lawe, some as concerning government, some divine matters, unto diverse Ladyes and Gentlewoman." Why would she have thought that this practice established a precedent for the publication of her translation of Ortuñez' s romance? Tyler's reasoning seems to assume, in the first place, a relatively easy modulation between the role of reader and that of writer. She continues: "And if men may and do bestow such of their travailes upon Gentlewomen, then may we women read such of their workes as they dedicate unto us, and if wee may read them, why not farther wade in them to the search of a truth. And then much more why not deale by translation in such arguments." By degrees the woman reader immerses herself in the book dedicated to one of her kind, "farther wade[s]," not just passively receiving but actively searching for something Tyler calls "a truth." Her watery metaphor implies that the woman looks into the book first for its dedicatory reference to herself, as one might be attracted to the glassy top of a pond because it reflects one's own image, but then, becoming curious about something glimpsed beneath the surface, the argument, she wades in to grasp it. Once in the book, as in the pond, she is no longer just a shadowy image on its surface, a mere decorative embellishment of the dedication, but an active prober of its submerged contents. She has become, like the author, a seeker of the book's truth. Moreover, once she grasps the truth it becomes hers, and she is, therefore, entitled to "deale" in it by translation and publication.

This smooth, gradual movement from looking into a book to actively seeking its truths to dealing in its arguments□that is, passing them on to others□ is propelled by a common understanding that truths are nobody's private property. Errors may be exclusively attributed, but truths cannot. If the arguments of a book are true, they belong as much to the reader who retrieves them as to the writer who put them there to be discovered; anyone who gets them, has them. Every reader therefore has a precedent for dealing in the arguments of a book: the precedent of the writer.

If the reader and writer are thus alike in relation to the arguments of the book because both grasp what they cannot exclusively claim, author and translator are even less distinct. For translating further emphasizes that the truths of the book are not of the author's sole making. Translating is that special instance of the mediation between reading and writing that underscores a general idea about authorship: since truth cannot be the invention of any particular human intelligence, the verbal conveyances used by authors are in some sense themselves translations. In Tyler's epistle, moreover, translation indicates not only the common ground of readers and writers but also the common ground of gentlemen and gentlewomen. And here, too, she was right to think herself precedented, for translation had been figured as feminine (as in the preface to John Florio's translation of Montaigne), and it commonly did cross not only the roles of reader and writer but also the barriers of gendered literacy. Many translations of the late sixteenth century, especially those from Latin, present the translator as a gentleman courteously opening a cultural door for the gentlewomen. To be sure, the image implies that gentlewomen will never be learned, but it also demonstrates an effort to create a lettered culture independent of gendered schooling, a realm of *belles letters* that

gentlemen and gentlewomen could share. Since dealing by translation had already made the opening that allowed the sexes to share a textual experience, Tyler indicates, there is nothing to prevent women from participating in what men had already made a common endeavor.

So far I've been explaining why Tyler thought that the male practice of writing or translating for women implied that women could themselves ' 'pen a storie." Her epistle, though, refers to something more specific than writing books for a mixed audience or intending that they be read by women. The precedent that matters most to her is the practice of inscribing the name of a patroness-dedicatee in the text in order to authorize it. Her argument continues:

And they [male writers] must needes leave this as confessed, that in their dedications, they minde not onely to borrowe names of worthie personages, but the testimonies also for their further credite, which neither the one may demaund without ambition, nor the other graunt with out overlightnesse: if women be excluded from the viewe of such workes, as appeare in their name, or if glorie onely be sought in our common inscriptions, it mattereth not whether the partyes be men or women, whether alive or dead.

This passage argues, first, that to dedicate a book to a woman is to imply her testimony about its worth. In such dedications, the patroness's worthiness and that of the book are thereby paired. Not only do patronesses' names appear in books, but books also "appeare in their name." The conventional locution stresses that the dedicatee, in vouching for the book, participates in the authorial function as the *authorizer.*

The sense in which a patroness or dedicatee blends with authorship, moreover, goes beyond her role as aristocratic warranter insofar as her influence is assumed to predate the book's publication. Inscribing the name of a patroness is mere empty name-dropping if, to quote Tyler's richly ambiguous phrase, the "women be excluded from the viewe of such workes." The phrase implies both that women must have read the books which they guarantee and that the women had to be in view at the time of the writing. The patroness is imagined as a final cause of the book (just as she may have been one of its efficient causes as the author's benefactor), and hence she enters into its production as a part of its view, its outlook. Tyler certainly realizes that none of this may be true, that men may dedicate books to women simply to bask in the glory of an aristocratic personage, but she insists that such cynical appropriation would be excessively discourteous. Either their dedications yield authorial responsibilities and rights to women, she concludes, or they diminish the dedicatees to the senseless state of corpses, whose names alone exist.

Returning to our original enigma□why does Tyler claim that it is "all one for a woman to pen a storie, as for a man to addresse his storie to a woman"?□the answer is that she considers both instances of female authorship. The ' 'all oneness" of female patronage and female writing floats on the fluid relationship she establishes between reader and writer, the special fluidity of that relation in the activity of translation, the precedent that men had set by participating in a cross-gendered cultural endeavor, and the confluence

of all of these factors in the exchange between writer and patroness, which publicly proclaimed the woman as the author's authority. Thus the patroness is, in several different ways, the book's coauthor, so Tyler can point to her as an example of female authorship, already frequently cited by ' 'the best" male authors, who have declared themselves preceded by their patronesses. In Tyler's argument, the male authors unwittingly become the precedent conveyors, transferring cultural authority from their aristocratic patronesses to an aspiring woman author.

To be sure, Tyler's traditional rationale is not designed to appear uncontroversial. The conditional structure of her sentences□the repetition of *if ("if* men may and do," "if wee may read them," "if glorie only be sought")□and the frequent references to hostile imaginary interlocutors ("they must needes leave this as confessed") remind us that her arguments have counterarguments. For example, in the sixteenth century humanists were busy differentiating the roles of reader and writer, partly motivated by a desire to restrict women's participation in learned endeavors. Tyler's model of a smooth transition from reading to writing would certainly not have gone unchallenged at the time. Moreover, Tyler placed herself against the background of another controversy, one that was so well-worn by the 1570s that conjuring it simply yielded further precedents. Her ' 'Epistle to the Reader" fits neatly inside the *querelle des femme* which, as LindaWoodbridge has shown, was then becoming part of the. literature intended for a mixed audience. Even its misogynist side was designed to titillate and incite female reply. The *querelle* itself consisted largely of listing positive and negative female exempla, relying almost entirely on legitimacy derived from earlier authors. Tyler's epistle conforms to this ongoing mode of entertainment, taking advantage of a ready-made dispute. Her argument□ that authors who insincerely dedicate works to ladies might as well be dedicating them to corpses, for example□is echoed by the character Gondarino in *The Woman Hater,* who raves against the false compliments of authors: "How many that would faine seeme serious, haue dedicated graue works to ladies tooth-lesse hollow ei'd, their haire shedding, purplefac'd, their nayles apparantly comming off; and the bridges of their noses broken downe; and haue called them the choyse handy workes of nature, the patterns of perfection, and the wonderment of women." Tyler had used the same logic when she argued that the obverse side of an insincere dedication is an insult and that therefore writers must either own the literal truth of their dedications or confess their *incivility,* as well as hypocrisy. By viewing the dedications to patronesses either as precedents or as disingenuous flattery Tyler draws on both sides of the *querelle des femmes.* The misogynists in the quarrel targeted such dedications as signs of the ' 'effeminacy" of the age, and Tyler shares their skepticism, their suspicion of authorial corruption, while at the same time insisting that authorship is, indeed, effeminate and therefore an appropriate female pastime. She does not, however, stress that her precedents are recent, whereas Gondarino and other spokesmen for the misogynist side of the debate clinch their arguments by calling patronesses *innovations.*

Tyler's publication may seem startlingly innovative to us, but its underlying rationale denies its originality and reiterates a traditional model of authority. The author is no doubt testing a *de facto* male monopoly on print, and she is frequently ironic toward the precedents she cites, but she does not challenge the deeper rule that her behavior

conform to established patterns. Under traditional modes of legitimation, as Weber remarks, that which "is actually new is ... claimed to have always been in force but only recently to have become known through the wisdom of the promulgator." Tyler does not begin female publication but rather points out that it has already begun; she claims merely to draw out what was already implicit in settled practice. Her authorial persona abides comfortably within others' prescriptions and controversies.

What a contrast with this we seem to find in turning to Mary Wollstonecraft's prefatory letter to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* Challenging her addressee Talleyrand to provide an argument based on reason for the exclusion of women from the rights of citizenship under the new French constitution, she accuses him of departing from "abstract principles" and relying on mere "prescription." Wollstonecraft consistently contrasts *prescription,* or the citing of previous texts as sufficient justification for a practice, with *reason,* by which she means the deduction of practices from universal principles by clear, logical steps. Wollstonecraft had hoped that the new French constitution would ground itself in the latter, what Weber would call rational-legal, mode of legitimation and therefore chides its author for retreating into traditional, precedential justifications when disposing of the woman question. Wollstonecraft thus implies that the triumph of rational-legal modes of thinking over traditional legitimation will eventually entitle women to full citizenship.

The dependence of the rights of women on the delegitimation of traditional authority in Wollstonecraft's rhetoric is well understood; indeed, feminists have tended to take her arguments as self-evident. Several aspects of them, however, remain unremarked. The first of these is Wollstonecraft's inability to acknowledge her own precedents. In a rhetorical move that reverses that of Tyler, Wollstonecraft sweeps the two centuries of female authors that preceded her into oblivion:

In tracing the causes that, in my opinion, have degraded woman, I have confined my observations to such as universally act upon the morals and manners of the whole sex, and to me it appears clear that they all spring from want of understanding. Whether this arise from a physical or accidental weakness of faculties, time alone can determine; for I shall not lay any great stress on the example of a few women who, from having received a masculine education, have acquired courage and resolution.

The erasure here is double. First, the reader is to understand that the observations and discoveries to follow are Wollstonecraft's formulations of impersonal reason and will stand or fall on their own strength. The fact that dozens of seventeenth-and eighteenth-century women writers had identical observations and opinions is placed beside the point.

Second, counterexamples of women with strong understandings will not be considered because theyare not representative. A footnote to this passage continues, "Sappho, Eloisa, Mrs. Macaulay, the Empress of Russia, Madame d'Eon." The list surprises mainly by its very shortness (especially considering the fact that the Chevalier d'Eon turned out not to be, biologically, a woman) and by the fact that Catherine Macaulay alone represents the tradition of British women writers that produced Wollstonecraft.

Although the author acknowledges that "many others" might also be "reckoned exceptions,' ' the argument never depends on the work of earlier women writers. A previous woman writer is quoted and footnoted in support of the book's argument only once, and the acknowledged writer is again Macaulay, as if Wollstonecraft were containing and minimizing her antecedents through this synechdochal repetition. While Macaulay keeps getting cited, other contemporary women are simply used without acknowledgment; she quotes without citing Anna Letitia Barbauld and attributes the sentiments of one of Frances Burney' s characters to "a lively writer, I cannot recollect his name." Wollstonecraft could certainly not have plead ignorance of the extent of pertinent writing by female authors, since she reviewed Frances and Sarah Burney, Elizabeth Inchbald, Charlotte Lennox, Charlotte Smith, Helen Maria Williams, Madame Genlis, Sarah Trimmer, the Comtesse du Barry, and Hester Piozzi. Out of this list, Wollstonecraft uses only the work of Piozzi, and she uses it negatively to illustrate the ignorance of improperly educated women. The remaining English writers on this list, whose works are often directly relevant to the topic of women's education, go unmentioned.

One could continue to pile up such evidence, but you are probably now willing to concede the point that whereas Tyler dragged precedents out of unlikely places, Wollstonecraft closeted her obvious antecedents. We should not, however, judge Wollstonecraft's strategy on moral or political grounds; she didn't suppress awareness of her precedents just because she was egotistical, ungenerous, or insufficiently sisterly. Nor can we say simply that her argument led her to magnify the difficulties of educating women under current conditions, so that constant quotation of dozens of truly incisive women writers would have blunted her point. Nor can we point to the fetish of original genius that begins to dominate authorship in the Romantic period, for Wollstonecraft does not often call attention to herself as an especially gifted intellect.

The tendency to ignore precedents is deeper than the surface logic of her argument or even the demands of ingenuity; it is, rather, basic to the rational discursive mode that legitimizes her. That mode stresses the fungibility of reasonable persons. Justifying her lack of interest in exceptional women, Wollstonecraft writes "are not all ... heroines, exceptions to general rules? I wish to see women neither heroines nor brutes; but reasonable creatures." This attention to the normal rather than the exceptional person is, according to Weber, typical of the ' 'leveling" that occurs under rational-legal authority. To make normal women reasonable creatures, moreover, Wollstonecraft encourages a skeptical attitude toward all antecedent texts. As she stresses repeatedly, arguments must stand on their own, authorized only by their adherence to rational principles that have universal force. Hence it doesn't really matter who said what because one should not establish an argument by marshaling authorities. Legitimacy instead requires inducing sound generalizations from accurate observations or deducing conclusions from manifestly true principles and can in theory be attained by anyone willing to follow the discursive rules. Weber calls this ' 'the dominance of a spirit of formalistic impersonality," explaining that it encourages a norm of "straightforward duty without regard to personal considerations. Everyone is subject to formal equality of treatment; that is, everyone in the same empirical situation." Wollstonecraft aims to bring the mass of women into the "same empirical situation" as the mass of men, and

hence exceptional members of either sex are largely irrelevant: ' 'I speak of bodies [that is, groups] of men, and ... men of genius and talents have started out of a class, in which women have never yet been placed."

The desire to find a *new* place for women contrasts starkly with Tyler's ambitions, and I would like briefly now to sum up the main differences between the traditional and rational-legal modes of authorizing women. Whereas Tyler (as well as her implied adversaries in the *querelle des femmes)* cited historical examples of exceptionally great women to illustrate the truth about Woman in general, Wollstonecraft attends to anonymous ' 'middling" women. Whereas Tyler authorizes herself through worthy predecessors, Wollstonecraft practices indifference toward her predecessors and relies on reason alone. Whereas Tyler (and other parties to the *querelle)* accuse each other of innovation and compete for unanimity with past thinkers, Wollstonecraft accuses her adversaries of being merely conventional and strives to make breakthroughs. In short, Wollstonecraft's very mode of authorization□with its democratic, formalist indifference to distinctions of person□prompts a disregard for her own precedents.

This is not to say that *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is unconcerned with earlier writers, for the book's rational procedures of legitimation encourage a mode of controversy in which the author spends a great deal of time pointing out previous *errors* of reason. Appropriately, he most frequent targets share her basic assumptions, not about what on thinks, but about how one justifies what one thinks. Although she addresses her argument to Talleyrand, his exclusion of women from the rights of citizenship simply on the basis of conventional practice leave her with very little to say in response. She simply points out that he has slipped back into a surpassed mode of justification. To engage her sustained attention, a writer must at least partly inhabit her procedural universe. One writer who proves especially vexing to Wollstonecraft, Edmund Burke, shares her procedures but uses them to justify a reliance on traditional practice and thus conflates the distinction between reason and prescription with which she opens A *Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* Unlike Talleyrand, Burke does not lapse uncritically or unreflectively into prescription; reflection is, after all, his favorite genre. Indeed, while defending tradition, custom, precedent, even prejudice, he seldom *uses* any of these in his arguments. Instead, he defends tradition on rational-legal grounds. Like Wollstonecraft, he eschews citing authorities or warranting his opinions by appealing to precedent. Instead of taking tradition for granted as the established means of self-authorization, in the mode of Tyler, Burke takes rational-legal discourse for granted as the necessary framework for his critique of rationality and defense of tradition. Tradition, in other words, is the object, not the grounds, of his argument.

To use Karl Mannheim's terms, Burke is a conservative rather than a traditional thinker because he reflects on tradition and gives reasons for its underlying wisdom□even, he claims at times, its rationality. I would suggest, though, that Burke is more than just a conservative thinker, reflecting in an ad hoc way on this or that customary practice; he is *the* conservative thinker who reasons about tradition in general and thereby explicates how it will figure into post-traditional discourse. Even when praising unreflective traditionalism, therefore, Burke reflects on it:

instead of casting away all our old prejudices [we English] cherish them to a very considerable degree, and, to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices; and the longer they have lasted and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them. We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason, because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages.

There are many things to notice in this passage; for example, traditionalism is likened to joint-stock investment, making it seem quite up-to-date. The corporate "we" who respect tradition, moreover, does so out of *skepticism* rather than credulity or piety. Finally, although the passage begins by praising English prejudice, it turns out that those prejudices are just the repositories of the ' 'reason" of nations and ages. Burke's paean to the particular and the prejudiced thus comes to rest on the universal and the reasoned. In short, his skepticism about individual reason was the main *reason* he gave for recommending self-consciously traditionalist political procedures.

No wonder Wollstonecraft found him irritating. His paradoxes confounded the distinctions on which she relied; to refute him she had to reerect the barrier between the traditional and rational modes. Hence, in *A Vindication* she writes,

I know that a kind of fashion now prevails of respecting prejudices; and when any one dares to face them, though actuated by humanity and armed by reason, he is superciliously asked whether his ancestors were fools. No, I should reply; opinions, at first, ... were all, probably, ... founded on some reason: yet not unfrequently... it was rather a local expedient than a fundamental principle, that would be reasonable at all times. But, moss-covered opinions assume the disproportioned form of prejudices, when they are indolently adopted only because age has given them a venerable aspect, though the reason on which they were built ceases to be a reason.

The rhetoric of this riposte links current fashion to prescription: *la mode* and the outmoded together represent local, time-bound, partial reason as opposed to that which "would be reasonable at all times." This is a neat reversal of Burke's claim that prejudice contains the more universal reason, what he sometimes calls ' 'wisdom" to mark its independence of formal logical operations. We should also notice that Wollstonecraft rhetorically imitates traditionalists here, who habitually attacked Enlightenment ambitions as mere modern fashions. The nub of her refutation, though, is the identification of the paradoxical nature of Burke's logic: "A prejudice is a fond obstinate persuasion for which we can give no reason; for the moment a reason can be given for an opinion, it ceases to be a prejudice." Burke, that is, contradicts himself by giving reasons in defense of not giving reasons: "Are we then advised to cherish opinions only to set reason at defiance?" Wollstonecraft will not allow Burke to enjoy the play of his performative contradiction. Either one argues rationally and thereby subscribes to the dominance of reason, of one sets ' 'reason at defiance."

Wollstonecraft's first line of attack against Burke, therefore, discredits his new, nontraditionalist defense of the precedent. But the phrase ' 'fond obstinate persuasions"

introduces a second line of assault, one that links her objections to Burke with her complaints against another nontraditionalist antagonist, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Burke and Rousseau might be at opposite poles of an Enlightenment spectrum of opinion about custom and tradition, but for Wollstonecraft they also share a dangerous rhetorical tendency. She suspects that in both ' 'fondness," merely pleasurable emotional attachment, plays too large a role first in forming and then in promulgating their opinions. Burke's defense of prejudice resolves itself, she implies, into emotional self-indulgence: "This mode of arguing," she writes, ' 'reminds me of what is vulgarly termed a woman's reason. For women sometimes declare that they love, or believe, certain things, *because* they love, or believe them". She finds it especially distressing that Burke argues like a woman, that is, from the authority of his own unexamined feelings. In A *Vindication of the Rights of Men,* she associates this emotional self-authorization with Burke's rhetoric, his belletristic style, which covers over the defects in his logic. In A *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* she seems to fear that the very effeminacy of Burke's argumentative style, chiming as it does with women's own rational deficiencies, will bind them to him and to the very customs that oppress them.

This fear, which is only hinted in her remarks on Burke, becomes explicit in her sustained treatment of Rousseau. Rousseau is her chief antagonist in A *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* because his was the most influential nontraditionalist argument about the education of women then in circulation. Deeply inspired herself by many of Rousseau's works, Wollstonecraft acknowledges his genius and visionary power in the very act of warning against them:

So warmly has he painted, what he forcibly felt, that, interesting the heart and inflaming the imagination of his readers; in proportion to the strength of their fancy, they imagine that their understanding is convinced when they only sympathize with a poetic writer, who skilfully exhibits the objects of sense, most voluptuously shadowed or gracefully veiled And thus making us feel whilst dreaming that we reason, erroneous conclusions are left in the mind.

The dream of which Wollstonecraft disapproves is Rousseau's exaggerated impression of women's erotic power, which he imagines is based on a strict separation of spheres and the encouragement in girls of sensibility at the expense of reason. What is particularly pernicious about his idea Wollstonecraft asserts, is that they are based on fondness and call out a reciprocal fondness in the female reader. Once again, it is the writer's effeminacy, his display of the very attributes he prizes in women, that creates the erotic bond:

All Rousseau's errors in reasoning arose from sensibility, and sensibility to their charms women are very ready to forgive! ... Born with a warm constitution and lively fancy, nature carried him toward the other sex with such eager fondness, that he soon became lascivious. Had he given way to these desires, the fire would have extinguished itself in a natural manner; but virtue, and a romantic kind of delicacy, made him practice self-denial; yet, when fear, delicacy, or virtue, restrained him, he debauched his imagination, and reflecting on the sensations to which fancy gave force, he traced them in the most glowing colours, and sunk them deep into his soul.

The feminization of Rousseau in this passage is thorough. Like a woman, he is driven by sentiment; like a woman, he is fond of the opposite sex; like a woman, he is too shy or virtuous to be sexually active; like a woman, he instead indulges his erotic imagination. What Wollstonecraft herself imagines in this description is a sororal erotic bond at the center of which is the pulsating□because unsatisfied□desire of an effeminate and therefore powerful man.

Rousseau's authorization, in short, is neither traditional nor rational-legal; it is, rather, based on the ' 'quality of [his] individual personality" which "is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with ... specifically exceptional powers or qualities." His readers fall under his personal domination, freely submitting to his ideas not because they are warranted by precedent or reason but because they are parts of a singular, overpowering sensibility. They thus unite in ' 'an emotional form of communal relationship." Rousseau, as presented by Wollstonecraft, thus enacts a mode of authorization that is neither traditional nor rational; she notices and condemns in him a form of legitimation that, to complete our Weberian scheme, we might designate as charismatic.

Indeed, most of the last paragraph was taken from Weber's description of the characteristics of charismatic authority. One could easily object here that Weber intended this category to comprise more robust forms of leadership, such as military and revolutionary heroes or religious prophets, who are perceived as divinely appointed. I can only plead, once again, that I'm using these categories loosely; nevertheless, I will cite a precedent in Weber. He specifically lists under the heading "charismatic" "the type of intellectual ... who is carried away with his own demagogic success," which echoes Wollstonecraft's depiction of the effectiveness of Rousseau's impassioned rhetoric. What specifically interests me here, however, is not so much the perfection of the fit between Weber's category and Rousseau's self-authorization, but Wollstonecraft's *feminization* of the dynamic of charisma. Forged in sexual repression and molded to the desires of compensatory narcissism, the bonds of love that link Rousseau and his readers are not only erotic but also effeminately autoerotic. If Rousseau invokes a precedent, it is that of the self-love of his female admirers; their subjection to him results from a sympathetic identification with his love of their prior subjection. Wollstonecraft, in turn, exhibits the self-delusion of Rousseau's female disciples and exhorts her readers to break from their own precedent. Rousseau may be famous for inventing the modern version of the separation of spheres, but Wollstonecraft depicts him as the man who has crossed the gender barrier to permeate female error with the glamor of eros.

Indeed, I was tempted, on the strength of Wollstonecraft's depictions, to take Rousseau as my example of a charismatic woman writer; but I found myself with too many competitors. Among nineteenth-century women, Georges Sand, Elizabeth Barrett, Florence Nightingale, and Flora Tristan all made what we might call charismatic demands on their readers or auditors. I could explore Sand's adaptations of Rousseau's persona, for example, or Barrett's self-hagiography, or the christological and messianic self-presentations of Nightingale and Tristan. But in none of these could I find a use of the *precedent* that seemed to conform to charismatic authorization. To be sure, charismatic leaders often dismiss the need for precedents with great flair; one thinks, for

example, of Napoleon solving the problem of his ancestry by declaring, ' 'I am an ancestor." But I had a different style of charisma in mind and finally decided to move all the way into the early twentieth century to illustrate it. During the era when charismatic authority was beginning to enjoy its most worrisome political successes, Virginia Woolf wrote what is probably still the most widely read short history of British women writers: A *Room of One's Own.* In that work, which is so familiar to us that we sometimes have difficulty grasping the specifics of its authorization, a woman writer uses precedents not with the traditionalist aim of normalizing her discourse, of authorizing it from the top of a genealogical or social hierarchy, and certainly not in the rationalist mode of pointing out earlier mistakes, but in a different spirit, of which we are the immediate inheritors.

Why do I call Woolf s discourse and use of precedents charismatic? Granted, it is unlike Tyler's or Wollstonecraft's, but why charismatic? At first glance, the authorial persona of A *Room of One's Own* might seem too hesitant, too self-effacing to qualify for charisma. Harried from the outset, chased off lawns and distracted by cats, unable to remember her assigned topic, visited by visions, often experiencing incongruities between her inner and outer realities, and repeatedly noting the difficulty of articulating her thoughts, she even presents her argument as a kind of failure:

All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point□a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved. I have shirked the duty of coming to a conclusion upon these two questions□women and fiction remain, so far as I am concerned, unsolved problems.

But, as we all know, social ineptitude, awkwardness, inwardness, visionary visitations, even inarticulateness are often signs that an individual is, in Weber's words, "endowed with ... specifically exceptional powers or qualities" that are the very basis of her highly particular authority. True to this pattern, Woolf s very diffidence and the rhetoric of her inability to stay within her assigned topic, the eccentricity of her performance, imply that the legitimacy of her discourse rests on its being authentically hers:

Perhaps if I lay bare the ideas, the *prejudices,* that lie behind this statement you will find that they have some bearing upon women and some upon fiction. At any rate, when a subject is highly controversial□and any question about sex is that□one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker.

One could say that, like Burke's, this is a reasonable account of the limitations of reason; opinion and prejudice (the word is repeated twice) are revalued; objectivity and universal truth politely put aside as, if not chimerical, then irrelevant to the present undertaking. Nothing could be further from Wollstonecraft's faith in reason. But that word *idiosyncrasy* marks the distinction between Woolf and *Burke* as well; indeed, it measures the distance between the rational-legal mode, which structured the controversy between Wollstonecraft and Burke, and the habits of legitimation that dominated early twentieth-century authorship. Burke, we should recall, defended

prejudice as the opposite of idiosyncrasy, and Wollstonecraft constantly struggled against accusations of eccentricity. But Woolf preempts and embraces the charge, for like most modernist authors she derives rhetorical power from the idea of her singularity, her inability to proceed comfortably along the normal routes of either reason or custom. To be sure, hers was not the authoritarian charisma that required blind faith, and I would not be misunderstood to mean that modernist authors, by being charismatic, somehow participated in the totalitarian projects of the early part of the century. On the contrary, we might read Woolf s rhetoric as an attempt to create an emancipatory alternative inside a charismatic trend: she explains that the reader who accepts the authority of Woolf s idiosyncrasy is likely to become self-authorizing by attention to her own specialness. In Weber's formulation, she is one of those authors whose aim is ' 'the transformation of charisma in an anti-authoritarian direction." Woolf, we could say, puts herself at the center of a community of the singular, and recalling that A *Room of One's Own* is addressed to the women of Girton, the first women's college at Cambridge, helps us to identify the almost monastic sense of a female community that pervades her rhetoric.

Woolf s use of precedents accords with this charismatic mode by extending the community of idiosyncracy back into the past. Singularity seems to mean two things in a A *Room of One's Own.* It means the special' 'incandescent" quality of genius that burns up all traces of ' 'grudges and spites and antipathies," but it also means the oddities and aesthetic blemishes left by struggling for a creative life against the antipathy of one's culture. Woolf takes as her own antecedents generations of women striving to free their minds from the pinch of circumstances. Some of these are mute, like Shakespeare's imaginary sister or the ancestors she gives her Girton College auditors: ' 'Among your grandmothers and great-grandmothers there were many that wept their eyes out." Some were noisy□ "Florence Nightingale shrieked aloud in her agony"□but almost all were vulnerable, wounded, damaged. The idiosyncracy of both their ambition and their damage is internalized and borne by Woolf. From the women writers of the past, Woolf inherits a troubled legacy. Indeed, her legacy is so encumbered, so tentatively a legacy at all, that it cannot actually be said to survive outside of her□and her community's□*efforts* to keep it alive. Female creativity, as she explains, is precious because it is fragile, always passing out of print, requiring the archival efforts of Girton undergraduates, needing to be rediscovered.

What makes Woolf s use of the precedent charismatic, to put it briefly, is that it *reverses* the traditional mode: the charismatic woman writer is not so much legitimated by her precedents as she is struggling to legitimate them. Indeed, she emphatically makes her own precedents by a redemptive act of her will, as in her creation of a fictional female counterpart to Shakespeare, whose ambition and genius can only lead to ruin and suicide. Woolf selfconsciously invokes these precedents□both fictional and real□not as powerful ancestors but as *prefigurations.* She then goes on to gain rhetorical power by recruiting her community to redeem their ancestors:

I told you in the course of this paper that Shakespeare had a sister .... She died young□alas, she never wrote a word.... Now my belief is that this poet who never wrote a word and was buried at the crossroads still lives. She lives in you and in me, and in

many other women who are not here tonight.... But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh.

This charismatic mode of fulfilling the promise of the prefigurations, of rescuing precedents so that they can fill us with their power, is, of course, our most immediate precedent, the precedent of the work that many academic feminists do.

The rhetoric of legitimation most intimately connected to the dramatic late nineteenth- and twentieth-century gains in women's political rights was a charismatic rhetoric. To be sure, a rational-legal universalist concept of individual rights underlay it, but we should not therefore be misled into thinking that before postmodernism feminism was purely□ or even primarily□a rational-legal protect, drawits inspiration from a model of individual, critical, reflective reason. The effective person constructed in feminist rhetoric was often not an abstract, formal entity, but instead a member of a saving remnant, one specially touched by grace and brought into a community with a mission. Twentieth-century feminism has been□to repeat Weber's language□' 'the transformation of charisma in an anti-authoritarian direction." I have illustrated this transformation with Virginia Woolf's rhetoric, but I could have used the rhetoric of Emmeline Pankhurst or Susan B. Anthony. For what brought women into the streets, what encouraged them to brave hunger strikes, force-feeding, and stone-throwing mobs was not the unprecedented concept of Enlightenment reason but a sense of solidarity with a community of present and past fellow sufferers.

But feminism's charisma has been a victim of its own success. Its long march through the institutions, especially those of the American academy, have resulted in what Weber called ' 'the routinization of charisma." This very essay might serve as an example. Feminism becomes an object of academic discipline, rather than a method or point of view from which to operate. The genealogy of feminism is submitted to the same analytical procedures applied to all textual phenomena. Once relatively unproblematic categories, such as "woman," are discovered to have histories, complex discursive constructions, uncertain ontological status. In short, critical reflection inside the academy repeats and reinforces fragmenting trends that have intensified the differences between women in the society at large. Moreover, as our efforts bend toward normalization, certification, and legitimation through the ordinary channels of academic reward, our antecedents as well lose the powerful aura they had in the rhetoric of Woolf. The routinization of feminism, for example, replaces Woolf s explicitly mythical collective ancestor, Shakespeare's imaginary sister (who dies without writing a word), with her altogether empirical and prosaic sixteenth-century contemporary, Margaret Tyler (who comfortably inhabited her times and was not martyred for her ambition).

Even through the droning of the academic routinization of feminism, though, one continues to hear the charismatic timbre of former generations. Postmodernist rhetoric itself, ever unconscious of its institutional provenance, conjures former struggles when it routinely presents itself as transgressive, and even the more staid, historicist academic feminists frequently borrow the cachet of their subjects' marginality. Am I arguing that these identifications are made in bad faith? No. For this essay has consistently held that

even the most "transgressive" of our precedents conformed to because they were formed by their prevailing discourses of legitimation, and we ourselves do not depart from that pattern. Our discourse is necessarily permeated by the paradoxes of the routinization of charisma, and postmodernism is as good a name as any for the lamentations we keep up as we bury the charismatic corpse ever deeper.

Source: Catherine Gallagher, "A History of the Precedent: Rhetorics of Legitimation in Women' s Writing," in *Critical Inquiry,* Vol. 26, No. 2, Winter 2000, pp. 309-27.

Adaptations

Patrick Garland adapted *A Room of One's Own* for the stage and directed its premiere in 1989. The play is still performed throughout the world.

Topics for Further Study

Research Emmeline Pankhurst, the indefatigable British suffragette and feminist. What organizations and newspapers did she found or help found? What were their goals? What were her various strategies for achieving change? Write an essay that answers these questions.

The early twentieth century was a period of fervent women's rights demonstrations across the globe. Feminists in Russia, Japan, and Mexico, for example, were extremely active at this time. Research a feminist leader of a country other than the United States or Britain and write an overview of her life and work.

It is said that the rise of democracy in the eighteenth century and the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth provided the combined impetus for feminist movements in Europe and the United States. Research how and why the Industria Revolution led to changes in women's social status. Present your findings in a cause-and-effect diagram.

Examine the relationship between the abolitionist and feminist movements in the United States in the nineteenth century. Compare and contrast this to the relationship between the civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s. Present your findings in a graphic organizer such as a Venn diagram.

Reread chapter three of Woolf s book. Then read Alice Walker's essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens." Write a paper explaining how Walker complicates or builds on Woolf s thinking. For example, consider how Walker's ideas about art and race contest Woolf s vision of what constitutes great art and what is necessary for such art to be produced.

Compare and Contrast

1920s: Woolf and other British feminists such as Winifred Holtby and Rebecca West argue vigorously for women's equal opportunity in the professions and public life.

Today: Numerous female politicians, in Britain and elsewhere, have become prime ministers or presidents of their nations.

1920s: The Flapper is the female icon of the day. Her short hair and simply cut, loose dresses announce a new freedom of movement and action.

Today: Fly Girls and Riot Girls strut their stuff. These young women project independence and capability through physical fitness, skimpy clothing, and colored hair.

1920s: Literature courses in British universities are geared to the education and grooming of young, upper-class men. The ancient Greek and Roman writers are taught, and a knowledge of Greek and Latin is a must.

Today: Like all major universities around the world, British universities offer literature courses that cover all eras and languages; moreover, by the 1970s, the exclusion of literature written by women was understood to be an institutional oversight.

1920s: In 1928, Britain's limited franchise (vote) for women, enacted in 1918, is extended to include all women over age 21.

Today: More so than its women, Britain's ethnic minorities, many of which come from ex-colonies, agitate for acceptance and advancement.

1920s: Like pre-World War I Britain, post-World War I Britain continues its struggle to dismantle the attitudes and structures that have maintained its broad class divisions for so long.

Today: While Britain's largest class is now middle-class, nevertheless, classist attitudes and inequalities still persist.

What Do I Read Next?

Jane Eyre (1847), by Charlotte Brontë, is the story of an orphan who becomes a governess and who must make her own way in the world. This book, with its compelling female character and equally compelling plot is a major nineteenth-century novel written by a woman.

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), like all her novels, is admired by critics for its subtle humor and irony. The book follows the path of Elizabeth Bennet as she considers various suitors for marriage; at the same time, it engages in a perceptive analysis of the social milieu it depicts.

Three Guineas, published in 1938, is Woolf s second feminist book. Its tone is more serious and urgent than that of her first, partly owing to Woolf s despair over the rise of fascist, antifeminist ideologies in Germany and Italy during the 1930s.

Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969) is the founding book of post-World War II academic feminism. It is a staple text for students and historians of feminism.

Rachel (Ray) Strachey, a relative of Woolf, wrote *The Cause* (1928), a history of the feminist and suffragist movements. Strachey, who is quoted by Woolf in *A Room of One's Own,* was an extremely active feminist.

Testament of Youth (1933), by British writer and feminist Vera Brittain, is a powerful and moving memoir of this woman's experiences of World War I and after. Brittain lost a brother, her two best friends, and her fiancé in this war.

Further Study

Bell, Clive, *Old Friends,* Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1956.

This is a description of the Bloomsbury Group, of which Woolf was a part, by one of its members. Bell married Woolf s sister, Vanessa (Stephen) Bell, who was a painter.

Evans, Nancy Burr, "The Political Consciousness of Virginia Woolf: *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas,"* in *New Scholar,* Vol. 4, 1974, pp. 167-80.

This is an analysis of Woolf s politics and feminism based on a reading of Woolf's two feminist books.

Fussell, Paul, *The Great War and Modern Memory,* Oxford University Press, 1975.

This book is about World War I, its impact on British life, and the literature some of its soldiers produced.

Lee, Hermione, *Virginia Woolf,* Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1996.

This is a recent biography of the author.

Woolf, Virginia, *The Years,* Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1965. Woolf s eighth novel, first published in 1937, chronicles the lives of various members of a family through many decades,many decades.

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Gilbert, Susan M., and Sandra Gubar, *The War of the Words,* Vol. I of *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century,* Yale University Press, 1989.

Joplin, Patricia, "'I Have Bought My Freedom': The Gift of A*Room of One's Own," in Virginia Woolf Miscellany 21,* Fall 1983, pp. 4-5.

Millet, Kate, *Sexual Politics,* Virago, 1969.

Walker, Alice, ' 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Nonfiction Classics for Students (NCfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NCfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NCfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NCfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NCfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NCfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NCfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Nonfiction Classics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Nonfiction Classics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Nonfiction Classics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NCfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NCfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Nonfiction Classics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Nonfiction Classics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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