

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Judith D. Stockton for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies  
in the co-departments of English and Education presented on May 5, 1992

Title: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF FEMINIST CRITICS' REFERENCES TO  
VIRGINIA WOOLF

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Abstract approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Virginia Woolf wrote both prose and poetry, both fiction and non-fiction: she was both a creative writer and a politically conscious reporter. She left a wealth of beautifully crafted observations and comments that continue to be immensely quotable and influential. Feminist critics today use Woolf's vocabulary to continue the feminist conversation which she entered early in her life and consistently influenced as long as she lived and wrote. My purpose in this essay is to identify some of the ways in which feminists strategically use references to Virginia Woolf and A Room of One's Own to empower their own perspective or to develop legitimacy for their own knowledge and discourse.

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS  
OF FEMINIST CRITICS' REFERENCES TO VIRGINIA WOOLF

by

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A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies

Completed May 5, 1992

Commencement June 1992

APPROVED:

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Date thesis is presented May 5, 1992

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis represents a focusing of both interest and energy for one who was once without an organizing direction.

So many people have supported my explorations in so many ways. My thanks to Dr. Lisa Ede who, with extraordinary patience, has supported me through the various stages of my writing process and who has cheerfully read many drafts of this thesis. Her example, her valuable friendship, and her assistance have been and continue to be exceedingly important to me.

Thanks, too, to Dr. Elizabeth Campbell whose generosity and expert guidance have been essential to the writing of this thesis and whose approach to teaching literature has greatly benefited me and many others.

My wonderful husband, Don, has contributed to my life and to the present endeavor in more ways than I could possibly name. His unflagging support and his love have given me great strength. I am so very fortunate.

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A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS  
OF FEMINIST CRITICS' REFERENCES TO VIRGINIA WOOLF

*Therefore I would ask you to write all kinds of books, hesitating at no subject however trivial or vast. By hook or by crook, I hope that you will possess yourselves of enough money to travel and to idle, to contemplate the future or the past of the world, to dream over books and loiter at street corners and let the line of thought dip deep into the stream. For I am by no means confining you to fiction. If you would please me -- and there are thousands like me -- you would write books of travel and adventure, and research and scholarship, and history and biography, and criticism and philosophy and science. By doing so you will certainly profit the art of fiction. For books have a way of influencing each other. Fiction will be much better for standing cheek by jowl with poetry and philosophy. Moreover, if you consider any great figure of the past, like Sappho, like the Lady Murasaki, like Emily Bronte, you will find that she is an inheritor as well as an originator, and has come into existence because women have come to have the habit of writing naturally; so that even as a prelude to poetry such activity on your part would be invaluable.*

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* ( 113 )

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf calls for women to write all kinds of books both that they might please her and that they might influence. Inviting women to write books and to become inheritors as well as originators "like Sappho, like the Lady Murasaki, like Emily Bronte," Woolf truly challenges women to represent themselves. *A Room of One's Own* is based upon the talks Woolf presented to the Arts Society at Newnham and the Odtas at Girton, in 1928, on the topic of "Women and Fiction." And, although *A Room of One's Own* was published over sixty years ago, today many feminists

although A Room of One's Own was published over sixty years ago, today many feminists use references to Woolf and her works to support their own arguments concerning women's place in society and literature.

Researching her topic of "Women and Fiction" at the British Museum and finding little information about women in the public domain written by women, information that was not supplied by men, Woolf comes to the conclusion that it is masculine discourse which determines the conditions governing who is allowed to speak and be heard. The reason for the absence of women's writing, Woolf maintains, is obvious:

The most transient visitor to this planet . . . could not fail to be aware that England is under the rule of a patriarchy . . . . His was the power and the influence. He was the proprietor of the paper and its editor and sub-editor. . . . With the exception of the fog he seemed to control everything. ( 34 )

Focussing attention on the reasons why women's voices are not heard in a patriarchal society, Woolf says it is men who determine both the conditions under which women are allowed to speak and the content and form which their conversation must take. In response to the void she encountered researching women's writing at the British Museum, in A Room of One's Own she encourages women to write all kinds of books and she asks women to represent themselves in a society engineered to repress their voices. It is since Woolf published A Room of One's Own that a new field of knowledge has developed as women have struggled to write their own stories, to fill the void Woolf found at the British Museum.

My purpose in this essay is to identify some of the ways in which feminists strategically use references to Virginia Woolf and A Room of One's Own to empower their own perspective or to develop legitimacy for their own knowledge and discourse. While many feminist essay, article and book mentions either Virginia Woolf and her

accomplishments or one of her many works, in this paper I have chosen to examine Sexual Textual Politics by Toril Moi, A Literature of Their Own by Elaine Showalter, The Female Imagination by Patricia Meyer Spacks, and Literary Women by Ellen Moers. I have chosen these particular authors because they all use references to Woolf in interesting ways and because they are also textually united by Moi in Sexual Textual Politics. In my essay, I will also show how feminists, through repeated references to Woolf and A Room of One's Own, have come to equate Woolf with A Room of One's Own. "Identified" with her text in the Burkean sense of the term, even brief references to Woolf and A Room of One's Own have come to represent or be representative of the entire argument she proposes in A Room of One's Own ( Burke 27-28 ). While numerous feminist scholars have written a multitude of interpretations of both the events in Woolf's life and the arguments she makes in A Room of One's Own, my purpose in this essay is not to make a case either for or against any particular reading or to introduce one of my own. Although I do have opinions of my own, and it is possible to question the sometimes conflicting points of view I found in my research -- especially about a topic as controversial as Virginia Woolf -- in this paper my intention is to focus on the ways in which feminists use references to Woolf to further their own arguments.

In this first section of this essay I will introduce Virginia Woolf as she was known by some of her contemporaries, and I will briefly outline her major contentions in A Room of One's Own. Descriptions of Woolf, written by her contemporaries both before and after her death, present the picture of a complex, unique woman. And although these fleeting glimpses of Woolf's personality, revealed through her contemporaries in recorded recollections of isolated moments in her company, give her substance, today's readers must tolerate what seems to be a vague outline of her complex personality. However, because an awareness of Woolf brings additional insight and adds a further dimension to any reading of her text and because today she can only be known through reading -- reading reminiscences and reading her own writing -- it is important to perceive Woolf as she was



seen from the inside of her own circle, as she was known and documented by her friends and family. As Kenneth Burke conceived of criticism in The Philosophy Of Literary Form, the main ideal of criticism "is to use all that there is to use" ( 23 ). Today's readers of A Room of One's Own are blessed with a wealth of rich biographical material written about Woolf, and any knowledge of her that we can bring to her text can only enhance our own reading.

*. . . a woman writing thinks back through her mothers.*

*Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own ( 101 )*

In order to understand Woolf's appeal and continuing influence, a look at Virginia Woolf herself provides an intriguing forword. Considered alone no one of the reminiscences quoted here even attempts to provide a full narrative of Woolf's life, yet contemplated together -- as a collaborative effort -- they constitute a brief and incomplete biography of Woolf, a collage picturing both the public and the private Woolf. Creating this story of Woolf, these narratives both name and celebrate the woman who has been a powerful female muse for the women writers who invoke both Woolf and her writing in their own compositions.

Winifred Holtby's sketch of Woolf, Virginia Woolf: A Critical Memoir, was written in 1931 and published in October 1932. In her book, Holtby's speculations about Woolf's inner life illustrate her own personal bias. In 1931, Holtby was a young woman writer who wanted to make a mark in the world, and she was writing about another woman writer, an older woman, who had already made her mark. It is evident from the way she describes Woolf that she was not writing about a typical woman. The metaphor Holtby creates to describe Woolf is not one usually used for describing a woman. Winifred Holtby describes Virginia Woolf as a frozen falcon:

She lives quietly. Her public appearances are rare, but they are notably successful; her remoteness only enhances her prestige. Tall, graceful, exceedingly slender, she creates an impression of curbed but indestructible vitality. An artist sitting near her during a series of concerts given by the Lener quartette, said afterwards, "She makes me think of a frozen falcon; she is so still, and so alert." The description does in some measure suggest her elegance veiling such intellectual decision, her shyness lit by such irony. Meeting all contacts with the world lightly yet courageously; withdrawn, but not disdainful; in love with experience yet exceedingly fastidious; detached, yet keenly, almost passionately interested; she watches the strange postures and pretences of humanity, preserving beneath her formidable dignity and restraint a generosity, a belief, and a radiant acceptance of life unsurpassed by any living writer. ( 31-36 )

In her author's note, Holtby states that she met Woolf in person only once and saw her twice more at public and private functions. In the course of their meeting, Woolf's sole instruction to Holtby was that Holtby should treat Woolf's work with the candor and impartiality applied by critics to the writings of the dead. While writing Virginia Woolf: A Critical Memoir, Holtby relied upon Woolf's family and friends first for information, particularly biographical details, and then for proofreading, and it may be that Holtby's attentiveness to detail nettled Woolf's "radiant acceptance." Hearing reports of Holtby's inquiries, Woolf wrote in a letter to Ethel Smyth, "Why doesn't she send the biography straight to me? I told her not to consult my friends; after all I'm the chief authority. . . I'll make all corrections " (LVW, Vol 4, 375).

In "Virginia Woolf: A Recollection," Louie Mayer provides another, more personal glimpse of Virginia Woolf. Mayer was the Woolf's cook - general at their small country house near Lewes. The Woolf's hired Mayer when she was young and inexperienced.

Virginia Woolf taught her to bake bread. According to Mayer, "Mrs. Woolf was not a practical person - for instance, she could not sew or knit or drive a car -- but this [baking bread] was a practical skill which she was able to do well every time" ( 3 ). Mayer was quite impressed with the Woolf's timetable. The Woolf's were very particular about their coffee; Mayer says Mr. Woolf made that himself, every morning at 8 o'clock. Mayer describes Virginia Woolf walking to the house from the writing room each day at 1 o'clock for lunch:

She used to walk down through the orchard smoking one of her favorite cigarettes in a long holder. She was tall and thin and very elegant. She had large, deepset eyes and a wide curving mouth - I think perhaps it was this feature that made her face seem particularly beautiful. She wore long skirts - usually blue or brown corduroy - in the fashion of the day, and silk jackets of the same color. I remember, too, that there was always a large silk handkerchief tucked into the jacket pocket. ( 3 )

Supplying another personal glimpse of Woolf, Mayer describes something she found very strange on the first day she worked for the Woolfs:

The floors in Monks House were very thin, the bathroom was directly above the kitchen and when Mrs. Woolf was having her bath before breakfast I could hear her talking to herself. On and on she went, talk, talk, talk: asking questions and giving herself the answers. I thought there must be two or three people up there with her. When Mr. Woolf saw that I looked startled he told me that Mrs. Woolf always said the sentences out loud that she had written during the night. She needed to know if they sounded good and the bath was a good, resonant place to try them out .( 2 )

Mayer defines Woolf as an unusual woman -- not a typical woman -- when she lists the practical things Woolf was either not inclined to be interested in or was incapable of accomplishing, such as sewing or knitting or driving a car. Compared to Holtby's sketch of Woolf representing her as a falcon -- alert, courageous, and strong -- Mayer judges Woolf by her inability or lack of desire to do what Mayer identifies as woman's work. Mayer pictures Woolf as a less than capable woman with unusual habits.

Nigel Nicolson provides a child's perspective of Virginia Woolf in Recollections of Virginia Woolf by her contemporaries. The son of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson, Nigel Nicolson saw Woolf many times from 1924, the year Virginia and Vita met, until Woolf's death in 1941. Nicolson remembers Woolf with a childlike candor:

I would frequently come home from school to find Virginia at Long Barn or Sissinghurst. She was marvelous with children. She treated us like grown-ups, looking at childhood as yet another facet of human character. There was something in a child which no adult could recover; she was determined to discover what that special thing was . . . . Virginia had this way of magnifying one's simple words and experiences. One could hand her a bit of information as dull as a lump of lead. She would hand it back glittering like diamonds. I always felt on leaving her that I had drunk two glasses of an excellent champagne. She was a life enhancer. That was one of her favorite phrases. She always said that the world was divided into two categories; those who enhanced life and those who diminished it . . . she gave us a new interest in life, a new way of looking at life. She amused us. She petted us as children . . . . Even at this distance in time, I can say without exaggeration she was the most remarkable human being I have ever known. ( 131 )

Nicolson's reminiscence of Woolf is a warm remembrance that pictures her as a magician with the ability to metamorphose crude and mundane material into precious fabric. Seeing Woolf as a woman with unusual powers -- as living beyond conventional expectations -- he recognizes both that she had a special gift and that she had the power to compose her own life, so that she might be one of those who enhances life rather than diminishes life.

Another view of Virginia Woolf was written by E.M. Forster after Woolf's death in 1941. Forster was a member of a circle of friends who often met in Bloomsbury to share their work and to explore new ideas. The young Stephens' had moved to Bloomsbury after Sir Leslie died because the rent was cheap; however, Bloomsbury became associated with prestige and influence due to the success of those belonging to the Bloomsbury Circle which included, among others, Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey, John Maynard Keynes, Hugh Walpole and T.S. Eliot. This text is from the Rede Lecture which Forster delivered in the Senate House, Cambridge, on May 29, 1941, just two months after Virginia Woolf committed suicide. After pointing out the obstacles to summing up either Woolf or her work, Forster went on to say:

As soon as we dismiss the legend of the Invalid Lady of Bloomsbury, so guilelessly accepted by Arnold Bennett, we find ourselves in a bewildering world where there are few headlines. We think of The Waves and say "Yes - that is Virginia Woolf"; then we think of The Common Reader, where she is different, of A Room of One's Own or of the preface to Life As We Have Known It: different again. She is like a plant which is supposed to grow in a well - prepared bed - the bed of esoteric literature - and then pushes up suckers all over the place, through the gravel of the front drive, and even through the flagstones of the kitchen yard. She was full of interests, and their numbers increased as she grew older, she was curious about life, and she was tough, sensitive but tough....But in her writing, even in her light writing, central control entered. She was master

of her complicated equipment, and though most of us like to write sometimes seriously and sometimes in fun, few of us can so manage the two impulses . . . . She liked writing with an intensity which few writers have attained or even desired. Most of them write with half an eye on their royalties, half an eye on their critics, and a third half eye on improving the world, which leaves them with only half an eye for the task on which she concentrated her entire vision ( 3, 12 ).

Forster concludes his address with the observation that, despite the circumstances of her death, Woolf's career should be regarded as a triumphant one. "She was not confined to sensationalism and intellectualism. She was also a social creature, with an outlook warm and shrewd. But it was a peculiar outlook, and we can get at it best by looking at a very peculiar side of her: her feminism" ( 21 ). Forster calls Woolf's feminism a peculiar outlook and one which he could not totally understand, yet he is farsighted enough to realize the limitations of his own vision and to allow that "if the students of Fernham think that [ A Room of One's Own ] expresses an existent grievance, they are right" ( 22 ). The metaphor Forster creates to describe Virginia Woolf pictures her as an unusual plant -- sensitive but tough -- that should only prosper under certain conditions but instead defies orthodox definition to push up suckers and thrive all over the place.

Observing Virginia Woolf from four very different vantage points, Holtby, Mayer, Nicolson and Forster wrote four stories of Virginia Woolf. Although no two of the four stories are really similar, it is interesting that in each narrative Woolf is represented as unusual -- extraordinary and powerful. And judging from the references to Woolf and A Room of One's Own that continue to be found in feminist writing, Woolf's power has not diminished since her death -- she is still pushing up suckers all over the place. "She lives in you and in me . . . for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences." Woolf is a continuing presence who extraordinarily continues to be born and reborn, to put on the

body, in the texts of feminists who have followed her ( 117 ). In Among Women, Louise Bernikow describes Woolf as "the paver of the way for more sisters" ( 176 ). Bernikow also "found in Woolf a guide, an indicator of what needs to be explored" in her own work ( 11 ). The peculiar outlook that Forster notes in A Room of One's Own still expresses an existent grievance, recognized by the students at Fernham, and feminists use references to Woolf rhetorically in their own work to identify themselves with a specific feminist audience as they continue to write out the injustice. Virginia Woolf, like all authors, produced more than her own texts. Her texts also helped open the way for feminist writing by providing some of the metaphors which feminists continue to use to compose their own texts. One workable definition of aesthetic value -- a valuable text is one that performs for its readers a multitude of functions, a text that intersects with a wide range of individual experiences and makes itself available to be used in a variety of contexts -- can be used to describe Virginia Woolf's writing. Her text does perform a multitude of functions and it makes itself available to be used in a variety of contexts.

*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 women and the true nature of fiction unsolved. Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own ( 4 )*

Caroline Heilbrun remembers in Writing A Woman's Life that the women's movement began, in fact, with discussions of power, powerlessness, and the questions of sexual politics. In A Room of One's Own, Woolf provided an innovative account of women's literary history and creativity and foresaw a change, a time when women would not be protected from "activities and exertions" awarded only to men. In A Room of One's Own, Woolf makes an auspicious prediction, foretelling the time when the discussion of power and powerlessness will cease to exist:

Moreover, in a hundred years . . . women will have ceased to be the protected sex. Logically they will take part in all the activities and exertions that were once denied them. All assumptions founded on the facts observed when women were the protected sex will have disappeared . . . ( 40 )

And the questions she poses in A Room of One's Own, after she gives what she calls her opinion on "one minor point," have provoked women writers to respond, to imagine and to reimagine why it is that the dominant discourse in the public domain is masculine and why it is that the other side of the story -- woman's -- is edited out. To provide an impetus for women writers, Virginia Woolf left a legacy in the form of a series of writing topic suggestions. In 1929, after researching the topic of women and fiction at the British Museum and after reflecting upon both the incidents in her own life and upon her readings of women's literature, Woolf suggests that women consider the following topics. Some of the questions Woolf first proposed in A Room of One's Own to her students at Newnham and Girton and then suggests to her readers are the following:

Why did men drink wine and women water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor? What effect does poverty have on fiction? What conditions are necessary for the creation of works of art? . . . I hope that you will investigate ( these questions ) when you have five hundred a year on your own.  
( 25 - 37 )

What one wants, I thought -- and why does not some brilliant student at Newnham or Girton supply it -- is a mass of information, at what age did she [a woman in the time of Elizabeth] marry; how many children had she as a rule; what was her house like; had she a room to herself; did she do the cooking; would



she be likely to have a servant? . . . What I find deplorable . . . is that nothing is known about women before the eighteenth century. ( 47 )

The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself. An amusing book might be made of it if some young student at Girton or Newnham would collect examples and deduce a theory . . . . ( 57 )

That profoundly interesting subject, the value that men set upon women's chastity and its effect on their education, here suggests itself for discussion, and might provide an interesting book if any student at Girton or Newnham cared to go into the matter. ( 67 )

The significance of the questions Woolf suggests in A Room of One's Own have not been diminished by time. They are still being considered as the conversation Woolf recommends proceeds without her, and Woolf remains a major feminist figure today because the questions she posed to her readers in 1929 continue to provoke controversy. One way of measuring the importance of Woolf's inquiry into "Women and Fiction" is to note the number of references to Woolf and A Room of One's Own in feminist writing. Viewing my research for this paper in retrospect, I continue to be struck by the number of references -- both to Virginia Woolf and A Room of One's Own -- that I found through serious search and that my friends and family discovered by accident. Virginia Woolf is referenced everywhere. Though it has no connection whatsoever to my paper, I must mention that the most remarkable reference to Woolf was discovered by my daughter, Shirley. On page 77 of a teenage romance titled I'm Kissing As Fast As I Can, by Merrill Joan Gerber, the young teenage hero of the romance -- holding a copy of A Room of One's

Own -- both questions what his father would think of him holding the book and he imagines how he would explain Shakespeare's sister to his father.

Some of the rhetorical strategies I will look at in this paper include the way feminist authors use lists of women writers to establish categories and values. That identification can work for the author in a variety of ways. In some cases, references to Woolf are used to provide evidence in support of an author's argument. However, interestingly, it is not uncommon for Woolf's name be used to be used in several lists by the same author to support different arguments. Other references to Woolf sometimes claim another writer to be "like" Woolf. The claim that another author is like Woolf, shares some of the same qualities Woolf is identified with, can be used rhetorically to either identify another author with Woolf -- inside a select and preferred group of writers -- or to exclude that author (along with Woolf) from a select group of writers. References to Woolf and A Room of One's Own can also be used to indicate a particular author's wealth of knowledge. It is not uncommon for references used in this way to be uncited, dropped in without a credit. Another kind of reference to Woolf can refer to either Woolf or her writing as an allusion to the particular time in which Woolf wrote and published her writing. References of this kind are often used to boost the value of a less well known author -- by value of association -- by placing her within Woolf's historical context. It is also not unusual for feminist writers to use a quote from Virginia Woolf as an introduction to their own text.

Often both Woolf and her texts, particularly A Room of One's Own, are referenced without introduction and citation. She is a given to whom feminist readers and writers need no introduction or explanation. One brief example of an uncited reference to Woolf which equates Woolf with her words is found in Blood, Bread and Poetry, "The Eye of the Outsider." Using Woolf's words, Adrienne Rich describes the poor, parentless, immigrant poet Elizabeth Bishop. Placing her reference to Woolf in the middle of her description of Bishop, in the middle of her sentence, Rich writes "The child made 'different' because parentless, the emigrant who thinks she would -- understandably -- 'rather have the iceberg

than the ship,' the woman writing, consciously or not 'against the male flood' [Woolf's phrase], the lesbian writing under the false universal of heterosexuality, the foreigner who can take little for granted -- all inhabit Bishop's poetic voice and eye" ( 127 ). With no further mention of Woolf or where her words might be originally found, Rich continues her essay. However slight and uncited, Rich's small reference to Woolf works by evoking a storm of meaning for feminists as they equate Bishop's experience with the experience of Shakespeare's sister in A Room of One's Own. While Bishop may not be widely known, Rich's reference identifies her with Virginia Woolf and Woolf needs no introduction, nor does A Room of One's Own -- both are widely known by feminists and they have come to be mutually representative.

Feminist authors also use quotes from Virginia Woolf to introduce their own texts. Suzanne Juhasz introduces "Towards a Theory of Form in Feminist Autobiography: Kate Millet's Flying and Sita; Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior" with the voice of Virginia Woolf: 'So many memoirs are failures,' said Virginia Woolf 'because they leave out the person to whom things happened . . . . They say: 'This is what happened'; but they do not say what the person was like to whom it happened" ( 221 ). In the next line of her text, Juhasz agrees with Woolf when she quotes her, "To know and to reveal "what the person was like" is an especially imperative goal for feminist autobiographers . . . . ( 221 ). After identifying her own article as sympathetic to Woolf's statement, Juhasz reviews the autobiographies of Millet and Kingston. Alicia Suskin Ostriker also uses a quote from Virginia Woolf to introduce the first chapter of Stealing the Language, "I'm Nobody: Women's Poetry, 1650-1960." Ostriker uses her reference to Woolf, "We think back through our mothers, if we are women," followed by a quote by Alice Walker -- "Our mothers and grandmothers, some of them: moving to music not yet written. And they waited" -- to suggest a similarity between Woolf and Walker and to support her statement that as "writers from Virginia Woolf to Alice Walker make clear, women poets need strong mothers" ( 15-16 ). Elizabeth A. Meese makes similar use of a quote from

Woolf in Crossing the Double-Cross : The Practice of Feminist Criticism. Introducing her text with Woolf's words, "Literature is no one's private ground; literature is common ground. . . .Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves . . . ." Meese continues her discussion with a quote from Max Planck, "A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it." Meese argues that the practice of feminist criticism "can be represented as a figure standing at an intersection" and that women have been from the beginning "trespassers in the world's literary communities" ( 4-5 ). Beginning her text with the quotes from Woolf and Planck, Meese effectively illustrates two points of view -- to leave the intersection and to trespass fearlessly or to remain at the intersection and wait until your oponents die off -- before beginning her own examination of feminist criticism. Barbara Hill Rigney also uses a quote from Woolf to introduce Lilith's Daughter's : Women and Religion in Contemporary Fiction, "What are these ceremonies and why should we take part in them?" ( 3 ). Rigney, raising the question Woolf asked in Three Guineas, alerts her readers to her own point of view before stating the purpose of her text, to interpret what women writers think about themselves and God and to examine the sexism which permeates almost every facet of the major traditional religions. Writing from four different perspectives -- autobiography, poetry, feminist criticism and religion -- Juhasz, Ostriker, Meese and Rigney all found references to Woolf effective introductions to their own writing.

To count all the references to Virginia Woolf in contemporary works by feminists would take more time than anyone would like to spend; however, the number of references to Woolf and A Room of One's Own that can be found in nearly any feminist book or article is a good indication of Woolf's continuing influence. For example, in 1980, Sandra Gilbert in "What Do Feminist Critics Want?" continued the argument Woolf initiated in 1928. Gilbert says "we can and we must redo the history of Western culture . . . . something has been left out: 'merely,' in Carolyn Kizer's ironic understatement, ' the lives

of one-half of humanity.'" Gilbert comes to the same conclusion Woolf determined: "we must redo our history, therefore, I mean we must review, reimagine, rethink, rewrite, revise and reinterpret the events and documents that constitute it" ( 32 ). Gilbert discusses the difference between "male patrimony" and "female penury" and points out, as Woolf pointed out more than fifty years before, that throughout history men have had the "power of speech" while women have had -- or were supposed to have had -- the "graceful obligation of silence" ( 34 ). Quoting Woolf, Gilbert speaks of "rewriting history," the written history which does not include women, and urges women to write their own stories. Gilbert adds her voice to Woolf's voice when she says that she agrees with Woolf, "we feminist critics are still dwelling in and on that moment "when the middle-class woman began to write and "we are still coming to terms with and through it" ( 44 ). It is interesting to note that Gilbert has seven references to Woolf in her fourteen page article -- three cited and four not cited. Noting the number of times Woolf is referenced in feminist writing is one way of determining Woolf's continuing importance -- her force -- in feminist criticism.

*For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice. Virginia Woolf, A Room of Ones Own ( 68-69 )*

I have been interested in Virginia Woolf since I first encountered her in an undergraduate classroom when I was assigned to read Mrs. Dalloway. Immediately entranced, I read Mrs. Dalloway twice, and I didn't stop reading Woolf until I had read all of her novels, letters and diaries. I have been intrigued with Woolf for years; however, it wasn't until I read Toril Moi's Sexual Textual Politics that my interest in Woolf gelled. The impact of reading Sexual Textual Politics pushed me into taking a critical look at how

feminists have determined their positions and have used references to Woolf and A Room of One's Own as authoritative evidence to support their own views. Woolf's relationship with feminism is explicit -- she needs no credentials. Using references to Woolf, feminist writers provide readers with a way of identifying themselves with their texts and involving themselves with the problems Woolf perceives women writers must overcome before they can write their own stories, their own lives. When feminist writers refer to Woolf's admonition, "woman must have money and a room of her own to write," they provide a psychologically vivid evocation, reminding their readers of their own need for both money and a room of their own so that they might write. Citations to Woolf herself provide feminist writers with a real example of a feminist woman writer who despite bouts of depression was able to support herself by her pen, who managed to write and publish volumes of novels and essays that are still read today. Referring to Woolf herself, feminists strengthen their own arguments by identifying themselves with Woolf.

Reading Moi, and then going on to read Spacks, Showalter and Moers, I noticed that the position or place these feminist writers assign themselves in the universal feminist text is often illustrated by references to Virginia Woolf. And references to A Room of One's Own in particular provide feminists with a historical context for the writing and reading of feminist criticism. In the introduction to Sexual Textual Politics, Moi structures her text in answer to the rhetorical question "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?" Reviewing the feminist reception of Woolf, Moi presents the two main approaches to feminist literary theory -- the Anglo-American and the French -- in her survey of different feminist readings of Woolf. Perceiving Woolf as a revolutionary, Moi then identifies Kristeva, the theorist whose work she discusses most fully, as a revolutionary, thereby using Woolf as the revolutionary mother of both Kristeva and Moi.

*For we think back through our mothers if we are women. It is useless to go to the great men writers for help, however much one may go to them for pleasure.*

*Lamb, Browne, Thackeray, Newton, Sterne, Dickens, De Quincey--whoever it may be--never helped a woman yet, though she might have learnt a few tricks of them and adapted them to her own use. The weight, the pace, the stride of a man's mind are too unlike her own for her to lift anything substantial from him successfully. The ape is too distant to be sedulous. Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own ( 79 )*

In her introduction to Literary Women, first published in 1977, Ellen Moers states that the subject of her book "is the major women writers, writers we read and shall always read whether interested or not in the fact that they happened to be women" ( xi ). The women whose writings still remain well known and widely read from the eighteenth century to the present can truly be called major literary figures, and although Moers did not intend Literary Women to be a history of women's writing she does provide a careful and studious examination of major women writers as she pursues her principle purpose, "to record without simplification what it has meant to be at once a woman and a writer" ( xiii ). A discussion of women writers and what difference their writing has made to literature is a valuable critical access. As is the case with writers grouped by either their nationality or their race or their social station, the fact of their sex and the roles they are assigned because of their sex influence women's writing. And while Moers once believed that separating major writers from "the general course of literary history was futile," she justifies her own separationist strategy by claiming that we already practice a segregation of women writers in anthologies and curriculum (xv ). Until recently, a quick perusal of almost any literary history or anthology gives the impression that a history of women writers could be accomplished in a few pages -- in a short day's work. However, Moers' sixty-seven page index to the women writers she considers in Literary Women -- the ones that she refers to as just the major writers -- indicates that there are many women writers still waiting to be discovered and heard.

Taking all of women's writing into her grasp with a large loose grip, Moers has no doubts about the greatness of the women writers she introduces and the lasting importance of their works. The enthusiasm with which she discusses "something new worth saying," about Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Emily Dickinson, George Sand, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Willa Cather, Emily Bronte, and Virginia Woolf -- just to name a few -- and the details she provides, invigorate her approach ( xiii ). In Literary Women, Moers brings together women writers who in chronological studies are often separated by time. Literary Women is written in two parts -- "History and Tradition" and "Heroism," and only the second chapter of "History and Tradition," "The Epic Age: Part of the History of Literary Women" is organized chronologically, considering major women writers in order of their appearance in the literary landscape. Moers's approach in the remaining chapters of Literary Women is to introduce and group together women writers who, for one reason or another, have something in common, such as their interests or their marital status or their lot in life.

References to both Virginia Woolf and A Room of One's Own play an important part in the development of Moers' investigation, as she tracks the deep creative strategies of the literary mind at work upon "the fact of female" (xiv ). Identifying Virginia Woolf in "Epic Age: Part History of Literary Women," Moers names her as "the most brilliant of all critics of women's literature, and the most sensitive to its rage" ( 20 ). Woolf is the most brilliant critic; however, Moers also notes that Woolf was "an original creative genius in her own right, and invariably at odds with her predecessors" ( 20 ). The most brilliant and the most sensitive, appropriately enough Virginia Woolf is the first woman writer Moers discusses in Literary Women, beginning her discussion of literary women with a quote from Woolf's "Professions for Women" describing the "Angel in the House" -- the utterly unselfish Angel -- that Woolf must kill before she can write. However, Moers quickly points out that Woolf's twentieth - century Bloomsbury literary angel was not necessarily the same angel administering to women writing in the nineteenth century. While "Virginia



Woolf wanted an end to women's cursing," Mrs. Browning's avenging angel, on the eve of the Civil War asked Browning to curse the hypocrisy of the American nation . . . " ( 20).

Despite the fact that Woolf is the most brilliant and an original creative genius, she has also been ritually alienated -- she was invariably at odds with her predecessors and was regularly taken to task by her contemporaries -- and her position in women's literature is ambiguous, according to Moers. Using textual references to Woolf to substantiate major points of her own argument in Literary Women, Moers links what at first sight appear to be opposing principles when she uses references to Virginia Woolf to produce a unified view of women's literature. Woolf's place in women's literature is illustrated when Moers uses her to link the generations of women's literature, drawing together women writers and their issues from the beginning of women's time until the present. References to Woolf provide Moers a means of maintaining the continuity of women's literature as she presents Woolf as being in opposition yet part of the chain. She uses Woolf to both link the evolution and to explain the contradictions. It is through references to Woolf that Moers' perspective remains uniform, without hiatus, from the beginning of women's literature until the present. Woolf is the woman writer whose writing is representative of both the discontent that preceded the "epic age," the "outreaching of the feminine impulsion" which Moers identifies as the "epic age" phenomenon, and the writing which has followed it ( 28 ). Showing the relationship between our time and Woolf's time, although Woolf died in 1941 and Moers' book was published in 1977, Moers defines the "epic age" of women's literature by listing women writers. She says the time of Jane Austen, George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte, and George Sand is distinct "from the ages of women's literature which preceded it, and from the ages which followed it , including Virginia Woolf's and our own" time ( 29 ). Identifying Woolf's and our own time as one, Moers strengthens her own argument by creating identification with Woolf.

So identifying Woolf with both our time and the time preceding the "epic age" of women's literature, Moers transforms the curve of Woolf's own particular history and gives Woolf, it seems, perpetual life. Locating Woolf's time and our time on the same side of the "epic age," she effectively asks her readers to regard Woolf's time and our own time as equivalent and so also to metaphysically identify her readers with the mother of women's literature, Virginia Woolf. Moers answers the questions that are the subject of her book by using Woolf as a metaphor for all women's writing. Her identification complete, Virginia Woolf, a metaphor for women's literature, becomes Moers' measuring device. She uses Woolf to establish the reality of her own argument by using her references to Woolf as means of allowing her readers both to see and to measure something else.

An analysis of Moers' textual references to Woolf in Literary Women illustrates Moers' quantitative and qualitative considerations in her discussion of the difference women writers have made in literature. Why women should write at all is one of the first questions Moers considers. Using two quotes to illustrate the difference between the attitudes of women writing before and after the "epic age" -- one by Harriet Martineau, written in 1832, and one by Virginia Woolf, written in 1925 -- she calls upon Woolf to provide a response to Harriet Martineau. Moers uses Martineau's statement, "I want to be doing something with the pen," to mark the opening of the "epic age" ( 30 ). Martineau purposefully wrote to influence, as an impetus to action while, according to Moers, Woolf's purpose was to "to write calmly . . . to use writing as an art" ( 21 ). Thus women writers had changed their attitude toward the function of writing by the time Virginia Woolf wrote A Room of One's Own. The impact of Martineau's statement is emphasized when it is compared to Woolf's peroration in A Room of One's Own - "Do not dream of influencing other people . . . " ( 30 ). However, when Moers suggests that Woolf's A Room of One's Own is a natural resource and so is an influence, regardless of Woolf's intent, her reference to Woolf bridges the gap she created by juxtaposing the apparently contradicting attitudes of Martineau and Woolf.

Moers encourages her audience to recall their own memories of reading A Room of One's Own and to identify with Woolf's words by quoting Woolf, "for it is a fact, that there is no arm to cling to, but that we go alone" ( 31 ). However, reviewing Moers' references to Woolf throughout Literary Women, it is apparent that Moers' argument itself illustrates that if there is one arm a feminist may cling to it is Virginia Woolf's arm. In Literary Women, Moers uses references to Woolf as a thread to weave through the history of women's literature, drawing together the famous and the obscure. Woolf is Moers' common link. In her discussion of "Aurora Leigh," which she identifies as "the feminist poem," Moers wonders aloud "Why Aurora Leigh is not more read by feminists . . . puzzled writers like Alice Meynell and Virginia Woolf" (61). Moers draws the relatively obscure Alice Meynell into her discussion because she is "like" Virginia Woolf. Drawing Woolf and Meynell together with an analogy, Moers focuses upon the similarities of Woolf and Meynell and encourages her readers to consider Meynell as they consider Woolf, a woman of influence. Locating Meynell and Woolf in the same sentence, Moers presents them as contextually united rather than as a contrasting pair of women writers, and maintains the continuity of women's writing.

Pointing out that work, money and fact have always been the specialties of women writers, in "Money, Job, Little Women: Female Realism," Moers uses textual references to Woolf as a bridge between the economic anxieties Jane Austen expressed in Pride and Prejudice, published in 1813, and the presence of money in Lillian Hellman's "The Little Foxes," published in 1939. Pointing out the similarities in their attitudes towards money, Moers says that while Austen's references to money were considered vulgar in her time, the presence of money in Hellman's play is thought to add to "its crackling realism" (117). After introducing Austen and Hellman, Moers encourages her readers to remember A Room of One's Own when she points out that the coin symbolism in Woolf's books purposefully draws Woolf's reader's attention to the small sums that have often meant the difference between freedom and slavery for both women and children. The significance of

cash money, the five hundred a year Woolf advocates in A Room of One's Own, in Woolf's later work turns into concerns for precise sums of money as symbols. The shilling Mrs. Dalloway throws into the Serpentine in Mrs. Dalloway and the change in a purse or a pocket noted in Three Guineas suggest both the general, pervasive economic anxiety Austen expressed in Pride and Prejudice and the particular, detailed balance sheet Hellman portrayed in her plays. Moers' reference to Woolf and A Room of One's Own reminds her readers of Shakespeare's sister and evokes visions of poor women today. Moers compares and contrasts the attitudes of women writers toward money from Austen's time to the present, using references to Woolf both as an authority and to arouse the sympathy of her readers.

Moers makes a stylistic identification when she classifies Virginia Woolf, Willa Cather, Gertrude Stein, and Colette and classifies them as a group belonging to the "modern movement away from courtship." Moers also uses her "Woolf" group as a foil to another combination of writers, James, Proust, Mann, and Joyce, "who pursued the consequence of Flaubert's sentimental education" ( 354 ). And while Moers borrows Gertrude Stein's title to name Woolf, Cather, Stein, and Colette as "The Mothers of Us All," she acknowledges both that they are all very different and that they are, at the same time, very much the same ( 355 ). Linking Woolf, Cather, Stein and Colette together and identifying them as mothers, in her discussion Moers makes a figurative analogy when she identifies them all as participating members of a particular company. They are all writers; however, they are not all mothers in the literal sense. Calling Cather, Stein, Colette and Woolf mothers, Moers makes her argument vivid and dramatic by creating a metaphor. Linking them, identifying them with Woolf, Moers' evidence supersedes her audiences' prior knowledge -- their knowledge that only Colette was in fact a mother of a child -- and gives a new meaning to the word "mother." To give the answer to the riddle, "When is a mother not a mother?" Moers' answer is a list of women writers beginning with Woolf: when she is Woolf, Cather, Stein or Colette, one of the "mothers of us all" ( 358 ).

Virginia Woolf plays an important role in Literary Women. By including Woolf in her text, Moers identifies herself with the feminist community and reveals the bias of her own perspective. To overcome any obstacles she might encounter persuading her readers, Moers uses references to Woolf and to A Room of One's Own to provide authoritative evidence to support her own views. Grouping writers together because they either were or were not like Woolf, Moers is able to quickly categorize and classify women writers who might not have anything else in common but their commonality with Woolf. Woolf is well known and she needs little introduction in any feminist text; she is one natural resource that many feminists have used to fire their own arguments, and Moers is no exception to the rule.

*For books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately.  
And I must consider her--this unknown woman--as the descent of all those other  
women whose circumstances I have been glancing at and see what she inherits of  
their characteristics and restrictions. Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own  
(84 )*

As rhetorical woman manipulates her own reality, grappling with the imperfections and exigencies to which both she and her readers must respond, feminist writers juggle their information in the process of fabricating their own experience. Simultaneously creating and occupying the roles that they make possible, feminist writers both respond to and manipulate the position that they have been granted by serious men who have determined women to be, as Napoleon and Mussolini thought -- Woolf reminds us in A Room of One's Own -- incapable and frivolous. By exploring the means available to her to put her particular argument into place, in The Female Imagination Patricia Meyers Spacks investigates both the ways of female feeling, the ways that women have responded in writing to the phallogentric view of women Virginia Woolf investigated at the British

Museum, and the ways in which women have responded creatively in order to facilitate a change of perception about women which might shape the creative expression of women. In The Female Imagination, published in 1972, Spacks says in her prologue that "a special female self-awareness emerges through literature in every period" and in her text Spacks investigates the continuities which she found in her study of women's writing. According to Spacks, it is not necessarily true "that books by women differ vividly from books by men . . . . Still, there appears to be something that we might call a women's point of view. . . a vague enough phenomenon, doubtless the result of social conditioning, but an outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the centuries" (3). Spacks found through her study and through her interviews with students "that the experience of women has long been the same, that female likenesses are more fundamental than female differences" and she notes the obvious nature of that observation ( 3 ). Her purpose in The Female Imagination is to investigate "some possibilities," to examine "the ways the life of the imagination emerges in the work of women writing" not to write a history of women's writing ( 3 ).

In her first chapter, "Theorists," Spacks reviews literary theories which have concerned themselves with "women's literary manifestations" ( 9 ). The remaining chapters of The Female Imagination are named for the clearly defined issues Spacks selects for her investigation including "Power and Passivity," "Taking Care" and "The Artist as Woman." Spacks begins her investigation by introducing Virginia Woolf, who she identifies as perhaps the first woman theorist to concern herself with women's literary manifestations: "Among female theorists . . . Virginia Woolf was perhaps the first writing on the announced subject 'women and fiction'" ( 9 ). Presenting Woolf in the first page of the first chapter of her text, Spacks' reference to Woolf works to both create appropriate expectations and to involve her readers with her subject. Virginia Woolf is well known, and Spacks' reference to Woolf creates a subtle but important bond with her feminist readers. Continuing to develop this bond, Spacks links herself to Woolf's argument in A

Room of One's Own when she says that although Woolf's essay strayed frequently from its focus, "that was its point . . . . Women's writing could not be considered in isolation from the social, economic, and political facts that dictate much of women's condition." And, pulling in still more support and authority, Spacks adds, "Subsequent critics have agreed" ( 9 ). Here clearly Spacks, unlike other places in her discussion where she argues with Woolf, uses Woolf for her own rhetorical purposes.

Beginning her investigation with an analysis of Virginia Woolf, Spacks defines Woolf's personality through a rhetorical analysis of A Room of Ones' Own, which Spacks judges, "leaves more questions unanswered than resolved" ( 15 ). Organizing her analysis with a series of negations, Spacks enumerates Woolf's apparent weaknesses. Woolf was "apparently obsessed" with the fact we have no "female Shakespeare" and she "begins her essay with an elaborate statement of insecurities" ( 10 ). Woolf disguises the critical questions implied by her argument "as expressions of inadequacy. Such disguises, of course, are only figures of rhetoric . . . . Her stylistic elegance, her withdrawals and qualifications, her delicacies of feelings: all apologize . . . " ( 10 ). In particular Woolf apologizes for feminine anger: "All these instances of anger are to Mrs. Woolf examples of female weakness . . . . The fact is, moreover, that Virginia Woolf herself writes marvelously out of personal anger . . . . But the problem of whether it is or it is not a good thing for a woman to write out of consciousness of being a woman is one that Virginia Woolf finally cannot resolve" ( 14 ). In "Theorists," Spacks rhetorically equates what she believes to be Woolf's flawed personality and indecisiveness with the personality of A Room of One's Own. Using her series of negations to define Woolf and A Room of One's Own, Spacks then uses her definition as a perspective through which she looks at Simone de Beauvoir and The Second Sex, Mary Ellmann and Thinking About Women, and Kate Millett and Sexual Politics.

Defining de Beauvoir, Ellmann and Millett by contrasting them to Woolf, Spacks organizes the remainder of her first chapter in a series of three dialectical definitions,

comparing de Beauvoir, Ellmann and Millett to Woolf and emphasizing their differences rather than their similarities. De Beauvoir, Ellmann and Millett are all "like" Woolf, and Spacks uses their initial similarities to establish her perspective before changing her focus to discuss their differences. In each of her discussions of de Beauvoir, Ellmann and Millett, negation in the form of contrast shapes the definitions that result. In her discussion of de Beauvoir, Spacks says, "Like Virginia Woolf, then, de Beauvoir believes that women must transcend the condition of being women in order to be great artists" ( 22 ). But, comparing The Second Sex to A Room of One's Own , Spacks points out that de Beauvoir comes to her conclusion only after demonstrating how she reaches it, "Beauvoir tells it so well: with endless convincing detail and with profound, meticulous empathy. I am female, she seems to say, and nothing female is alien to me" ( 23 ). Contrasting this analysis of The Second Sex with her earlier discussion of A Room of One's Own, "Moreover the evidence that Mrs. Woolf cites. . . leaves more questions answered than resolved," Spacks presents her evaluation of The Second Sex from the perspective of A Room of One's Own. In another instance, Spacks says de Beauvoir is "like" Woolf but in this case she immediately qualifies their similarity by pointing out their difference in the same sentence, "Like Virginia Woolf (although it is not for her as important an image as it is for her predecessor), Simone de Beauvoir is interested in the mirror, metaphor and reality, as a key to the feminine condition" ( 23 ). In this place in her argument, Spacks uses references to both Woolf and A Room of One's Own as an introduction to her discussion of de Beauvoir and The Second Sex.

In her discussion of Ellmann, Spacks uses a similar construction when she says, "Yet as clearly as Virginia Woolf, although less apologetically, Mrs. Ellmann writes in the distinctive voice of a woman" ( 27 ). Spacks further contrasts Ellmann and Woolf when she points out that in Ellmann's case her writing "is a display not of sensibility but of a particularly feminine sort and function of wit. A new category suggests itself for her: not the passivity of formlessness or the purposelessness of instability, but the feminine



resource of evasiveness" ( 27 ). Earlier in the chapter, Spacks describes Woolf's writing: "Her stylistic elegance, her withdrawals and qualifications, her delicacies of feeling; all apologize for undertaking such a subject" ( 10 ). And describing A Room of One's Own, Spacks says, "Its mannered virtuosity conceals self-justification: Don't judge me by the quality of my thought, note the fineness of my sensibility" ( 11 ). While Ellmann's writing is not a display of sensibility, Woolf's writing is a display of sensibility. While Woolf's writing conceals self-justification, Ellmann's writing is feminine, witty and cleverly evasive. After establishing Ellmann's similarity to Woolf and then immediately qualifying that similarity, Spacks further uses negation to emphasize the differences between Woolf and Ellmann and directs and focuses attention on Ellmann.

Introducing Kate Millett by contrasting her thoughts on anger with the thoughts of Woolf, de Beauvoir and Ellmann, Spacks defines each of the four theorists' anger and then lumps them into a group. Naming their respective thoughts on anger, Spacks says, "Virginia Woolf considers anger a defect in feminine writing. Simone de Beauvoir conceals it behind her accumulation of data and logic, Mary Ellmann uses it as an impelling force for her wit, evasively presenting wit rather than anger as her justification. Kate Millett, feeling justified in her anger, uses it as a rhetorical weapon" ( 34 ). After focusing attention on all four of the theorists' views on anger, Spacks goes on to more directly compare the anger of Woolf with the anger of Millett, "The anger for which Virginia Woolf apologizes is the focus of the later critic's [ Millett's ] attention" ( 37 ). Again, in this comparison, Spacks points out the differences between Woolf's attitude toward anger and Millett's attitude toward anger. The anger which Woolf deprecates is celebrated and revealed in by Millett. After contrasting Woolf and Ellman's views toward anger, reviewing their differences, Spacks then finds them compatible: "Although (Millett's) approach is different from her predecessor's (Woolf's), she too reveals the problems of women writing about women" ( 41 ). So introducing her own argument, Spacks both asks and answers a very important question: "So what is a woman to do, setting out to write about women?"

She can imitate men in her writing, or strive for an impersonality beyond sex, but finally she must write as a woman: what other way is there? ( 41 ). Finally, according to Spacks, Woolf and Millett have very much in common despite their very serious difference over anger in women's writing.

Beginning The Female Imagination with a discussion of Virginia Woolf and A Room of One's Own, Spacks establishes a control for her discussions of de Beauvoir, Ellmann and Millett. Writing about each theorist and her text from the perspective of her analysis of Woolf and A Room of One's Own, Spacks provides herself with both an organizing principle and a common point of reference. Beginning her text with a reference to Woolf, who is widely known, Spacks begins her discussion with a well known and effective example of a feminist theorist, piques the interest of her feminist readers, and strengthens her own argument. Virginia Woolf plays an important role in the first chapter of The Female Imagination , "Theorists," as Spacks reviews the ways in which feminist theorists have written about women in the past before beginning her own discussion of what it means to a woman to write.

*Again if one is a woman one is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness, say in walking down Whitehall, when from being the natural inheritor of that civilization, she becomes, on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical. Clearly the mind is always altering its focus, and bringing the world into different perspectives. Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own ( 101 )*

Presenting the history of the British novel from a woman's perspective and discussing female novelists from Bronte to Lessing in A Literature of Their Own Elaine Showalter uses rhetorical skill to select and arrange her materials. According to Showalter, "In the atlas of the English novel, woman's territory is usually depicted as desert bounded by mountains on four sides: the Austen peaks, the Bronte cliffs, the Eliot range, and the

Woolf hills" ( vii ). Picturing major women writers as peaks, cliffs, a range and hills in a landscape, Showalter creates a metaphor for the history of women's literature -- a landscape -- and indicates the importance of the writers included in that landscape.

Comparing the major women writers' relative importance in the landscape she has created, Showalter focuses on their similarities at the same time she compares their importance.

Working with her metaphor, Showalter says she wrote A Literature of Their Own to fill in the territory between these literary landmarks so that she might draw a more reliable map "from which to explore the achievements of women novelists" ( vii ). Showalter points out that though English women writers have always had an audience, critics have never been quite sure that women writers have a common bond, a common territory. She says, "we have never been sure what unites them as women, or, indeed, whether they share a common heritage connected to their womanhood at all" ( 3 ). "Feminine, feminist, or female," Showalter points out, "the woman's novel has always had to struggle against the cultural and historical forces that regulated women's experience to the second rank" ( 36 ).

Using "we" to address her readers, Showalter creates an immediate relationship with her audience. Showalter both invokes her audience and asks her audience to join her, to become her collaborator. Approaching her readers as her peers, using "we," Showalter both pulls her audience into her text and makes her audience her colleague. She says, "we have not had a very clear understanding of the continuities in women's writing" ( 7 ).

Throughout the first chapter of A Literature of Their Own, "The Female Tradition," Showalter reinforces her relationship with her readers by reminding them they are peers. She says, "When we look at women writers collectively we can see an imaginative continuum, the recurrence of certain patterns, themes, problems, and images from generation to generation" ( 11 ). Identifying herself with her readers, Showalter encourages her readers to identify with her by indicating their common ground with her references to "we."

In A Literature of Their Own, Showalter first employs textual references to Virginia Woolf to provide her audience a means of identification. As references to Woolf operate as a common bond in Literary Women and The Female Imagination, references to Woolf provide Elaine Showalter a common bond with her readers in the first few pages of A Literature of Their Own. References to Woolf -- and our shared memories of her, evoked by Showalter's references -- become the rhetorical glue holding Showalter's rhetorical "we" together. However, more than providing a common bond, references to Woolf give authority and support to Showalter's own argument. She says, "If we want to define the ways in which female self-awareness has expressed itself in the English novel, we need to see the woman novelist against the backdrop of the women of her time as well as in relation to other writers in history. Virginia Woolf recognized that need" ( 9 ). Showalter follows her reference to Woolf with a quote which is worth noting:

The extraordinary woman depends upon the ordinary woman. It is only when we know what were the conditions of the average woman's life -- the number of her children, whether she had money of her own, if she had a room to herself, whether she had help in bringing up her family, if she had servants, whether part of the housework was her task -- it is only when we can measure the way of life and the experience of life made possible to the ordinary woman that we can account for the success or failure of the extraordinary woman as writer. ( 9 )

With this long quote from "Women and Fiction," Showalter supports her own perspective with Woolf's authority and expertise and in the process the rhetorical "we" she has been using to address her readers expands to include Virginia Woolf. Using references to Woolf, Showalter enables her audience by giving her readers a means of identifying with her and so, by extension, with her argument.

Following the textual references to Woolf in "The Female Tradition," it is possible to trace the design of Showalter's argument. Arguing that the female literary tradition is similar to the development of any other literary subculture rather than a reflection of the class, lifestyle and culture of their male relatives, Showalter uses textual references to define the literary horizon with a list of greats, ending with Woolf: "In practice, the concept of greatness for women novelists often turns out to mean four or five writers - Jane Austen, the Brontes, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf" ( 7 ). Situating Woolf again, in another list of women authors later in the chapter, Showalter places Woolf last once more: "The fiction of Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield, and Virginia Woolf created a deliberate female aesthetic, . . . a determined version of modernism, responding to the "material culture of male Edwardian novelists" ( 33 ). Placing Woolf last in two very different lists of women authors representing one hundred years of women's writing, Showalter uses these textual references to Woolf to bond the separate individual histories of women authors and provide a continuum from Austen until Woolf's death in 1941. When Virginia Woolf died, according to Showalter, "the English women's novel seemed adrift" ( 34 ).

Turning from the overview of the female literary tradition she constructs in "The Female Tradition," Showalter continues her investigation of the history of women's literature in "Virginia Woolf and the Flight Into Androgyny" ten chapters later. In the beginning of the chapter, she announces that she is seeking to demystify the legend of Virginia Woolf because she believes "Woolf was cut off from an understanding of the day-to-day life of the women she wished to inspire; characteristically, she rebelled against aspects of female experience that she had never personally known and avoided describing her own experience" ( 294 ). Showalter says "Virginia Woolf was as thwarted and pulled asunder as the women she describes in A Room of One's Own . . . . In her fiction, but supremely in A Room of One's Own, Woolf is the architect of female space, a space that is both a sanctuary and a prison" ( 264 ). Redefining Woolf using Woolf's terms and

imagery, Showalter states, "To borrow her own murderous imagery, a woman writer must kill the Angel in the House, that phantom of female perfection who stands in the way of freedom. For Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot, the Angel was Jane Austen. For the feminist novelists, it was George Eliot. For mid-twentieth-century novelists, the Angel is Woolf herself" ( 265 ). Marking Woolf with an unflattering label, Showalter sets out to kill the Angel she identifies as Virginia Woolf by enumerating what she (Showalter) perceives as Woolf's weakness.

With a long list of negatives Showalter rewrites Woolf's life. Showalter describes Woolf as continually struggling to keep her manic feminine vision of life balanced with her depressive masculine vision of life in order to maintain her sanity. For Woolf, "the achievement of a coherent and comfortable sexual identity was an urgent problem" ( 265 ). In other words, according to Showalter, Woolf was not androgynous through choice. Woolf also, according to Showalter, felt inadequate because she was frigid. Never having children she renounced "a primary female role, failing to accomplish the act that is a woman's rite of passage into adulthood" ( 273 ). After suffering through several rest cures -- after her marriage to Leonard -- that were prescribed when she was unable to balance her feminine and masculine visions, Woolf finally killed herself in 1941. She was not feeling well and she feared another rest cure would be ordered. Showalter interprets Woolf's suicide saying that Woolf died suffering from the feelings of guilt and inadequacy, "the feeling that she had always struggled with, and often succumbed to, intensified in the mid - 1930s, when she was going through menopause" ( 279 ). Tying Woolf's health and mental state to her text, Showalter points out that "Woolf's ideas about women's literature were closely connected to her personal struggle for self-definition" ( 280 ). Showalter's textual references to Woolf provide her with Woolf's own language which she then defines in negative terms, finally naming Woolf as the very angel of the house that she (Woolf) had to kill before she could write. The picture Showalter creates of Woolf, using Woolf's terms redefined, allows Showalter to demystify Woolf. Woolf's androgyny is not a state

of serene indifference; it is the uncomfortable solution she found to handle her tendency to manic-depression. Woolf's room is not the space women need to create; Woolf's room is, as Showalter defines it in the final sentence of her chapter on Woolf, "is the grave" ( 297 ).

In the next chapter of A Literature of Their Own, "Beyond the Female Aesthetic: Contemporary Women Novelists," Showalter again uses Virginia Woolf as a reference to strengthen her own argument. Women writers still seem somewhat limited, yet "we are discovering how much in female experience has gone unexpressed; how few women, as Virginia Woolf said, have been able to tell the truth about the body, or the mind" ( 318 ). Addressing the notion of autonomy, Showalter again turns to Woolf, "Virginia Woolf believed that given economic independence and a room of one's own, given "the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think, . . . then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down" ( 318 - 319 ). Making a fine distinction, Showalter defines Woolf's room one final time. A room is a tomb when it is used as a retreat, as an escape from the world. A room is not a tomb when women taking "strength in their independence to act in the world" continue to write in the female tradition ( 319 ). Showalter's changing conceptions of "a room of one's own," evolving from Woolf's A Room of One's Own, depend upon Woolf's original vision and the powerful figure Woolf continues to be in the natural community of women writers.

*Moreover, a book is not made of sentences laid end to end, but of sentences built, if an image helps, into arcades and domes. Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own ( 80 )*

As Toril Moi points out In Sexual Textual Politics, responses to Virginia Woolf in feminist criticism have described her as being from frivolous to frightening to friendly;

however, whatever the chosen response, she has always been regarded -- she has not been ignored. In the introduction to Sexual Textual Politics, Toril Moi asks the provocative question, "Should feminists criticize each other at all?" ( xii ). Answering her own question, she replies with an "unqualified affirmative"; however, whether or not the idea of sisterhood should stifle debate seems now to be a question that is past asking. Feminists have been questioning themselves and each other, using a variety of approaches, since the beginning of the feminist movement.

Moi's question effectively introduces the debate she continues in her first chapter, "Introduction: Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist readings of Woolf." Her question forms the frame for her argument that feminist criticism "has always been political: it seeks to expose, not to perpetuate, patriarchal practices" ( xiv ). Introducing her text with the presence of Virginia Woolf, Moi piques her audience's interest by encouraging her readers to speculate over the answer to her dramatic question, challenging her readers' prior knowledge of Woolf. Didn't Woolf die in 1941? Why should anyone be afraid of Virginia Woolf? Reading Sexual Textual Politics, it is plain that nobody is afraid of Virginia Woolf. However, Moi's ironic question provides a beginning for Sexual Textual Politics by beginning at the beginning, by illustrating the feminist point of departure. The paradox illustrated by Moi's question and the answer she ultimately provides is her way to situate her "critique of the theoretical positions of other feminists clearly within the the perspective of feminist politics: [because] it is after all primarily on that terrain that we as feminists must be able to legitimate our own work" ( xiv ). Seeking to define feminist writing by categorizing feminist textual strategy, Moi rates specific feminist texts according to their political importance, in order "to develop a critical presentation of the critical debates within feminist criticism and theory" ( 93 ). However, it is with her references to Virginia Woolf -- her writing, her biography, and the metaphor for feminism that she has become -- that Moi begins by indicating "some points towards a different, more positive rating of Woolf, before finally summing up the more salient features of the feminist



response to Woolf's writings" ( 1 ). Moi suggests that Virginia Woolf may have been feared by certain feminists and praised by others; however, she has been used as a reference, and is still used as a reference. Moi's use of Virginia Woolf, in Sexual Textual Politics, illustrates just a few of the ways in which references to Woolf have been used as a form of argument in feminist criticism.

Using Woolf as a means of introducing Kate Millett's perspective in Sexual Politics, Moi sets up a polarity, positing Woolf on one side of the scale and Millett on the opposite side. Listing the five references to literary criticism contained in the bibliography of Sisterhood is Powerful, written by Robin Morgan, Moi points out that although feminism was alive and well in 1970 the few references to literary criticism in Morgan's large bibliography question the role of literary criticism in the feminist movement. Moi refers to the five references to literary criticism that were included in chronological order in Morgan's book. Listing the authors, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Katherine M. Rogers, Mary Ellmann, and Kate Millett, Moi points out that it is their "works (that) form the basis for the explosive development of Anglo-American feminist criticism" ( 22 ). Woolf is at one end of the ledger and Millett is at the other end.

Moi begins her discussion of feminist theorists, in "Two feminist classics," after contextualizing Woolf and Millett at opposite ends of the spectrum. Reinforcing that divisive image, Moi notes that in Sexual Politics, Millett "dismisses Woolf in one brief passage." "In fact," admonishes Moi, "with the sole exception of Charlotte Bronte, Sexual Politics deals exclusively with male authors" ( 22 ). Moi withdraws the possibility of a relationship between Millett and Woolf by questioning Millett's identification; Moi says Millett would rather identify with French homosexuals than recognize the birth of feminist text by mentioning Woolf. Analyzing Millett's text, Moi interprets what she sees as Millett's rejection of Virginia Woolf as Millett's rejection of all "mother figures" ( 25 ). Millett, says Moi, chooses to use "Jean Genet's texts as representations of a subversive perception of gender roles and politics, but never even mentions women like Edith Warton

and Doris Lessing" ( 25 ). Analyzing Millett's feminist perspective by her response and attention to Woolf in Sexual Politics, Moi uses her reader's prior knowledge of Woolf and the importance of Woolf's early anti-patriarchal works to her advantage.

Similarly, in her discussion of Mary Ellmann's Thinking About Women , Moi lists Ellmann's favorites among modern women writers and specifically notes the absence of Woolf's name in Ellmann's list: "Since Ellmann's own favorites among modern women writers are Dorothy Richardson, Ivy Compton-Burnett and Nathalie Sarraute ( but oddly enough not Virginia Woolf ), we can see where her distaste for authority and also of traditional realism takes her" ( 34 ). Moi's listing of Ellmann's favorites followed by her parenthetical "( but oddly enough not Virginia Woolf )" establishes another polarity, very similar to the one she constructed in her discussion of Millett, only this time she is balancing Woolf at one end of the equation and Ellmann's choice of Richardson, Burnett, and Sarraute at the other end. Ellmann aligns herself with Richardson, Burnett, and Sarraute as Millett aligned herself with French homosexuals. Moi prefers Virginia Woolf.

Woolf is Moi's measuring rod and her scale. It is interesting to note the position Woolf maintains in Moi's argument. As "mother and sister" of feminist criticism, Woolf is supple, both complex and flexible enough to represent feminist issues. Woolf is the author of the one text that is representative of all feminist texts. With textual references to Woolf and A Room of One's Own, Moi presents the views of both Millett and Ellmann against a backdrop created by her references to Woolf. According to Moi, Millett's and Ellmann's responses to Woolf determine their relative places in feminist criticism.

Moi's discussion of Elaine Showalter, in "Introduction: Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist readings of Woolf," particularly exemplifies the close collaborative relationship Moi has with Woolf in Sexual Textual Politics. In her discussion of Elaine Showalter's reading of A Room of One's Own, Moi alligns herself so closely with Woolf that she criticises Showalter's detachment by asserting: "remaining detached from the narrative strategies of Room is equivalent to not reading it at all" ( 3 ). Moi points out that

Showalter reads Woolf's concept of androgyny to be a "flight away from a 'troubled feminism'" and that Showalter reads Woolf's use of multiple personalities as distracting and impersonal. Moi quotes Showalter's description of Room, "The entire book is teasing, sly, elusive in this way; Woolf plays with her audience, refusing to be entirely serious, denying any earnest or subversive intention." As Moi points out, Showalter claims in A Literature of Their Own that the only way a feminist can read Room is to remain "detached from its narrative strategies" ( 3 ). That means the only way Showalter can read Room is, according to Moi, not reading at all. While Showalter in A Literature of Their Own rejects Woolf, Moi in Sexual Textual Politics rescues Woolf.

The relationship Moi establishes with Woolf by discounting Showalter's reading of Woolf is an important part of her argumentative strategy. While, as noted before, Moi's objective "is to illuminate the relationship between feminist critical readings and the often unconscious theoretical and political assumptions that inform them," another, perhaps less obvious goal may be to illuminate the close relationship of Moi and Woolf ( 1 ).

Showalter, Moi says, determined that "Woolf's greatest sin against feminism is that 'even in the moment of expressing feminist conflict, Woolf wanted to transcend it. Her wish for experience was really a wish to forget experience'" ( 2 ). Moi summarily dismisses Showalter's reading. While Showalter considers A Room of One's Own to be "'teasing, sly, elusive in this way; Woolf plays with her audience, refusing to be entirely serious, denying any earnest or subversive intention,'" Moi sees Showalter as being more impatient with A Room of One's Own because of its "formal and stylistic features than by the ideas (Showalter) extrapolates as its content" (3). Asserting that Showalter's theoretical framework is never made clear in A Literature of Their Own, Moi points out that the traditional humanism Showalter and others represent is "in effect part of patriarchal ideology" ( 8 ). Defining effective feminist writing in terms of a "powerful personal expression of personal experience," a "'coherent attempt to create new models, new images of women,'" and a "'truthful picture of women'" is too limiting ( 5 ). The autonomous,

seamless, unified self, Moi argues, creates the image of the phallic self, self-contained and powerful. Moi's appeal appears to be selfless; her heading announces, "Rescuing Woolf for feminist politics: some points towards an alternative reading" ( 11 ).

To rescue Woolf from Showalter's critical and theoretical perspective, Moi introduces an alternative reading, making a series of interpretive statements, always speaking for Woolf: "Woolf . . . seems to practice what we might now call a 'deconstructive' form of writing . . . . Woolf exposes the way language refuses to be pinned down to an underlying essential meaning . . . Woolf rejects the metaphysical essentialism underlying patriarchal ideology, which hails God, the father or the phallus as its transcendental signified . . . . For Woolf, as for Freud, unconscious drives and desires constantly exert a pressure on our conscious thoughts and actions" (8-10). Thus Moi appears to be motivated by her concerns both for Virginia Woolf and for feminist politics.

But while Moi's rescue of Woolf appeared to be a selfless foray into Showalter's territory, her introduction of both Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva evidences another motive. Entangling alliances compromise, and Moi's alliances with a combination of Derridean and Kristevan theory move her discussion out of the sphere of consciousness raising into the field of debate. According to Moi, Showalter's specific reading strategies inform her interpretation of Woolf's text. Showalter's recommendations to read while remaining detached from the narrative strategies of text misrepresent the very activity of reading. Showalter's interpretation of Woolf's text is faulty because her recommended reading strategy "is equivalent to not reading at all" ( 10 ). Julia Kristeva, on the other hand, knows how to read Woolf. Kristeva believes that there is a specific practice of writing that is itself revolutionary, that defies the so-called rational or logical form of writing. Virginia Woolf broke from conventional writing techniques and Showalter's reaction was to remove herself from Woolf's text while Kristeva's reaction was to immerse herself in Woolf's text, accepting both its 'spasmodic force' and its rejection of binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity. "For it is only through an examination of the

detailed strategies of the text on all its levels that we will be able to uncover some of the conflicting, contradictory elements that contribute to make it precisely this text, with precisely these words and this configuration" ( 10 ). Introducing Julia Kristeva, Moi neatly fills the void created by Showalter's detached, "non-reading" of Woolf. The conflict between Showalter and Woolf, as Moi conceptualizes it, allows her both to reveal a void and to stimulate her audience's interest. So when Moi introduces Kristeva to her audience it is because she must just at that moment fill the void. As Moi says, "Kristeva's feminism echoes the position taken up by Virginia Woolf some sixty years earlier" ( 13 ).

Moi's rhetorical question in the first pages of Sexual Textual Politics provides her with an entrance into her discussion of feminist theorists. When she says she aims to rescue Woolf, she reveals her own perspective of feminist criticism and she encourages the sympathy of her audience. Her references to Woolf juxtaposed with the various interpretations made of both Woolf's life and her writing provide Moi with a way to compare and contrast contemporary feminists and their writing, with Woolf and her writing. Moi mediates between Woolf and others, acting as Woolf's spokeswoman. Moi identifies herself with Woolf in Sexual Textual Politics and, in some respects, that identification provides her with Woolf's authority. It is as if Virginia Woolf had an arm around Toril Moi giving her support. Toril Moi rescued Woolf for feminist criticism; however, Virginia Woolf provided the impetus for Moi's argument and Moi's references to Woolf supported her argument. After a close reading of Sexual Textual Politics -- in some respects -- it is difficult to determine who finally rescued whom.

Reading Moi's conclusions, that Julia Kristeva's feminism echoes the position that Virginia Woolf took some sixty years earlier, sounds like yet another echo as we remember E.M. Forster's remarks on Woolf and her work in Virginia Woolf. As the plant that "pushes up suckers all over the place, through the gravel of the front drive, and even through the flagstones of the kitchen yard," Forster's Woolf is a strong verdant growth resisting classification ( 4 ). Winifred Holtby's view of Woolf as a falcon reveals a similar

indestructible vitality; and, although Mayer thought her impractical, Woolf nevertheless appears in Mayer's account as extraordinary. These sometimes conflicting views of Virginia Woolf combined represent her as extraordinary and indestructible, pushing through everywhere. Certainly not a bad description, and one I think is apt.

Virginia Woolf wrote both prose and poetry, both non-fiction and fiction; she was both a creative writer and a politically conscious reporter. She left a wealth of beautifully crafted observations and comments that continue to be immensely quotable and influential. She wrote all kinds of books as she exercised what she considered to be the greatest freedom of all, "the freedom to think of things in themselves" (39). Feminist critics today use Woolf's vocabulary to continue the feminist conversation which she entered early in her life and consistently influenced as she long as she lived and wrote. Her influence did not stop with her death; the texts she left as well as her own life experience are remembered. Woolf wrote, "For books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately" ( 84). Books do have a way of influencing each other, and Virginia Woolf's books in particular have a way of influencing the writing of feminist critics.

Many good books, including those I have mentioned in this paper, have been written since Virginia Woolf wrote in A Room of One's Own that "good books are desirable and that good writers, even if they show every variety of human depravity, are still good human beings. Thus when I ask you to write more books I am urging you to do what will be for your good and for the good of the world at large" ( 114 ). It is interesting to note how many of the the good feminist books that have been written since A Room of One's Own draw upon Virginia Woolf and her text for both support and inspiration. She is literally pushing through everywhere. Certainly not all feminists agree on how Woolf should be read or considered; however, Virginia Woolf didn't call for books to be written in the image of her own. In her peroration in A Room of One's Own she said, "Ought not education to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities . . . Above all, you must illuminate your own soul" ( 91 -93 ). True to her request, answering her call for

books, feminists are writing, although they are not always agreeing. Moers, Spacks, Showalter and Moi all evoked Virginia Woolf and her text early in their own books as a means of entering the ongoing feminist conversation and then continued to use references to her to develop their own arguments. While their discussions often found fault with earlier feminist texts, including Woolf's, they did all agree that Woolf is a valuable resource. And as long as Virginia Woolf is mentioned, is remembered, is used for both support and inspiration -- is used as the natural resource she is -- she will continue to live. What Virginia Woolf liked simply was life and she does live in Literary Women, The Female Imagination, A Literature of Their Own, Sexual Textual Politics and a host of other good books.

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