

615169558

UV - UFS

BLOEMFONTEIN

BIBLIOTEEK - LIBRARY

INDIE EKSTENSIER MAG ONDER  
N. VERANDIGHEDE UIT DIE  
BIBLIOTEEK VERWYDER WORD NIE

University Free State



34300003818816

Universiteit Vrystaat

# Writing for Equality: A Comparative Study of the Writings of Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf on the Status of Women

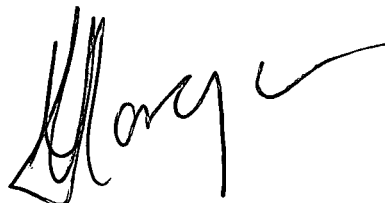
Yvette Margaret Morgan

Supervisor: Prof. M. M. Raftery

This Dissertation has been submitted in accordance with the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in the Faculty of the Humanities (Department of English and Classical Languages) at the University of the Free State.

I declare that the dissertation hereby submitted by me for the Master of Arts degree at the University of the Free State is my own independent work and has not previously been submitted by me to another university/faculty. I furthermore cede copyright of the dissertation in favour of the University of the Free State.

Submission of corrected version: 10 August 2007

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Y. Morgan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

I dedicated this thesis to my parents who taught me, from a young age, the importance of education, questioning dogmas and making my own decisions about life. Thank you for giving me a 'room of my own' in which not only this thesis, but many other works have been created. Many thanks for your constant encouragement and support, without you, I could never have done it.

Thank you to my sister who also provided me with encouragement, support and love.

Many thanks to Prof. Raftery who, in my honours year, opened up a chapter of history that had not only been left out of text books, but also my own schooling. Thank you too for your hard work in helping me mould the final version of this dissertation.

I also want to thank Alina Garau for helping me keep my sanity and starting me off on my next educational journey.

Many thanks to God, the Angels and ascended masters who inspired, taught, helped and shouldered me along the way.

In light and love

Yvette Morgan

## **Table of Contents**

Introduction, 1 – 10

Chapter One: Double Standards, 11 – 40

Chapter Two: Women in Society, 41 – 66

Chapter Three: Education, 67 – 94

Chapter Four: The Professions, 95 – 128

Conclusion, 129 – 133

End notes, 134 – 135

Summary, 136

Key Terms, 137

Bibliography, 138 – 149

## Introduction

Feminists have felt for decades that society has been "contaminated by patriarchal ideology" (Moi, 1992:204). This "contamination" has led to the maltreatment and misrepresentation of women. Their stories have been largely omitted from the pages of history yet certain women writers seem to have found a gap through which their lives could be documented and the story of women's reality told. Literature, like history, has traditionally denied women the opportunity to enter the field, and those who did manage to break through the limitations placed on them were seldom acknowledged.

As Showalter pointed out almost a generation ago:

Before we can even begin to ask how the literature of women would be different and special, we need to reconstruct its past ...[and] as we recreate the chain of writers in this tradition, the pattern of influence and response from one generation to the next, we can also begin to challenge the periodicity of orthodox literary history, and its enshrined canons of achievement. **It is because we have studied women writers in isolation that we have never grasped the connection between them.** When we go beyond Austen, the Brontës and Eliot, say, to look at ... more of their sister novelists, we can see patterns and phases in the evolution of a female tradition. (1978:35; emphasis mine)

Following Showalter's injunction to "grasp the connection", I have chosen to consider texts by Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 – 1797), Olive Schreiner (1855 – 1920) and Virginia Woolf (1882 – 1941) from an Anglo-American feminist viewpoint as this branch of feminism argues that it is important to see works of literature in the context of their socio-historical circumstances. Anglo-American feminism explores literature

as a "historically grounded enquiry ... [and] probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena" (Showalter, 1977:25). It focuses on the relationship between literature and ideology, examining how the latter colludes with the former, and trying to expose the truths behind the ideology or how it disseminates its false ideals. Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf were gifted, not only as writers but because they were able to stand back, observe and identify the workings of society during their time. While many blindly went along with mainstream thought, these three exposed, questioned and wrote polemically about what they observed of women's lives. As their work focuses predominantly on middle-class women, this band of society has formed the focus of my work. Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf were themselves of this class and their work was aimed at women of this group as they were literate and could be made aware of their circumstances and how they could possibly be changed. As Wollstonecraft writes in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, "I pay particular attention to those in the middle class, because they appear to be in the most natural state" (1792:73). I have also used examples of working-class women as a contrast to show how the two sections of society lived in completely different realities.

Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf were all well aware of the double standards that existed in society with regard to the want of education and the lack of freedom of choice in their lives, as compared to men. Vast differences also existed between what was considered acceptable behaviour for men and women and the laws pertaining to each sex. Double standards between men and women created a gap that could only be closed by the removal of the discrimination. Olive Schreiner believed that the rift between the sexes had started with the Industrial Revolution, which had created a middle class that saw the effete wife as a status symbol, so that it became fashionable to be a "lady of leisure". The three authors, however, saw this kind of woman as a social problem because such behaviour created the idea that women were naturally lazy, frivolous and superficial. It also resulted in the

formation of two very separate and different roles for men and women, along with education that suited those roles. From Wollstonecraft's time to Woolf's, women had little or no control over their public lives as they were thought incapable of handling business affairs, reasoning, or managing their own estates. Thus their fathers or husbands had total command over their destinies and controlled their public and private domains. The enforced reliance of women on their male caretakers created a vicious circle, making them dependent on fathers, husbands, or other custodians for financial support as well (Banks, 1981:34 – 36). Social ideology placed cultural restrictions on women, who were often unaware of the subservient roles they were playing. Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf wanted to make women aware of this and of the world of triviality with which they were surrounding themselves. The three authors castigated women for using their sexual power over men: they saw such behaviour as manipulative and degrading to the female sex as it created a stereotypical image of all women as calculating.

Married and unmarried women both suffered under double standards in society but in very different ways. Married women underwent what Gilbert and Gubar call a "civil death" (1985:289) because they became nonentities under the law once they wed as all their wealth was transferred to their husbands. Until the late 1800s wives had no right to ask for a divorce and they were not entitled to vote until the first quarter of the 1900s. Women literally became slaves to their husbands: once they married they seldom left their homes and they focused much of their energy on pleasing their spouses. Husbands, on the other hand, lived relatively carefree lives, as society did not frown on married men who kept mistresses, drank or gambled – in fact, these were considered manly things to do. Couples frequently married without knowing each other very well and in some cases, little warmth developed between husband and wife (Branca, 1978:163 – 164). Thus while men lived relatively free lives, women were largely confined to in the domestic realm, like damsels in towers. Wollstonecraft and Schreiner believed that many women chose to marry for financial

security and caustically called them “legal parasites” and “sex parasites”. Those that choose not to, or could not marry lived infinitely poorer and lonelier lives, by and large. Spinsters, as they came to be known around the time of the Industrial Revolution when the “Spinning Jenny” was invented and spinning wool became a profession dominated by unmarried women, lived meagre lives (Rowbotham, 1973:1). Spinsters were conceived of as old and on-the-shelf while unmarried men were given the honourable title of bachelor, connoting the status of eligibility.

Stereotypes of women were prevalent in literature, especially in the Victorian era, and were also conveyed in conduct manuals for women. For many centuries, women had been classed as either virginal maidens or immoral whores. These stereotypes escalated as a result of the Industrial Revolution when the construct of the lady of leisure became fashionable. While middle-class ladies spent their time in their homes receiving guests, fawning over fashion or attending society parties, lower-class women were employed in factories and mines or worked as maids, nannies or seamstresses. Middle-class women were constructed as *femmes couvertes* – typified by Coventry Patmore's 1854 poem “The Angel of the House,” which depicts them as sympathetic, unselfish and servile – while lower-class women were constructed as rough, immoral jezebels (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:257 – 258). Literature also portrayed women on either extreme of the scale, giving them no credible role model to inspire them. Manuals on morals and etiquette for women, mostly written by male “experts” on the subject, imparted an idyllic ideal of women and contributed to the double standards for men and women. There were no such prescriptive manuals for men at this time. The popularisation of fictive characters and chauvinistic views on the way women should behave, think, talk, and dress allowed them little autonomy in the way they lived their lives, which contrasted radically with the liberty of men.



Schreiner was especially concerned with the double standards by which prostitutes and their male customers were judged. Under the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864, any woman suspected of selling herself could be arrested and forced to undergo a gynaecological examination. Men, even if caught in the act with a prostitute, were at most fined for their indiscretion (Rowbotham, 1973:52). Having befriended prostitutes in London, Schreiner understood that their destitute situation was due to the unfairness of the situation of women and the lack of education and professional opportunities available to them.

Conduct manuals were highly popular until the early 1900s and encouraged young ladies to become "ideal women" – ideal for men or, in other words subservient, unquestioning and well groomed (Kelly, 1992:33 – 34). Wollstonecraft and Schreiner abhorred male-written conduct books for women as both writers believed them to kindle a chauvinistic image of how women should behave and to reduce women to mere decorative items. Wollstonecraft wrote her own conduct book in which she taught mothers not to encourage triviality in their daughters. She also urged them to educate themselves and raise their daughters to think for themselves, to value education and not to stumble into vices such as going out at night to public places or falling in love with rakes. Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf wanted women to be taken as seriously as their male counterparts, and therefore felt the conduct book's image of women was utterly demeaning. They fought against the (mis)education of women by such manuals, which taught women that their life's purpose was to learn the skills of finding a rich husband, keeping him and raising his children.

Many misogynists from Wollstonecraft's time to Woolf's believed that women were mentally inferior to men and should be taught to live their lives according to their limited capacity. All three writers opposed this sexist thought. Wollstonecraft contested the writings of thinkers such as

Rousseau and Dr Fordyce who believed women to be incapable of virtue; Schreiner's writing argued that women should use their unique talents in productive ways, and Woolf honoured her predecessors in her work, disproving the notion that women have never been able to produce great literary works because they lack the intellect (Turner, 1992:45 – 46). All three depicted the reality and hardships of women's lives. Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, Schreiner's *From Man to Man* and Wollstonecraft's *Mary, a Fiction* all show how women have been undervalued because of their sex and the rigid restrictions that were imposed on their lives. In the early 1900s, roles for women in society started to increase as many men were enlisted to fight in the First World War. Women started to assume more independence, as they did not have husbands either to serve or to depend on. After the war, many women thought of themselves as liberated and rejected the traditional norms for women in their actions, thought and dress. Woolf gives a very perceptive example in *Mrs Dalloway*: Miss Kilman, a post-war feminist with a total disregard for the Victorian social norms of the pre-war period. The situation of women improved after the war as they were considered legal entities, had the opportunity of education and were admitted into a few more professions. Through these women lived slightly more liberal lives than their Victorian predecessors, Woolf urged them to break free from the remaining cultural restrictions. Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf all challenged the narrowness of the domestic concept of women's role in society.

Education was one reason for women's stagnation in their private sphere, as girls were not taught subjects that would help them move beyond their private realm. The notion that girls' education needed to be different from that of boys had been held for hundreds of years as females were considered to be mentally inferior and were not expected to enter the professions or to be taught subjects that would allow them this entrance. For girls, the norm was to study cooking, music, sewing and painting before finding an eligible man to marry (Branca, 1978:171 – 172).

Schreiner and Woolf believed that it was man's greed for power that excluded women from education. All three authors recognised the need to find an equilibrium in the balance of power, rather than to overthrow power, which would make women, in turn, the oppressors. Many women were aware of the inequalities in education as their brothers were sent to school while they were made to stay at home, if fortunate, with a governess. Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf all felt the poignancy of this contrast in education and demonstrated it in their works. In *The Years*, Woolf illustrates how the four Pargiter girls stay at home idly while their brother is shunted from one tutor to the next. Similarly, Wollstonecraft shows in *Mary, a Fiction* how Mary's brother is sent off to school while she is passed on to the maids for care. The three authors believed that naïveté kept women under misogynistic rule and they fought for equal education so that women could gain independence and more social standing. Wollstonecraft had very specific ideas on the education of children, while Schreiner opposed the wretched state of girls' schooling and Woolf advocated equal education on the secondary and especially the tertiary level. All three criticised the superficiality of women's actions, which they attributed to their lack of proper instruction.

Though education for girls continued to improve at a slow pace, the basic goal of marriage was still the major aim for many girls, and their education often simply made them more appealing as potential wives. Thus education for women did not necessarily result in a balance of power in society. One reason why educated ladies turned to marriage was that the professional world was still resolutely closed to them, so that even with a good qualification a woman still had no chance of entering a field in which her husband or brother could practise (Branca, 1978:173). The three writers fought to bring about equal opportunity, using, as part of their argument, the theory that education brings out the similarities rather than the differences between the sexes. Woolf

criticised patriarchal rule for keeping women out of society through poor education and excluding them from prestigious colleges as she felt that this put women at a gross disadvantage and led to their financial and intellectual impoverishment. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf states that the reason women were excluded from education as well as from the professions was male jealousy, petulance and greed for power. She maintains that men wanted to keep their centre of power and retain control of the prestigious careers that might lead to success.

Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf all agreed that the greatest drawback resulting from women's lack of learning was their exclusion from the professions, which cut them off from gaining independence, self-confidence and the right to control their destiny.

In Wollstonecraft and Schreiner's eras, motherhood was seen as the only profession for middle-class ladies. Both tried to inspire women to excel at it through gaining some schooling which they could pass on to their offspring as they were to set the standard for the next generation. Wollstonecraft and Schreiner felt strongly about the education of mothers as they believed it would make them better parents and raise the standard of their nation as a whole as children would be brought up with more morals, manners and a desire for learning.

Wollstonecraft and Schreiner experienced first-hand the uncertainty many women went through as they had little choice but to work as governesses. In this vocation, women seldom had prior knowledge of the family they were to work for or of the way they would be treated. They were unsure of their term of service or of whether they would find another position when it ended. Governesses, even those from well-to-do families, lost their social standing and were never quite on the same level as their peers but always a rank above the rest of the servant body, leaving them in a state of social ambiguity. All three writers were aware of the cultural restrictions imposed on women because of their scant schooling and that they would thus never be able to enter the

professions on the same level as their male counterparts (Berkman, 1989:21 – 23).

From before Wollstonecraft's time, writing had been one of the few professions open to women as it did not require a university qualification or much money to enter. For women, writing was a means of self-expression, even though many had to publish under pseudonyms. It was also a career in which women such as Hannah More, Mary Oxlie and Aphra Behn earned a reasonable living. Women writers, however, wrote under social pressure and endured criticism from misogynistic males. They were kept under strict censorship if their works were published under their own names, or if they were found to be women writing under male pen-names (Barrett, 1979:11 – 12).

Wollstonecraft was inspired by her friend and employer, Joseph Johnson, to write a book of her own. She was delighted when her first novel earned her ten pounds. The realisation that she could write and earn a living from her efforts spurred her on to embark on a literary career (Kelly, 1992:29). Schreiner started writing *The Story of an African Farm* while working as a governess. When it was published, under the pseudonym Ralph Irons, it became a great success in both England and South Africa (Vivan, 1991:20). Woolf found that her literary reviews were enough to keep her financially stable and turned to writing novels only after her marriage. She felt that the lack of a tradition of women writers was a disadvantage for women, as she believed genius was seldom born out of solitary works. She wanted women to remember their predecessors; thus much of her own writing was created to generate such an awareness. All three authors found writing a deeply satisfying career and urged young women to put their own thoughts onto paper.

Wollstonecraft felt that to exclude women with an education from the professions was meaningless and cruel, as many such women aspired to careers. In this respect, she felt that uneducated women were luckier as they lived in blissful ignorance. Wollstonecraft and Schreiner believed that women were natural physicians and had practised the art of healing for centuries. Both maintained that women had an innate talent for making medicines and palliatives for their patients. All three authors felt that the freedom to enter professions of their choosing was paramount to their sex's liberation, equality and freedom.

I have structured this work thematically rather than chronologically as these four themes form strong arguments in all three writers' work. The double standards in society led women to live sheltered lives and for centuries remain in a subordinate position. Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf saw education for women as a way to eradicate this subordination as they believed it would bring about equality between the sexes. With an education, women would be able to join men in the professional arena and thus bring about an equilibrium in society and eliminate double standards.

Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf wrote to bring about social change. Their views were considered radical at the time yet they made no excuse for their words. They were three outstanding women who had much more than gender in common, as they held similar ideas on the double standards in society, the situation of women in society, women's education and professions for women. Given that these three authors lived roughly a century apart from one another, these similarities make a fascinating study. From a feminist perspective it is valuable that they wrote and published their ideas so that we, as readers, can not only understand their feelings on the injustices perpetrated against women in each of their eras, but also gain some insight into the largely unrecorded history of the female gender.

## Chapter One

### Double Standards

"[S]omething has been left out ... merely the private [and sometimes public] lives of one-half of humanity" (Gilbert, 1986:32).

For over three hundred years women have been "forgotten", in history, law, education and the professions, and have been regarded as a silenced group. In the post-war era, when people started to question the status quo of society, Virginia Woolf felt that the acknowledgement and acceptance of women's writing was "of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses" (1928:66). The recognition of women and their writing started the slow progress from subordination to liberation. The penning of their thoughts, feelings and fantasies and the release of their creativity allowed for a communication in society that resonated: "You are not alone". It gave women a mirror in which they could reflect on society or perhaps escape it. Sharing their thoughts with people, via books or pamphlets, gave women the opportunity to use the knowledge of the inequitable treatment they were experiencing and fight for equality under the law, in education and in their private lives. In other words, text inked by women helped other women to gain new insights or perspectives on their lives. Though women have always written, whether they recorded their reflections in diaries and letters or attempted to write books, they have been excluded from the canon, which has caused indignation among feminist critics since the 1970s. The canon, still dominated by white male writers, can be seen as an expression of society. It not only reflects the sexist ideology which still remains, but contributes to sexism as it lacks fair representation of women's literature and creates

the idea that women's literature is of lesser quality or unworthy of canonical accolades.

As the scale of sexual power had lain tilted for over three hundred years, Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf argued that the root of unequal sexual treatment lay in political power, which allowed men to gain control over women's private and public lives. Wollstonecraft believed male writers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau were partly responsible for women's lack of power as they spread the idea that "women have, or ought to have, but little liberty" (1792:155). All three writers scorned women who unquestioningly accepted patriarchal rule, thus colluding with the ruling ideology. They implored unaware women to take control of their lives, grasp independence and realise that, uncontested, society offered them nothing more than an unrealised life in bondage to misogynistic control. The works of these three writers helped to restore the neglected picture of women's lives, as they centred on women's perspectives on the world and on themselves, instead of on men's often distorted, ill-informed or idealised version.

The late 1700s, the era in which Mary Wollstonecraft lived, witnessed the Industrial Revolution, which not only affected industry and technology but also filtered through to every aspect of society. Modernisation, the source of the Industrial Revolution, meant the invention of new life-changing technology. The inventions of the flying shuttle, spinning jenny, water frame and power loom meant that women's lives were made less labour-intensive as they were freed from hours of weaving and carrying water. Though not every household could afford these new devices, they also meant that products could be produced at an increased speed by factories. Bread, milk and clothing were now available on the market. The release from some of the burdens of housework meant that women had less to occupy their time productively (Rowbotham, 1973:xxv). Modernisation not only influenced women's lives but, as Olive Schreiner, who lived a



hundred years after the advent of the Industrial Revolution, writes in *Women and Labour*.

Year by year, month by month and almost hour by hour ... crude muscular force, whether man or beast, sinks continually in its value in the world of human toil; while intellectual power, virility and activity and that culture which leads to the mastery of the inanimate forces of nature, to the invention of machinery, and to that delicate manipulative skill often required in guiding it, becomes ever of greater and greater importance to the race. (1911:42)

As Schreiner observantly points out, industrialisation led to the replacement of human labour by that of machines, forcing people to use their minds in the field of labour, and creating the immediate problem of unemployment. Thus the previously semi-skilled layman had to learn specialised skills while middle-class males enhanced their education to keep up with the times. The Industrial Revolution also caused one of the major rifts between the sexes. Women were effectively made "redundant" in the labour market as job scarcity meant that jobs were reserved for the physically stronger, non-fecundative side of the population. Though jobs were scarce for those men that were not qualified, they still had opportunities to find work. As Schreiner notes,

Whatever the result of modern civilisation may be with regard to the male, he certainly cannot complain that [modern society has] ... robbed him of his fields of labour, diminished his share in the conduct of life or reduced him to a condition of morbid inactivity. (1911:49)

While men were forced to learn to use new machines and thrust into being educated on various levels, women were left, for the most part, labourless and uneducated. What kept them busy, it seems, were babies. According to Branca,

Increased food production was the basic ingredient that sustained massive population growth. Agricultural breakthroughs such as the introduction of the potato and other root crops enabled the majority of people to raise their standard of living above the pre-industrial subsistence level. Among the most important benefits of the agricultural innovations were improved diets which were both regular and more nutritious. Nutritional changes altered the female's life cycle [and fertility] markedly. (1978:85)

While men were acquiring training, “‘modern civilisation’ [has] tended to rob [women], not merely in part but almost wholly of the more valuable of [their] ancient domain of productive and social labour” (Schreiner, 1911:50). Left without brewing-vat or hoe, women lost what little financial independence and self-worth they had gained from selling the beer or goods which many had traditionally produced. Owing to their increased fertility, they became almost wholly occupied with their offspring. The Industrial Revolution thus created a shift in power which disrupted the status quo, job equality and division of labour which men and women had shared in pre-industrial times. It reduced the power and status of women and further tipped the scales of control towards men, who seized their dominance over women by creating laws and ideologies that ensured the subjection of the “weaker sex”.

Another shift created by the Industrial Revolution was in the arena of class. The middle-class mushroomed with the success of tradesmen and factory owners. Capitalist entrepreneurs became *nouveau riche* and “decorously [imitated] what they believed to be the manners of the aristocracy, furnishing their parlours with ornate bric-a-brac [and] dressing their women in expensively complicated costumes” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:284). As it meant wealth and status, the *nouveau riche* wife was not only indulged with clothes but with servants, cooks and nursemaids. The sexual division of labour in the middle class thus transposed itself to education (male) and leisure-related (female) roles. Wollstonecraft saw how society was creating a breed of women who lived in a state of “blind obedience; but, ... blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists [who] are in the right when they endeavour to keep women in the dark, because the former only want slaves, and the latter a play-thing” (1792:90). According to Wollstonecraft, the absolute dependence of women on men – whether wives, daughters or mothers, married or otherwise – created a culture of women, who were false, obsessed with keeping up appearances and keeping in favour with whoever maintained them in the style to

which they had become accustomed. As Shaw comments, "Many of [Wollstonecraft's] arguments are aimed at demonstrating that society has constructed a false and degraded model of femininity" (1998:124). Wollstonecraft writes, "Everything [a woman] sees or hears serves to fix impressions, call forth emotions, and associate ideas, that give a sexual character to the mind" (1792:178). Wollstonecraft branded women of this type as nothing more than "legal prostitutes" as they trade their coquettish selves for financial security in marriage. In *Women and Labour*, Schreiner too traces "the Woman Problem" back to Wollstonecraft's days and blames the Industrial Revolution for creating a class of women which she, like Wollstonecraft, scathingly calls "sex parasites". Schreiner claims, "social conditions tend to rob [women] of all forms of active, conscious, social labour, and reduce her, like the field-tick, to the passive exercise of her sex functions alone" (1911:78). Schreiner points out this relationship in *The Story of an African Farm* as Lyndall remarks to Waldo:

Look at this little chin of mine, Waldo, with the dimple in it. It is but a small part of my person; but though I had knowledge of all things under the sun, and the wisdom to use it, and the deep loving heart of an angel, it would not stead me through life like this little chin. I can win money with it, I can win love; I can win power with it, I can win fame. What would knowledge help me? The less a woman has in her head the lighter she is for climbing. I once heard an old man say, that he never saw intellect help a woman so much as a pretty ankle. (1896:198 – 199)

With these words, Lyndall exposes the double bind in which women were caught because of the double standards that prevailed in society. Schreiner was influenced by Wollstonecraft's idea that women "sold" themselves to men for financial security. Powerless under the law, deprived of education and barred from the professions, women had little chance to better themselves. They were left with almost no choice but to harness the one weapon which could assure them of some standing in society. As much as Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf abhorred the reality, women were assessed on their looks, men on their intelligence. Indeed, intelligence and thought were disadvantageous to a woman who wanted to gain a husband. Schreiner reflects on this inequity in *Women and Labour*.

It is not the man of the strong arm, but the man of the long purse, who unduly and artificially dominates the sexual world today ... whenever in the modern world woman is wholly or partially dependent for her means of support on exercise of sexual functions, she is dependent more or less on the male's power to support her in their exercise, and her freedom of choice is practically so far absolutely limited. Probably three-fourths of the sexual unions in our modern European societies, whether in the illegal or recognised legal forms, are dominated by or largely influenced by the sex purchasing power of the male. (1911:240)

Woolf picks up on this reality in *A Room of One's Own* as she writes that, in earning an income, "I need not flatter any man; he has nothing to give me" (1928(a):39). Woolf recognised the financial hold men had over women, which was the reason she, Wollstonecraft and Schreiner argued for women's access to education and entry into the professions on a par with men.

Through Lyndall's words, Schreiner also touches on another issue, which Woolf explores in *A Room of One's Own*: men feel threatened by women's intellect and possible encroachment on the power they hold over women. Woolf claims that men have a need to think women inferior as it inflates their egos. In *A Room of One's Own*, she argues:

Without self-confidence we are as babes in the cradle. And how can we generate this imponderable quality, which is yet so invaluable most quickly? By thinking that other people are inferior to oneself. By feeling that one has some innate superiority – it may be wealth, or rank, a straight nose, or a portrait of a grandfather by Romney – for there is no end to the pathetic devices of the human imagination – over other people. Hence the enormous importance to a patriarch who has to conquer, who has to rule, of feeling that great numbers of people, half the human race indeed, are by nature inferior to himself. It must indeed be one of the chief sources of his power ... Napoleon and Mussolini both insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge. (1928(a):36 – 37)

Lyndall offers a bleak response to the root of the misogynistic control which devalues and enslaves women when she says, "she must be trodden down or go with it; and if she is wise she goes" (1896:200). Schreiner and Woolf identified the core of the problem between the

sexes – men need power, thus they dominate and subjugate women to bolster their power and ego. As Schreiner writes in *Women and Labour*:

The woman who contributes to the support of her family by giving legal opinions will less desire motherhood than she who in the past contributed to the support of her household by bending on hands and knees over her grindstone, or scrubbing floors, and that the former should be less valued by man than the latter – these are suppositions which it is difficult to regard as consonant with any knowledge of human nature and the laws by which it is dominated.  
(1911:230)

Schreiner affirms the threat men felt from the prospect of women entering the professions, proving their mental capacity and gaining financial and personal independence, thus endangering male status and power. As in any despotic society, the dominated are kept powerless through lack of control over any sphere of their lives, making them effectively dependent on the dominator. Wollstonecraft believed that man has "... from the remotest antiquity, found it convenient to exert his strength to subjugate his companion" (1792:92). All three women recognised the anxiety that men felt about women entering the professions as it meant that they would lose their control over the professional world. In *Women and Labour*, Schreiner concluded that "[the] male who opposes the entrance of woman into the trade or profession in which he more or less holds a monopoly, would oppose with equal, and perhaps with greater bitterness, the opening of its doors to numbers of his own sex ... to retain as much as possible for the ego" (1911:274). As a result, women were left ineffective objects in society. In *Women and Labour*, Schreiner exposes the bind women were in by constructing an example which exposes the state of inequality in society to show her readers that what they take to be "normal" is actually a phallocentric vision of the world. Schreiner claims that man

... depends mainly on his power for procuring the sex relation he desires, not on his power of winning and retaining personal affection, but, [sic] on the purchasing power of his possessions as compared to the poverty of the females of his society ... [and he fears] any social change which [gives] to the woman a larger economic

independence and therefore greater freedom of sexual choice .... A subtle and profound instinct warns him, that with the increased intelligence and economic freedom of woman [sic], he ... might ultimately be left sexually companionless; the undesirable, the residuary, male old-maids. (1911:241 – 242)

Without any hope of gaining an education equal to that of their male counterparts or entering a profession which would grant them financial security of their own, women had to rely on their male “caretakers”, to allow them a certain future. As most men felt threatened by an intelligent woman, she had to trap her husband with her fine features rather than her firm mind. Sandra Gilbert’s analogy of Western patriarchy quite pertinently represents the situation of women until the latter part of the twentieth century – ousted and impoverished, their power over their private and public lives effectively diminished to a controllable or silenced state (1986:33). Gilbert writes that the patrimony of Western culture “was a grand ancestral property that educated men had inherited from their intellectual forefathers, while the female relatives, like characters in a Jane Austen novel, were relegated to the most modest dower houses on the edge of the estate” (1986:33).

The eighteenth century operated within a legal system in which “women were held to different standards of behaviour than men and were punished more severely for departing from those standards” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:75). A young unmarried woman could not own or inherit any property. Though a widow was allowed a portion of her deceased husband’s estate, neither she nor any other woman (unmarried, married or widowed) could make a will at the time. A married woman was considered a non-entity under the law as she was incorporated into her husband’s person. As a wife, a woman had no right to request a divorce, while her husband was free to apply for one on grounds as shaky as suspicion of infidelity. If divorced, a woman had no privileges with respect to her children as they lawfully belonged to her husband. Until 1891, husbands could imprison their wives in the house, rendering a woman literally a slave to her spouse (Gilbert and

Gubar, 1985:76). Lack of power over their private and public spheres of life meant that women were at the mercy of their male guardians, with little or no control over their own destinies.

As a follower of Enlightenment Theory<sup>1</sup>, Mary Wollstonecraft believed in the basic human rights of men and extended these to women. She thus supported the idea of the private and legal equality of men and women, which she hoped would equalise the disparity between the treatment of the two sexes. Wollstonecraft created the tale *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*, which shows just how legally incapacitated women were. Through the main character, Maria, she also explores the emotional and autonomous debilitation women suffered as a result of their subjectivity. As Maria warns her infant daughter, to be "born a woman is to be born to suffer" (1976:155). Schreiner's character Lyndall, in *The Story of an African Farm*, uses similar words: "We are cursed, Waldo, born cursed from the time our mothers bring us into the world till the shrouds are put on us" (1896:198). Maria's husband at first seems to her "an advocate for liberty" (1976:156) but turns out to be a subjugating brute. Almost every example of victimisation is applied to Maria and despite her husband's acts of adultery, extortion, kidnapping and even an attempt to prostitute her to a friend, he is seen in the eyes of the law as her guardian and protector. Through *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*, Wollstonecraft gives an example of how virtually powerless women in the 1700s were. Perhaps not a literary masterpiece, the book is influential for its symbolic message. It can be seen as a novel in which the main character is disillusioned with life. As for many women, marriage "had bastilled [her] for life" (1976:155). She can be seen as the collective representation of women as she "feel[s] acutely the various ills [her] sex [is] fated to bear" (1976:178). The novel exposes the extent to which women were treated as inferior to men and underlines the political and philosophical messages of Wollstonecraft's non-fiction works in perhaps a more palatable way for readers of her day, making them aware of the double standards which prevailed under the law as well as in the home.

One cannot entirely blame women for their behaviour at this time. Barred from adequate education, decent professions, ownership of property and inheritance, they had little choice. Wollstonecraft echoed the unfair situation of unmarried women, which she highlighted in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and again in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft thought the unnatural distinction that a woman was not able to own property or benefit, as an unmarried person, from her family's wealth was grossly unfair.

In this milieu women were seen and depicted as helpless, polished ladies of leisure whose obligations in life were to bear heirs and please their husbands. Wollstonecraft's *Mary, a Fiction* typifies this stereotype of women in Mary's mother, who spends her time in bed feigning some illness, in front of her mirror adorning herself, or reading sensational novels. The novel exposes the multiple double standards that were pervasive in society and traces the causes of women's condition to their roots. It shows how from childhood, boy children were treated as superior to girl children as they were the family heirs. Mary's brother is given a tutor so that he may gain a little learning before entering school while Mary's parents are not concerned enough about her future to find her a governess and carelessly pass her on to the servants, who teach her how to read. *Mary, a Fiction* can be seen as defying Rousseau's statement that women are incapable of thought as the character transcends her situation and illustrates Wollstonecraft's own opinion that "genius will educate itself" (1994:253). Though society is at odds with her, Mary manages to acquire an education. She is endowed with a "wonderful quickness in discerning distinctions and combining ideas" (1976:45) and teaches herself a little theology, metaphysics and medicine. She has no interest in fashion, gossip or other mindless preoccupations. Thus Wollstonecraft creates a character unlike most literary heroines of the time, who is intellectually capable,



compassionate toward her friends and deeply religious, as Wollstonecraft herself was. *Mary, a Fiction*, like *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*, shows how women were held to wholly different standards from men. It is precisely these different standards and patriarchal domination that, roughly a century later, Schreiner writes about in *The Story of an African Farm*. Though Lyndall talks about being fettered by the lack of freedom for women, she has been hailed as “the first wholly serious feminist heroine in the English novel” (Showalter, 1977:199). In a conversation with Em, she asserts, “I am not in so great a hurry to put my neck beneath any man’s foot” (1896:193). Lyndall realises from an early age that the rules by which men and women operate in society are entirely different. In this way the political system maintained patriarchal control.

Many eras of chauvinistic thinking have littered society’s collective consciousness. Innumerable works by male “thinkers” containing belittling, degrading, chauvinistic remarks and opinions on women have filtered down into the psyche of society. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft held Dr Gregory responsible for ideas that “render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society” (1792:87). She also criticised Rousseau for his sexist belief that “women ought to be weak and passive, because [they have] less bodily strength than a man” and for inferring that a woman was “formed to please and to be subject to [man] and that it is her duty to render herself agreeable to her master” (1792:92). By exposing and contradicting these kinds of misogynistic thought, which belittled women, Wollstonecraft hoped to show how wrong such thinking was.

Though Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando, a Biography* has been dismissed by well-known critics of the time, like Arnold Bennett and David Daiches, as a “frivolous”, “farcical” novel (Barrett, 1979:55), it reveals many truths about the position of women and contrasts the ways in which men and women have been treated from the Renaissance onwards.

As Rosenthal maintains, "Orlando mocks all the anti-feminist canards Woolf loathed: the inability of [women] to write, think, enjoy each other's company, or want anything more out of life than the love signified by the respectable marriage" (1979:138). Woolf cleverly created a character born in the Renaissance who lives through all the historical periods up to the Modern. Like *A Room of One's Own*, *Orlando, a Biography* traces the history of literature and women's situation, but within the realm of narrative. Woolf uses this "silly novel" ( as a very powerful showcase for exemplifying chauvinistic opinions of women and the double standards which have existed through the ages. "Woolf's playfulness, then, does not mean secondariness or unseriousness, but is a necessary detachment and disguise, a deliberate narrative politics by which she can express what she otherwise prohibits herself" (Minow-Pinkney, 1987:120). The narrative of the book takes the form of a biography, allowing Woolf to distance herself from the text. In *Orlando, a Biography*, Woolf not only follows Wollstonecraft and Schreiner in criticising the frivolity of women, but also criticises society for the duality with which women were treated. The biographer quotes Lord Chesterfield as saying: "Women are but children of a larger growth ... A man of sense only trifles with them, plays with them and flatters them" (1928(b):197), which exemplifies the feeling toward women at the time. Woolf exposes, through Orlando, the stereotypes of women which were sustained by men. Sardonicly the biographer writes: "She was becoming a little more modest, as women are, of her brains and a little more vain, as women are, of her person" (1928(b):170). In her female state Orlando gives the reader a deep, unquestionable picture of the disparity between the sexes as chauvinistic comments and ironies fill the text. One scene which exemplifies the degraded state of women in society shows how, after being beaten at a mere game of Loo by Orlando, the Archduke breaks down completely in front of her. Later, after his male ego has been shattered by his loss and breakdown, he consoles himself by saying: "She was, after all, only a woman" (1928(b):167). As Orlando becomes used to the idea of being a woman, she starts to adopt typical Victorian mannerisms. To my mind the most farcical incident

exposing the ridiculous extent of women's sensibility is when Orlando goes for a walk and breaks her ankle. For, at this moment, she fully embraces the mentality of the frail Victorian waif as she lies on the ground, melodramatically recounting her life in anticipation of death. She soliloquises: "My hands shall wear no wedding ring ... I have sought happiness through many ages and not found it; fame and missed it; love and not known it; life – and behold, death is better" (1928(b):224). As she awaits her death, or symbolically the "death" of her existence as an independent woman (Minow-Pinkney, 1987:136), Orlando's hero arrives on horseback: "'Madam ... you're hurt!' 'I'm dead sir!'", she replies, and "[a] few minutes later, they became engaged" (1928(b):225). This piece pokes fun at the fickleness of Victorian women but highlights a more serious issue. It shows how society expected men and women to behave according to their sexual typecasting – men to be ever chivalrous and strong, women to enact their role as passive, weak damsels. As a woman, "Orlando hides her manuscripts" (1928(b):289) – yet another example of how she acts in comparison to the male Orlando, who proudly showed his work to others. By deconstructing gender roles in *Orlando, a Biography*, Woolf shows this adoption of gendered characteristics to be learned and culturally bound and thus affirms that men and women are fundamentally the same but take on gender roles owing to the influence of society. "The novel itself tries to destroy the illusions that adhere to our notion of the different sexes" (Sprague, 1971:105).

Woolf thus shows the difference between Orlando's behaviour as a man and as a woman. In so doing, she sums up male and female stereotypes into one character and shows how society responds to each sex. As her biographer notes, as a woman, Orlando gains "modesty as to her writing, ... vanity as to her person, ... fears for her safety" (1928(b):245) – all of which is considered female behaviour and judged as inferior to the male traits she previously exhibited. As a man, for all his sexual indiscretions, Orlando is considered nothing but "rich [and] handsome ... [N]o one could have been received with greater acclamation than he was" (1928(b):31). According to the

narrator, physical differences create altered behaviour. Orlando experiences sexual differences

... almost stereotypically. Orlando's manliness involves nonchalance about clothes, impatience with household matters, bold and reckless activity. Her womanly disposition involves a lack of male formality and desire for power, 'tears on slight provocation', [and] weakness in mathematics. (Minow-Pinkney, 1987:131)

Orlando is squeezed into society's mould of womanliness. As Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm* points out, "We fit into our sphere as a Chinese woman's foot fits her shoe<sup>2</sup>, exactly" (1896:189).

Another aspect of physical difference between men and women in the novel is clothing. Clothes form a strong symbolic element. For Woolf, clothing is a powerful symbol of sex and sexual inequality. For Orlando's nocturnal adventures, she sheds the bondage of her female clothing and dons the freedom of a man's garb, along with all the liberty associated with being a man. In the confinement of women's clothing, the biographer describes Orlando as

... dragged down by the weight of the crinoline which she had submissively adopted. It was heavier and more drab than any dress she had yet worn. None had ever impeded her movements. No longer could she stride through the garden with her dogs, or run lightly to the high mound and fling herself beneath the oak. Her skirts collected damp leaves and straw. The plumed hat tossed in the breeze. The thin shoes were quickly soaked and mud-caked. (1928(b):220 - 221)

Not only are these Victorian clothes physically restrictive; on a symbolic level they show how society itself restrained women from the liberty of physical and intellectual movement: just as Orlando's skirt and shoes hinder her freedom of movement, so society debarred women from private and public development through its laws and misogynistic mentality. In *Orlando, a Biography*, Woolf uses the symbolism of clothing extensively to show how "clothes wear us and not we them" (1928(b):168). Minow-Pinkney points out: "As the biographer reflects later, clothes alone define as male or female the individual person" (1987:132). As a woman, Orlando escapes from the

limitations of her sex when she puts on men's clothing for her nightly excursions. It went unquestioned for a man to go out alone at night, but was not even contemplated for a woman. By doing this, Woolf allows us to examine the sexual double standards that have prevailed in society through the ages. Just as Orlando retreats into long periods of sleep which can be seen as a cocooning or healing process, readers are obliged to consider their own position and behaviour and those of the opposite sex in their own society.

The latter half of the 1700s saw the emergence of the novel as the middle-class developed into a reading audience of ladies eager to pass their time. As mentioned before, Mary's mother in *Mary, a Fiction* can be seen as the epitome of the middle-class woman of fashion who – when not absorbed by her looking-glass – finds reading the “most delightful substitute for bodily dissipation” (1976:155). According to Showalter, women were “[d]enied participation in public life ... forced to cultivate their feelings and to overvalue romance” (1978:79). The rise of the novel and the growing readership of upper- and middle-class women also promoted the rise of women writers. Many of these writers were affronted by chauvinistic criticism and comments like that made by John Gregory: “My ideal woman is one who can write but doesn't” (Browne, 1987:134). Most hid behind pseudonyms, as it allowed them to keep writing and be published – it was their silent independence. Many women writers have been criticised for using pseudonyms but, for most, it was a trap they could not escape. Schreiner's publishers refused to publish *The Story of an African Farm* under her own name as they considered it too scandalous in content to put forward as written by a woman (First and Scott, 1980:83). Schreiner, though, had a loftier reason for using a pen name. She initially published it under the pseudonym Ralph Irons, explaining in her diary: “I should like each book to be brought out under a new name so that it got no help from its forerunners, and stood or fell alone” (Rive, 1987:41). In other words, just as women used pseudonyms to escape the criticism reserved for women writers, Schreiner felt a work

should be judged on its artistic value rather than by the fame or sex of the writer. Woolf exposes the spurious claims men have made about women not being able to write fine, much less great fiction. It came as a shock to society that *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Middlemarch* were all written by women. Exposing the desperate irony in society, Woolf writes: "Such is the inconceivable licence of the profession of letters that any daughter of an educated man may use a man's name – say George Eliot or George Sand – with the result that an editor or publisher, unlike the authorities in Whitehall, can detect no difference in the scent or savour of a manuscript, or even know for certain whether the writer is married or not" (1928(a):163 – 164). As Showalter writes: "Through the 1850s and 1860s there was a great increase in theoretical and specific criticism. Hardly a journal failed to publish an essay on women's literature; hardly a critic failed to express himself upon its innate and potential qualities" (1978:74). With such prejudice against women writers, it is hardly surprising that women wanted to dodge such precalculated criticism. Showalter puts it aptly: "The theories of female aptitude for the novel tended to be patronizing, if not downright insulting" (1978:82).

By the Victorian era, the novel was a "very popular and saleable commodity ... a major part of the Victorian entertainment industry" (Banks, 1981:156). Not as worldly as today's reader, many Victorian women got caught up in the "cult of sensibility" that the sensational novels of the time propounded. Three-decker novels and shilling monthly magazines, which published stories in series, formed a new hub in the entertainment world. Circulating libraries ensured a fresh and inexpensive stock of novels for the reading public (Shaw, 1998:160). Novels like Richardson's *Pamela* had storylines which swept readers away on a sentimental roller-coaster – conceivably as most "soap operas" or sensational novels do these days. Wollstonecraft, however, chided women for taking these "flimsy works" seriously. Wollstonecraft's conduct-style book of manners, contrary to other manuals at the time, encouraged mothers to educate their

daughters as they would their sons and to steer them away from frivolous pastimes. Wollstonecraft felt that most pastimes, such as visiting the theatre, playing cards or reading three-decker novels, as most other conduct manuals prescribed, not only led to "erroneous opinions" of life but also "corrupt[ed] their [readers'] taste and enticed women with improbable fantasies worked up in their 'stale tales' and meretricious scenes" (1995:301). Women, especially young ones, were taught "to look for happiness in love, refine their sensual feelings, and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion which leads them to neglect the duties of life, and frequently in the midst of these sublime refinements they plump into actual vice" (1995:278).

Wollstonecraft, often labelled "anti-feminist", wanted a "revolution of female manners" (1995:281) so that the gap between the stereotypes of "sentimental women" and "logical, straight-thinking men" could be closed. Wollstonecraft realised that one of the ways to create equality and eradicate the disparity between the sexes was to encourage women to stop behaving in a way which made them seem weak, overly emotional maidens, probably modelled on those who featured in the sensational novels.

Wollstonecraft targeted misogynistic writers who espoused the idea that women are both mentally and physically weaker than men. Writers such as James Fordyce, Lord Chesterfield and Dr John Gregory were reproved for their "pernicious ... books in which [they] insidiously degrade the sex whilst they are prostrate before their personal charms" (1995:293). In particular, Wollstonecraft criticised Rousseau's *Emile*. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft copied long passages from *Emile* and interspersed caustic commentary about Rousseau's female character, Sophie. Rousseau aimed to create the perfect female character, whom he described as having the kind of dress which is

... extremely modest in appearance, and yet very coquettish in fact: she does not make a display of her charms, she conceals them; but in concealing them, she knows how to affect your imagination ... while you are near her, your eyes

and affections wander all over her person ... all her virtues and qualities ... [have made her] accustomed to submission – ‘your husband will instruct you in good time’. (1792:161)

Wollstonecraft thought this character typified the phallogocentric ideal of the domestic plaything whose only desire in life was “to render herself agreeable to [men]” (1995:276). Schreiner also protested against this image of women, claiming in *Women and Labour* that a woman’s submissiveness was the very root of her dilemma: “[S]he is a receptacle and a safety valve instead of a human being worthy of self-development ... [While] she has been slaving and mothering, her complete emancipation has been delayed, not only by men and government but by woman herself” (Clayton, 1989:67). This selfless, self-sacrificing domestic-goddess image of women filtered right through to the twentieth century. In *Professions for Women*, Woolf refers to Coventry Patmore’s poem “The Angel in the House”, which exemplifies the stereotypical image of women (1979:58). She found this image an insult to women. It metaphorically whispered into every woman’s ear: “be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of your sex” (1979:59). For Woolf, as for Wollstonecraft and Schreiner, such an image was utterly destructive as it destroyed any hope of creating a figure of the independent, strong, intelligent woman which they strove to propagate. In *Professions for Women*, Woolf chooses to “kill” her “Angel in the House” and what remains is “a young woman in a bedroom with an inkpot ... [S]he has rid herself of falsehood, that young woman had only to be herself” (1931:60).

Around Schreiner’s period, patriarchal society had thus created this docile image of women, which was seen as the ideal. Though many positive changes such as advancements in medicine, technology and industry were taking place in society, women’s position, in fact, regressed. This deterioration led to what was called in the Victorian era the “Woman Question”, which stimulated many writers to pen their thoughts defining a woman’s proper place in society. Works of writers such as Wollstonecraft and Hannah More came to the fore as people questioned the rights of women, who were still confined by law and by custom (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:285). In Schreiner’s time the



subjection of women had reached its nadir and the thought "It is a man's place to rule, and a woman's to yield" (Banks, 1981:85) echoed through society. This belief in male domination came from a long tradition of dogmatic male writers including Dr Fordyce, Rousseau, Pope, Milton and Swift. Not only did they spread their belief that man is the physically stronger and therefore the mentally stronger sex but they propagated "the cult of true womanhood" (Banks, 1981:86). The idea of separate spheres for men and women was challenged by feminists, who believed a woman had the right to break free from the shackles of her "confinement of domesticity" and "legal and political subordination to man" (Banks, 1981:86), thus becoming emancipated from the double standards under which women were held. The Victorian "cult of true womanhood" not only prescribed the way women should behave but even the way they should look, as the ideal was an uncannily slender waist (eighteen inches) and

... the 'art' of fainting to remind their beaux of their delicacy  
 ... [M]any medical men and laymen believed that a  
 'good'...woman was essentially passionless: if men were  
 beasts ruled by sexual desire, their pure wives and  
 daughters knew nothing of such matters. (Gilbert and  
 Gubar, 1985:278)

In their novels, Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf all negated this biased vision and expectation of women's behaviour, which imposed its double standard on women. In her chapter on "Morality Undermined by Sexual Notions of the Importance of a Good Reputation" in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft shows how women of her time were doomed to be preoccupied with their reputation, rather than with the reality of their character, as society rejected women with tainted images. This obsession with appearance rather than reality, Wollstonecraft claims, encouraged women to "acquire, from supposed necessity, an equally artificial mode of behaviour" (1792:214), while men were left almost untouched by public opinion. Such double standards on the expected behaviour of men and women were advocated by Rousseau, whom Wollstonecraft goes on to quote as writing that "reputation is no less indispensable than chastity ... A

man [who is] secure in his own good conduct depends only on himself, and may brave the public opinion; but a woman, in behaving well, performs but half her duty; as what is thought of her is as important to her as what she really is" (1995:225). Thus women were pressured by society to "preserve appearances [that would] keep their mind[s] in that childish, or vicious, tumult which destroys all [their] energy" (1995:226). So, as Wollstonecraft writes, women became "confined to a single virtue – chastity" (1995:227). This servile, innocent, knowledge-deficient image of women who would die to preserve their chastity became a false ideal against which Schreiner and Woolf also fought.

According to Jones, a literary historian, "sentimental prostitution narratives [were] purveyed by the late eighteenth-century humanitarian reformers" (Vivan, 1991:243). Contrary to the opinion of Dallas, a writer and critic in the Victorian era, who implied that "women's writing was as artless and effortless as birdsong" (Showalter, 1978:82), Schreiner's works were quite different from sentimental women's writing. Like Wollstonecraft and Woolf, she seriously confronted this very real problem in society. Schreiner's characters often fail to fill the virginal "Madonna mould" of the model woman. In *From Man to Man* she creates a fallen woman who gains the reader's sympathy as she is portrayed as having been more sinned against than sinning. Baby Bertie is shunned by her besotted suitor when he finds out that she has been seduced by her former tutor. As Schreiner writes in a letter to Pearson:

She becomes a prostitute not through any evil, but through her sweet fresh objective nature, through her lovingness, and her non-power of opposing the human creatures who are near her. The men whom she comes into contact with, from the first who seduces her to the last who leaves her in the London streets ... look upon a woman as a creature created entirely for their benefit. (Rive, 1987:91)

In the novel, a group of women, led by Mrs Drummond, conspire against her so that her "fallen moment" becomes her life's downfall – showing that the concept of sisterhood had hardly been conceived.

Bertie is mistreated and tainted by men so that she becomes an outcast in society, incapable of redemption. Her death seems an almost kind conclusion; under the scrutiny of society, she would never have been able to attain an image that didn't produce hushed whispers as she walked down the street. Schreiner thus shows the reader what happens to the "whores" in society yet creates a great deal of sympathy for these fallen women, as their situation is hardly self-inflicted. Schreiner did indeed feel an immense compassion for the "fallen woman". She wrote several times on the subject to the then professor of applied mathematics, Karl Pearson. In a letter of 1886, she asked if he had ever "read a certain large *History of Prostitution by an American* ... It is well worth reading, a better collection of facts on that subject from Grecian times downward than is to be found anywhere else in English or French" (Rive, 1987:72). Being well read on the subject, she had no qualms about befriending prostitutes and finding out what had led them into their situation. In England, she stayed for some weeks in a home which tried to "rehabilitate" prostitutes. It seems Schreiner gained insight into the part of society which was most criticised as "improper". Schreiner used what she learnt in London in her novel *From Man to Man*. She also told this story to Pearson:

[W]hen I have been walking in Gray's Inn Road and seen one of those terrible old women that are so common there, the sense of agonised oneness with her that I have felt, that she was *myself* only under different circumstances, has stricken me almost mad ... I feel so about all these poor women. I agree that the Criminal Amendment Act<sup>3</sup> will not touch the matter, there will not be one prostitute in England less at the end of the year because of it, nor because of any law that could be passed. (Rive, 1987:65 – 66)

While feeling the injustice of their ill or negligent treatment by the law, Schreiner took a typically feminist view on prostitution by claiming that such women "have made themselves absolutely free of material dependence on men" and that "their reasons and their wills will have had to be cultivated" (Rive, 1987:66).

The main character in *From Man to Man*, Rebekah, is married to Frank, who can be seen as the foil to Bertie. He not only has an affair with a woman but with a coloured woman – a highly controversial issue in South Africa. To make the comparison with Bertie even stronger, he has a child by his mistress. Once the truth is known it is almost immediately ignored. The message Schreiner sends is unmistakable – well-bred women are expected to be selfless, submissive, passionless angels while men are allowed to be sexual predators ruled by their manly desires. Showalter criticises Schreiner for portraying her female characters as being “granted only the narrowest of possibilities, [complaining that] the treatment of them is disconcertingly unadventurous, even timid” (1978:203), but perhaps this portrayal was a true reflection of the narrowness of women’s lives at the time. However much Lyndall may want emancipation, Rebekah a better education and greater scope for her intelligence, or Bertie equality and self-realisation in relationships, these, at the time, were dreams and ideals, never realised.

In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf exposes this same double standard as she imagines George Eliot saying:

‘I wish it was understood ... that I should never invite anyone to come and see me who did not ask for the invitation’; for was she not living in sin with a married man and might not the sight of her damage the chastity of Mrs Smith or whoever it might be that chanced to call? ... At the same time, on the other side of Europe, there was a young man living freely with this gipsy [sic] or with that great lady; going to wars; picking up unhindered and uncensored all that varied experience of human life which served him so splendidly later when he came to write his books. Had Tolstoy lived at the Priory in seclusion with his married lady, cut off from what is called the world, however edifying the moral lesson, he could scarcely ... have written *War and Peace*. (1928(a):71)

As Showalter (1978:202) points out, “Schreiner had many affinities with Virginia Woolf, and *From Man to Man* anticipates the language, as well as the symbolism, of *A Room of One’s Own*, published two years later”. Both writers use the symbolism of a private room as a place

where a woman can express herself creatively and intellectually, unpatronised and unjudged by society. Rebekah felt that her room “was there; and there was always a quiet spot in her mind answering to it” (Showalter, 1978:203), a place where she could be free from society and open to her own creativity and thoughts. Similarly, Woolf’s fixed income gave her a room that “unveiled the sky to [her], and substituted for the large imposing figure of a gentleman, which Milton recommended for [her] perpetual adoration, a view of the open sky” (1928(a):40) and the consequent freedom from the asphyxiation of patriarchal society.

Wollstonecraft also became a posthumous target of misogynistic hypocrisy. During her life, she was a celebrated author and radical revolutionary. Though not everyone may have agreed with her polemical views on the rights of women, she was a respected writer. In 1798, after her death, her husband William Godwin, intending to demonstrate how she had lived according to her revolutionary ideas, published her memoirs. This did nothing but sully Wollstonecraft’s reputation as it chronicled her two suicide attempts, how she lived with a lover outside of marriage and that she had given birth to an illegitimate daughter. If she had been a man, these facts would have been expected, accepted and overlooked – but as a woman her reputation was undeservedly destroyed.

In England, Schreiner’s ideas on equality for women and individual rights expanded as she gained a broader view on “the Woman Question”. “Schreiner’s two main influences and forerunners were Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792) and John Stuart Mill (*The Subjection of Women*, 1869)” (Clayton, 1983:41). Like Wollstonecraft, Schreiner discredited the idea propounded by Rousseau that “Women have most wit, men have most genius; women observe, men reason” (Clayton, 1983:42). According to Clayton, having read and been asked to write an introduction for *A Vindication*

of the *Rights of Woman*, Schreiner was greatly influenced by Wollstonecraft's writings (1983:42). Schreiner also argued against the stereotyping of sexually inherent qualities and held, like Wollstonecraft and Woolf, that education was the precursor to changing the mindset of society. Schreiner shared Mill's idea that economic independence was a basic human right. She saw women as caught in a double bind: the apparent worship of women, on the one hand, and their actual subservient status on the other. In *Women and Labour* she wrote acerbically that women were seen by the average man as mothers and child-bearers,

... and that in some man's house, or perhaps his own, while he and the wife he keeps for his pleasures are visiting a concert or entertainment, some weary woman paces till far in the night bearing with aching back and tired head the fretful, teething child he brought into the world, for a pittance of twenty or thirty pounds a year, does not distress him. But that the same woman by work in an office should earn one hundred and fifty pounds, be able to have a comfortable home of her own, and her evening free for study or pleasure, distresses him deeply. (1911:204)

Like Mill, who was a social reformer, Schreiner believed that "equality of rights would abate the exaggerated self-abnegation which is the present artificial ideal of the feminine character" (1911:258). Like Wollstonecraft, she rejected the weakness, affectation and parasitism of the middle-class Victorian woman. So, too, she wanted women to take a pro-active approach to their own emancipation by ceasing their frivolous behaviour and gaining a substantial education. Just as Wollstonecraft called for a "revolution of female manners" (1792:245), Schreiner argued that women "should become more free, more wealthy, or more actively intelligent" (1911:236).

Schreiner's thoughts on many of the beliefs she held are elucidated in her letters. In those to Karl Pearson and Havelock Ellis, a pioneering sex psychologist and writer, her views on the position of women, marriage and the "Woman Question" are expressed without restraint. From 1864 to 1969, the Contagious Diseases Act fired up many women and Women's Rights activists who were disgusted and insulted

by its blatant sexual discrimination. The legislation gave police the right to arrest any working-class woman on suspicion of prostitution and subject her to a gynaecological examination. Her refusal of such an examination would prove her culpability, in the eyes of the law (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:293). No laws were made for men suspected of visiting prostitutes, though they would also be the cause of adultery or the spread of diseases. This law typified the moral double standard which prevailed at the time. Schreiner herself was almost prosecuted under the Act during her stay in London in 1885. She wrote a letter of protest to the editor of the *Daily News* in which she recalls the incident:

We alighted from the cab, the man having drawn up at the wrong number. We walked slowly up and down for a few moments continuing our discussion. A policeman passed us and said good evening in a somewhat insulting manner. He then turned shortly, and said – 'What's this; what's up here, what's up here; I won't have this. What are you doing here' ... my friend said that the house before which we stood was the one in which I lived. He said he wouldn't believe it: what was I doing out at that time of night, etc. and he would ring the bell ... My friend offered him his card, and remarked with self-restraint and politeness that he was astonished at his interfering with two persons who were in no way breaking the public peace. He said, 'I've nothing to do with you, I don't want to interfere with you. It's her I've to do with.' (Rive, 1987:71)

After having to prove that the place was indeed her residence she was acquitted but recalls with some indignation:

If anyone thinks it a matter of any importance that an individual well able to defend themselves should [not] be insulted, they are entirely mistaken: but there are in London more than a hundred thousand women who are unable to defend themselves against our police. (Rive, 1987:71)

According to Gilbert and Gubar, the Contagious Diseases Act "shadowed the nineteenth-century ideology of femininity. In particular, an anxiety about the female body led, on the one hand, to fantasies about the upper-class woman's rare spirituality and on the other hand, to imaginings of the working-class woman's corrosive sexuality" (1985: 293).

The Contagious Diseases Act was not the only spark which lit the feminist flame. The "Woman Question" covered many issues of inequality in society. In 1856 Barbara Smith organized a committee which collected petitions for the Married Women's Property Bill (Banks, 1981:34). This bill would allow a wedded woman to maintain ownership of land left by her family. Instead of the bequest automatically becoming part of her husband's estate, she could have some financial security of her own. It was passed in 1869 – though, frustratingly, more to protect the wealth of a family against a potential scoundrel of a husband than to safeguard the future of the daughter.

Showalter calls the time in which Woolf wrote the "Feminist Phase", in which "from about 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote, women [were] historically enabled to reject the accommodating postures of femininity and to use literature to dramatise the ordeals of wronged womanhood" (Jacobus, 1978:35). In the context of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf shows the sanctuary and financial security a woman has in a room of her own and also depicts how women were imprisoned by the way society treated, mistreated and expected them to behave. She exposes the indignation she is met with when she physically and metaphorically steps into the realm of man and walks "across a grass plot" at an "Oxbridge College", a fictional top college which Woolf used to symbolise the height of patriarchal society. She explains her trespass further: "He was a beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me" (1928(a):8). Woolf's remark is multifaceted. Not only had women been barred from roaming the smooth, cared-for turf of private and public freedom but the turf, "rolled for 300 years in succession", had created a patriarchal society of tradition which had kept women out. Just as women were barred from the closely guarded "Oxbridge" library, which contained male-only fiction, so women had been excluded from the superior educational institutions and professions that might have put them on an equal footing with men. Three hundred years earlier, Wollstonecraft also



lamented the fact that women "might have practised as physicians, regulated a farm, managed a shop ... [or] businesses of various kinds, if they were educated in a more orderly manner" (1792:260).

By the 1900s women were free in terms of their person, property, money and body, yet double standards still cut through society as the Victorian mentality of female inferiority continued to thrive. While men stood in the tradition of education, the professions and superiority, women were shadowed by the cult of Victorian femininity, which endorsed the image of the frail, pure, selfless, confined, unquestioning woman. Clarissa Dalloway, in Woolf's novel *Mrs Dalloway*, can be seen as a woman who fits snugly into these limitations which make women seem to recede into the background (Snaith, 2000:165). Mrs Dalloway's conventionality can be understood as being contrasted to the feminism of Miss Kilman, who is stifled by patriarchal society as she does not fit the patriarchal ideal of what is beautiful or proper in a woman's looks or action, and is thus discredited as one. Miss Kilman also serves as a symbol of women's thwarted aspirations and the potential which neither she nor most women of her time realised. Likewise, Woolf mourns the lost potential of women through the centuries in *A Room of One's Own*.

All three authors exposed the hypocrisy in society in their work, while embracing sexual differences and espousing legal equality for men and women. At the end of *Women and Labour* Schreiner recalls the story of Adam and Eve. Instead of using it, as many women writers did, as an example of misogynist feeling due to Milton's rendition, she looks at the tale from a different angle:

We also dream of a Garden: but it lies in a distant future. We dream that woman shall eat of the tree of knowledge together with man, and that side by side and hand close to hand, through ages of much toil and labour, they shall together raise about them an Eden nobler than any the Chaldean dreamed of; an Eden created by their own

labours and made beautiful by their own fellowship.  
(1911:282)

As Schreiner reasons in *Women and Labour*, "woman does not realize her own disease, the disease of slavery" (1911:57). Schreiner, like Wollstonecraft and Woolf, wanted women to transcend their bondage and the separate standards they were held to. The inequality in society seems to have been the major motivation for their writing: through their words, they hoped to expose society's imbalances so that men and women could become partners and not be tied by the dominant/submissive role. All three shared a vision of women and men in relationships of equality. Edith Lees of the *Book News Monthly* wrote of Schreiner:

Since her return I [have] realized the indomitable strength of the woman that lies in her. It is in her understanding of the newer and completer [sic] relationship of man and woman to each other and of their mutual obligation to the world as intelligent and responsible citizens. (Clayton, 1983:67)

While Woolf showed women the disparity in society, hoping to inspire them to take a more active part in their lives as they "reflect[ed] on the immense privileges and the length of time during which they have been enjoyed" (1928(a):111), Wollstonecraft hoped that equality for women would encourage "rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience" so that "[men] would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers – in a word – better citizens" (1792:250).

Like Wollstonecraft, Schreiner did not blame the dependence of women on society alone or leave change to occur "organically", but called for a "New Woman". This "New Woman" would be essentially "non-parasitic", socially aware and independent. Schreiner envisages "a great movement of the sexes towards each other, a movement towards common occupations, common interests, common ideals, and towards an emotional sympathy between the sexes" (1911:259). Schreiner echoed Wollstonecraft in passionately wanting to see "the breaking down of artificial lines which sever the woman from the man"

(1792:260). Wollstonecraft claimed that once women shared the rights, they would "emulate the virtues of [men]; for [they] must grow more perfect when emancipated" (1792:260). Similarly, Schreiner believed that reform would bring about "movement of the woman towards the man, of the sex towards closer union (1911:160).

By Woolf's era women had been legally capacitated and were no longer completely bound by the law. Woolf implored women to take a pro-active approach in their lives as "the excuse of lack of opportunity, training, encouragement, leisure and money no longer holds good" (1928(a):111). She encouraged women to seize every opportunity available to them which had not been open to their mothers and grandmothers, so that they might emerge from the obscurity in which social and political double standards enveloped them, overcome the intellectual handicap passed on to them over the generations, and take their place in society and history. While rejecting their reticence, Woolf urged women, in *A Room of One's Own* and in *Three Guineas*, to celebrate their femaleness rather than to emulate men – perhaps embracing the spirit of Wollstonecraft's argument that "[w]omen, I allow, may have different duties to fulfil; but they are human duties" as such requiring, "independence of character" (1792:87).

Just as Schreiner admired Wollstonecraft's work, Woolf held Schreiner's example of independent womanhood in high regard. Taking an objective view and being able to witness and analyse society, all three authors had a special gift which they used to bring about changes in their society by means of their writing. All three authors wanted women to escape the double standards of society by rising above them in the way they behaved, improving their intellect, and rejecting the restrictions and stereotypes imposed on them by society. As will be shown in the chapters that follow, particular attention will be paid to the position of women in society, education and the professions.

The prevailing double standards had an immense effect on the situation of women in society – while men were free to do and behave as they pleased, women had to live their lives cautiously to protect their reputations in society. Women were also kept ignorant of the world at large as their schooling kept their minds on sewing, music and domestic issues. Their lives were lived largely in their social spheres, which consisted of their homes, the homes of their friends and a tea-room or two. Society's double standards imposed rigid restrictions on women's lives, keeping them under patriarchal control, passive and pleasing to men.

## Chapter Two

### Women in Society

Lord Dudley, *The Times* said when Lady Dudley died the other day, 'a man of cultivated taste and many accomplishments, was benevolent and bountiful, but whimsically despotic. He insisted upon his wife's wearing full dress, even at the remotest shooting-lodge in the Highlands; he loaded her with gorgeous jewels', and so on, 'he gave her everything – always excepting any measure of responsibility'. (Woolf, 1928(a):65)

Society's ideology placed cultural restrictions on women, limiting them to narrow private and public lives, yet women also sustained their subservient roles because they performed them without question. Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf wanted to make women aware of this and of the trivial, superficial lives most lived. The three authors had a balance in their work, showing the realities of women's situation as well as imagining a "perfect" world. They urged women to release themselves from cultural conditioning and (mis)education and hoped for a time when double standards would fall away so that men and women could live together as equals.

Women through the ages have been "othered" by being made nonentities under the law and were excluded from decent education and the professions. The situation of women gradually improved as laws became more lenient; first allowing women custody of their children in the case of a divorce (in 1839), then the right to inherit from their husbands (in 1891), and finally the right to vote (in 1928) (Rowbotham, 1973:40 – 42). After World War Two, conditions for women became more liberated than those of their Victorian sisters. Woolf, having lived in an era when women's situation first began to undergo real change, urged girls to become educated and enter the professions so as to become more autonomous and break free from the cultural restrictions imposed on their foremothers. She considered the situation of her predecessors and told other women to remember the limited lives their mothers

and grandmothers were forced to lead and to use this as inspiration in creating self-determined lives.

The situation of women was greatly affected by marriage. Women were expected, for the most part, to be subservient. Due to their lack of power, they depended on finding "the highest bidder" for a husband. Most married without knowing their spouse. If they were lucky, they married a wealthy man who would improve their standing in society (Branca, 1978:161 – 163). All three writers shared the idea that a good marriage was one in which friendship, equality and co-operation flourished. They disliked women who married for money and called this nothing more than "legal prostitution". Woolf and Schreiner, being realists, demonstrated with great veracity the constraints and coldness of some marriages in *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *From Man to Man*. All three writers thus held strong ideas on a variety of topics relating to the situation of women in society and tried to show in their works, both obliquely and directly, the true circumstances of women.

Set roles for women in society derived from two main sources. The first source is society itself: the way in which patriarchal thinking permeated every cultural, historical, religious, legal and educational aspect of Western culture. The second reason for women's bondage was their own behaviour. Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf were all aware of the limitations women placed on themselves by complacently accepting and colluding with society's constructions of them. They all wrote polemically about women who, in their eyes, accepted the constraints imposed on them, often without even being fully aware of those limitations. Being excluded from the law and a decent education as well as being subject to strict cultural limits in terms of behaviour, many were solely concerned with manners and physical appearance, as opposed to mental development. Thus many women lived in a world of superficial frivolity. Wollstonecraft targets the "fine ladies, brimful of sensibility and teeming with capricious fancies" (1792:227) whom she viewed as the main culprits in falling in with society's insubstantial view of women. Schreiner, too, writes in *Women and Labour*: "[W]hether as kept wife, kept mistress, or prostitute, she contributed nothing ... [she] was the 'fine lady,' the human female parasite" (1911:82). Woolf held similar views on the false behaviour of women who tried

to act out the submissive image imposed on them by society. In her essay *Professions for Women*, she exposed this stereotype of women, asserting: "She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily ... in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others" (1931:59). All three writers strove to give women the insight to break through the barriers of self-incarceration and go against the grain of society's idea of the ideal woman, hoping that their works might release their readers from their subjugation and put them on a par with men, who had always been without constraints in respect of their behaviour.

There has always been a "double vision" of women - how they were imagined and depicted in both life and literature as "delicate, frail [and] ethereal" heroines (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:286) and, less glamorously, as "fallen women" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:287). In Wollstonecraft's time, manuals on the proper conduct of young ladies were moneymaking staples for publishers (Turner, 1992:16). Male "experts" wrote most such manuals. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft writes that these men "lose all simplicity, all dignity of mind in acquiring power" (1792:245). She realised that it was the reign of patriarchal power that kept women in their restrained positions in society. Manuals on morals for women such as the one written by the educational reformer Vicesimus Knox in 1779 contain statements such as: "[That] learning belongs not to the female character, and that the female mind is not capable of a degree of improvement equal to that of the other sex, are narrow and unphilosophical prejudices" (1792:171). Though this statement may sound liberal and focused on the equality of education for both sexes, Knox considered a good education for girls to encompass only "history, literature, geography, languages and some 'superficial knowledge' of natural philosophy and mathematics" (1792:171). These subjects may have been a step up from sewing and cooking, the prescribed subjects of the day, but they were by no means the same as what boys were learning at school. The notion that women were not capable of much learning created much anger among women. Books such as Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Olympe de Gouges' *Declaration of the Rights of Women* and Anna Lytitia Barbauld's *Rights of Women* opposed these sexist images of women and made women

aware of their position in society. Not only ill-informed manuals had to be countered, but also sexist and debasing statements such as Lord Lyttleton's words: "A woman's greatest station is retreat" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:74). In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft attacked the cultural conditioning of girls which the manuals and the sexist philosophy brought about. She also felt that how girls were raised was crucial as she thought mothers guilty of perpetuating the belief that women had no capacity for reason. She writes: "The conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state ... One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to the false system of education, gathered from books written on this subject by men who consider females rather as women than human creatures" (1792:90). Wollstonecraft wrote authoritatively, urging women to better themselves, to rise above the vain, superficial, thought-free world most were occupying and to dismiss "those pretty feminine phrases, which the men condescendingly use to soften slavish dependence, and that weak elegance of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners, supposed to be the sexual characteristics of the weaker vessel" (1792:175). Wollstonecraft criticised mothers for allowing their daughters to be taught ornamental manners for the sole purpose of marriage. She warned mothers against teaching their daughters to be superficial and flighty for the pleasure of men and society as this would reinforce the fickle, weak image of women.

In the 1780s as the French Revolution drew near, writers and philosophers questioned the status quo in society. One of the most influential movements at the time was the European Enlightenment circle. Striving to propagate the concept of progress, Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Locke and Montesquieu believed in rational and intentional progress through harnessing the natural and human sciences, overcoming the ignorance bred of superstition and religion, overcoming violence through social improvements, and tolerance. Enlightenment theory held that reason was the centre of human identity and a justification for basic rights. At a time in history when traditional roles and positions were being challenged, Wollstonecraft joined in discussions and set forth her thoughts on women. Wollstonecraft used the basis of the Enlightenment theory and applied it to women. She learnt from the Enlightenment thinkers how "hierarchical relationships degrade all parties to



them, with the most powerful often the most morally debilitated" (1792:161). As she was one of the first women to consider and publish her thoughts on the equal status of men and women in society, Wollstonecraft became "an instant literary celebrity [and] had an enormous and lasting impact on almost all the female writers of the age" (Shaw, 1998:124). Wollstonecraft argued against sexist thinkers like Knox, Pope, and Fordyce, who believed women were and should be naturally weak, subordinate and mentally lacking. She criticised society for raising girls to behave in accordance with this mentality, writing in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*: "I will venture to affirm that a girl, whose spirits have not been dampened by inactivity, or innocence tainted by false shame, will always be a romp, and the doll will never excite attention unless confidence allows her no alternative" (1792:87). Wollstonecraft realised that changing society's view of girls and women had to begin by their portraying themselves in a way that commanded respect and refusing to submit to the "cultural conditioning" (Rowbotham, 1973:21) of the day. For this reason, she was passionate about equal education for girls, to enable them to grow into well-read young ladies fit to attend the finest schools and enter the professions of their choice so that the hierarchical structure between men and women might crumble as she felt it "absurd and tyrannic ... to lay down a system of slavery" (1792:22) under which equality of the sexes remained only a dream.

Schreiner envisaged a rather ideal union between the sexes in *Women and Labour*, calling for "the relationship between man and woman [to] become a co-partnership between freemen", and claiming that "the males of the race remaining precisely as they are to-day [sic], the corresponding females shall have advanced to undreamed of heights of culture and intelligence" (1911:247). While these ideals were noble and visionary, in Schreiner's day they were just ideals. Idyllic visioning in narrative became very popular toward the end of the 1800s. Gilbert and Gubar state that this kind of narrative "[brought] to the surface the psychological problems that women writers confronted", and that the feminist movement also provided "a utopian vision of a world in which women might experience complete freedom" (1985:976). Though much of Schreiner's work served to expose injustices rather than idealise a way out of them, her allegories and short stories explore an ultra-reality. In the short story "The Child's Day", later used as a prelude to *From Man to Man*, Schreiner tells the tale of a little girl called Rebekah, who finds

herself in a nirvana-like reality or daydream. Rebekah escapes into the world of her imagination to evade the harsh loneliness of her life. In another short story, "In a Far-Off World", taken from *Dreams*, Schreiner pictures a world "where a man and a women had one work, and walked together side by side on many days and were friends" (n.d:38). We can see in her words the idealisation of equality between the sexes. Schreiner held the conviction that "human 'progress' [was moving] towards an ideal state" (Barash, 1987:19). Her allegories move from visionary to dreamlike and idealistic styles, hence Barash points out: "Schreiner's allegories are compressed narratives of wish-fulfilment" (1987:11). One can see the beginning of this kind of idealistic rhetoric in Wollstonecraft's works as she gives her version of her perfect world with regard to the relations between the sexes, as well as women's equality under the law, in education and in the professions. For her time, Wollstonecraft's ideal – to "let women share the right [so that] she will emulate the virtues of man, for she must grow more perfect when emancipated" (1792:133) – may have seemed far-reaching and sanguine, but in retrospect we can appreciate that her beliefs were truly visionary and now in the twenty-first century seem to serve as a benchmark of Western society. In literature, as we look at Woolf's work, we can see that this utopian idealism had waned by the twentieth century, as she and other women writers of her day such as Katherine Mansfield and Gertrude Stein focused on depicting the harsh reality of women's lives rather than idealising the improvement of their situation in society. In *Three Guineas*, *The Years*, *To the Lighthouse*, *A Room of One's Own*, *Mrs Dalloway*, and many of her shorter texts, Woolf derides society's tyranny over women rather than envisaging an altruistic image of them.

Both Schreiner and Woolf also noted the "othering" of women in society and saw the inclusion of women in politics as crucial if they were to become autonomous beings under the law. Women "began organising with increased militancy to gain female enfranchisement ... their ideologies built on the work of the early feminists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Mary Wollstonecraft" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:974). Both Schreiner and Woolf supported the Suffragette Movement as they felt that it would improve women's situation in all areas of life: reduce prostitution, "transform the economic helplessness of the unsupported mother ... end sweated work and improve the training of midwives" (Rowbotham, 1973:86). Gaining a say in society, the Suffragettes

believed, would not only make them heard regarding major issues such as education and equal pay, but also improve the lives of all women, including the working class who, for lack of money and education, could possibly never enter the professions even if they were open to women. By the early 1900s the Suffrage Movement had gained momentum. In 1903 a small group of women formed the Women's Social and Political Union, which campaigned mostly for votes for women (Rowbotham, 1973:75 – 76). As Gilbert and Gubar note:

By 1918, a visitor to London observed that 'England was a world of women – women in uniforms' and the English poet Nina Macdonald proudly proclaimed that  
 'Girls are doing things  
 They've never done before ...  
 All the world is topsy-turvy  
 Since the war began'. (1985:1221)

Schreiner supported the South African Suffrage Movement and wanted all women, regardless of race, to become enfranchised. She felt that women's status in South Africa was like "the subjugation of large bodies of other human creatures either as slaves, subject classes, or races" (Rive, 1987:221). In *Women and Labour*, she reasons:

[W]oman as woman has something radically distinct to contribute to the sum-total of human knowledge, and her activity is important, not merely individually, but collectively, and as a class ... [Women should be] accorded their share in the electoral, and ultimately in the legislative and executive duties of the government. (1911:192)

Though she continued to espouse the enfranchisement of women, her support of the South African Suffrage Movement soured somewhat as it became clear to her that it was only interested in gaining the vote for white women. However, Schreiner continued to fight for the vote, arguing

[W]e have called the Women's Movement of our age an endeavour on the part of women among modern civilised races to find new fields of labour as the old slip from them, as an attempt to escape from parasitism and an inactive dependence upon sex function alone ... [it will bring] the sexes towards each other, [as it is] a movement towards common occupations, common interests, common ideals, and towards an emotional sympathy between the sexes. (1911:258 – 259)

Woolf, too, supported the Suffrage Movement as it represented for her, as for Schreiner and many women, a hope of gaining a say in society and a move towards the complete emancipation of women. Woolf, however, waned in her practical support of the movement when her enthusiasm for stuffing envelopes dropped because she felt that she was "not doing anything useful" (Bell, 1980:13). In *The Years*, the character Rose is used to show the abuse which militant suffragettes suffered. Rose's family seems rather embarrassed at their sister's unruly behaviour. In their conversation, they discuss her in an almost clandestine way:

'What's all this about Rose?' she asked....

'Morris says she's been had up in a police-court,' said Celia. She dropped her voice slightly though they were alone.

'She threw a brick -' said Eleanor ...

'Will she be put in prison?' Peggy asked quickly.

'Not this time,' said Eleanor. 'Next time - Ah, here she comes!' She broke off. (1937:219)

In this dialogue, we observe not only the hushed tones in which Rose's "improper" activities are discussed but also the ill treatment which suffragettes were subjected to. According to Rowbotham: "When the suffragettes went to prison, they were not given the privileges of political prisoners" (1973:85). Often incarcerated for trying to attain their human rights, suffragettes also had to contend with police intervention at their meetings and demonstrations. One march to Parliament in 1910 ended in "a clash between suffragettes and the police and a watching crowd. The fight went on for several hours, many women were injured and two died" (Rowbotham, 1973:85).

During the First World War, the Suffragette Movement was split between those who supported the war and those who thought it a patriarchal display of suppression and desire for domination. Schreiner refused to back the war effort and dedicated her energy to working towards world peace (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:975). She felt that men overlooked women's involvement in war. For her, women are not merely bystanders in times of war but pay both financially and emotionally for conflict. In *Women and Labour*, she writes:

We have always borne part of the weight of the war, and the major part. It is not merely that in primitive times we suffered from the destruction of the fields we tilled and the houses we built; or that in later times as domestic labourers and producers, though unwaged, we, in taxes and material loss and additional labour, paid as much as our males towards the cost of war; nor is it that in a comparatively

insignificant manner, as nurses of the wounded in modern times, or now and again as warrior chieftainesses and leaders in primitive and other societies, we have born our part; nor is it even because the spirit of resolution in its women, and their willingness to endure, has in all ages again and again largely determined the fate of a race that goes to war, that we demand our controlling right where war is concerned .... We pay the first cost on all human life. In supplying the men for the carnage of a battlefield, women have not merely lost actually more blood, and gone through more acute anguish and weariness, in the long months of bearing and in the final agony of child-birth ... There is, perhaps, no woman [who could] ... look down upon a battlefield covered with slain, [without] the thought [rising] in her, 'So many mother's sons! So many bodies brought into the world lie there!' (1911:168 – 170)

Schreiner opposed the War and used her unusual viewpoint to inspire others to dispute it too. Having lived through the Anglo-Boer Wars (1899 – 1902), she was familiar with the slaughter and sacrifice that accompany the patriarchal fight for power and land. Her yearning for "universal equality along with individual freedom and spiritual well-being" (Buck, 1991:343) can be seen in her opposition to the war. While Schreiner deplored the War for its deep loss, suffering and cost to women, Woolf thought war an expression of patriarchal domination, violence and show. Woolf made her views very clear in *Three Guineas*, which has been harshly criticised for its class assumptions, political naiveté, empty sloganeering and clichés (Showalter, 1978:294 – 295). Though Showalter (1978:295) calls the book "irritating and hysterical", it is no more shrill than Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* or Schreiner's *Women and Labour*. Woolf calls war "an abomination; a barbarity" (1938:21), while noting that wars are planned by, fought by, won or lost by men. Woolf uses the theme of the war both symbolically and pragmatically. Symbolically, it can be seen as a metaphor for patriarchal society with man's need to conquer and dominate. Equating war with patriarchal society shows the inequity and destructiveness of both, involving as they do the suppression of a group of people so that the dominator's ego may be gratified and bolstered. As Apter writes, Woolf:

... posits universal causes of war as those advantages men have over women. She sees the splendid robes, titles, degrees, and honours available only to men as a means of labelling them brave and clever ... Women, who are denied these privileges and honours, have little call to love their country, nor have they any access to those labels which rouse the fighting spirit, nor are they bound by loyalty to English institutions such as school and college and club, which might inspire valour. Women's interest in the war effort is only an excuse to escape the tyranny of domestic work. (1979:102 – 103)

In *Three Guineas* Woolf thus exposes the hypocrisy of men, who have through the ages treated women as glorified servants, yet expected them in times of need to stand by and support their oppressor. Women, like true "Angels in the House" were expected to offer up peace, brothers, sons, and stability for patriotism. Woolf raises the question of women supporting the war by asking:

'Our' country denies me the means of protecting myself, forces me to pay others a very large sum annually to protect me, and is so little able, even so, to protect me that Air Raid precautions are written on the wall. Therefore if you insist upon fighting to protect me, or 'our' country, let it be understood, soberly and rationally between us, that you are fighting to gratify a sex instinct which I cannot share; to procure benefits which I have not shared and probably will not share. (1938:197)

Just as Hitler and Mussolini brainwashed their subjects, establishing laws that would keep them tightly under their despotic reign, and ruling by oppression and cruelty, so the British patriarchal government and society promulgated Acts to ensure that the control of politics, property and education was firmly in the hands of the ruling male upper class.

Woolf examines the relations between knowledge, power, education and class as an expression of men's desire to dominate, whether it be a country, other men or women. Woolf identifies three reasons for the male sex's hostility: "war is a profession; a source of happiness and excitement; and it is also an outlet for many qualities, without which men would deteriorate" (1938:15 – 16). Later in the same text she argues that it is pride, the desire to dominate and the ego of men that fuel their need for war (1938:17).

Woolf also points out the disturbing parallels between fascism and sexism, arguing for a connection between "the political repressiveness of fascism and the exaggeration of divisions between the sexes which have resulted in a conception of man as protector of woman and thereby led to militarism and belligerence" (Barrett, 1979:14). Woolf outlines the similarities between Britain's rule and despotism as she writes, addressing an imagined male reader:

'[F]eminists' were in fact the advance guard of your own movement. They were fighting the same enemy that you are fighting and for the same reasons. They were fighting the tyranny of the patriarchal state

as you are fighting the tyranny of the Fascist state ... [yet we] still smell a particular and unmistakable odour in the region of Whitehall and Westminster. And abroad the monster has come more openly to the surface. There is no mistaking him there. He has widened his scope. He is interfering now with your liberty; he is dictating how you shall live; he is making distinctions not merely between the sexes, but between the races. You are feeling in your own persons what your mothers felt when they were shut out, when they were shut up, because they were women. (1938:185 - 187)

In her novels *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf portrays two women in an interesting way. From one perspective, the two main characters Mrs Ramsay and Mrs Dalloway can be seen as constricted by the vestiges of the Victorian moral code. In these novels Woolf portrays the reality of two women's lives, showing them to be far from the glorified image of the female sex. Mrs Ramsay can be seen as an "Angel in the House" figure as she is depicted as having a "delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life [into which] the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare" (Rosenthal, 1979:43). She is the caretaker, the archetypal matriarch: "Mrs Ramsay embodies all the conventional maternal virtues. Intuitive, compassionate, non-intellectual, protective, she represents the wisdom of the heart which professes to know nothing of the complicated workings of the head" (Rosenthal, 1979:104). Mrs Dalloway is shown as the post-Victorian woman surrounded by the cult of domesticity – a supposed sanctuary for women but a prison for many. Contrasting Miss Kilman and Mrs Dalloway, Woolf shows the reader the contradictions that haunted society – the opposition between women's rights and women's duty. Young ladies gained some liberty due to the First World War, which allowed them to break out of the carefully constrained moral mould of previous generations. The new generation threw off these codes, which they considered pointless, as life took on a new meaning amidst the degradation and death of the War. They sought to live life to the full and enjoy every moment for, as they had seen during the War, it does not last forever. As Rowbotham notes, "In the atmosphere of release, anti-climax, and bitter recognition that the years of the war were lost and wasted, [young women] asserted themselves more powerfully" (1973:123). The new generation held more liberal views on sexuality, wore shorter skirts and gained employment in offices and banks, which afforded them new luxuries like silk stockings and make-up. These new women were a far cry from those of the previous era who, though living at the same time, were still bound by the codes

of the Victorian ethos. The characters of Mrs Dalloway and Mrs Ramsay can be seen as a poignant portrayal of two women who have grown up in the *fin de siècle* of the Victorian era and are living in a much-changed post-war world. Before and during the First World War, there was a rise in women's resistance against their unfair treatment in the workplace, under the law and at home.

Parallels can be drawn between *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*: while *A Room of One's Own* criticises male-dominated society for its suppression of women and the lack of choice and opportunity it afforded them, *Three Guineas* attacks society for these same attitudes towards women though Woolf widens her argument to include broader social criticism, showing how this patriarchal society aims to dominate not only women but also any other country or object that may pose a threat to its rule. At the heart of both books' arguments lies an appeal for economic freedom. As she states in *A Room of One's Own*: "Intellectual freedom depends upon material things" (1928(a):162 – 163) and in *Three Guineas*: "[T]he weapon of independent opinion [is] based on independent income" (1938:73). Woolf argues in both books that the economic monopoly of the male species has led to the subjugation of the other half of humanity. Woolf affirms in both *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* that inadequate education is the means whereby women have been rendered unable to earn an adequate salary. It seems this cycle of educational and financial poverty, identified by Wollstonecraft, had not been broken as Woolf's arguments run along the same lines as those of her two predecessors. Sadly, too, her appeal was heard but dismissed, just like Wollstonecraft's and Schreiner's. Another reason for the scant education and involvement of women in the public sphere, Woolf claims, was the demands of motherhood and domestic servitude. As she points out in *A Room of One's Own*,

Mary's mother – if that was her picture – may have been a wastrel in her spare time (she has thirteen children by a minister of the church), but if so her gay and dissipated life had left too few traces of its pleasures on her face. (1928(a):22)

Indeed, Woolf points out in both books that the intellectual, imaginative and personal freedom of women had been and remained limited. By the early decades of the 1900s, though women were gaining more acceptance in the workplace (albeit out of necessity because of the War), the mentality of female inferiority prevailed, probably because many men felt threatened by the advancing Women's Movement. Belfort Bas, a member of the Men's Anti-



Suffrage League, was against women gaining the vote as he argued that they were "originally inferior because they had smaller brains" (Rowbotham, 1973:99) while others felt that if women gained the right to vote, men would be disadvantaged as women outnumbered men. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf exposes more of the residual mentality of the "cult of true womanhood" as she debunked some of the ludicrous beliefs that had been accepted as true through the ages. While Pope's old statement "Most women have no character at all" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:74) was still held in society's unconscious, many men and women seriously questioned whether women were capable of education – which, according to Woolf, Napoleon denied but Dr Johnson affirmed<sup>1</sup> (1928(a):31). In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf points out an interesting and poignant irony stemming from the ideal vision of women which has made them the subject of many works of art, novels, philosophies and studies as she writes, "Some savages say they have [no souls]. Others, on the contrary, maintain that women are half divine and worship them on that account" (1928(a):31). As she worked her way through her ideas on women and fiction in the National Library she found almost too much written about and on women and only a portion of a single shelf devoted to literature written by women. This discrepancy fed society's ignorant views on women and helped perpetuate the image of the "ideal woman".

Feminist criticism often divides characters into those that strive against society's limits to better themselves and their lot in life, on the one hand, and those that offer a representation of reality by giving the reader an often bitter *trenche de vie*. The latter are perhaps more powerful, giving readers an austere look at reality and forcing them to reflect on their own lot and perhaps create space for improvement. The inspiration of the former may be more momentary and Hollywoodesque – over as soon as the next thought flies by. For the most part Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf draw characters that are true to life, creating powerful fictional examples of the matter of their non-fiction texts.

The roles of women in Victorian society were as limited as in the previous century. As Banks shows, the "doctrine of separate spheres" which resulted in the development of the "cult of true womanhood ... was based in part on the notion of man as the stronger and the harder sex" (1981:86). Along with

Patmore's notion of "The Angel in the House", other texts and images such as Rousseau's *Emile*, Goethe's *Ewig Weibliche*, and the Virgin Mary all contributed to the cult of "true womanhood". Middle-class Victorian women were seen as pure, moral beings who inspired their husbands and guided their children. In the words of Gilbert and Gubar: "Worse still, even some of the most liberal thinkers of the age helped formulate the concept of a 'woman's sphere' that was in its way no less oppressive than the misogyny of medieval monks and the antifeminism of Augustan wits" (1985:185). A woman who did not fit into the tight prescriptions of the "cult of true womanhood" was labelled as the other extreme, a fallen woman. As Wollstonecraft wrote, it was "the passion of men that put women on thrones" (1792:64). It is still today the passion of men that has created the ideal image of women – blonde, hourglass-figured and unthreatening in intelligence.

Schreiner depicts the double view of women in her two main female characters Em and Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm*. While Lyndall is portrayed as a rebel, a potentially fallen woman who is castigated for going against society's grain, and is "punished" with the loss of her child and her own life, Em is depicted as "perfect wife material": fat, fertile, and knowing how to cook, sew and serve her husband. Indeed, Em is depicted as very similar to Wollstonecraft's description, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, of a sycophantic wife: "often amiable; their hearts are really more sensible to general benevolence, more alive to the sentiments that civilize life ... but, wanting a due proportion of reflection and self-government, they only inspire love; and are the mistresses of their husbands" (1792:115). So, Em can be seen as the *femme infantile* as she dreams only of marrying her fiancé, while proclaiming herself deprecatingly "[not] worthy of his love. I am not. It is great and pure" (1896:192).

Schreiner's feminist platform was closely linked to that of Wollstonecraft, as she, like her predecessor, "argued against the arbitrary fixing of sexually inherent qualities and treatment" (Clayton, 1983:43). In her female characters, Schreiner exposes and questions the predetermined roles and images of women, which construct them as either angel or whore. We can see Schreiner's indignation at the unfairness of the tightly prescriptive roles

imposed on women. As Showalter observes, Schreiner presents her female characters with authenticity and at the same time in a depressing and claustrophobic way (Clayton, 1983:104). It seems Schreiner consciously or unconsciously chose to portray heroines like Bertie, Rebekah, Lyndall and Undine in a distressing and realistic way in order to convey her feminist message about the repression of women by their circumstances. By using characters who go against the grain of what was considered proper in women's behaviour at the time, she commented on society's intolerance of women who did not follow the norms of behaviour, leading many readers to question the justice of the narrow roles women were granted. Her characters Bertie, Lyndall and Undine can all be seen as "cursed from birth to grave" (1896:245), each being a heroine whom the world seems to oppose. As Lyndall says,

They begin to shape us to our cursed end ... when we are tiny things in shoes and socks. We sit with our little feet drawn up under us in the window, and look out at the boys in their happy play. We want to go. Then a loving hand is laid upon us: 'Little one, you cannot go ... your little face will burn, and your nice white dress will be spoilt'. We feel it must be for our good, it is so lovingly said; but we cannot understand; and we kneel, still one little cheek wistfully pressed against the pane ... We see the complexion we were not to spoil, and the white frock, and we look into our own great eyes. The curse begins to act on us. It finishes its work when we are grown women, who no more look out wistfully... (1886:199)

Girls were taught to stay indoors in their formative years and had only the vicarious experience of longingly looking at the boys playing games they would have liked to join in, while boys were free to play to their hearts' content. We can see that Lyndall views women as being shaped to please from childhood to satisfy the whims of a male-dominated society, making sure their looks stayed perfect instead of developing their bodies and social skills by being able to play, explore and interact with other children. Lyndall draws the "cursed" situation which women, young and old, experience. They are shaped from an early age to fit society's ideal image of women so by the time they are grown their "education" is so ingrained that it is not even questioned. Just as they were not allowed outside to play with the boys as children, so they are not allowed "out" to get an education and vocation like men. Schreiner's last sentence is most moving and thought-provoking: when the "curse" has taken effect, women "no more look out wistfully" but have accepted their roles as women as no escape from their "curse" existed. The underlying message seems to be that women adapt to their repression psychologically as well as physically. Perhaps when they no longer have to look good to find a husband,

they are happy – as society has taught them to be. Yet, from a feminist perspective, marriage, for many, was like a spiritual death as, having fulfilled their duties as mothers and wives, they were no longer “useful”. This narrow purpose and importance must have made life a lonely, dejected one for middle-class women and so the “contented” feeling is nothing more than a chimera. As First and Scott point out, “Lyndall keeps returning to the brokenness of women’s lives and the constraints on their aspirations” (Clayton, 1983:101), as she exposes on the one hand the false image women have of life after marriage and motherhood, and on the other hand the possible disillusionment that they face once they quit the race to secure a husband. Contrasting with Lyndall’s words, we have in Woolf’s *The Years* the character of old Aunt Warburton, who no longer has to put up coquettish pretences and is described as “honest in her way” (1952:178). From this perspective, it is conceivable that after the ever-parading social façade of youth has passed, a woman can be more herself and so find a truer contentment than described in Lyndall’s words.

According to Rosenthal, “In giving her parties, Clarissa functions in the same way as Mrs Ramsay does in *To the Lighthouse*, and with the same purpose: to affirm life, to manufacture moments of order in the face of chaos” (1979:100). In this way these two characters can be seen as nurturing matriarchs as “Clarissa reminds us of Mrs Ramsay’s identifying herself with the beam of the lighthouse, which breaks though the darkness, or with the warmth and light of Mrs Ramsey’s own dinner party” (1979:100). Mrs Ramsay is not only the centre of the novel but that of her family: as the matriarch, she always “cater[s] to the needs of her children, her husband, and their friends ... [being] the seemingly limitless source of energy and life from which all characters draw their sustenance” (Rosenthal, 1979:104). Viewing these two characters in this way, we can also see them as a celebration of the matriarchal aspect of womanhood.

These two characters spend most of their lives in a milieu of change and are like many middle-aged women, trapped in a mentality, a marriage and a social environment that will not allow them the change or opportunity that younger women are offered. Woolf herself seems to mourn the fact that she lost out on equal education as a result of the era she was born in. At the end of *A Room of*

*One's Own* she beseeches young female students to make use of every opportunity offered to them, while in *Professions for Women* she writes:

You have won rooms of your own in the house hitherto exclusively owned by men. You are able, though not without great labour and effort, to pay the rent. You are earning five hundred pounds a year. But this freedom is only the beginning; the room is your own but it is still bare. It has to be furnished; it has to be decorated; it has to be shared. How are you going to furnish it, how are you going to decorate it? With whom are you going to share it, and upon what terms? These, I think are questions of the utmost importance and interest. For the first time in history ... you are able to decide for yourselves what the answers should be. (1931:63)

In this passage Woolf tries to make women aware of how lucky they are to have the chance of financial independence, education and professions, when women were for centuries virtual slaves to their male caretakers. She wants women to break out of the cycle to which the previous generation was tied, as they for the first time are in a position to gain liberation by means of education and a broader range of careers. Woolf suggests that the choice of what to do and how to do it is up to them; that they must take a decision, otherwise they will end up like their great-grandmothers and even their mothers: without autonomy and caught up in the same servile life as their ancestors.

Woolf also noted how women have been depicted in literature as adversaries. In *Orlando, a Biography*, she sarcastically writes: "[I]t is well known (Mr. T.R. has proved it) 'that women are incapable of any feeling of affection for their own sex and hold each other in the greatest aversion'" (1928(b):199). They are seen as in constant competition with one another to claim the most moneyed man. In *A Room of one's Own*, Woolf interrogates the idea that women have seldom been depicted as friends in literature:

'Chloe liked Olivia,' I read. And then it struck me how immense a change there was there. Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature. Cleopatra did not like Octavia ... Cleopatra's only feeling about Octavia is one of jealousy ... [A]lmost without exception, [women] are shown in their relation to men. It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen's day, not only seen by the other sex but seen only in relation to the other sex. (1928(a):81 – 82)

Women are depicted in works like Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* or Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* as adversaries in competition for a man. Save for a handful of texts (usually by women) Woolf claims, women were falsely, "almost without exception ... shown in relation to men" she adds: "[H]ow small a part of a

woman's life is that; and how little can a man know even of that when he observes it through the black or rosy spectacles which sex puts upon his nose" (1928(a):82). In this way, the representation of women in literature until the twentieth century seems only one small step away from that of the male-authored conduct books whose authors, knowing little about women, felt uninhibited in their prescriptions for women's behaviour, manners and dress. Just as the portrayal of heroines in literature spawned false images of women and perhaps suggested how women should and should not behave, in portraying what "good" women do and what happens to a "bad" heroine, so conduct books etched images of right and wrong behaviour, education and manners. One could say neither literature nor conduct books gave women a positive, encouraging image which would inspire positive traits in them and make them feel they could abandon the construct of a weaker, servile sex incapable of learning, physical activity or independence. The lack of strong, independent role-models for women kept them in ignorance of their potential and allowed passivity to become the accepted norm. Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf all found the ideal image of women stifling to real women. To them, the image and enactment of the "fawning spaniel", "sex parasite" and "Angel in the House" – society's epitome of femininity – smothered women's potential.

Marriage was a sensitive topic for women: from Wollstonecraft's to Woolf's era it determined a woman's happiness, financial security and independence. Most feminists and critics of women's literature write about men in the harshest terms, citing laws which excluded women, their scant education and misogynistic sayings as a generalisation of how all men felt and acted towards their wives, daughters, mothers, aunts and sisters. For example, Wollstonecraft quotes Rousseau: "[T]he education of women should be always relative to the men. To please, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young, and take care of us when grown up, to advise, to console us, to render our lives easy and agreeable: these are the duties of women at all times" (1792:152). Not all family relations would have been like this, and there must have been many happy unions, wonderful fathers and pride-instilling sons, but as a feminist critic, it is important to look at what was wrong, what was overlooked and what behaviour was condoned in society. All three writers had very strong views on marriage, which they wrote about rather

polemically, displaying the evils of conventional and ill-fated marriages while also putting forward their own concept of the ideal marriage.

For many critics, lack of choice due to third-rate professions and poor education was one of the key issues creating unhappiness in women's lives. From Wollstonecraft's day until Woolf's, women had very little option about whether they wanted to marry or not. They either married and were looked after and taken care of by their husbands or became companions, governesses or maids living in lonely poverty for the rest of their lives. Many women married not for love but for security. In *From Man to Man*, Rebekah marries Frank, a cousin with whom she is hardly acquainted. Schreiner writes:

He had always wanted to have her for his wife since [as] a boy of eleven he came with his parents from England to visit their relations in South Africa. He had gone back to England, but then ten years later he had come out again and settled in Cape Town to manage a branch of his father's business, and he had visited the farm once a year for four years, and had always asked Rebekah to marry him when he came, but she always said she could not. Now everyone was surprised: she had suddenly written to him that she would; and she was married the next day. (1926:82)

By comparison to Tant Sannie's twenty-four-hour meeting with, courtship of and proposal to Little Piet Vander Walt [sic], Rebekah's romance seems a lengthy and involved one. Until the 1920s women had little choice in the matter of marriage partners – especially on South African farms, which were remote and difficult to access by ox wagon. Both men and women "took what they could get" and made do. In England, as in suburban South Africa,

[M]ost women [preferred] the subjugation of matrimony to the uncertainties of spinsterhood ... [It was] not surprising that mothers struggled, often desperately, to further their daughters' chances on the 'marriage market' ... [S]pinsterhood would render her, as Jane Austen put it, a 'ridiculous old maid, the proper sport of boys and girls'. (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:291)

In Woolf's famous example, "the daughter who [in medieval times] refused to marry the gentleman of her parents' choice was liable to be locked up, beaten and flung about the room, without any shock being inflicted on public opinion" (1928(a):44). Woolf shows that this repression and expectation of women's behaviour persisted a few hundred years later, as she writes: "When the husband had been assigned, he was lord and master, so far at least as law and

custom could take him" (1928(a):44). Nor had women's liberty pertaining to marriage advanced – women were not only obliged to marry the man of their father's choice but bound within the marriage as they were only granted the right to sue for divorce in the 1830s and were only able to gain custody over their children from 1839 (Rowbotham, 1973: 41 - 42). For women like Wollstonecraft's character Mary, in *Mary, a Fiction*, being married to a brute like Mr Venables was like being chained in a torture chamber. Ironically, the prison cell to which she is confined as a result of her husband's tyranny allows her more liberty and happiness than she had as a "free" woman as she finds love in Darnford and a true friend in Jemima.

Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf viewed unions based on a girl's marrying to improve her station in life as legal prostitution. According to Wollstonecraft, "To rise in this world, and have the liberty of running from pleasure to pleasure, they must marry advantageously, and to this object their time is sacrificed, and their persons often legally prostituted" (1792:40). Similarly, Schreiner felt that many women were in a "purchasable condition ... in the blatantly barbarous field of sex traffic that lies beyond the pale of legal marriage" (1911:244). In *Three Guineas*, Woolf seems to share very similar views to her predecessors, affirming that "the profession of marriage in the educated class is a highly paid one" (1938:101). According to Berkman, Schreiner "declared that a married woman was no less a prostitute than those women who had no alternative to professional prostitution for adequate means of self-support" (1989:127). Several of Lyndall's speeches in *The Story of an African Farm* are used to show Schreiner's view on marriage and set the reader thinking. Schreiner touches on the sensitive issue of women going into the "profession" of marriage in Lyndall's words:

With good looks and youth marriage is easy to attain. There are men enough; but a woman who has sold herself, even for a ring and a new name, need hold her skirt aside for no creature in the street. They both earn their bread in one way ... [M]arriage without [love] is the uncleanliest [sic] traffic that defiles the world ... When we ask to be doctors, lawyers, law-makers, anything but ill-paid drudges, they say, – No; but you have men's chivalrous attention; now think of that and be satisfied! (1896:201)



While Wollstonecraft opposed marriage for most of her life, Schreiner believed, as she pointed out to her friend Karl Pearson, that it was the "moral obligation, that dependency of another soul upon you, that is so terrible in marriage" (Rive, 1987:82). Schreiner greatly admired Wollstonecraft and saw her marriage as the ideal. She wrote: "The relation of Mary to Godwin gives one such a splendid opportunity for treating of the ideal form of marriage" (Rive, 1987:106). So, Schreiner, like Wollstonecraft, believed marriage should be a unity of two people's minds, spirits and bodies and not an exchange of one's self and one's life for financial security. In "The Buddhist Priest's Wife", one of her short stories, Schreiner sets forth some of society's views on marriage. In a conversation, the male character exposes all the conventional and oppressive ideas about matrimony while the female character is used as a mouthpiece to express Schreiner's own ideas. The male character tries to impose a cultural role, saying, "You ought to settle down and marry like other women, not go wandering about the world to India and China and Italy and God knows where. You are simply making a mess of your life". When the female character replies that she is happy, he insists, "[B]ut a woman like you ought to marry, ought to have children" (1892:114). The female character explains her view on marriage with these words:

For a woman, marriage is much more serious than for a man. She might pass her life without meeting a man who she could possibly love, and, if she met him, it might not be right or possible. Marriage has become very complex now it has become so largely intellectual ... No woman has the right to marry a man if she has to bend out of shape for him. (1892:115)

Schreiner's attitude comes through very strongly in her words: on the one hand, as marriage was one of the few "professions" open to women, it was like a metaphorical boa constrictor around many women's necks as it signalled their "civil death" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:289) (I've checked, the quote is in my version) and an end to their freedom.

In her novels, Woolf portrayed less-than-perfect images of marriage. In *Mrs Dalloway*, she shows how an icy rift prevents any tenderness in the relationship between Clarissa and her husband. There are none of the traditionally shared things like a bedroom, lunch appointments with a mutual friend, or meaningful conversations such as one would expect in a marriage. Mr and Mrs Dalloway can be seen as one of those couples born of the "correctness" of the match

rather than from love. As Rosenthal writes, "Sleeping in separate rooms and asking almost nothing of one another, Richard and Clarissa live a life almost unsullied by passion or exhaustive commitments" (1979:97). Mrs Dalloway has opted for a marriage which demands very little and provides her with a life of luxury, instead of for one with Peter, to whom she is still strongly attracted, as her future with him was not as certain as it was with Richard. The union is a cold one and it seems that she entered the profession of "legal prostitution" in marrying simply because Richard seemed a better provider than Peter, who had obviously won and still has her heart.

In *Orlando, a Biography*, marriage exemplifies society's attitude towards unions through the ages. Woolf has the central character take on a different sex in different centuries, which allows the reader to examine attitudes to marriage in different eras and from both the male and the female perspective. Orlando's first marriage with the Turkish dancer Rosina Pepita is represented as a frenzied affair. In post-colonial terms, one could say Orlando colonises his subject Rosina with little thought for emotion and that his lust results in a hurried nuptial. We see Rosina through the eyes of the servants as they report: "[A] woman, much-muffled, but apparently of the peasant class, was drawn up by means of a rope ... they embraced passionately 'like lovers', and went into the room together". The next moment, the description reveals

... nothing less, indeed, than a deed of marriage drawn up, signed, and witnessed between his Lordship, Orlando, Knight of the Garter ... and Rosina Pepita, a dancer, father unknown, but a reputed gipsy [sic], mother also unknown but reputed a seller of old iron in the market-place over against Galata Bridge. (1928(b):121 - 122)

The brief mention of their marriage is contrasted with its heartless dismissal. As if it were a momentary fancy, Orlando comments on the charge brought against him that as the deceased father of three sons and husband to Rosina, his sons should inherit his property and fortune. Orlando's reaction is: "Such grave charges as these would, of course, take time and money to dispose of" (1928(b):153). Like some soiled garment, his family is thoughtlessly pushed away and left destitute without the slightest hint of guilt or feeling. Woolf perhaps tries to portray the fact that many men see women as "play-things" and convenient wives and that marriage is a nonchalant affair, much as Schreiner's male character in "The Buddhist Priest's Wife" remarks: "[W]hen a man reaches a certain age he wants to marry. He doesn't fall in love; it's not that he definitely

plans anything; but he does have that feeling that he ought to have a home and a wife and children" (1892:114). Both Woolf and Schreiner express the opinion that while women are dependent on marriage for financial security, men find it a matter of fancy or obligation.

Orlando's second union starts off with a shaky imbalance of power. Orlando, now female, has embraced the spirit of the Victorian age and thus acts like a Victorian lady, and is doing remarkably well, as we see in her first meeting with Shelmerdine, when she breaks her ankle and prepares melodramatically for death. Neither of Orlando's marriages starts with love. The first seems to be built on lust and perhaps the desire to subjugate Rosina Pepita. The second, to Shelmerdine, is a marriage of convenience – Orlando feels socially inept and develops a deep longing for someone to "lean upon" (1928(b):223) a spouse as she mourns: "I shall wear no wedding ring" (1928:224). As Orlando arrives back from Turkey she finds that "everyone is mated" and "each man and each woman has another allotted to it for life" (1928(b):221). As a woman, she becomes painfully aware of marriage and feels a failure without one. Woolf subtly comments on the state of Victorian women through this depiction of Orlando, like many unmarried women, feeling the desire to marry. In the second marriage, Orlando comes closer to Woolf's idea of faultless union. Ironically this is a pseudo-androgynous marriage. In a moment of discovery Orlando cries, "You're a woman, Shel!" as Shelmerdine responds, "You're a man, Orlando!" (1928(b):228). For Woolf an androgynous marriage was one of balance – a balance of male and female traits in both partners as well as a balance of power between the two spouses, escaping the traditional patriarchal domination in marriage. Considering this from a post-modern perspective, one could say Woolf aims to destroy or deconstruct the binary opposition between man and woman within the context of marriage. She blurs the boundaries and limitations of sex roles and confuses the reader, leading to a consideration of the true reason for and importance of marriage. So, like Wollstonecraft and Schreiner, Woolf essentially calls for equality and a drawing together of the sexes so that a union between a man and a woman might be meaningful and beneficial to each partner and to society as a whole.

For Wollstonecraft the perfect marriage comprised friendship, co-parenting and equality. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she wisely writes that in marriage, "friendship is ... the most sublime of all affections, because it is founded on principle and cemented by time" and continues: "The very reverse may be said of love" (1792:194). She advises: "[A]fter marriage calmly let passion subside into friendship – into that tender intimacy, which is the best refuge from care; yet is built on such pure, still affections, that idle jealousies would not be allowed to disturb the discharge of the sober duties of life" (1792:195). Wollstonecraft believed that love is but a flighty delusion of passion and that those whose marriage is initially based on love may find themselves having "not sufficient intellect to substitute the calm tenderness of friendship, the confidence of respect, instead of blind admiration and the sensual emotions of fondness" (1792:99). In her own life Wollstonecraft was opposed to the idea of marriage as she believed it would subjugate "women, their children and their property to patriarchal control" (Kelly, 1992:201) and only consented to it when she found out she was pregnant with William Godwin's child. Wollstonecraft held that the majority of marriages were founded on 'subservience for women under the tyranny of a husband, such as she had witnessed in her parents' marriage and saw again in her sister Everina's.

Schreiner criticised the restrictions in marriages such as those Wollstonecraft witnessed and wrote about in *Mary, a Fiction* and *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*. Schreiner felt that marriages in her own era bore too much similarity to those in the time of Wollstonecraft. As a result, Schreiner imagined how equality in unions could come about. In *Women and Labour*, she explains her ideal "New Man" and "New Woman", both of whom are "being rapidly modified as to their sexual and social ideals as to their mode of life, but that this change is strictly complementary" (1911:256). For Schreiner, a marriage between these "new species" would be "increasingly a fellowship of comrades, rather than the relationship of the owner and the bought, the keeper and the kept ... [with] active companionship and co-operation rather than passive submission" (1911:256). She summed up her view on marriage by writing: "The most ideal marriage at the present day, seems to me to be the union of two individuals strongly sympathetic" (Rive, 1987:95). One can see in Woolf's union with Leonard Woolf that she held a meeting of minds, equality and companionship to be the pillars of her marriage. Mary Anne Caws describes their relationship:

No children, for the doctors would have thought it unwise, because of Virginia's mad spells; no sex, and separate bedrooms – nevertheless, the life of Virginia and Leonard together must have been a happy one. They both thought so and repeatedly Virginia states that no one can be, can have been, as happy as she was, as they were together. (1990:31)

Indeed, in her diary Woolf repeatedly affirms her happiness in marriage. She wrote in April 1925, "But L. & I were too too happy, as they say; if I were now to die &c. Nobody shall say that I have not known perfect happiness, but few could put their finger on the moment, or say what made it" (Bell, 1980:8 – 9).

In the sphere of private life, there was a tension between what was expected of women, how they were portrayed, the role they were set, and the way they responded to this constructed image of their lives. Suffragettes and feminists fought to widen their sphere by striving to gain better education and legal recognition, as well as to secure the vote, divorce rights and possession of property. Slowly, as women gained more power over their lives, their private and public spheres widened. As Woolf writes in *A Room of One's Own* about the modern woman of the late 1920s:

[F]or her coming without preparation, without that effort on our part, without that determination that when she is born again she will find it possible to live and write her poetry, that we cannot expect, for that would be impossible. But I maintain that she would come if we work for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worth while. (1928(a):112)

The path to the emancipation of women may have taken centuries and may have seemed, at times, like a battle that could never be won, but a slow, heavy force accumulated over these few hundred years. For Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf, it was clear that the double standards in society had led to the narrow lives and situation of women. They believed this situation could be corrected or eradicated by elevating women to an intellectual level equal to that of men. For all three, education was vital to the independence of women as it meant they would be able to enter the professions and become financially independent, thus not having to rely on male guardians for financial security. Due to the inequitable treatment of women, they, unlike their male counterparts, were thought only capable of the most basic education. Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf supported and fought for equality in

education, as can be seen in their works. In the following chapter, I will look at the progress of education from the time of Wollstonecraft until Woolf's era and demonstrate how the three authors protested against the paucity of education for girls and women.

## Chapter Three

### Education

... [F]or girls are more restrained and cowed than boys, [which] speak[s] of the wearisome refinement they endured at school. Not allowed, perhaps, to step out of one broad walk in a garden, and obliged to pace with steady deportment stupidly backwards and forwards, holding their heads and turning out their toes, with shoulders braced back, instead of bounding, as nature directs to complete [their] own design ...  
(Wollstonecraft, 1792:248)

Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf were fervent about changing the status of education so that boys and girls would be educated in the same way. They hoped this would create minds which, equally educated, would blur the traditional roles of men and women and lead to egalitarianism. Wollstonecraft had very specific ideas on how children should be educated, which she set forth in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, while Schreiner opposed the poor state of education of girls and Woolf fought for equal standards in education, especially higher education. They hoped for parity in education, as they believed it would lead to equality between the sexes and equal opportunity in the professional field.

From before Wollstonecraft's time, the education of girls had been regarded as needing to be different from the education of boys. Experts in religion, medicine and science based this argument on the concept of "natural" differences between males and females. Their main concern was the effect that education might have on girls' mental and physical well-being (Skelton, 1993:305). The idea that girls needed only

ornamental learning continued into the twentieth century. In 1909 the President of the Local School Board in the North Surrey district addressed a group of girl scholars with the words: "To keep house, cook, nurse and delight in making others happy is your mission, duty and livelihood" (Frazer et al., 1992:37). Until the end of the Second World War such thinking on the education of girls was the accepted norm. Access to top-level education was neither possible nor desired for by most women: until the early 1900s, they had little knowledge of what they were being excluded from. Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf had the intellect and the desire to educate themselves as much as possible by reading widely and sharing their thoughts with intellectual groups. Wollstonecraft gained inspiration from the Rev. Price, the publisher Joseph Johnson, the poet and philosopher William Godwin and the radical intellectual Thomas Paine. All the members of her group were writers and philosophers spurred on by the changes in France after the Revolution. In England, Schreiner joined a group of thinkers dubbed "The Wollstonecraft" which was made up of lawyers, doctors and writers. This group met "for the free and unreserved discussion of all matters in any way connected with the mutual position and relation of men and women" (1987:65). Woolf was a well-known member of the Bloomsbury group, which created an atmosphere of reflection on life and literature for its members, including the writers E.M. Foster and Clive Bell and the publisher Leonard Woolf. As Woolf states in *Three Guineas*, many women over the centuries gained "unpaid-for education" by cultivating their minds through reading, writing and conversation with like-minded thinkers. These three writers can be seen as exemplars of women moulded by unusual teachers – poverty, derision, and exclusion from the public sphere. All three authors criticised the narrow sphere of influence available to women as it limited their lives and the control they had over their own destinies due to the lack of educational and professional opportunities. It is rather poignant that Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf, who believed so adamantly in the equal education of the sexes and hungered to gain knowledge, did not live to see the opening of Oxford, Cambridge, the University of Cape Town or the University of Pretoria to women, or to



experience a time when statements like that of the President of the North Surrey Local School Board would no longer be made.

Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf believed that the neglect of education was one of the chief reasons for the degraded position of women in society as they were seen as "less than men" – superficial, unable to reason and without much capacity for virtue. All three writers held the belief that virtue was not tied to sexual identity, but that the education of female understanding is a prerequisite for women's emancipation, and that until there is equality in society, until women are in some degree independent from men, it is vain to expect virtue from them (Clayton, 1983:43). Such unfair treatment and criticism seems to have been a vicious circle which Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf all felt needed to be broken by giving girls an education on a par with that of boys so that there would be little room for critical statements on women's behaviour. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft devoted a chapter to the effect of misogynistic domination on women. Characteristically severe on the frivolous, coquettish behaviour of women (Kelly, 1992:34), in this chapter she took a more forgiving stance, indicating that women's superficial behaviour was largely imprinted by

[T]he books professedly written for their instruction, which make the first impression on their minds, [and] all inculcate the same opinions. Educated then in worse than Egyptian bondage, it is unreasonable, as well as cruel, to upbraid them with faults that can scarcely be avoided. (1792:193)

In this sense women were in a double bind: on the one hand they were moulded by manuals on manners, ornamental education and societal expectations of their behaviour and on the other they were criticised and degraded for being unable to reason, incapable of thought, sentimental and weak.

As Branca writes: "The concept of education for women was first widely discussed in the late eighteenth century and the debate gained

intensity through the following century" (1978:171). Wollstonecraft's was a time when a liberal education for girls consisted of embroidery, modelling in wax, painting on glass and musical accomplishment. Misogynistic thought on the education of girls flourished: a pamphlet written by Dr Gregory seems to sum up the idea of girls' education: "[K]eep learning a secret especially from men who are jealous of such women" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:77). It seems the threat men experienced from the fear of women's gaining power over them was also felt then and not only in Schreiner and Woolf's days. Woolf wonders if "man demand[ed] sympathy and resent[ed] competition ... [and if their] dominance [was a] craving over submission?" (1938:233 – 234). In the opinion of all three writers, the naïveté of women was both the result of and the reason for patriarchal rule as they all claimed that once educated, women would obtain not only virtue but also independence and equality. Many misogynistic thinkers believed that women were incapable of contemplating human rights and morality, though Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf rejected such thinking. Wollstonecraft, being well grounded in the Enlightenment tradition, incorporated the belief that reason, natural law and equal rights were basic human rights for men as well as women into her ideas on education. This belief in equality became a cornerstone of feminist thought. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft fought for the equal rights of women and her "impassioned plea against the miseducation of women constituted a groundbreaking demonstration of how the very protection offered women confines them to the vices and virtues of an inferior class" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:255). According to Wollstonecraft:

To render mankind more virtuous, and happier of course, both sexes must act from the same principle; but how can that be expected when only one is allowed to see the reasonableness of it? To render also the social compact truly equitable, and in order to spread those enlightening principles, which alone meliorate the fate of man, women must be allowed to found their virtue on knowledge, which is scarcely possible unless they be educated by the same pursuits as men. For they are now so inferiour [sic] by ignorance and low desires, as not to deserve to be ranked with them. (1792:259 – 260)

Regardless of the virtual banning of women from education around Wollstonecraft's time, one of the results of the flimsy curriculum offered them was the formation of groups like the "Bluestockings", which bore testimony to the fact that some women craved intellectual stimulation. The Bluestockings were a group of middle- and upper-class ladies who met informally, "imitating [women in] the salons of French hostesses, [and] became known for their learning and grace" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:77). Meeting informally, the likes of Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter and Frances Boscawen discussed science, philosophy and literature – subjects from which women were barred at the time (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:77). Though the group later became famous for its knowledge and refinement, it should not be forgotten that their meetings were held in private as such topics were definitely not generally considered suitable for the "fragile" female mind.

Education thus seems to have been the intellectual dividing line between men and women and, as Showalter writes, "intelligent women aspired to study Greek and Latin with a touching faith that such knowledge would open the world of male power and wisdom to them" (1978:42). In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft overthrew many false ideas on the education of women. In one example she quotes Rousseau's words: "Educate women like men ... and the more they resemble our sex the less power they will have over us" and comments, "This is the very point I am at. I do not wish them to have power over men but over themselves" (1792:159). Wollstonecraft agreed with Rousseau that educated women would not need to manipulate men with their sexual powers but be able to govern themselves and interact as equals. She realised that to try to dominate men would only make women the "oppressors". Thus, she understood

that women should embrace their sexually inherent qualities and recognise that they have unique talents, different from those of their male counterparts. She saw that to gain equality (or a balance of power in society), women would have to struggle. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* she affirms:

[I]mprovement must be mutual, or the injustice which one half of the human race are obliged to submit to, retorting on their oppressors, the virtue of man will be worm-eaten by the insect whom he keeps under his feet. (1792:262)

Just as Wollstonecraft saw the futility of gaining power over men, so Schreiner also believed that the hierarchical ranking of men above women should be levelled, not overthrown, through education. In *Women and Labour* she states: "Our [W]oman's [M]ovement resembles strongly ... the gigantic religious and intellectual movement which for centuries convulsed the life of Europe ... the final emancipation of the human intellect and freedom of the human spirit" (1911:136). Schreiner wanted this freedom and intellect to be gained by both sexes in all classes so that "the race, male and female [could] march side by side" (1911:131). Similarly, Woolf did not wish to gain power over men but fought for women to be accepted as equals, in every way, to men. She wanted women to have influence in politics, education and the professional world so that they would gain respect according to their ability and not because of the men they married. In *Three Guineas*, she (like Schreiner) envisaged a time when equality between the sexes would reign and

[T]he daughters and sons of educated men ... [would be] fighting together side by side ... [for] the rights of all – all men and all women – to the respect in their persons of the great principles of Justice and Equality and Liberty. (1938:187)

Shortly after the French Revolution, many started to question the status quo of the old regime. There was a strong feminist movement which embraced the revolutionary feeling and campaigned for women's equal rights. At this time a French feminist journal called *La Femme Affranchie* expressed its sentiments on the pro-education campaign for women:

[T]he real woman will be the woman emancipated by a rational education which, without distinction of sex and without distinction of class, will give freely to all intellects the culture that is demanded and the knowledge that each mind can assimilate (Branca, 1978:173).

This attitude to education was held not only by French women but also by many liberals around Wollstonecraft's time, one of whom was Catharine Macauley, the writer and activist who published *Letters on Education*. Wollstonecraft regarded her highly and the two corresponded on their work and sent each other copies of their texts as they greatly admired each other's thoughts. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft honoured Macauley after her death by writing that she was the "woman of the greatest abilities, undoubtedly, that this country has ever produced ... [and] an example of intellectual acquirements supposed to be incompatible with the weakness of her sex" (1792; 180). In a letter that Wollstonecraft sent Macauley along with a copy of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, the precursor to her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she stated: "You are the only female writer who I coincide with respecting the rank our sex ought to endeavour to attain in the world" (Taylor, 2003:49). In her reply, Macauley conveyed her pleasure in reading the copy of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* and wrote that she was delighted that the "publication which I have so greatly admired from its pathos and sentiment should have been written by a woman and thus to see my opinion of the powers and talents of the sex in your pen so early verified" (Taylor, 2003:49).

Wollstonecraft believed that cultivation of the female intellect was the only remedy for frivolity and triviality:

[T]he most perfect education ... is such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart ... To enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent ... in fact it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason. (1792:213)

Wollstonecraft was later hailed by feminists and educators alike for her foresight on education, which was made concrete roughly a century later. At the time, though, her thoughts on education were revolutionary, even shocking, as eighteenth-century Britain educated its girl children very meagrely. Girls from wealthier families were usually groomed for the fiercely competitive marriage market by being taught dancing, singing, French and the piano. Girls whose families could not afford these lessons were taught at home by mothers or sisters (Taylor, 2003:44). According to Taylor,

[t]he most advanced female curriculum proposed by pedagogic theorists included history, literature, geography, languages (particularly French and Italian) and some 'superficial knowledge' of natural philosophy and mathematics but seldom [involved] real erudition. (2003:45)

With this kind of education, it is little wonder that girls turned towards "superficial pastimes" as their education was itself practically a superficial pastime. However, Wollstonecraft's radical ideas were not well received by all, which shows just how deeply misogynistic ideology had penetrated society. The writer Anna Barbauld's response to Wollstonecraft was less than enthusiastic as she wrote, "[Y]oung ladies ... ought only to have such a general tincture of knowledge as to make them agreeable to a man of sense" (Taylor, 2003:46). James Fordyce, the Scottish Enlightenment writer, horrified at the idea of women gaining a solid education, melodramatically declared: "Femininity is gone: Nature is transformed ... [into] a clamorous, obstinate, contentious being ... fit only to be chased from the haunts of society" (Taylor, 2003:46). Thinking such as this laid the foundation of a kind of system that relegated women to an inferior education and led Wollstonecraft to comment:

Educated in the enervating style recommended by the writers on whom I have been animadverting; and not having a chance, from their subordinate state in society, to recover their lost ground, is it surprising that women every where [sic] appear defect in nature? Is it surprising, when we consider what a determinate effect an early association of ideas has on a character, that they neglect their understandings, and turn all their attention to their persons? (1792:191)

In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, she started formulating her ideas on education, maintaining that mothers should raise their daughters no differently from their sons, allowing both to be educated by tutors and obtain schooling. Wollstonecraft pleaded against the miseducation of young ladies as they did not learn subjects that would stimulate their minds intellectually, which led them to become frivolous, vain and shallow. Wollstonecraft harshly criticised mothers for raising their daughters to be vain and superficial, feeling from the first that the lack or poor quality of girls' education was the deepest source of their limitations in later life. Having run a school for young ladies, Newington Green, Wollstonecraft was able to identify areas in girls' upbringing that needed to be changed. She, for instance, shunned the theatre and warned mothers that its melodrama would give young ladies false impressions of life and lead them to become overly dramatic. Thus much of *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* is devoted to cautioning mothers against instilling any habits or beliefs that would lead to the superficiality, thoughtlessness or idleness to which so many fashionable middle-class ladies fell prey at the time. Disliking artificiality of any kind, she requested mothers to instruct their daughters that their talk "should never be expressed when it was not genuine" (1995:40). Wollstonecraft advised mothers to encourage children to think for themselves and fill their minds not with improper tales, but with stories that would teach them morals. She advocated teaching children the skill of writing, as she thought writing to be "of great consequence in life as to our temporal interest and still more to the mind; as it teaches

people to arrange their thoughts and digest them" (1995:46). She also warned against contrived dress as she felt that girls over-adorned themselves in clothing which distracted people from their true intellect. The façade of fashion and superficial pastimes encouraged the belief that women had only limited intellectual capacity in relation to men and so perpetuated the patriarchal domination of women and the belief that they were mentally delicate.

Wollstonecraft believed that mothers acted as role-models to their daughters, resulting in daughters being brought up to emulate their mothers. Thus she felt it important for mothers themselves to be educated. She asserts in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that for a woman to be a good mother, she must "have sense and that independence of mind few women possess" (1792:233). Wollstonecraft asked mothers in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* to lay "a foundation of sound body and mind in the rising generation" (1995:278). She thought it imperative that they should pay attention to their children, encouraging them to reason and instilling a superior education in both boys and girls. She wanted women to take a pro-active approach to changing the lives of their daughters and themselves.

Both Schreiner and Wollstonecraft saw mothers as conveyers of culture and beliefs and felt that they should be better educated and carry their knowledge over to their children. Having read *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Schreiner shared Wollstonecraft's beliefs that schooled mothers should take personal care of their children instead of relegating them to a nursery with a nanny and, conversely, warned mothers against treating children like play-things. Like Wollstonecraft, Schreiner also reflected that educated women make informed



decisions for the community as well as the home: "[H]ers was the training and influence which shaped them" (1911:54). Though she thought mothers should not be ignorant she felt that they should not be entirely responsible for the education of their children but only foster a desire for learning in their children as "the woman who should at the present day insist on entirely educating her own offspring would ... inflict irreparable injury on them, because she is incompetent" (1911:55). So, both felt that women should gain an education, if for nothing more than "fulfilling the duties of a mother ... a woman with a sound constitution may still keep her person scrupulously neat and assist to maintain her family, if necessary, or by reading and conversations with both sexes, indiscriminately, improve her mind" (1792:279). They also advocated the education of mothers so that they might in turn produce "able and labouring manhood; [as] only an effete and inactive male can ultimately be produced by an effete and inactive womanhood" (1911:107). At the same time the evils of uneducated mothers were pointed out by Wollstonecraft as she held firm that "[I]gnorant women mistreat their babies, alienate their servants [and] ruin family finances ... [and that] only well-instructed women make good wives and mothers" (Taylor, 2003:47).

From Wollstonecraft's time, according to Branca, there were "an endless number of statements ... advocating higher education for women on the grounds that it would make them better housewives and mothers" (1978:173). Thus, even though radical feminists like Wollstonecraft and Schreiner argued for the education of women, it does seem rather limiting that one of their major reasons was that "they will quickly become good wives and mothers" (Wollstonecraft, 1792:264). In both *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft suggested that educated women make better mothers and wives, do not resort to vanity or shallow amusements, have more dignity and are the social and intellectual equals of their male counterparts. For wives, an

education was also paramount as it taught them independence so that they did not turn into "meek wives and foolish mothers; wanting their children to love them best, and take their part, in secret, against the father" (1792:233). Wollstonecraft affirmed that educated women would not have to rely on the judgement of their husbands but would be able to depend on their own knowledge of "anatomy and medicine [which would] enable them to take care of their own health [as well as] ... make them rational nurses of their infants, parents, and their husbands" (1792:264). Equal education would allow husband and wife to become equal partners in marriage and abolish the typical master-slave marriage.

Wollstonecraft is most famous for her proposal of a national co-education system, which, roughly a century later, revolutionised society. Even today, her forward-thinking proposal for co-education is hailed by feminists and educators. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft insisted on co-education: boys and girls of all classes and all levels of ability should be taught together so that the division based on aptitude and rank would be eradicated as she believed school should be a place where "boys and girls, rich and poor, should meet together" (1792:253). Though she entreated mothers to instil a foundation of learning, she thought private education was inadequate for many reasons. Firstly, Wollstonecraft considered it unnatural for children to be in the "society of men and women ... [as they would] very soon acquire that kind of premature manhood which stops the growth of every vigorous mind or body" (1792:241). She believed children should be able to "prattle and play with [other] children" (1792:242) and for this to occur, it was necessary to send them to school, though not just any school; a public, co-educational school. For her, boys at single-sex schools became "gluttons and slovens and instead of cultivating domestic affections, very early rush into libertinism which destroys their constitution before it is formed; hardening the heart as it weakens the understanding" (1792:246). She

also disapproved of girls' schools as, being "shut up together" (1792:246), the girls would only learn superficial subjects pertaining to domesticity. For Wollstonecraft, a public, co-educational system would erase the social and sexual hierarchies in society as it would "be without those sexual distinctions that taint the mind" (1792:250). Schreiner shared Wollstonecraft's belief that children should not be schooled at home. In *Women and Labour* she wrote: "[T]he child [should] of necessity [be] removed from the hands of the mother, and placed in those of the specialised instructor" (1911:134). Thus Schreiner, like her predecessor, firmly held that public education was paramount as she thought mothers incapable of providing adequate education, given the ever-changing pace of society. Wollstonecraft's ideal educational system started with "an elementary day-school, where boys and girls, rich and poor, should meet together" (1792:253). It would have a playground so that children could exercise their bodies, and an "element of religion, history, the history of man, and politics" (1792:253) might be taught. She also proposed that at the age of nine, children should be streamlined into the areas of study in which they showed promise. She envisioned that this system would emancipate both men and women. For men, it would lead them away from their patriarchal outlook on life and allow them to be better, more understanding fathers and husbands, as they would gain more respect for women. Wollstonecraft hoped that her proposed system of education would allow women to rid themselves of their "flippant sportiveness of refined coquetry, discard themselves of vanity [and] acquire a portion of knowledge superior to that of the rest of their sex" (1792:264).

In the Victorian age, the continuing influence of Rousseau's belief that a girl should be taught to subordinate her interests to those of men meant that sewing, watercolour painting and music were still the staples of girls' education. In an era obsessed with "a woman's place", educators taught subjects which moulded women into decorous,

submissive, angelic creatures – an ideal towards which the upper and middle classes strove. Ex-governess Anna Jameson, who wrote about the distorted educational system in the Victorian era, comments: “[I]t was absurd to educate girls to be ‘roses’ and then send them to pass their lives in an arctic zone” (Rowbotham, 1973:48). Her observation was accurate as women were not taught to deal with the realities of life and were therefore effectively excluded from it. Her remark summed up the educational system beyond her own time. Although reforms slowly started to take place around the 1850s it was not until the 1950s that any real equality was brought into the system. In the 1850s, national governments became more active in the control of education and many pronounced that reforms had started to take place in primary schools, as primary schooling had been made compulsory for boys and girls, but differences persisted. Some educational institutions that opened their doors to women had a distorted idea of what this meant. According to Banks,

Oberlin College, one of the earliest examples of co-education, discriminated between its male and female students in many ways. The women students, for example, were expected to cook and clean for themselves and for the male students. (1981:45)

Such shocking discrimination persisted beyond the late 1800s. As Skelton notes, “Education in the early part of the twentieth century lacked the benefit of feminist analysis, and so continued to provide an ‘appropriate curriculum’ for girls” (1986:305). An “appropriate curriculum” for public schools was very much located in the domestic sphere, though a few private girls’ schools offered all the subjects the boys’ schools presented.

Schreiner, like Wollstonecraft and Woolf, discredited the misogynistic thinking that women were incapable of applying themselves to study. She writes:

[W]omen’s adequacy in the modern field of intellectual or skilled manual labour is no more to-day [sic] an open matter

for debate, than the number of modern women who, as senior wranglers, doctors &c. [sic], have already successfully entered the new fields and the high standard attained by women in all university examinations to which they are admitted ... proves their intellectual and moral fitness for the new forms of labour. (1911:221 – 222)

Schreiner blamed the dearth of women in educational institutions and professions on a society which had cut them off from equal opportunities. As she writes in *Women and Labour*, women had not been placed in “like intellectual conditions, with like stimuli, like training, and like rewards that some aptitudes [might] be found running parallel with [men’s]” (1911:202). She blames the patriarchal environment for creating traditions and a culture which did not foster a desire or need in women to gain an education. Schreiner wanted the sexes to be educated equally so that women’s ignorance could not be mistaken for women’s stupidity. She maintains “equality of training, intellectual or physical, is essential ... [to show] the organic aptitudes of a sex or class” (1911:205). Schreiner negated the sexist thoughts on women’s intellect by writing that they were no more than false assumptions made by a sexist society. In *Women and Labour* she writes emphatically:

We have no adequate scientific data from which to draw any conclusion, and any attempt to divide the occupations in which male and female intellects and wills should be employed, must be to attempt a purely artificial and arbitrary division: a division not more rational and scientific than an attempt to determine by the colour of his eyes and the shape and the strength of his legs, whether a lad should be astronomer or an engraver. (1911:160)

To Schreiner, men and women were “two halves of humanity ... found so identical and so closely to balance, that no superiority can possibly be asserted of either” (1911:208). For her, the disparity that thrived between the sexes was not a matter of biology but of social and educational differences which could be remedied through the proper and equal schooling of both sexes. Wollstonecraft also disregarded the misogynistic belief that women were “artificial, weak characters ... and consequently, more useless members of society” (1792:87). In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she writes against this kind of

thinking that tends to “disregard one half of the human species, and render women pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue” (1792:87). To resolve this erroneous thinking about women, Wollstonecraft advocates education: “The woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband” (1792:95). Woolf believed that education would lift the standards, morals and virtues of women so that they might be seen as equals to men. She also felt women of her time had more opportunities, as well as private and public freedom, and thus implores them to use the chance of education in order to fulfil the dreams of foremothers such as Wollstonecraft and Schreiner. Woolf wanted young ladies to strengthen their minds, realise that there is no scientific data which can prove the inferiority of the female mind, and start to close the divide between the sexes. Addressing her female audience in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf used these words: “I should implore you to remember your responsibilities, to be higher, more spiritual; I should remind you how much depends upon you, and what influence you can exert on the future” (1928(a):109).

The poor quality of girls' education is shown in Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* as it leaves Lyndall filled with disillusionment. She is determined to get an education so that she may gain independence and improve her situation in life as she, unlike Em, has nothing to inherit that will earn her a living. As a child, Lyndall tells Em of her plans to study:

There is nothing [that] helps in this world ... but to be wise, and to know everything – to be clever ... When you are seventeen this Boer-woman will go; you will have this farm and everything that is upon it for your own; but I ... will have nothing. I must learn. (1896:14 – 15)

When she returns from her schooling, Lyndall is filled with a deep disappointment as the reality of women's education has shown her that

women are discriminated against not only in life in general, but also by the educational system. She also exposes the differences in adolescent education: while boys are taught at schools, girls "are not to study law, nor science, nor art; so we study [men]" (1896:203). Her words seem to echo Wollstonecraft's main arguments in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* – while boys are taught substantial subjects, girls are taught only to adorn themselves and adore men. She recounts her experience:

I have discovered that of all cursed places under the sun, where the hungriest soul can hardly pick a few grains of knowledge, a girls' boarding-school [sic] is the worst. They are called finishing schools, and the name tells accurately what they are. They finish everything but imbecility and weakness, and that they cultivate ... I have not learnt what I expected. (1896:194 – 196)

Through Lyndall, Schreiner gives her opinion of finishing schools, which she abhorred. In a letter to her friend Mary Sauer in 1896, she wrote: "I would advise you not to take Dorothy to England at all but to send her to Miss Molteno's at Port Elizabeth. You know my HORROR of schools, well if I *had* a child and had to part with it I would send it there" (1987:275 – 276). According to Rive, Schreiner was writing about the Collegiate School for Girls in Port Elizabeth, which was a private and independent school known for its excellence in education as subjects like mathematics, physics and biology were taught there (1987:276).

Despite all the efforts on behalf of co-education, according to Branca traditional culture still persisted as "most women's education did not change basic goals [of marriage]. It enhanced marriage prospects by making the woman more interesting and useful and also by expanding her social contacts" (1978:175). In *Three Guineas* Woolf remarks how the opening of schools to women did not change the mindset of society

as many were still stuck in the Victorian mode of thought that a woman's sphere was marriage and the home. In *Three Guineas* she comments rather bitterly on the grooming of women and the shelteredness of their lives. Provoking thought and awareness on the position of women and education, she asks:

And what was the great end and aim of these years of that education? Marriage, of course '... it was not a question of *whether* we should marry, but simply *whom* we should marry,' says one of them. It was with a view to marriage that her mind was taught. It was with a view to marriage that she tinkled on the piano, but was not allowed to join an orchestra; sketched innocent domestic scenes, but was not allowed to study from the nude. (1938:69 – 70)

One has to wonder why education did not achieve equality between the sexes but instead cultivated more interesting wives. Perhaps the answer is twofold. Girls were still taught a superficial curriculum with subjects like needlework and music, which traditionalists believed suited their mental capability, and were thus automatically excluded from further university education (Branca, 1978:171 – 173). Women's education only obtained a status equal to that of men when major institutions like Oxford and Cambridge finally opened their doors to women in the late 1930s and co-education gradually became the norm. Having gained some knowledge, however, women of the late 1800s and early 1900s became more frustratingly aware of what they were being excluded from, in comparison to women one or two hundred years earlier, who had very little knowledge or schooling. Women therefore recognised that equality in education had still not been obtained, regardless of all the co-educational schools that had opened. Secondly, due to their inferior education, women were still not welcomed into the professions. For many, having a career meant working as a clerk or a teacher. Such "men's vocations" as medicine, law or business were worlds away from them. Institutions which did hire women would not place them in top positions as they knew their training could not match that of their male counterparts.



According to Showalter, "For the middle-class girl, the departure of a brother for school was a painful awakening to her inferior status" (1978:41). Woolf felt the sting of this kind of discrimination as a "daughter of an educated man". While Woolf's father was considered a Victorian free-thinker, there was little which could be considered emancipated in his family structure. He can be seen as an example of the patriarchal thinking that Woolf condemned in *Three Guineas* and *A Room of One's Own*, as all her brothers went to public schools and to Cambridge while Woolf and her sisters received an education at home in preparation for marriage (Rosenthal, 1979:3). Woolf was excluded from her brothers' circle as they considered her ignorant – an exclusion which led her to recognise the injury caused by double standards in education. In *Three Guineas*, she comes close to using the text as an "emotional dumping ground" as she explains how women were indoctrinated to believe that learning was not for them though many may, like her, have had a deep desire to become learned. She advises young ladies to ignore the old stigma attached to their learning and fulfil their dreams of going to school as many colleges had, at that time, opened their doors to women. In this way she urges women of the 1930s to live the life she would have liked:

'I was told that the desire for learning in women was against the will of God, ...' – we must allow that their desire must have been strong. And if we reflect that all the professions for which a university education fitted her brothers were closed to her, her belief in the value of education must appear still stronger ... so innate in human nature is the desire for education that you will find, if you consult [a] biography, that the same desire, in spite of all the impediments that tradition, poverty and ridicule could put in its way, existed too among women (1938:46 – 47).

Millet writes, "the sexual revolution would have had little impetus, the Woman's Movement still less, without the growth of higher education for women, one of the major achievements of the [twentieth century]" (1969:76). It was in this setting that Woolf produced *A Room of One's*

*Own and Three Guineas*. She points out the blatant discrimination that, as late as 1937, colleges for women were not allowed full membership at Cambridge. Woolf protests:

[T]he women's colleges are not allowed to be members of the university; and the number of educated men's daughters who are allowed to receive a university education is strictly limited; though both contribute to university funds. (1938:55)

Discrimination was also shown in the financial support given to women's colleges in comparison to the wealth of the men's colleges:

[B]ut if we measure the money available for scholarships at men's colleges with the money available for their sisters at the women's colleges, we shall save ourselves the trouble of adding up; and come to the conclusion that the colleges for the sisters of educated men are, compared with their brothers' colleges, unbelievably and shamefully poor. (1938:56)

Woolf shows "the differences between the haves and the have-nots" (Rosenthal, 1979:221). At the heart of her arguments in *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* is her call for economic equality as she describes the wealth, tradition and power of the established men's colleges and questions why women's colleges do not have this same luxury. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf remarks on the poverty and neglect of women's colleges by contrasting the meals of two colleges, having Mrs Seton say that "[t]he amenities ... will have to wait" (1928(a):22) as the college's state of poverty forces it to focus on the most basic essentials. While women's colleges served unceremonious meals of beef and greens gained by "bargaining and cheapening" (1928(a):19), male college students dined on sumptuous meals of partridge and wine. Woolf contrasts the two to show the lack of funding and support available to women's colleges.

In *The Years*, Woolf also exposes the discrepancy between the kind of tutoring and educational surroundings males experienced at the tertiary level and the kind offered to females who were able to study further. In

their colleges, filled with books and pianos and surrounded by gardens, the males warm themselves with port as one of them says pompously: "You can't go in for an exam without drinking" (1951:54). The male students do not seem to take their studies very seriously as a large part of their experience seems to be built around keeping the traditions, talking about "girls and horses" while drinking fine wine sent by doting fathers. This lavish way of study is contrasted with that of Kitty, a female student whose liberal-minded parents allow her to continue her education. We see her head off in the rain to her tutor, Miss Cradock's, "ramshackle" house for her lesson. Instead of giving Kitty any helpful advice on her essay, which Miss Cradock regards as not "worth correcting" (1951:68), the two chat about flowers, moss and the Scarborough moors – hardly conducive to furthering Kitty's studies. Even though women were by Woolf's time able to further their education, they received little more than token learning as the standard of their colleges was inferior and the prospect of attaining a superior career with the learning gained was futile. According to Branca, most feminist demands for equality of schools were realised by 1914 with the expansion of facilities and upgrading of curricula, although co-education at the university level remained unattainable as girls still received only practical training at school (1978:173). By Woolf's time co-education was established but co-educational schooling was not the preferred form of education, possibly because of the feeling that boys educated with girls would not receive superior schooling. Woolf exposes the gaps between male and female colleges in *A Room of One's Own*, showing the contrasts between Oxbridge, a traditional male college, and Fernham, a women's college. Woolf uses subtle and obvious contrasts to show not only the differences in monetary support but also in educational excellence and traditions.

Branca affirms: "Feminists entered the [educational] scene with increasing force toward the end of the nineteenth century,

concentrating on changes at the higher levels of education" (1978:173). The accumulation of attention to the issue of women's education could be taken as an indication that society was changing, though very slowly. While liberal thinkers agreed that schooling for women would lead to a better society, many conservatives and anti-feminists claimed that an education would distract a woman from her domestic duties, and the old belief that "women were by nature intellectually inferior to men [and that] education could not remedy this basic fact of life" (Branca, 1978:171) still prevailed in society until the late 1940s. In Woolf's *The Years*, Kitty Malone's father regards his daughter as unfit for schooling. Though her parents "indulge her" by allowing her to further her education, her father, Mr Malone, is still saddled with the chauvinistic mentality as he says to his daughter: "Nature did not intend you to be a scholar, my dear" (1951:86). Just like Colonel Pargiter, Mr Malone is disinclined to support his daughter's education. This kind of thinking shows how deeply the affirmations of moralists, educators and physicians that women should lead decorous, selfless, private lives as daughters, wives and mothers had permeated the ideology of society.

Woolf also argued against sexist writing as she responded in *The Intellectual Status of Women* to a column written by "Affable Hawk" (alias Desmond MacCarthy) about Arnold Bennett's *Our Women*. MacCarthy had made it clear that Bennett endorsed the idea that women were intellectually inferior. In her reaction, she discredits Bennett's conclusion that "no amount of education and liberty of action will sensibly alter" (1920(b):55) women's alleged inferiority to men by citing some examples of brilliant women who succeeded in their writing regardless of the fact that they had received no formal education. Her response continues:

[W]hen I compare the Duchess of Newcastle with Jane Austen, the matchless Orinda with Emily Brontë, Mrs Haywood with George Eliot, Aphra Behn with Charlotte Brontë, Jane Grey with Jane Harrison, the advance in

intellectual power seems to me not only sensible but immense; the comparison with men not in the least one that inclines me to suicide; and the effects of education and liberty scarcely to be overrated. (1920(b):55 – 56)

Schreiner recalls: "When I was a child, and a young girl in my teens, the thing that absorbed my thoughts and feelings was the position of women" (Clayton, 1983:55). Given that Schreiner started writing *The Story of an African Farm* at the age of nineteen and had it published at twenty-eight it is fair to say that Lyndall seems to be something of an autobiographical figure, laying bare Schreiner's own thoughts on the position of women. In *The Story of an African Farm*, Lyndall experiences some equality of power with Waldo as she says, "When I am with you I never know that I am a woman and you are a man; I only know that we are both things that think" (1896:197). Schreiner desperately wanted to escape the stigma of inferiority placed on women and wrote to Havelock Ellis: "I wish I was a man that I might be friends with you all, but you know my sex must always divide. I only feel like a man but to you all I seem a woman" (1987:179). Thus, with the sad state of women's education at that time, women were essentially powerless.

While Wollstonecraft and Schreiner argued for an education that would facilitate equality between men and women, Woolf also held firm to the idea of women embracing their femininity and cultivating their own style of writing and intellectuality. As Minow-Pinkney writes, "Woolf advocates the 'woman's sentence', but only in the sense that it is used to describe a woman's mind by a writer who is neither proud nor afraid of anything that she may discover in the psychology of her sex" (1987:8). For Woolf, embracing the unique traits of one's sex was crucial and education would "bring out and fortify the differences rather

than the similarities ... For we have too much likeness as it is" (1928(a):140). So women educated to the same level as men would no longer feel bound by inferiority and ignorance, but embrace their unique talents and be confident in their difference from men while acknowledging their new-found equal status. As Minow-Pinkney states, for Woolf, "Androgyny is the rejection of sameness. It aims to cultivate difference on an individual level, in the teeth of a cultural impulse to reduce the two sexes into something which is seemingly neither but actually male" (1987:10). In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf writes, "It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple" (1928(a):157). Perhaps, in writing this, Woolf alludes to the opposition and differentiation of the words man/woman. By calling for an androgynous mind, she calls for a unity, balance or wholeness in the power struggle between men and women instead of a hierarchical structure in which the man/male will always dominate the woman/female. Woolf suggests that the creative mind should be androgynous. Making this statement, she did not mean the avoidance of all sexuality, male or female, but the simultaneous embracing of both so that the writer may compose, authentically, male and female characters, portraying their experiences as real and valid. To an androgynous mind, women had to step inside the dominant order of society from which they were excluded. The dominating class had to allow women the freedom to attend the schools of their choice and to obtain jobs previously reserved for men. Woolf acknowledges that women felt themselves to be the target of patriarchal domination and realises that in order to break from this, they needed to heighten their status by gaining a balance with men, which at the time would require men to incorporate traditionally feminine traits such as compassion, creativity and nurturing with traditionally male traits such as logic, education and independence. In seeking this, Woolf wanted to create a balance between the two forces, male and female, that symbolised by the androgynous mind. As Showalter suggests, Woolf "sought a serene androgynous 'oneness'" (1978:28). In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf states: "A woman must have money and a room of her own" (1928(a):6). By making this assertion, Woolf affirms her position on the androgynous, creative mind as money can be seen as symbolic of the

male side, since only men earned decent salaries. Her reference to a room can be seen as symbolic of the female side, as women were traditionally house bound, while a room of her own is a place where a woman can express her creativity fully and without patriarchal bounds. Without money (the male side) and a room (the female side), a woman could not write or fully express herself artistically. Thus as women inherently had female traits, it was her plea for them to be able to gain male ones such as independence, education and professionalism so that they might become more balanced human beings. Schreiner also had a vision of balancing the differences between the sexes. According to Berkman, though Schreiner “did not use the term *androgyny* ... that was precisely what her description of the new woman and new man connoted” (1989:141). In *Women and Labour*, Schreiner writes that “the highest ideal ... of human nature is intellectual power and strength of will ... combined with an infinite tenderness and wide human sympathy” (1911:127) – again traits traditionally considered male and female, respectively.

Woolf's *The Years* can be seen as a story of how a Victorian woman's life remained unrealised because of the reigning misogynistic culture and the discrepancy between the ways boy and girls were raised, which determined their adult life. *The Years* has been called “a harsh indictment of society ... [showing] its values, institutions, and leaders as offering little possibility for full human satisfaction” (Rosenthal, 1979:173). The way Colonel Pargiter treats his son is unmistakably contrasted with his treatment of his daughters. Perhaps taking a subconsciously autobiographical stance, Woolf shows how the Pargiter girls live a largely secluded and unstimulated life while Martin, the only son, is sent off to school. Colonel Pargiter is not unfeeling towards any of his children as he lovingly calls his youngest daughter a “grubby little ruffian” (1951:11) and takes an interest in what they have all been up to. His manner with Martin, however, differs tremendously from how he

treats his daughters. With Martin, he is both strict and lenient – he is concerned about his studies and at tea urges him to “hurry up and get off to your prep. my boy” (1951:13) and he rewards him with a sixpence for coming top of the class. In this interaction we can see the discrimination against females, even in their homes. The Pargiter girls are not only banned from education by society but also by their father, who sees no value in schooling them. Later in their lives, though, they show a desire to further their intellect as Elinor takes a keen interest in law and Rose becomes involved in the Suffragette Movement. While Martin is sent off to Oxford, given gifts of wine by his father and housed in luxurious quarters, Delia, Elinor, Rose and Milly stay idly at home. Their lives can be seen as exemplified in a poem Woolf quoted in *A Room of One's Own* (1928(a):60):

... They tell us we mistake our sex and way;  
 Good breeding, fashion, dancing, dressing, play,  
 Are the accomplishments we should desire;  
 To write, or read, or think, or to enquire  
 Would cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time,  
 And interrupt the conquests of our prime,  
 Whilst the dull manage of a servile house  
 Is held by some our utmost art and use.

(Lady Winchilsea 1661 - 1720)

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf tries to remedy the disparity between women and men's tertiary educational institutions. Her proposal is that

[T]he college for the daughters of educated men must also make Research [sic] produce practical results which will induce bequests and donations from rich men; it must encourage competition; it must accept degrees and coloured hoods; it must accumulate great wealth.” (1938:65)

Though by the inter-war period a woman's situation had improved greatly since the time of her predecessors, Woolf, like Schreiner and Wollstonecraft, also dreamed and hoped for complete change in the educational system. In *Three Guineas*, her tone becomes almost desperate as she is keenly aware that women's fight for equality was not yet over. It is rather sad that the first real move toward creating gender equality in British secondary and tertiary education started three



years after her death when the Education Act of 1944 was passed. According to Skelton, the Act was significant "because of its focus on equal opportunities" (1986:305). It provided free secondary school education and guaranteed that achievement, regardless of sex, would be rewarded. Perhaps it did not at first fully realise true equality in education but it was an affirmation that the government was taking note of the difference in the quality of the education offered to boys and girls and perhaps realising that equal education would advance society in general.

Looking back at the education of women over the past two centuries, Millet affirms:

[T]he growth of higher education for women was the result of two factors: the opening of teaching to women, and feminist agitation. The spread of universal primary and secondary education was one of the greatest ideals of the nineteenth century. Since in both England and America, the cheapest system of public education was obtained through hiring women as schoolteachers, women had to be conceded better education if only so that they might teach children. (1969:76)

One can see how this last issue would be one explanation for the opening of education to women, though surely not the only reason. It is comforting to think that progress was made as a result of pressure from the Women's Movement and liberal thinkers to create equality in society, and not merely so that women might be put through the system of education only to be exploited by a patriarchal society. Whatever the initial reason for allowing women into schools, for many traditionalists it must have seemed like the opening of a Pandora's box: the more women started to reason and learn, the more they recognised their inequitable standing in society. The education of women seemed to create a snowball effect as an increasing number of women grew dissatisfied with their standing in society and were no longer content with being non-entities under the law, having only poor quality higher

education and being excluded from the professions (Branca, 1978:172 – 173). Women realised that they were involved in a political struggle as men had for centuries held power over women's private and public lives, a fact that many women would no longer countenance. The marginalisation of women began to shift with their education. Forward thinkers kept fighting for the improvement of education for women and took their struggle even further, as equality in the professional arena seemed to be the next step in creating a balance of power in society.

## Chapter Four

### The Professions

We demand ... our share of honoured and socially useful human toil, our full half of the labour ... We demand nothing less. *This is our 'WOMAN'S RIGHT!'* (Schreiner, 1911:68)

Many feminists, even in the late 1700s, saw the need to change the legal position of women (Banks, 1981:38). This preoccupation continued until the early twentieth century when women obtained equality under the law. Along with their appeal for legal autonomy, many women, including Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf, had an even greater concern with creating more employment opportunities for women, as earning a salary would mean that they would be financially independent and have more control over their private lives. These three authors saw not only the effect of the lack of entry to the professions on middle- and upper-class women but also how the lack of choice forced lower-class women into jobs in which they were often exploited. Before experiencing success in writing, both Wollstonecraft and Schreiner took positions as governesses, giving them first-hand experience of the uncertainty (and often ill-treatment) that came with the job. All three authors were aware of the exclusion of women from professional fields. As a result of their shared vision, they fought for equal opportunities for women, which would allow them to enter the careers of their choice. In both Wollstonecraft's and Schreiner's times, marriage and motherhood were seen as the true vocations for women. Both felt that even though society limited women to the domestic sphere, having an education was still imperative as it made them better mothers, lifted their minds out of superficiality and led to the advancement of the human race.

Woolf felt that the reason why women were kept out of the professions was the same as the reason why they were excluded from decent education – men's jealousy, pugnacity and greed for power. She also thought that the lack of tradition in the professions and in writing was a great limitation on women as she believed that excellence was seldom born in isolation and that women had few role-models to inspire them.

Writing was one of the few satisfying professions open to women. It was accessible as it did not require much money, or education, and it was a way in which women could express themselves. Being writers themselves, all three advocated it as a rewarding profession. However, the profession of writing did not evade the criticism of misogynists and many women wrote under very difficult circumstances. Censorship and criticism were quickly aimed at work written by women, leading many to write under male pseudonyms.

Wollstonecraft felt it was meaningless for women to have an education but to be left out of the professions. She felt sympathy for women who desired a professional career but were barred from having the chance. All three authors felt that careers were essential to women's liberation from the domestic sphere and to the balancing of the inequalities in society.

From Wollstonecraft's time to Woolf's, inequality in the type of work available to the sexes, poor payment for women and exploitation prevailed. Because women were not considered legal entities until the turn of the twentieth century, company owners often took advantage of this and made women work long shifts under harsh conditions for a pittance. In *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*, Wollstonecraft exposes

the double standards that existed with respect to employment in the words of her character Jemima, who says:

How often have I heard ... in conversation, and read in books, that every person willing to work may find employment? It is the vague assertion, I believe, of insensible indolence, when it relates to men; but, with respect to women, I am sure it is a fallacy, unless they will submit to the most menial bodily labour; and even to be employed at hard labour is out of the reach of many, whose reputation misfortune or folly has tainted. (1976:114)

In Jemima's words we can see not only the treatment of women but an exposure of the common belief that women were incompetent in any task outside the domestic sphere, as well as the effect that man-made laws had on women, not only of the higher classes, but also in the lower ranks. In the middle and upper classes, customs and culture created the woman of leisure while in the lower classes, women were used as cheap labour.

Jemima also comments on the position of the impoverished classes, saying, "[P]rejudices, caught up by chance, are obstinately maintained by the poor, to the exclusion of improvement; they have not time to reason or reflect to any extent, or minds sufficiently exercised to adopt principles of action" (1976:114). With these words, Wollstonecraft explains how those in the poverty-stricken lower class were excluded from self-improvement as they were caught up in the day-to-day drudgery of hard labour. Lower-class women, like Jemima, lived doubly difficult lives, as they would often have to work in factories and mines as cheap labour and rush home to feed their children during their brief midday break. With their focus on surviving the difficulties of each day, self-improvement through education was not even given a thought. It seems rather absurd that upper- and middle-class women were seen as delicate beings while women of the lower class went down into the mines and often worked throughout their lives (Rowbotham, 1973:24 – 26). In fact ideas on the lives of lower-class women during this time ran along the lines that they should be "hard-working and useful wives" rather than focusing on the possible need for them to "earn a living

independently" (Browne, 1987:104). Mary Collier, a washerwoman and poetess who lived around Wollstonecraft's time, wrote about the inequitable treatment lower-class women received:

When Evening does approach we homeward hie  
And our domestic Toils incessant ply;  
Against your coming Home prepare to get  
Our work all done, our House in order set ... (Rowbotham,  
1973:25)

According to Rowbotham, Collier "felt women's labour was equal to if not greater than a man's" and was keenly aware of the "economic exploitation" (1973:24 – 25) women experienced as they often only received one-fifth of what their male counterparts were getting for the same amount and type of work. These conditions did not improve for decades. Even pregnant women "worked like mules for fifteen-hour days, dragging loads of coal in the mines outside Nottingham" while London seamstresses "toiled for eighteen hours at a time during the height of the four-month social 'season' and starved for the rest of the year" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:284). Until the First World War working women were exploited as they were not offered much legal protection or shelter by labour unions since women held no power under the law (Branca, 1978:157).

Schreiner also wrote about enslaved, exploited lower-class men and women. She felt that the middle class had become wealthy as a result of "forced or ill-paid labour" (1911:313). It was under conditions such as these that lower-class women in the Victorian era scraped together money to help support their families. Schreiner also observed the double workloads with which lower-class women were often burdened. In *Women and Labour*, she exposes the oppression of women, writing about working-class women, "from tea pickers and cocoa traders in India and the islands, to the washerwomen, cooks, and drudging labouring men's wives, who, in addition to the sternest and most unending toil, throw in their child-bearing as a little addition" (1911:139). Thus Schreiner was aware of the doubly-burdened lives working women lived. But of all the modes of oppression, she

understood that prostitution was the most oppressive. Though she felt very sympathetic towards prostitutes, Schreiner believed the prostitute's position to be one that "combined the effect of social class inequality, sex-role stereotyping, male economic privilege, and female dependency" (Berkman, 1989:139). Prostitutes were also treated harshly under the law: as mentioned in chapter one, the Contagious Diseases Act allowed the police to arrest any working-class woman they suspected of being a prostitute and submit her to forcible gynaecological examination. If she were found to have a venereal disease, she would be shut up in a state hospital for months, leaving her children uncared for.

Changes started to take place in the type of work available to women from around 1913. As men were recruited for the army, women had to take over men's positions in the job market in order for the economy to survive (Rowbotham, 1973:129 – 130). The differences between salaries for men and women continued into Woolf's era as she avers in *Three Guineas* by referring to *Whitaker's Almanac*. Paging through the Almanac, she tries to determine the number of women in well-paid jobs and discovers "those to whose names the word 'Miss' is attached do not seem to enter the four-figure zone" (1938:87). So, women continued to be discriminated against in terms of salary and career choices well into the time of Woolf, and when they chose to enter the professional world, they chose a life of meagre means. All three writers refer to a misogynistic "boys' club" that kept women out of education, property, wealth and position through the ages. Schreiner wrote in *Women and Labour*: "In every walk of human life, whether trade, or profession, we find men associating by choice mainly with, and entertaining often the profoundest and most permanent friendships for, men engaged in their own callings" (1911:276). Virginia Woolf also wrote about this brotherhood which kept women from gaining respectable occupations. In *Three Guineas* she wrote: "[A]t any rate Miss is a woman, Miss was not educated at Eton or Christ Church. Since Miss is a woman, Miss is not a son or a nephew" (1938:92), thus

exposing the nepotism which created the double standards between men and women.

In Wollstonecraft's time, there were very few honourable ways for women to earn a living. In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, she seems to touch on the essence of the inequitable treatment of women at the time and brings to the fore the issues women were to fight for decades in an attempt to balance the scales of sexual equality. Wollstonecraft exposes the unjust social situation that women who were not born into wealthy families and had little chance of marriage were left to live destitute lives. She did not think their exclusion from the marriage market unfair but considered it inexcusable that they were not allowed to join their male counterparts in the professional arena and were left few "noble" ways of earning a living. While writing *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, Wollstonecraft herself was in the unfortunate situation of having few "modes of earning a subsistence and those ... very humiliating" (1995:69). She was between postings after having attempted to work as a companion, when she took a position with the Kingsborough family as a governess. During this time she wrote that to be a governess is to be in a state of uncertainty as a young lady is made to live with strangers who may be "intolerably tyrannical" (1995:72). Wollstonecraft was almost prophetic when writing about governesses, describing them as "alone, shut out from equality and confidence" (1995:73), very much the way she felt when working for the Kingsborough family. She claimed that as a governess, a young woman was "above servants, yet confined by them as a spy and ever reminded of her inferiority when in conversation with her superiors" (1995:72). Indeed, Wollstonecraft was very perceptive when she pointed out that the unfair treatment of women involved not only sexual inequality but also social discrimination because when a woman did not marry, she was automatically placed a few ranks lower on the social scale and labelled an on-the-shelf spinster. She explained that it was difficult for a woman of "polished society to herd [sic] with the vulgar or to condescend to mix with her former equals when she is considered in



a different light" (1995:73). As Wollstonecraft pointed out, this class awareness was a product of her status-obsessed society. Thus most unmarried woman lived poor and lonely lives as they were barred from the professions that would have stimulated their minds, enriched their social circle and improved their financial status. Wollstonecraft protested: "[T]he few employments open to women, so far from being liberal, are menial: and when a superior education enables them to take charge of the education of children as governesses, they are not treated like the tutors of sons ... to say nothing of the private comfort of the individual" (1792:229).

According to Todd, the *Edinburgh Review* reported on a census taken in 1851 that there was a "problem of 'surplus' women who could never marry, simply because there were not enough men to go round" (1988:38). This problem was compounded by the "higher rates [of] emigration ... [and the] unwillingness of men in the upper and middle class to marry at all" (1988:38). As Wollstonecraft and Schreiner experienced, unmarried women had little choice of professions and the problem of "surplus" women in the late 1800s was significant because single women did not have the education which would give them entrance into the limited professions available at the time.

Schreiner knew from early on that she wanted to be independent. At the age of fifteen, she left home to become a governess on farms, where she taught children to read and write and the basics of subjects like history, mathematics and biology. Not only was there an ambiguity in her social position but, like Wollstonecraft, Schreiner disliked the emotional uncertainty involved in being a governess. She once wrote "I like my new situation very much" (1987:24) but at another time she wrote that "Dutch people do not believe in holidays and they are not at all pleased that I have given any [to the children]. It is quite impossible however to go on without any rest from year's end to year's end,

impossible for both children and teacher" (1987:17). McClintock agrees with Wollstonecraft and Schreiner's view: a governess was

Like a lady, yet not quite a lady, like a maid, yet not quite a maid ... tasked with presiding over the contradictions of the domestic sphere as if they were a decree of nature ... [she was] in every sense a threshold creature ... [G]raced with an education, she did not have the opportunity to use it [in any field other than tutoring her charges]. (1995:277)

At the end of her stay with the Kingsborough family, Wollstonecraft wrote to her sister saying that she was very grateful to the publisher Joseph Johnson, who had lent her money to find a home, as he "saved me from despair and vexations I shrink back from" (Taylor, 2003:40). It seems Johnson not only gave her work and inspired her to write, but saved her from what she called a "grovelling occupation".

Wollstonecraft felt that the doors to the professions should be open to women if they chose not to get married or not to have children. The importance of having the option to marry or not, or to take up a profession or not, was her main argument, rather than any attempt to prescribe specific roles for women. Though *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* may, at times, seem harsh and didactic, she wrote to inspire equality between the sexes and not to impose yet another set of rules on the lives of women. For Wollstonecraft, the absolute necessity of having a career was not so much the issue; it was having a choice between staying at home and going into a profession that was satisfying. With this option, women would no longer be slaves to domesticity as their only career path but could choose it willingly. She also believed that if women were able to study and join the professional world, their frivolity would be forgotten as they would be able to stimulate their minds, even though culture had indoctrinated them to think that their place was at home and their world was so limited to that sphere that even an educated woman would be lost if taken out of her circle of domesticity. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she writes:

[W]hen they receive a careful education, they ... make fine ladies, brimful with sensibility ... and have a shrewd kind of

sense joined with worldly prudence, that often render them more useful members of society than the fine sentimental lady ... [unfortunately] the intellectual world is shut against them; take them out of their family or neighbourhood, and they stand still; the mind finding no employment. (1792:137)

Thus it would be fair to say that not only an education and the opening of the professions to women were necessary to create a balance in society but that women would have to be re-educated in order to gain the courage and self-sufficiency needed to live as independent beings. According to Wollstonecraft,

[W]omen cannot be confined to merely domestic pursuits for they will not fulfil family duties, unless their minds take a wider range, and whilst they are kept in ignorance they become in the same proportion the slaves of pleasure as they are slaves of man. They cannot be shut out from great enterprises, though the narrowness of their minds often makes them mar, what they are unable to comprehend. (1792:260)

Until the educational system improved for women and the professions were thrown open, marriage was considered by many women as the only possible "profession". Wollstonecraft noted: "It was with a view to marriage that her body was educated ... that the streets were shut to her; that the fields were shut to her; that solitude was denied her – all this was enforced upon her in order that she might preserve her body intact for marriage" (1792:301). Woolf also reflects on the situation of women in the days of Wollstonecraft and Schreiner and points out in *A Room of One's Own*, "How could it be otherwise? Marriage was the only profession open to her" (1928(a):70).

In the Victorian era, middle and upper-class women seemed to forget the other domestic "profession" they had - that of motherhood. Mothers handed over their infants to nurses and nannies shortly after their birth and saw their children for only a few minutes a day (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:290). For Schreiner, as for her predecessor, this was a travesty. She felt mothers should actively raise their children as she believed this "contribute[d] to the wealth and strength of [the] nation as a whole"

(1911:57). Both Wollstonecraft and Schreiner wanted women to see motherhood as an occupation. Wollstonecraft believed that children should be left to the management of their mothers and felt that lower-class women were better at raising their children than middle- and upper-class ladies, in terms of giving their children attention. As she explains: "Many poor women maintain their children by the sweat of their brow, and keep together families that the vices of the father would have scattered abroad; but gentlewomen are too indolent to be actively virtuous, and are softened rather than refined by civilization"

(1792:148). Wollstonecraft writes in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*: "Men have various employments and pursuits which engage their attention, and give character to the opening mind; but women, confined to one, and having their thoughts constantly directed to the most insignificant parts of themselves, seldom extend their views beyond the triumph of the hour" (1792:112). She believed for a woman to be "really virtuous and useful [she must] not be dependent on her husband's bounty for her subsistence during his life, or support after he is dead", and asked: "How can a being be generous who has nothing of its own? or virtuous, who is not free?" (1792:234). It was her belief that a woman should develop her independence and have a career of her own which would give her the freedom and generosity she needed to become "virtuous and useful". Wollstonecraft felt that a married woman's occupation should be raising her child, for which she needed as much learning as if she were to enter a profession. She wanted the status of men and women to be equalised so that the position of women would be raised and the importance of motherhood would take on new meaning.

According to Gilbert and Gubar, popular pamphlets, conduct books, sermons and essays analysed the "proper duties of wives and daughters" (1985:74), prescribing the narrowest domain of existence. Shockingly, such misogyny did not end in Woolf's era but still continues today. Browne writes: "[R]aising questions about the position of women is sometimes no more than a way of asking the reader to

engage in the mental gymnastics of thinking about something paradoxical and absurd" (1987:4). This is not only an insult to women throughout the ages but testimony to how tightly constrained women have been, if the thought of their entering the professions seems "paradoxical and absurd".

From a young age Schreiner showed her self-determination. In a letter to her sister Katie, she wrote: "I made up my mind when I was quite a little child that as soon as I was able I would support myself, for I see no reason why a woman should be dependent on her friends any more than a man should and as long as I am well enough I shall" (1987:15). The same kind of determination is shown by her character Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm*, who proclaims, "I intend to go to school" (1986:14). Lyndall, like Schreiner, is resolute about being self-reliant. She realises that without an education she will be kept on Tant Sannie's farm as a glorified maid or forced to marry someone who will "look after her". For Lyndall, the idea of being taken care of by someone equates to losing one's identity and independence. She holds firmly to her belief in autonomy until, in her last days, she cannot do otherwise but submit as her will to fight has been drained by the realisation that her determination to be independent has left her isolated without even an illegitimate child to give her comfort.

Many misogynistic thinkers, who believed women should be chaste, submissive and home-bound, feared that women would lose their purity and become unsexed if they entered the professions. According to Banks,

[E]ven leading feminists of the 1850s and 1860s continued to urge the importance of the 'paramount duties of a mother and wife ... this did not suggest, of course, that the feminists accepted the traditional view of women as they found it. In the hands of the most conservative of them the cult of domesticity became transformed into the ideal of female superiority. (1981:89 – 90)

It seems they did not share Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf's belief that women would retain their unique feminine traits, rather than take on masculine ones, in their transition into independence. As Banks writes, while Enlightenment thinkers such as Wollstonecraft "challenged women's traditional role, they accepted much of the traditional conception of womanhood which they ... saw as rooted in women's domestic situation" (1981:96). Their urge for independence was far removed from the desire to become masculine, which many men feared. The three writers wanted women to embrace their sexuality and gain confidence as women since they were deeply opposed to the assumption that women's subordination was natural and inevitable. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft penned her belief that: "[W]eak women, under the influence of childish passions and selfish vanity, will throw a false light over the objects" (1792:260). Wollstonecraft felt ignorant women had distorted views on life and scant morals. She wanted women to be educated and allowed independence: "Make them free, and they will quickly become wise and virtuous ... for the improvement of the human race must be mutual" (1792:262).

In *Women and Labour*, Schreiner wrote of the cultural boundaries that prevented women from entering the professions. Like Wollstonecraft and Woolf, she felt that the pitiful education women received was a major limitation and one of the most significant obstacles denying women the freedom to choose how they wanted to live their lives. She condemned the way society had barred women from "liberal professions and arts ... [women have] practically been excluded from the requisite training, and the freedom to place [themselves] in the positions in which they can be pursued" (1911:220). Schreiner felt that this exclusion created rifts between the sexes and produced two very different constructs for them. She addressed men defiantly, saying "To you it says – Work! and to us it says – Seem!" (1911:224). Schreiner abhorred the idle women whom patriarchal society had moulded and felt that their sedentary life was not only a waste of talent but

destructive of society as a whole as such women could not develop their children's minds through rearing them to value education. Schreiner wanted reforms that would remove the hindrances limiting women's choices in life. She wanted a

... removal of [the] tacit antifemale [sic] public and domestic sanctions ... [and to] uproot internalised modes of self-limitation. She [like Wollstonecraft] was adamant that women and men must come to view themselves and their relationship with one another in a new way. (Berkman, 1989:140)

According to Gilbert and Gubar, "the very doctrine of the woman's 'sphere' ... implied that there was an almost unbridgeable gulf between the public world of politics and business, ruled by men, and the domestic world of the household, ostensibly 'ruled' but more accurately inhabited by women" (1985:287). Tennyson's *The Princess*, written in 1847, seems to sum up the "professional" and domestic situation of a married woman in the Victorian period:

Man for the field and woman for the hearth,  
Man for the sword and for the needle she;  
Man with the head and women with the heart,  
Man to command and woman to obey... (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:290)

In the post-Victorian era, Woolf wrote to inspire women to gain an education which would allow them to enter the professions. In 1932 Winifred Holtby gave an insightful opinion of Woolf, saying:

When Virginia Woolf wrote of women ... she wrote of a generation as adventurous in its exploration as the Elizabethan men had been in their exploration of the globe. The women whom Mrs Woolf knew were exploring the professional world, the political world, the world of business, discovering that they themselves had legs as well as wombs, brains as well as nerves, reason as well as sensibility; their Americas lay within themselves, and altered the maps as profoundly as any added by Cabot or Columbus. (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:1593)

Rightly, Woolf saw women as no longer tied to their homes and as able to move, however slowly and marginally, into the male-dominated world of the professions. Though she aimed to inspire women to broaden

their minds by embarking on careers, she was fully aware of the difficulties and obstacles they would have to face. Woolf exposes some of the discrimination against women who managed to gain education and have careers. In *The Years*, she mixes irony and humour in the conversation between Peggy and a male writer at the party:

Her attention wandered. She had heard it all before. I, I, I – he went on. It was like a vulture's beak pecking, or a vacuum-cleaner, or a telephone bell ringing. I, I, I. But he couldn't help it ... He could not free himself ... 'I'm tired' she apologized. 'I've been up all night,' she explained. 'I'm a doctor –' The fire went out in his face when she said 'I'. That's done it – now he'll go, she thought. He can't be 'you' – he must be 'I'. She smiled. For up he got and off he went. (1951:389)

Woolf not only shows men's bias against women but illustrates her belief that men feel threatened by women who are educated, and in this instance better educated than themselves. In this example, Woolf demonstrates how many men could not bear to let go of their need to be superior, exposing men's need to dominate. When Peggy makes herself the subject of discussion, she challenges the use of the binary opposition you/I and proves she is aware that she is changing the power roles in the conversation as she assumes the superior "I" while making the male writer the inferior "you". Not only does Peggy defy the sexual order in her conversation, she also does so by escaping the conventional restrictions of the feminine role by creating a character who is a doctor, a member of a traditionally male profession.

In *Three Guineas* Woolf criticises the fact that a father will not allow his daughter to be paid for her tutoring. She shows how men tended to oppose the idea of women being paid for work as they thought it "low". She exposes the double standard in this thinking:

The daughter, Sophia, was offered a small sum for teaching mathematics; and she asked her father's permission to take it. That permission was instantly and heatedly refused. 'Dearest, I have only this moment heard that you contemplate being paid for the tutorship. It would be quite beneath you, darling, and I cannot consent to it'. (1938:238)



Perhaps if Sophia had claimed the money for her brother's education fund, her father would have agreed to the transaction – after all, daughters of educated men have to offer up their education and luxuries for their brothers. Woolf subjects the double standard to further scrutiny as she writes: "Why should it lower her? Taking money for work did not lower Tom in anybody else's eyes. That, Mr. Jax-Blake explained, was quite a different matter; Tom was a man; Tom 'feels bound as a man ... to support his wife and family'; Tom had therefore taken 'the plain path of duty'" (1938:238 – 239). Woolf exploits the disparity between the way women who worked and men who worked were treated. She protests: "[Y]ou object that to depend upon a profession is only another form of slavery, you will admit from your own experience that to depend upon a profession is a less odious form of slavery than to depend upon a father" (1938:30 – 31). Double standards in the world of the professions was one of the most palpable examples of the inferiority imposed on women as they were denied an education worthy of a good profession and if they did manage to acquire this they were discriminated against, just like Woolf's character Peggy.

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf unequivocally points out women's lack of choice among a poor selection of vocations. In a famous passage she protests:

"[W]e, daughters of educated men, are between the devil and the deep sea. Behind us lies the patriarchal system; the private house, with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its servility. Before us lies the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed. The one shuts us up like slaves in a harem; the other forces us to circle, like caterpillars head to tail, round and round the mulberry tree, the sacred tree, of property. It is a choice of evils. Each is bad. Had we not better plunge off the bridge into the river; give up the game; declare that the whole of human life is a mistake and so it end? (1938:135)

In *Professions for Women*, too, she explains:

Even when the path is normally open – when there is nothing to prevent a woman from being a doctor, a lawyer, a civil servant – there are many phantoms and obstacles, as I believe, looming in her way ... The whole position, as I see it ... [is that] women [are] practising for the first time in history. (1931:63)

Rowbotham believes the competitive nature of men kept women at a disadvantage, as “men would be afraid of the competition of women’s work” (1973:40). This was an idea Woolf also notes in *Three Guineas*, where she writes: “Is the tired professional man demanding sympathy and resenting competition?” (1938:238). She picks up on the idea that men jealously guard their sphere as they have the upper hand in society and are unwilling to let their standing and dominance be threatened by those that they dominate. Woolf argues that, when asked directly why men like to dominate, the answer comes evasively: “Professor Grensted has said that the psychology of the sexes is ‘still a matter for specialists,’ while ‘its interpretation remains controversial and in many respects obscure,’ it would be politic perhaps to leave these questions to be answered by the specialists” (1938:234). According to Rosenthal, the reason for women’s poor remuneration was not

... a consequence of an ineptitude of women, their unfitness for responsible positions but precisely the same reason for the determined effort of the male authorities at Oxford and Cambridge to prevent women from entering: it is the need to cling to one’s own privileges and power, to keep others from participating, to maintain exclusive control over the disbursement of wealth and knowledge. (1979:235)

For most, money means more than just the ability to buy groceries; it means the freedom to do more things and to have power and status in society. Unfortunately for women, men have been the wealthier sex for centuries and have held on to this status by keeping women uneducated and unemployed.

In *A Room of One’s Own* “Woolf developed a general theoretical account of women’s literary work and attempted a detailed critical assessment of many individual authors. This subject was for her a life-long interest and it forms a major part of her critical work” (Barrett:

1979:3). Woolf grieves over the loss of women's work: "Nothing remains of it all. All has vanished. No biography or history has a word to say about it" (1928(a):89). She thought that with the scant amount of extant writing about and by women, we know little about our predecessors. Woolf wanted to build a tradition of women writers from which modern women could create role models so that their writing would be stronger and more confidently penned. Woolf saw that writers can be seen as the product of their circumstances and that for women, for many centuries, their culture kept them unlearned, poor and restricted to their circle of domestic purpose. As Barrett points out,

[Woolf] argued that the writer was the product of his or her historical circumstances, and that material conditions were of crucial importance. Secondly, she claimed that these material circumstances had a profound effect on the psychological aspects of writing, and that they could be seen to influence the nature of the creative work itself. (1979:5)

Woolf looks with a certain poignancy at women in history who missed their chance of achieving greatness and reaching their fullest potential personally and historically. The Duchess of Newcastle would have been a famous writer and scientist if she had only had the necessary support and education – or been a man. Another distressing example Woolf cites is that of the writer Margaret Cavendish, whom society explained away as crazy and whose image of madness was used as "a boggy to frighten clever girls with" (1928(a):63). Woolf mourns the loss of talent in women who had "the makings of a writer" in them (1928(a):62) or who could have, and wanted to achieve. Woolf not only used historical examples of women who failed to reach their fullest potential as a result of inequitable treatment, but also made use of fictional examples, perhaps to show the lack of historical facts on the subordinate sex, as she wrote "nothing is known about women before the eighteenth century" (1928(a):27). One of her most famous characters, Judith Shakespeare, is used to speculate that "if a woman in Shakespeare's day had had Shakespeare's genius" (1928:48), she would not have been able to gain an education or an opportunity to show it. Judith Shakespeare can be seen as a "symbol of women's unrealised potential" (Sprague, 1971:121). In *A Room of One's Own*,

Woolf's fictive character Mary Carmichael is a potentially talented contemporary novelist whose gift fails to develop fully due to the lack of role models she, and other women, have and to the lack of any tradition of writing among the female sex. Thinking to herself rather disappointedly while reading Carmichael's work, Woolf writes:

[I]f Mary Carmichael knows how to write, and was beginning to enjoy some quality in her style; if she has a room to herself, of which I am not quite sure; if she has five hundred a year of her own – but that remains to be proved – then I think that something of great importance has happened.  
(1928(a):83)

As readers today, we can never know how some forgotten women writers created their own unique "women's sentences" or how their characters were unlike those in men's novels, in which "without exception [women] are shown in relation to men" (1928(a):82). In *A Room of One's Own* and in her essays on various women authors through the ages, including Wollstonecraft and Schreiner, Woolf looks at the social and historical development of the woman writer. In the work, she hails the "pioneers" of women's writing for their isolated genius and their disregard for social norms. Not only did Woolf celebrate or criticise women writers from the time of the Duchess of Newcastle (1624 – 1674) to her own contemporary Dorothy Richardson; she felt that in acknowledging their work, good or bad, she was creating a record, starting a tradition, so that their works could form a basis for writers to come. According to her, one of the biggest problems for women, one that decelerated their progress towards independence, was that they had no tradition. For Woolf, brilliance, whether in the arts or the sciences, was not a solitary birth, it was bred out of a tradition of learning and role models. Woolf thought that "since freedom and fullness of expression are of the essence of the art, such a lack of tradition, such a scarcity and inadequacy of tools, must have told enormously upon the writing of women" (1928(a):77). In *Three Guineas*, she again explored her belief that tradition in education and culture creates a milieu for excellence in a field. She points out the difference in tradition between men and women, going so far as to call men and women different classes due to the dissimilar traditions and

cultures in which they have evolved. Addressing a male reader she argues:

Take the fact of education. Your class has been educated at public schools and universities for five or six hundred years, ours for sixty. Take the fact of your property. Your class possesses in its own right and not through marriage practically all the capital, all the land, all the valuables and all the patronages in England. Our class possesses in its own right and not through marriage practically none of the capital, none of the land, none of the valuables, and none of the patronage in England. That such differences make for very considerable differences in mind and body, no psychologist or biologist would deny. It would seem to follow then as an indisputable fact that 'we' – meaning by 'we' a whole made up of body, brain and spirit, influenced by memory and tradition – must differ in some essential way from 'you,' whose body, brain and spirit have been so differently trained and are so differently influenced by memory and tradition. (1938(a):33 – 34)

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf talks about the tradition established by men and seems to lament the fact that

... If only Mrs Seton and her mother and her mother before her [had] learnt the great art of making money and had left their money, like their fathers and grandfathers before them, to found fellowships and prizes and scholarships ... we might have been exploring writing; mooning about the venerable places on earth; sitting on the steps of the Parthenon, or going at ten to an office and coming home comfortably at half-past four to write a little poetry. (1928(a):32 – 33)

For Woolf, as for many women in the course of history, the restricted premise of their lives, the confinement of motherhood and marriage imposed on those who wished they could enter a profession or showed promise in a certain field, seemed a great loss not only for women but for humanity at large. How much greater would humanity have been if women had been able to work alongside men in both the public and the private spheres. Woolf wanted women to break out of the narrow convention of finding a husband and being the lesser partner in a marriage. Instead, she wanted them to create a new tradition for themselves and for future generations, one of learning and professionalism built on that established by their forebears. Woolf yearned for women writers to establish themselves so that new writers

would emerge from the foundation of writers like the Brontës, George Eliot and Jane Austen. In *A Room of One's Own* she writes:

[M]asterpieces 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 a single voice. Jane Austen should have laid a wreath upon the grave of Fanny Burney, and George Eliot done homage to the robust shade of Eliza Carter – the valiant woman who tied a bell to her bedstead in order that she might wake early and learn Greek. (1928(a):66)

Woolf herself paid homage to her forebears by reading as much women's literature as she could acquire and appraised their work without any bias towards her sex. She read Wollstonecraft and Schreiner's work and drafted her thoughts on both. In her essay entitled "Mary Wollstonecraft", Woolf is eulogistic, describing Wollstonecraft's life and praising her courage, intelligence and forward-thinking ideas, as well as admiring her writing:

[M]illions have died and been forgotten in the hundred and thirty years that have passed since she was buried; and yet as we read her letters and listen to her arguments and consider her experiments ... and realize the hot-blooded manner in which she cut her way to the quick of life, one form of immortality is hers undoubtedly: she is alive and active, she argues and experiments, we hear her voice and trace her influence even among the living. (1924:103)

Words as exalting as these are a great honour, coming from a literary genius such as Woolf. She also wrote an essay on Olive Schreiner, though giving her less credit. Reviewing *The Letters of Olive Schreiner*, Woolf found her too self-involved and described the letters as "disrupted by the jumble and muddle of odds and ends, plans and arrangements, bulletins of health and complaints of landladies - all of which are related as if Olive Schreiner were a figure of the highest importance" (1925(a):180). One may wonder what Woolf would have said, had she read her own posthumously published diary. Woolf admires Schreiner for penning *The Story of an African Farm*, however, though not without reservation:

[T]hat famous book itself provides some explanation of her failure to become as she bade fair to become, the equal of our greatest novelists. In its brilliance and power it reminds

us inevitably of the Brontë novels. In it, as in them, we feel ourselves in the presence of a powerful nature which can make us see what we saw, and feel what we felt with astounding vividness. But it has the limitation of those egotistical masterpieces without full measure of their strength. The writer's interests are local, her passions personal, and we cannot help suspecting that she has neither width nor strength to enter with sympathy into the experiences of minds differing from her own, or to debate questions calmly and reasonably. (1925(a):181)

Though she called Schreiner "a diamond marred by a flaw" (1925(a):183), she did not regard her contribution as immaterial as she realised that Wollstonecraft and Schreiner made up a foundation for future women writers and feminists. Woolf understood that the importance of their work lay not only in the sentences they strung together but in the fact that they did write, that they as women fought for the liberation of their sex so that future generations might gain the freedom to write in rooms of their own and not only in their living-rooms in-between household duties and visits from guests.

Since Wollstonecraft's time, "Writing was one of the few professions open to middle-class women, one they could pursue in their homes with financial success" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:78). Recent studies of women's fiction have examined the conditions that led more women to write and found that there were several major factors: "the changing role and status of women within public ideology; the effect of this upon familial relations; [and] the impact of limited employment opportunities in the context of economic dependence for women" (Turner, 1992:17). Why did women turn to writing? Their scant education left them with no professional skills but they did know how to read and write, and as publishers paid for their works, writing became a viable profession. According to Spenser, "For women who had no rights, no individual existence or identity, the very act of writing – particularly for a public audience – was in essence an assertion of individuality and autonomy, and often an act of defiance" (1992:11). In *Professions for Women*, Woolf writes,

[W]hen I came to write, there were very few material obstacles in my way. Writing was a reputable and harmless occupation. The family peace was not broken by the scratching of the pen. No demand was made upon the family purse. ... The cheapness of writing paper is, of course, [another] reason why women have succeeded as writers before they have succeeded in the other professions. (1931:57 – 58)

In the 1800s, as employment opportunities were rather more limited, a young lady had the option of being a teacher, a governess, a seamstress or a lady's companion. Wollstonecraft tried, and hated them all. Literary work was the only alternative for women with the ability to write. Wollstonecraft, encouraged by her publisher and friend Joseph Johnson, decided to try her hand at it. *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* was Wollstonecraft's first work and earned her ten pounds (Taylor, 1993:6 – 7). According to Taylor, she was quite delighted at the idea of being an author and the experience of creating her first work inspired her to continue. After publishing *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* in 1798 Wollstonecraft gained some mild success as a woman writer, though according to Taylor, she "sought to distance herself from the generality of women writers whom she regarded as second-rate ... [A]lmost from the moment she began writing for the *Analytical Review*, Wollstonecraft took female authored novels as a chief polemical target" (1993:36). As most books written by women were overly sentimental and created false images of life, it was understandable that Wollstonecraft disliked and disapproved of them. To her, these novels' characters not only created poor role models, but played on the belief that women were incapable of thought as they were typically quick to fall in love, concerned only with parties and pastimes, and aiming only to marry a wealthy man. She describes women as "timid sheep ... [which] jump over the hedge one after the other, producing works of such artificial double-refined sensibility and so many unnatural characters [and] improbable incidents, that the only intelligent response to them would be diversion" (Taylor, 1993:37). It is no wonder that she wrote in a review about *The Child of Woe* that it



was a novel "having no marked features to characterize it, [so that] we can only term it a truly feminine novel" (Taylor, 1993:36).

In Wollstonecraft's day, feminist writing was made possible by the changes that were taking place due to the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. Though many women writers like Charlotte Clarke, Mary Astell, Lady Chudleigh and Catharine Macauley published their thoughts on the situation and education of women under their own names, many patriarchal thinkers still held the idea that women should be "ornamental, making them pleasing companions to men, or useful, making them good mothers and heads of households" (Browne, 1987:104). Though women enjoyed a fair amount of freedom as writers, they were still under societal pressure to limit their themes to women's domestic realm.

Schreiner, like Wollstonecraft and Woolf, strongly advocated writing as a profession. For her, writing was not only a way to earn a living but also a way to stimulate one's mind and break away from the dullness of everyday life. Schreiner felt writing to be innate to women: though her reasoning seems a little odd she looked at it from a symbolic point of view, seeing women as creators who as naturally give birth to books as they do to children. Women have also been studying the art of interaction and conversation since the dawn of time as they were seen as natural storytellers in ancient days and used their words to manipulate the more powerful sex. It seemed to her that putting their ideas down on paper was the next logical step. She observes:

[S]everal women of genius in modern times have sought to find expression for their creative powers in the art of fiction ... [T]here must be some inherent connection in the human brain between the ovarian [sic] sex function and the art of fiction. The fact is, that modern fiction being merely a description of human life in any of its phases, and being the only art that can be exercised without special training or special application, and produced in the moments stolen from the multifarious, brain-destroying occupations which fill the average woman's life, [women] have been driven to find

this outlet for their powers as the only one presenting itself.  
(1911:158)

From Wollstonecraft's time to Woolf's, women wrote under difficult circumstances. First they had to contend with moralists, thinkers, religious experts, political leaders and male writers who all believed that it was a woman's role to be firmly rooted in her domestic realm – which kept her a mental and physical prisoner. Until the early twentieth century a woman could “not go out alone, especially not in the city and certainly not at night” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:290). This incarceration is reflected in the reception of women's writing as it was considered “unsuitable for women to treat certain subjects ... Women's writing was often labelled as improper as it contained matter unsuitable for a woman to write about, and insignificant because of the belief that a ‘mere’ woman was not able to produce any worthy text” (Sherry, 1988:22). This was the very reason that *The Story of an African Farm* was almost refused publication and why Schreiner was compelled to publish under the pseudonym Ralph Irons.

In the mental sphere, women were similarly limited from an early age, as it was virtually impossible to gain learning, broaden one's mind or make a living, even if one did manage to gain an education. Women also had to contend with notions like Lord Lyttleton's, which seem to sum up the way many men felt about the way women should behave in the late 1700s:

Seek to be good, but do not aim to be great:  
A woman's noblest station is retreat:  
Her fairest virtues fly from public sight,  
Domestic work that shuns too strong a light. (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985:74)

Society thus identified men's lives with the public sphere and women's with the private. Browne notes:

This notion, which made women's participation in politics seem obviously absurd and impossible, also excluded them from the professions; the subject was difficult to raise seriously, for the image of women preaching, pleading at the bar, or engaging in other professional activity, could easily seem self-evidently ridiculous. (1987:136)

Female authors did not only suffer from criticism of their work and of the very fact that they wrote. Woolf noted that they were also under heavy censorship as topics such as sexual relations, bad language and any other "morally weak" topics were taboo for women though freely used by men. In *Professions for Women*, Woolf illustrates the problem of not being able to express oneself freely as a woman. She describes women's problem as being unable "to tell the truth about [their] own experiences as a body" (1931:60) These words not only show this topic to have been out of bounds, but also reveal the broader picture of the restrictions placed on both women's writing and their lives. Woolf illustrates that a woman's use of language and content was "impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex. For though men sensibly allow themselves great freedom in these respects, I doubt they realize or can control the extreme severity with which they condemn such freedom in women" (1931:62).

In *Women Novelists*, Woolf shows some of the tight restrictions placed on women's writing as she comments:

Mr Brimley Johnson again and again remarks, that a women's writing is always feminine ... He shows his wisdom not only by advancing a great many suggestions, but also by accepting the fact, upsetting though it is, that women are apt to differ. Still here are a few attempts: 'Women are born preachers and always work for an ideal.' 'Woman is the moral realist, and her realism is not inspired by any ideal of art, but of sympathy for life'. (1925(b):70 - 71)

She counters this tight moral path prescribed for women in *Indiscretions* as she applauds her predecessors for their unique,

unrestrained characters, of which traces can be seen in their work. She writes of her feelings for them:

A hundred years ago it was simple enough; they were stars who shone only in male sunshine; deprived of it, they languished into nonentity – sniffed, bickered, envied each other – so men said ... More probably Emily Brontë was the passion of [every woman's] youth; Charlotte even she loved with nervous affection; and cherished a quite sisterly regard for Anne. Mrs Gaskell wields a maternal sway over her readers of her own sex; wise, witty and very large-minded, her readers are devoted to her as to the most admirable of mothers; whereas George Eliot is an Aunt, and as an Aunt, inimitable ... Jane Austen we needs must adore; but she does not want it; she wants nothing; our love a by-product, and irrelevance; with that mist or without it her moon shines on. (1924:75 – 76)

In this passage, we can see the deep admiration and reverence she felt for her predecessors. For someone to slur her heroines was deeply insulting to her since she felt it demeaned women writers in general.

According to Sherry, at this time,

... much writing by women [was] implicitly regarded as being of limited value precisely because it [was] about women and [appealed] mainly or especially to women readers, who [were] regarded as special rather than as a general to typical audience. Even writing by women which does not readily fall into this category [was] likely to be treated as if it did. ... This custom [reinforced] the tendency to assume that work by women, whatever its content, and however much it [was] praised, somehow [did] not belong to the 'mainstream'. (1988:24)

Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* anticipates this notion as she visits the British Museum in search of an answer to her question – what is meant by “Women and Fiction”? In her search she finds scores of works written about the “Attractiveness of [women], Offered as sacrifice to ... Small brain size of [women]” (1928(a):30) and so, on but nothing about the literature of women. Walking back to her hotel room, Woolf is disappointed at “not having brought back in the evening some important statement, some important fact. Women are poorer than men because – this or that” (1928(a):43). Woolf raises the question of why women have not written a world of “extraordinary literature when every

other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet" (1928(a):43). Woolf was quite aware of the answer; she understood the obstacles placed before women with a gift for creative expression. In *A Room of One's Own* she leads the reader to understand the limitations placed on women, as they were economically dependent, largely uneducated and frowned upon for writing or taking up another profession if they were brave enough to do so. As Rosenthal says, *A Room of One's Own* is an "analysis of the explicit and implicit difficulties women, both artists and otherwise, must overcome in their quest for fulfilment and self-expression" (1979:221). For Woolf, the major barrier to women's independence was money. She shows in *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* how young men with financial backing from their families receive better educations, which lead to superior occupations, and how they are therefore able to be (financially) self-governing. As Rosenthal writes: "The inability to receive a proper education, the limited opportunity to earn an adequate salary, the grinding demands of motherhood and domestic servitude – all contribute to the basic constraints not only of the material life but of the imaginative life as well" (1979:221). Woolf also noted the difficulty that women had in writing, as they were for centuries considered incapable of innovative, creative thought. In *A Room of One's Own* she writes about this belief which men and some indoctrinated women held: "How the borders of ignorance shrank back at their approach! ... Women cannot write the plays of Shakespeare" (1928(a):48).

In *Orlando, a Biography*, Woolf points out many of the problems and restrictions that challenged women who chose to write. Under the constraints of social boundaries, Orlando finds herself unable to write as she becomes preoccupied by her lack of status as an unmarried woman. As Rosenthal points out, "Orlando cannot rise above the acute discomfort and creative blockage caused by the absence of a thin gold band on the appropriate finger of her left hand" (1979:134). For Orlando the pressure to get married hangs over her as the "Angel in the House" hangs over Woolf. Both feel a lack of creativity due to

society's belief that women cannot be imaginative. Both find that they must overcome their constraints, Orlando by marrying a never-present, token husband so as to satisfy the expectations of her society, Woolf by killing her metaphorical "Angel in the House" so as to release herself from both self-imposed and external limitations.

Orlando's traits become more and more effeminate as she gets used to the docile role that she must assume as a woman. She sheds her once confident male persona which the biographer describes as "young, ... rich, ... handsome. No one could have received greater acclamation than he" (1928(b):31). Orlando, as a woman, becomes insecure and unthinking, as the biographer notices when Sir Nicholas discusses the publication of her poem *The Oak Tree*: "Orlando understood nothing of all this, and from old experience did not altogether trust his good nature, but there was nothing for it but to submit to what was evidently his wish and fervent desire for the poem itself" (1928(b):253). Woolf shows the submission women were forced into by their ignorance as Orlando is somewhat helpless and not in control of the situation, just as many women conceivably were when dealing with issues of business.

In *Orlando, a Biography* Woolf also points out the prejudice against women's literature. Without even reading a word, the man to whom Orlando hands her life's work looks at it with considerable bias, and she realises the double standards that she as a woman is subjected to. At that moment she feels

... unaccountably disappointed. She had thought of literature all these years (her seclusion, her rank, her sex must be her excuse) as something wild as the wind, hot as fire, swift as lightning; something errant, incalculable, abrupt, and behold, literature was an elderly gentleman in a grey suit talking about duchesses. (1928(b):252)

In her moment of recognition, she exposes not only the Victorian era's preconceptions about ladies but also that society was ruled by those "gentlemen in grey suits" who made the laws and propounded the idea that women were not capable of brilliance. Even today women writers are discriminated against: the literary canon can still be seen as

representative of how women writers' works are overlooked and the stigma of their inferiority remains. According to Sherry, "more works by women are likely to go out of print than works by men; they are therefore less likely to be read and handed on to the future generations" (1988:28). This sad fact shows that the feminist campaign to raise the importance and recognition of women's literature and to include women's literature in the canon is not over. What has happened? Have women from the 1990s to the present day forgotten that the canon still remains largely representative of the white male's words? Have we been silenced into submission because Austen and Eliot have been added as token female authors? It seems poignant that, even today, publishing houses find women's works unprofitable after a first edition (Sherry, 1988:29).

Concealment, double standards and criticism were not the only conditions women wrote under until the public accepted them. In *Orlando, a Biography*, Woolf also demonstrates the secrecy under which women like Mrs Gaskell, Mrs Oliphant and Jane Austen wrote, as Orlando hides her manuscript in the bosom of her dress so that no one can find it. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf writes that "if a woman wrote, she would have to write in the common sitting-room" (1928(a):86) as a woman rarely had a study or "room of her own" in which she could write. According to Shaw, the prolific author Margaret Oliphant "recorded in her autobiography that she never had a study, but had always written in 'the little 2<sup>nd</sup> drawing room where all the (feminine) life of the house goes on'" (1998:154). While they penned their works, writers often ran their households and received guests between paragraphs or thoughts.

Wollstonecraft wrote despondently that "women educated like gentlemen are never designed for the humiliating situation which necessity sometimes forces them to fill; these situations are considered in the light of a derogation" (1792:245). She wrote of the situation of women whose hard-won education turned out to be virtually

meaningless, as it could never be used in a significant way. Thus, in a situation of impoverishment a woman might have no choice but to go into prostitution – legal (i.e. in marriage if she could find a husband) or illegal. She felt that women with a broader understanding of life and the desire to study and enter the professional world lived the most frustrated lives as they had an idea of the way they were being confined in a private sphere. Wollstonecraft writes that “the most respectable women are the most repressed” and laments: “How many women thus waste life away the prey of discontent, who might have practised as physicians, regulated a farm, managed a shop, and stood erect supported by their own industry, instead of hanging their heads surcharged with the dew of sensibility” (1792:230). Wollstonecraft was deeply affected by the wasted lives of women who would never be able to achieve their life’s purpose, whether in the professions or the public world, due to the sexist customs of the day. She realised that many women would never receive an education or break away from their vanity or frivolity. Though she disliked their kind of lifestyle she wished them well, hoping that their ignorance would lead them to happiness, as they would never want for more than they had. Though Wollstonecraft has been criticised for her harsh disapproval of ladies of leisure she felt for women who had been brought up to be “proud of their weakness”, warning that they

... must always be protected, guarded from care, and all the rough toils that dignify the mind. – If this be the fiat of fate, if they will make themselves insignificant and contemptible, sweetly waste ‘life away,’ [sic] let them not expect to be valued when their beauty fades, for it is the fate of the fairest flowers to be admired and pulled to pieces by the careless hand that plucked them. (1792:230 – 231)

The exclusion of women from the professions may be blamed on many things and Browne suggests that one of the reasons was because women were “associated with interior decoration and social graces, with things that add pleasure to life, but [are] not really important” (1987:124). Shaw calls *The Story of an African Farm* a domestic novel



in which the reader may "closely observe ordinary everyday life" (1998:160). Thus one may see what the daily chores of women who lived on farms comprised. Schreiner paints a realistic picture of a variety of female characters. Em is the girl who dreams of marriage and a man who will look after her as she presides over her household. Tant Sannie is the pragmatist who (while formidably running a farm) sees that finding a husband is essential to ward off loneliness on the isolated plains of the Karoo. Lastly, Lyndall is the feminist, the woman who wants to obtain learning and follow her own destiny independent of a controlling man and who says to herself as she studies her reflection in the mirror: "We shall never be quite alone, you and I ... We are not afraid; we will help ourselves!" (1896:245). Though Em and Tant Sannie are not doctors or lawyers, they are very competent at running a farm, which was traditionally seen as a man's job, and can be seen as arch-matriarchs who have an inner strength incomparable to their city sisters. As Berkman writes, Schreiner

... often invoked hardy, rural, nineteenth-century Boer women as closer to her ideal ... [as she thought them] 'keen, resolute, reflective and determined' personalities and she attributed these traits to a life of economic and physical parity with the Boer men and to the legal dignity that women's equal inheritance of property accorded them. (1989:142)

In *Women and Labour*, Schreiner wrote without uncertainty on the professional lives of women. This becomes the central theme of the work and her words, "Give us labour and the training which fits for labour!" (1911:271) seem to resonate through the book. She wanted women to reclaim their ancient economic power. She claims: "[W]omen have always worked; we have just not worked for wages" (1911:134), pointing out that from earliest times women were productively involved in hoeing fields, harvesting crops, milling flour and carrying water as well as raising children. Both Wollstonecraft and Schreiner felt that medicine and healing came naturally to women. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft proposed that women

... might certainly study the art of healing, and be physicians as well as nurses. And midwifery, decency seem[s] to allot them ... They might also study politics and settle their benevolence on the broadest basis ... Business of various kinds, they might likewise pursue, if they were educated in a more orderly manner, which might save many from common and legal prostitution. (1792:229)

Just as Wollstonecraft calls for women to be admitted to the medical profession, as it was their ancient tradition to heal, so Schreiner also points out that as herbalists and botanists, women were "the first physicians of the race" (1911:245). In modern times, she felt, women should "find exactly that field of labour which may most contribute to [their] development, happiness, and health, and in which [their] particular facilities and gifts shall be most effectively and beneficially exerted for [their] fellows" (1911:216). She felt that the admission of women to the professions would give them greater freedom of choice: "[T]he entrance of women into new fields of labour ... [would] probably result in greater freedom of action, economic independence and wider culture" (1911:237). She felt that one of the greatest benefits to women entering the public sphere would be that the two sexes would have more in common as they would not be on wholly different planes of existence. She argued:

[T]he relative power of individuals to command the gratification of their instincts and desires would be fundamentally altered ... [A woman would possess] somewhat greater freedom of sexual selection; she would no longer [be] captured by muscular force. (1911:238 – 239)

In other words, a woman would no longer be obliged to find a husband for financial support but could select someone she truly felt for – if she chose to marry. As Berkman puts it, part of Schreiner's feminism was "the over-coming of female self-hatred and dependency through equal opportunity with men for meaningful, productive, wage-earning labour" (1989:126). Schreiner felt that to have a choice in one's own future was fundamental and that for this to become a reality women needed to have "larger economic independence and therefore greater freedom" (1911:242). Once women gained entrance into the professional fields, Schreiner felt, the relationship between the sexes would flourish:

[T]he performance of common labours, necessitating identical knowledge, identical habits and modes of thought, forms a stronger bond, drawing men far more powerfully towards social intercourse and personal friendship and affection than the centrifugal force of professional jealousies. (1911:277)

She also felt that if men and women enjoyed equality on all planes the progress of the human race would be greatly accelerated. *Women and Labour*, like *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, propounded a radical doctrine for its time as it challenged the Victorian ideology of separate spheres for men and women as well as the notion of women's domestic realm.

Woolf's final words in *A Room of One's Own* inspired young women to grasp the opportunities which were opening up to them and gain an education so as to enter the professional field. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf advocated writing as it allows women to "speak [their] own mind, in [their] own words at [their] own time, at [their] own length, at [their] own bidding" (1938:162). In this way, writing offers women not only intellectual liberty but a freedom of self. Woolf wanted women, in whatever profession they may have chosen to earn their living, to "... possess the weapon of independent opinion which is still the most powerful weapon. It is to help them to have a mind of their own [and] a will of their own" (1938:73). For her, women with financial freedom were free from having to please their male caretakers and did not have to be passive and servile. As she stated in *Three Guineas*: "Money is the only means by which we can achieve objectives that are immensely desirable" (1938:125).

Thus the professions were not only a means for women to gain autonomy but a way in which their financial and educational status could be raised. All three authors fought for equality in the professional field as they saw the unhealthy imbalance that existed because of the sharp division of the world into the (public) realm of men and the (private) realm of women. It is possible to see how the desire for

equality on the part of women was greatly advanced by the opening up of the professions to them in the mid-1900s. In the light of this, it is not an exaggeration to say that Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf were visionary in their ideas on women and the professions.

## Conclusion

[B]uilding on ... earlier work ... reveal[s] the affinity which women writers have felt for each other, the interest ... that they have taken in each other's work, the way the writing of one might prepare the ground for another, the problems all face, and still face ... (Eagleton, 1986:1 – 2)

By looking at the works of Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf in their socio-historical context, one can see society's progress with regard to women. Two aspects stand out. The first is that these three writers had much in common in terms of their beliefs and the way they were influenced by their predecessors' thoughts. The second is how very slowly and how very marginally the situation of women, the double standards in society, the poor education and lack of professions for women changed over three eras.

Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf have gained the status of founding mothers in the feminist movement as their thoughts have played a vital role in the evolution of the Women's Movement, women's literature and feminist literary criticism. In their time, their texts were considered highly polemical and political. They revealed, criticised and examined society to bring about changes in the lives of women. They wanted women to be free to explore new subjects and experiences just as men were. Today, two generations after Woolf's time, a text written to encourage women to gain an education or go into a profession would not even be considered for publication in the Western world as it has more recently become a given that women are considered, in most countries, equals under the law, free to vote, to work, or to request a divorce from their husbands. In the countries in which Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf lived, women being educated at top universities is now the norm and a woman running her own business or taking her

seat as a chief executive officer of a multi-national corporation is acknowledged without protest.

From the Industrial Revolution until the First World War, women became progressively aware of the double standards by which they were judged. Many became discontented with their restrictive lives. It is interesting that Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf shared strong beliefs on discrimination against women, women's lives, education and professions. The fact that they were so passionate about these aspects of women's lives shows how, over more than two hundred years, society did not really make many notable changes in women's lives. It was only through the way women made themselves heard in their protest or, like these authors, through their writing, and refused to be treated as "less than men", that society took note of their grievances. Their defiant refusal to remain silent about their unfair situation grew into "the Woman Problem", the Suffrage Movement and the Feminist Movement. It was only after the First World War that humanity was shaken into the realisation that women are also valuable members of society and competent in more than they were thought to be capable of. Though great changes started taking place after the First and Second World Wars, with regard to the female sex, women still suffer from sex-based discrimination and hardships, especially in second- and third-world countries. According to Taylor it is this ongoing prejudice against women that makes "notions like 'post-feminism' merely fatuous, and it is this reality that continues to breathe life into Wollstonecraft" (1993:253) as well as Schreiner and Woolf.

These three uncovered the "wrongs of women" (to use the words of Wollstonecraft) and wrote to bring about social change. Their work and their lives can be seen to represent women's hopes of a society free from misogyny and sexual injustice. In their non-fiction texts, the words seem to jump off the page as one can feel the ardour with which they wrote. Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf also penned works of fiction

which echoed their non-fiction texts by showing the unfair situation of women and highlighting the importance of women's activities, showing that giving a dinner party, looking after an ageing father, running a farm or a household are important and should not be undervalued because they are traditionally a woman's occupation. For these writers, it was important to convey women's authentic experience as affirming female life histories in a way which was not melodramatic, like so much literature for women through the ages. For them, this was important as it affirmed for the reader the importance of a woman's life history and helped construct a sense of women's identity. Woolf also made honouring her predecessors one of her objectives as she felt it would make women and men aware that there was a tradition of excellent women writers who succeeded at their craft despite the criticism they endured because they "over-extended" their feminine boundaries.

All three were fervent about education for women as they realised the far-reaching changes that it would make in women's lives. Apart from the obvious implications of being able to apply for better jobs, earn higher salaries and therefore become self-supporting, with an education women would no longer feel bound by an inferiority complex born out of a lack of knowledge and social standing. Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf believed that equality in schooling would allow each sex to embrace its own unique talents and traits and at the same time blur the stereotypes of what was considered "female" or "male" as each would have a fuller understanding of the opposite sex. They recognised that it was important for women, and still is today, to understand that they are the primary transmitters of culture and thus can proactively correct sexist thinking, which still lingers today. As Schreiner affirmed of a mother's role: "Hers was the training and influence that shaped them" (1911:54).

The three authors foresaw how the entrance of women into the professional field would markedly improve their position, as they would

be able to earn "five hundred pounds" and rent "a room of their own". Allowing women to have careers also facilitated the breaking down of traditional roles for the sexes. Today we can see the result in the deconstruction of traditional roles in some families where the woman is the major or, sometimes, the only bread winner while her partner chooses to stay at home and take care of the domestic duties. The opening of the professional arena has also given women a choice in their destinies. A woman of today would shudder at the restrictive and foreseeable future of her grandmother and great-grandmother. Though not all women choose to work throughout their lives, even though they may have obtained university degrees, many women today are very fortunate as they have this option while men, for the most part, are still bound by their centuries-old tradition of "breadwinner". Today the relative position of men and women has been made more fluid due to centuries of protest from feminist writers and activists, like Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf. It is not uncommon for couples to negotiate their roles and the dynamic of their relationship and family so that they live out what these three authors envisaged as the perfect relationship – one of equality, friendship, co-operation and mutual support.

Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf may be seen as exemplary feminist figures who questioned the norms of society instead of accepting them as they were. Their works provoked men and women to question their situation or the treatment of others and the customs they adhered to. All three had the desire to make a positive change in other women's lives, whether by encouraging them to behave less frivolously, or to gain an education or to take up writing. Their aims seem to be summed up in the words of Schreiner: "I feel that if only one lonely and struggling woman read [my work] and found strength and comfort from it, one would not feel one had lived quite in vain" (Showalter, 1978:183). Their texts were explicitly and unapologetically political and feminist and can be seen as the foundation of feminist thinking in modern times. Their works have helped create a tradition for



women on which new writers can build their philosophy. In recognition of this and of the way in which they were influenced by their predecessors, I have, as Showalter suggests, "grasped the connection" (1978:35) between Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf as I, like them, felt it was important to show how women have been "left out" of history, education, the professions and the public sphere. By writing this dissertation, I hope to have acknowledged and extended the tradition of women who have paid homage to their foremothers and built on the history of women writers so that writers and critics of the future may have a strong sense of the history of their own sex. Like Showalter, I hope that women's writing will continue to go "[b]eyond fantasy, beyond androgyny, beyond assimilation" (1978:319), fulfilling the dreams of Wollstonecraft, Schreiner and Woolf.

## Endnotes

### Chapter One

- (1) The Enlightenment theory, which started in France before the French Revolution, put forward the idea that man was perfectible. The theory was a practical one stating that men needed to improve their religious, intellectual and social spheres so that the human race as a whole could move forward (Hooker, 1999:1 – 6).
- (2) Foot binding began in China, in the late T'ang Dynasty (613 – 906). Upper-class girls started as young as the age of four with the foot binding process, which took several years to complete. During the procedure, girls' feet were broken and tightly bound, leaving them in excruciating pain for the rest of their lives. Foot binding became popular as men found three-inch feet highly erotic and, as it left women largely restricted in movement, it ensured their faithfulness (Crites, n.d:1 – 3).
- (3) The Criminal Law Amendment Bill, which offered protection to young women through such measures as raising the age of consent, was first introduced to Parliament in 1883 and had been in danger of being dropped in the Commons for the third time, in 1885, when the whole issue was transformed by a crusading campaign mounted by the journalist W.T Stead. It was finally passed in August 1885 (Rive, 1987:66).

## Chapter Two

- (1) "Men know that women are the overmatch for them, and therefore they choose the weakest and most ignorant. If they did not think so, they never could be afraid of women knowing as themselves ... In justice to the sex, I think it but candid to acknowledge that, in a subsequent conversation, he told me that he was serious in what he said." – Boswell, *The Journal of a Tour of The Hebrides* (Woolf, 1928:31).

## Summary

Patriarchy has tainted the mind of society, thereby creating gender discrimination and inequality. Until recently, this bias against women filtered down to women writers too. This MA dissertation is a comparative study of the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Olive Schreiner and Virginia Woolf in their socio-historical context. While Wollstonecraft and Woolf lived in Britain, Schreiner spent most of her life in South Africa. It is interesting to observe that these three writers, working in two different countries, Britain and South Africa, shared strong ideas on women and education, double standards in society, professions for women and the roles of women in society. While sharing ideas, each writer lived in her own unique milieu and thus held certain beliefs more strongly than others. By evaluating women's literature dating from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, this dissertation examines the evolution of women's situation in society and obtains, for the reader, a sense of what social issues were relevant at the time and how these issues have changed and/or stayed the same. The three authors chosen were also influenced by their predecessors' thoughts, which is clear in their literature. By looking at their work in the context of society and the influence of previous feminist literature, the reader can see the power that their thoughts and words hold. Though some of the problems about which these authors wrote so tellingly (for example, inequality under the law) have become redundant in Western society, many of the issues addressed in their writing have formed the baseline of feminist beliefs and are still very relevant today.

## Key Terms

- Olive Schreiner
- Mary Wollstonecraft
- Virginia Woolf
- Women's Rights
- Sexual Double Standards
- Women and Education
- Women and the Professions
- Women in the 1700s
- Women in the 1800s
- Women in the 1900s

## Bibliography

- Apter, T. E. 1979. Self-Defence and Self-Knowledge: the Function of Vanity and Friendship in Virginia Woolf. (In Warner, E., ed. 1984. *Virginia Woolf: A Study of her Novels*. New York. New York University Press. pp. 83 – 89.)
- Banks, O. 1981. *Faces of Feminism*. Oxford. Martin Robertson.
- Barash, C. 1987. *An Olive Schreiner Reader: Writings on Women and South Africa*. London. Pandora Press.
- Barrett, M. 1979. *Virginia Woolf on Women and Writing – Her Collection of Essays, Assessments and Arguments*. London. The Women's Press.
- Beer, G. 1984. Virginia Woolf and Pre-History. (In Warner, E., ed. 1984. *Virginia Woolf: A Study of her Novels*. New York. New York University Press. pp. 99 – 123.)
- Bell, A., ed. 1980. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, 1925 – 1930*. Volume 3. London. Women's Press.
- Belsey, C. & Moore, J., eds. 1989. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. London. Macmillan.
- Berkman, J. 1989. *The Healing Imagination of Olive Schreiner*. Massachusetts. Massachusetts University Press.

Branca, P. 1978. *Women in Europe Since 1750*. London. Croom Helm.

Browne, A. 1987. *The Eighteenth-Century Feminist Mind*. Sussex. Harvester Press.

Burns, C. 1994. Re-dressing Feminist Identities: Tension Between Essential and Constructed Selves in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. (In *Twentieth-Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal*, 40 (3): pp. 45 – 56.)

Caws, M. 1990. *The Women of Bloomsbury*. New York. Routledge.

Cixous, H. 1991. *A Politics of Writing*. New York. Routledge.

Clayton, C., ed. 1983. *Olive Schreiner*. Johannesburg. McGraw-Hill.

Clayton, C., ed. 1989. *Women and Writing in South Africa*. Cape Town. Heineman.

Crites, J. 1995. *Chinese Foot Binding*. [2006/10/08].  
{<http://www.angelfire.com/ca/beekeeper/foot.html>}

Daymond, M. J, Driver, D. Meintjies, S. Molemo, L. Musengezi, C. Orford, M. & Rasebotsa, N., eds. 2003. *Woman Writing Africa. The Southern Region*. Johannesburg. Wits University Press.

Dick, S. [n.d]. The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism: *Woolf, Virginia*. [2005/02/27].  
{[http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins\\_guide\\_to\\_literary\\_theory/entries/b-virginia](http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_literary_theory/entries/b-virginia)}

Eagleton, M., ed. 1986. *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. Massachusetts. Blackwell.

Eagleton, M., ed. 1991. *Feminist Literary Criticism*. New York. Longman.

Eagleton, M. 1996. *Working with Feminist Criticism*. Massachusetts. Blackwell.

Ehrenreich, B. & Deirdre, E. Sunshine for Women. [n.d]. *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Expert's Advice to Women*. [2006/02/19]. {<http://www.pinn.net/~sunshine/book-sum/owngood.html>}

Ellis, H. 1898. Notes on Olive Schreiner. (In Clayton, C., ed. 1983. *Olive Schreiner*. Johannesburg. McGraw-Hill. pp. 56 – 64.)

First, R. & Scott, A., eds. 1980. *Olive Schreiner*. London. The Women's Press.

Frazer, E. Hornsby, J. & Lovibond, S., eds. 1992. *Ethics: A Feminist Reader*. Massachusetts. Blackwell.

Freedman, J. 2001. *Feminism*. Buckingham. Open University Press.

Gallop, J. 1992. *Around 1981: Academic Feminist Literary Theory*. New York. Routledge.

Gilbert, S. 1986. What Do Feminists Want? A Postcard from the Volcano. (In Showalter, E., ed. 1986. *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. London. Virago Press. pp. 29 – 44.)

Gilbert, S. & Gubar, S. 1979. Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of



Authorship from *The Madwoman in the Attic*. (In Warhol, R. & Price Herndl, D., eds. 1993. *Feminisms: an Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. London. Rutgers. pp. 289 – 300.)

Gilbert, S. & Gubar, S., eds. 1985. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York and London. W. Norton.

Goldman, J. 1998. *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

Gordon, L. 1984. A Writer's Life. (In Warner, E., ed. 1984. *Virginia Woolf: A Study of her Novels*. New York. New York University Press. pp. 56 – 67.)

Greene, G. & Kahn, C., eds. 1985. *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*. London. Methuen.

Gregor, I. 1984. Virginia Woolf and her Reader. (In Warner, E., ed. 1984. *Virginia Woolf: A Study of her Novels*. New York. New York University Press. pp. 41 – 55.)

Gualtieri, E. 2000. *Virginia Woolf's Essays: Sketching the Past*. New York. St Martin's Press.

Gubar, S. 1982. "The Blank Page" and Issues of Female Creativity. (In Showalter, E., ed. 1986. *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. London. Virago Press. pp. 292 – 313.)

Gunew, S., ed. 1990. *Feminist Knowledge: Critical Construct*. New York. Routledge.

Gunew, S., ed. 1991. *A Reader in Feminist Knowledge*. New York. Routledge.

Hewitt, N. 2002. *Internationalizing Feminism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Introduction. From Wollstonecraft to Mill: What British and European Ideas and Social Movements Influenced the Emergence of Feminism in the Atlantic World, 1792 – 1869?* [2006/05/15].  
{<http://www.binghamton.edu/womhist/awrm/intro.htm>}

Hooker, R. 1999. *World Civilizations Home Page. The European Enlightenment*. [2006/05/15].  
{<http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/ENLIGHT/PHIL.HTM>}

Jacobus, M., ed. 1978. *Women's Writing and Women Writing about Women*. London. Croom Helm.

Jefferson, R. & Robey, D., eds. 1982. *Modern Literary Theory*. London. B.T Batsford.

Kelly, G., ed. 1976. *Mary and the Wrongs of Woman*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

Kelly, G. 1992. *Revolutionary Feminism. The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft*. London. Macmillan Press.

Landry, D. & Maclean, G. [n.d]. *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism: Feminist Theory and Criticism*. [2005/02/27].  
{[http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins\\_guide\\_to\\_literary\\_theory/entries/b-feminist](http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_literary_theory/entries/b-feminist)}

Lees, E. (n.d). Olive Schreiner and Her Relation to the Woman Movement. (In Clayton, C., ed. 1983. *Olive Schreiner*. Johannesburg. McGraw-Hill. pp. 67 – 79.)

McClintock, A. 1995. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*. New York. Routledge.

Millet, K. 1969. *Theory of Sexual Politics*. [2005/08/02].  
{<http://www.marxist.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/millet/htm>}

Minow-Pinkney, M. 1987. *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject: Feminine Writing in the Major Novels*. Sussex. Harvester Press.

Moers, E. 1978. *Literary Women*. London. The Women's Press.

Moi, T. 1985. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London. Methuen.

Moi, T. 1992. Feminist Literary Criticism. (In Jefferson, R. & Robey, D., eds. 1982. *Modern Literary Theory*. London. B. Batsford. pp. 204 – 221.)

Rive, R., ed. 1987. *Olive Schreiner. Letters 1871 – 1899*. Cape Town. David Philips.

Robinson, V. & Richardson, D., eds. 1993. *Introducing Women's Studies*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London. Macmillan Press.

Roe, S. 1990. *Writing and Gender: Virginia Woolf's Writing Practice*. New York. Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Rosenthal, M. 1979. *Virginia Woolf*. New York. Columbia University Press.

Rowbotham, S. 1973. *Hidden from History: Rediscovering Women in History from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present*. New York. Random House.

Schor, E. [n.d]. *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism: Wollstonecraft, Mary*. [2005/7/27].  
{[http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins\\_guide\\_to\\_literary\\_theory/mary\\_wollstonecraft.html](http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_literary_theory/mary_wollstonecraft.html)}

Schreiner, O. 1880. Dream Life and Real Life: A Little African Farm. (In Barash, C., ed. 1987. *An Olive Schreiner Reader: Writings on Women and South Africa*. London. Pandora Press. pp. 133 – 142.)

Schreiner, O. 1887. The Child's Day. (In Barash, C., ed. 1987. *An Olive Schreiner Reader: Writings on Women and South Africa*. London. Pandora Press. pp. 23 – 53.)

Schreiner, O. 1890. Three Dreams in the Desert. (In Barash, C., ed. 1987. *An Olive Schreiner Reader: Writings on Women and South Africa*. London. Pandora Press. pp. 101 – 107.)

Schreiner, O. 1892. The Buddhist Priest's Wife. (In Barash, C., ed. 1987. *An Olive Schreiner Reader: Writings on Women and South Africa*. London. Pandora Press. pp. 121 – 127.)

Schreiner, O. 1896. *The Story of an African Farm*. London. Hutchinson.

Schreiner, O. 1911. *Women and Labour*. London. T. Fisher Unwin.

Schreiner, O. 1926. *From Man to Man*. London. Benn's Essex Library.

Shaw, M. 1998. *An Introduction to Women's Writing from the Middle Ages to the Present Day*. Hertfordshire. Prentice Hall.

Sherry, R. 1988. *Studying Women's Writing: an Introduction*. London. Edward Arnold.

Showalter, E. 1977. The Female Tradition. (In Warhol, R & Price Herndl, D., eds. 1993. *Feminisms: an Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. London. Rutgers. pp. 269 – 288.)

Showalter, E. 1978. *A Literature of their Own: British Women*. London. Virago Press.

Showalter, E. 1981. The Feminist Critical Revolution. (In Showalter, E., ed. 1986. *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. London. Virago Press. pp. 3 – 18.)

Showalter, E. 1983. Toward a Feminist Poetics. (In Showalter, E., ed. 1986. *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. London. Virago Press. pp. 125 – 143.)

Showalter, E., ed. 1986. *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. London. Virago Press.

Showalter, E. 1989. A Criticism of Our Own: Autonomy and Assimilation in Afro-American and Feminist Literary Theory. (In Warhol, R & Price Herndl, D., eds. 1993. *Feminisms: an Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. London. Rutgers. pp. 168 – 193.)

Snaith, A. 2000. *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations*. London. Macmillan Press.

Sprague, C., ed. 1971. *Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays*. London. Prentice-Hall.

Sunshine for Women. [n.d]. *The Rights of Women, Olympe de Gouges*. [2006/02/19]. {<http://www.pinn.net/~sunshine/book-sum/gouges.html>}

Taylor, B. 2003. *Mary and the Feminist Imagination*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

Thomas, P. 2002. *Crinolines Fashion History*. [2006/10/08]. {<http://www.fashion-era.com/crinolines.htm>}

Todd, J., ed. 1976. *Mary and the Wrongs of Women and Maria*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

Todd, J. 1988. *Feminist Literary Theory: A Defence*. Oxford. Basil Blackwell.

Todd, J., ed. 1993. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

Todd, J., ed. 1995. *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*. London. Thoemmes Press.

Turner, C. 1992. *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*. London. Routledge.

Vivan, I., ed. 1991. *The Flawed Diamond*. Sydney. Dangaroo Press.

Warhol, R. & Price Herndl, D., eds. 1993. *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. London. Rutgers.

Warner, E., ed. 1984. *Virginia Woolf: A Century Perspective*. London. Macmillan.

Whelehan, I. [n.d]. Sunshine for Women. *Modern Feminist Thought*. [2006/02/19].  
{<http://www.pinn.net/~sunshine/book-sum/mod-fem.html>}

Wollstonecraft, M. 1789. *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*. (In Todd, J., ed. 1995. *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*. London. Thoemmes Press.)

Wollstonecraft, M. 1792. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. (In Todd, J., ed. 1993. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. Oxford. Oxford University Press. pp. 5 – 283 )

Wollstonecraft, M. 1798. *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*. (In Todd, J., ed. 1976. *Maria and the Wrongs of Woman and Mary, a Fiction*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.)

Wollstonecraft, M. 1798. *Mary, a Fiction*. (In Todd, J., ed. 1976. *Maria and the Wrongs of Woman and Mary, a Fiction*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.)

Woolf, L., ed. 1925(a). *Collected Essays Volume 2*. London. Hogarth Press.

Woolf, L., ed. 1965. *Contemporary Writers*. London. Hogarth Press.

Woolf, V. 1910. Mary Wollstonecraft. (In Barrett, M., ed. 1979. *Virginia Woolf on Women and Writing – Her Collection of Essays, Assessments and Arguments*. London. The Women's Press. pp. 93 – 103.)

Woolf, V. 1920(a). Men and Women. (In Barrett, M., ed. 1979. *Virginia Woolf on Women and Writing – Her Collection of Essays, Assessments and Arguments*. London. The Women's Press. pp. 64 – 67.)

Woolf, V. 1920(b). The Intellectual Status of Women. (In Barrett, M., ed. 1979. *Virginia Woolf on Women and Writing – Her Collection of Essays, Assessments and Arguments*. London. The Women's Press. pp. 55 – 56.)

Woolf, V. 1924. Indiscretions. (In Barrett, M., ed. 1979. *Virginia Woolf on Women and Writing – Her Collection of Essays, Assessments and Arguments*. London. The Women's Press. pp. 72 – 78.)

Woolf, V. 1925(b). Olive Schreiner. (In Barrett, M., ed. 1979. *Virginia Woolf on Women and Writing – Her Collection of Essays, Assessments and Arguments*. London. The Women's Press. pp. 180 – 183.)

Woolf, V. 1925(c). *Women Novelists*. (In Barrett, M., ed. 1979. *Virginia Woolf on Women and Writing – Her Collection of Essays, Assessments and Arguments*. London. The Women's Press. pp. 86 – 77.)

Woolf, V. 1925(d). *Mrs Dalloway*. London. Hogarth Press.



Woolf, V. 1927. *To the Lighthouse*. London. Hogarth Press.

Woolf, V. 1928(a). *A Room of One's Own*. London. Penguin Books.

Woolf, V. 1928(b). *Orlando, a Biography*. London. Hogarth Press.

Woolf, V. 1929. Women and Fiction. (In Barrett, M., ed. 1979. *Virginia Woolf on Women and Writing – Her Collection of Essays, Assessments and Arguments*. London. The Women's Press. pp. 43 – 52.)

Woolf, V. 1929. Women and Leisure. (In Barrett, M., ed. 1979. *Virginia Woolf on Women and Writing – Her Collection of Essays, Assessments and Arguments*. London. The Women's Press. pp. 53 – 54.)

Woolf, V. 1938. *Three Guineas*. London. Hogarth Press.

Woolf, V. 1952. *The Years*. London. Hogarth Press.

