

☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

CLC

216



Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 216

Project Editor

Jeffrey W. Hunter, Kathy D. Darrow

Editorial

Jessica Bomarito, Jelena O. Krstović, Michelle Lee, Rachelle Mucha, Thomas J. Schoenberg, Noah Schusterbauer, Lawrence J. Trudeau, Russel Whitaker

Data Capture

Francis Monroe, Gwen Tucker

Indexing Services

Laurie Andriot

Rights and Acquisitions

Margaret Abendroth, Lori Hines, Timothy Sisler

Imaging and Multimedia

Dean Dauphinais, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Lezlie Light, Mike Logusz, Dan Newell, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Denay Wilding, Robyn Young

Composition and Electronic Prepress

Amy Darga

Manufacturing

Rhonda Dover

Associate Product Manager

Marc Cormier

© 2006 Thomson Gale, a part of The Thomson Corporation. Thomson and Star Logo are trademarks and Gale is a registered trademark used herein under license.

For more information, contact

Thomson Gale

27500 Drake Rd.

Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Or you can visit our internet site at

<http://www.gale.com>

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution, or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

This publication is a creative work fully protected by all applicable copyright laws, as well as by misappropriation, trade secret, unfair competition, and other applicable laws. The authors and editors of this work have added value to the underlying factual material herein through one or more of the following: unique and original selection, coordination, expression, arrangement, and classification of the information.

For permission to use material from the product, submit your request via the Web at <http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions>, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

Permissions Department

Thomson Gale

27500 Drake Rd.

Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Permissions Hotline:

248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006

Fax 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, Thomson Gale neither guarantees the accuracy of the data contained herein nor assumes any responsibility for errors, omissions or discrepancies. Thomson Gale accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 76-46132

ISBN 0-7876-7986-0

ISSN 0091-3421

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface

Named “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today’s reader.

Scope of the Series

CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete bibliographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

Organization of the Book

A *CLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Thomson Gale, including *CLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *CLC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *CLC* volume in which their entry appears.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in the series as well as in *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, and the *Contemporary Literary Criticism* Yearbook, which was discontinued in 1998.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *CLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces an annual cumulative title index that alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in *CLC* and is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

Citing Contemporary Literary Criticism

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language As-

sociation (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a bibliography set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Morrison, Jago. "Narration and Unease in Ian McEwan's Later Fiction." *Critique* 42, no. 3 (spring 2001): 253-68. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Vol. 169, edited by Janet Witlec, 212-20. Detroit: Gale, 2003.

Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." In *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*, edited by Charles Bernstein, 73-82. New York: Roof Books, 1990. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Vol. 169, edited by Janet Witlec, 3-8. Detroit: Gale, 2003.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a works cited list set forth in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 5th ed. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1999); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Morrison, Jago. "Narration and Unease in Ian McEwan's Later Fiction." *Critique* 42.3 (spring 2001): 253-68. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Janet Witlec. Vol. 169. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 212-20.

Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Roof Books, 1990. 73-82. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Janet Witlec. Vol. 169. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 3-8.

Suggestions are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Associate Product Manager:

Associate Product Manager, Literary Criticism Series
Thomson Gale
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535
1-800-347-4253 (GALE)
Fax: 248-699-8983

Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the criticism included in this volume and the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reproduction rights. We are also grateful to the staffs of the Detroit Public Library, the Library of Congress, the University of Detroit Mercy Library, Wayne State University Purdy/Kresge Library Complex, and the University of Michigan Libraries for making their resources available to us. Following is a list of the copyright holders who have granted us permission to reproduce material in this volume of *CLC*. Every effort has been made to trace copyright, but if omissions have been made, please let us know.

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *CLC*, VOLUME 216, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING PERIODICALS:

a/b: Auto/Biography Studies, v. 18, summer, 2003. Copyright © 2004 by *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*. Reproduced by permission.—*Agni*, v. 49, 1999. Copyright © 1999 AGNI. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture (1900-present)*, v. 2, fall, 2003. Copyright © 2003 Americana: The Institute for the Study of American Popular Culture. Reproduced by permission.—*American Poetry Review*, v. 32, July-August, 2003 for “The Three Tenors: Gluck, Hass, Pinsky, and the Deployment of Talent” by Tony Hoagland. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*BOMB*, v. 68, summer, 1999. Reproduced by permission.—*Chicago Review*, v. 49, summer, 2004. Copyright © 2004 by *Chicago Review*. Reproduced by permission.—*Christianity and Literature*, v. 46, spring-summer, 1997; v. 50, winter, 2001. All reproduced by permission.—*Classical World*, v. 89, July-August, 1996. Copyright © 1996 by the Classical Association of the Atlantic States, Inc. Reprinted with permission of the editor.—*College Literature*, v. 30, summer, 2003. Copyright © 2003 by West Chester University. Reproduced by permission.—*Commentary*, v. 103, June, 1997 for “Doing Daddy Down” by Elizabeth Powers. Copyright © 1997 by the American Jewish Committee. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the *Commentary* and the author.—*Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, v. 45, summer, 2004. Copyright © 2004 by Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation. Reproduced with permission of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation, published by Heldref Publications, 1319 18th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1802.—*Cross Currents: The Journal of the Association for Religion and Intellectual Life*, v. 50, fall, 2000. Copyright 2000 by Cross Currents Inc. Reproduced by permission.—*English Studies in Canada*, v. 22, June, 1996. Copyright © Association of Canadian University Teachers of English. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.—*Isle: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, v. 6, winter, 1999 for “Thinking Back through Our (Naturalist) Mother: Woolf, Dillard, and the Nature Essay” by Jocelyn Bartkevicius. Copyright © 1999 by the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Knox, Sara L. From the keynote address to the “Thanatographia Figuring Death,” Conference, Parramatta Campus, Nepean University, Sydney, October 1-2, 1999. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, v. 11, February, 2001 for “Trauma and Memory in Kingsolver’s *Animal Dreams*” by Sheryl Stevenson. Copyright © 2001 OPA (Overseas Publishers Association). Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis, Ltd., <http://www.taylorandfrancis.com>, and the author.—*Literary Imagination: The Review of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics*, v. 4, fall, 2002. Copyright © 2002, all rights reserved by the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics. Reproduced by permission.—*Literary Review*, v. 32, fall, 1988 for “Radical Damage: An Interview with Mary Gordon,” by M. Deiter Keyishian and Mary Gordon. Reproduced by permission of the authors.—*Massachusetts Review: A Quarterly of Literature, the Arts and Public Affairs*, v. 44, winter, 2003. Copyright © 2003-2004. Reprinted by permission from *The Massachusetts Review*.—*Modern Language Studies*, v. 32, spring, 2002 for “Bringing Whiteness ‘Home’: Exploring the Social Geography of Race in Mary Gordon’s ‘The Other Side’” by Patricia Keefe Durso. Copyright, Northeast Modern Language Association 2002. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—*Mystics Quarterly*, v. 26, March, 2000. Copyright © 2000 *Mystics Quarterly* and the several authors, each in respect of the material contributed by him or her. Reproduced by permission.—*New Letters*, v. 64, 1998 for “Image of Desire: An Interview with Robert Pinsky” by Kay Bonetti Callison. Copyright © 1998 The Curators of the University of Missouri. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission the author.—*New Republic*, v. 227, 2002. Copyright © 2002 by The New Republic, Inc. Reproduced by permission of *The New Republic*.—*Northwest Review*, v. 38, 2000; v. 39, 2001. Copyright © 2000, 2001 by *Northwest Review*. All reproduced by permission.—*Pembroke Magazine*, 1999 for an interview with Robert Pinsky by Grace Cavalieri. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Pennsylvania English*, v. 21, 1998. Reproduced by permission.—*PN Review*, v. 25, September-October, 1998; v. 26, January-February, 2000. All reproduced by permission of the author.—*Providence: Studies in Western Civilization*, v. 3, fall, 1997. Reproduced by permission.—*Publishers Weekly*, v. 245, March 9, 1998. Copyright © 1998 by Reed Publishing USA. Reproduced from *Publishers Weekly*, published by the Bowker Magazine Group of Cahners Publishing Co., a division of Reed Publishing

USA., by permission.—*Sojourners*, v. 29, November, 2000. Copyright © 2000 *Sojourners*. Reproduced with permission from *Sojourners*. (800) 714-7474, www.sojo.net.—*Studies in American Jewish Literature*, 2003. Copyright © 2003 by The Kent State University Press. Reproduced by permission.—*Studies in the Humanities*, v. 28, June-December, 2001. Copyright © 2001 by Indiana University Press of Pennsylvania. Reproduced by permission.—*West Coast Line*, v. 35, winter, 2001-2002 for “Essays by Poets: A Poetics of Relation and Desire” by Anne Quéma. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Western American Literature*, v. 36, fall, 2001. Copyright © 2001 by The Western Literature Association. Reproduced by permission.

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN CLC, VOLUME 216, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:

DeMarr, Mary Jean. From *Barbara Kingsolver: A Critical Companion*. Greenwood Press, 1999. Copyright © 1999 by Mary Jean DeMarr. Reproduced by permission of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., Westport, CT.—Gross, Terry and Gordon, Mary. From a transcription of Fresh Air, WHYY: Philadelphia. National Public Radio, 14 May, 1996. Copyright © 1996 by WHYY, Inc. Reprinted by permission.—Kunz, Diane. From “White Men in Africa: On Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible*,” in *Novel History: Historians and Novelists Confront America’s Past (And Each Other)*. Edited by Mark C. Carnes. Simon & Schuster, 2001. Copyright © 2001 by Mark C. Carnes. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Legler, Gretchen. From “‘I Am a Transparent Eyeball’: The Politics of Vision in American Nature Writing,” in *Reading under the Sign of Nature: New Essays in Ecocriticism*. Edited by John Tallmadge and Henry Harrington. The University of Utah Press, 2000. Copyright © 2000 by the University of Utah Press. Reproduced by permission.—Papa, Jr., James A. From “Water-signs: Place and Metaphor in Dillard and Thoreau,” in *Thoreau’s Sense of Place: Essays in American Environmental Writing*. Edited by Richard J. Schneider. University of Iowa Press, 2000. Copyright © 2000 by the University of Iowa Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Rishoi, Christy. From *From Girl to Woman: American Women’s Coming-of-Age Narratives*. State University of New York Press, 2003. Copyright © 2003 State University of New York. Reproduced by permission of the State University of New York Press.—Rubenstein, Roberta. From “Home is (Mother) Earth: *Animal Dreams*, Barbara Kingsolver,” in *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women’s Fiction*. Palgrave, 2001. Reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan and the author.—Sheidley, William E. From “The Poet Laureate on His Land: Robert Pinsky’s ‘An Explanation of America,’” in *The Image of America in Literature, Media, and Society*. Edited by Will Wright and Steven Kaplan. The Society for Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery, University of Southern Colorado, 1999. Reproduced by permission of the author.—White, Richard. From “A Review of Annie Dillard’s *The Living*,” in *Novel History: Historians and Novelists Confront America’s Past (And Each Other)*. Edited by Mark C. Carnes. Simon & Schuster, 2001. Copyright © 2001 by Mark C. Carnes. Reproduced by permission of Simon & Schuster Macmillan.—Wright, Charlotte M.. From *Updating the Literary West*. Texas Christian University Press, 1997. Copyright © 1997, Western Literature Association. Reproduced by permission.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS APPEARING IN CLC, VOLUME 216, WERE RECEIVED FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:

Dillard, Annie, photograph. Copyright © Jerry Bauer.—Gordon, Mary, photograph. AP/Wide World Photos. —Kingsolver, Barbara, photograph. AP/Wide World Photos.—Pinsky, Robert, photograph. AP/Wide World Photos.

Thomson Gale Literature Product Advisory Board

The members of the Thomson Gale Literature Product Advisory Board—reference librarians from public and academic library systems—represent a cross-section of our customer base and offer a variety of informed perspectives on both the presentation and content of our literature products. Advisory board members assess and define such quality issues as the relevance, currency, and usefulness of the author coverage, critical content, and literary topics included in our series; evaluate the layout, presentation, and general quality of our printed volumes; provide feedback on the criteria used for selecting authors and topics covered in our series; provide suggestions for potential enhancements to our series; identify any gaps in our coverage of authors or literary topics, recommending authors or topics for inclusion; analyze the appropriateness of our content and presentation for various user audiences, such as high school students, undergraduates, graduate students, librarians, and educators; and offer feedback on any proposed changes/enhancements to our series. We wish to thank the following advisors for their advice throughout the year.

Barbara M. Bibel

Librarian
Oakland Public Library
Oakland, California

Dr. Toby Burrows

Principal Librarian
The Scholars' Centre
University of Western Australia Library
Nedlands, Western Australia

Celia C. Daniel

Associate Reference Librarian
Howard University Libraries
Washington, D.C.

David M. Durant

Reference Librarian
Joyner Library
East Carolina University
Greenville, North Carolina

Nancy T. Guidry

Librarian
Bakersfield Community College
Bakersfield, California

Heather Martin

Arts & Humanities Librarian
University of Alabama at Birmingham, Sterne Library
Birmingham, Alabama

Susan Mikula

Librarian
Indiana Free Library
Indiana, Pennsylvania

Thomas Nixon

Humanities Reference Librarian
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Davis
Library
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Mark Schumacher

Jackson Library
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Greensboro, North Carolina

Gwen Scott-Miller

Assistant Director
Sno-Isle Regional Library System
Marysville, Washington

Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

Annie Dillard 1945-	1
<i>American essayist, poet, nonfiction writer, memoirist, and novelist</i>	
Mary Gordon 1949-	94
<i>American novelist, short story writer, essayist, and memoirist</i>	
Barbara Kingsolver 1955-	162
<i>American novelist, short story writer, essayist, nonfiction writer, and poet</i>	
Robert Pinsky 1940-	243
<i>American poet and essayist</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 345

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 451

CLC Cumulative Nationality Index 463

CLC-216 Title Index 477

Annie Dillard

1945-

American essayist, poet, nonfiction writer, memoirist, and novelist.

The following entry provides an overview of Dillard's life and works through 2005. For additional information on her career, see *CLC*, Volumes 9, 60, and 115.

INTRODUCTION

Considered one of America's foremost environmental writers, Dillard is best known for the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974). Her work explores the role of self within the world, the nature of God, and the art of writing. Noted for vividly detailed descriptions and masterful prose, Dillard's writing combines careful observation with a deep knowledge of science and literature. Her writing has often been compared to that of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Dana Wilde observes that, "Annie Dillard's essays sit squarely in the age-old contemplative tradition, but speak directly from and to our own time."

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Dillard was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on April 30, 1945, to Frank and Pam Doak. The oldest of three girls, her Presbyterian childhood eventually became a subject for her writing. Dillard's early explorations of nearby Frick Park and her rebellion against certain traditions and mores of her social class are described in her book *An American Childhood* (1987). She attended Hollins College earning a B.A. degree in English in 1967 and completing an M.A. there in 1968. She married a professor and writer, Richard Dillard in 1964. Dillard later divorced and married professor and writer Gary Clevidence in 1980. Since 1988 Dillard has been married to Robert D. Richardson, Jr., also a writer and professor. She taught at Western Washington University in Bellingham as a scholar-in-residence from 1975 to 1979 and at various American universities during the 1980s. Dillard is currently a professor emerita at Wesleyan University. Dillard wrote for *The Living Wilderness* magazine from 1973 to 1975 and was a contributing editor for *Harper's Magazine* from 1974 to 1981 and again from 1983 to 1985. She serves as a member of the usage panel at *American Heritage Dictionary*. In addition to her 1975 Pulitzer Prize in the general nonfiction category for *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Dillard was



nominated for the National Book Critics Circle award in 1987 for *An American Childhood*. She received the Milton Prize in 1994 and the Academy Award in Literature given by the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1998. Dillard was inducted into the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame in 1997 and was the recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1982-1983 and the Guggenheim Foundation in 1985-1986.

MAJOR WORKS

Dillard is known for her work in many genres. Initially, she wrote poetry; her first published book of poems, *Tickets for a Prayer Wheel* (1974), explores many of the major themes also contained in her later works, including spiritual faith, science, nature, and time. Dillard returned to writing poetry in *Mornings Like This* (1995), an experimental collection utilizing bits of text from such sources as the letters of Vincent Van Gogh

and a 1926 junior high school English textbook in the creation of new poems. Dillard is best known, however, for her nonfiction works on nature and spirituality such as *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, *Holy the Firm* (1977), *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (1982), and *For the Time Being* (1999). *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* chronicles four seasons Dillard spent at Tinker Creek in Virginia's Roanoke Valley. She vividly describes the beauty and horrors extant in the natural world—a bloody tomcat that climbs through a window to jump on her chest in the middle of the night; a water bug that eats a frog by sucking its insides out. Dillard employs a scientific approach in her examinations of Tinker Creek, even looking at the creek water under a microscope. In the process of her exploration, Dillard ponders the meaning of her own existence and her relationship to God and the universe. All of Dillard's writings share this spiritual quest. *Holy the Firm* was inspired by a passage in one of Emerson's letters to Margaret Fuller which became the epigraph for the book: "No one suspects the days to be gods." After reading this passage, Dillard decided to make the next three days a test case. On the second day in her test, a neighbor's seven-year-old child was badly burned in a plane crash, an event Dillard uses as a springboard to reflect on the metaphysical aspects of pain. She sets off on a two-year sojourn on an island in Puget Sound, attempting to come to terms with senseless suffering. *Teaching a Stone to Talk* includes fourteen essays covering travels to such places as the Galapagos and South America while also detailing everyday happenings. In one essay, "Total Eclipse," Dillard describes a February 1979 visit to central Washington to watch a total eclipse of the sun. She details the trip, the hotel, and the eclipse itself, to which she has a powerful reaction. In *For the Time Being*, Dillard ponders her trips to China and Israel, all the while considering life and death in the presence or absence of God. Dillard is also known for her memoir *American Childhood*, which documents her growing awareness of the world around her, exploring her rebellions against both the Presbyterian Church and the constraints of her upper-middle class upbringing. *The Living* (1992) is a historical novel set in Washington Territory in the nineteenth century which provides a picture of frontier life at the time. Dillard has also authored works of literary criticism and essays on writing. *Living by Fiction* (1982), *Encounters with Chinese Writers* (1984), and *The Writing Life* (1989) examine Dillard's own need to write, her desire to motivate writers to fully commit to their art, and her exploration of literature's role in society.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Dillard earned resounding critical acclaim over time, though she noted that *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* was not an immediate critical success. *Kirkus Reviews* panned the book and Eudora Welty wrote in the *New York Times*

Book Review: "I honestly do not know what [Dillard] is talking about." However, as time passed, the book earned a reputation as a masterpiece. Critics called *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* an unorthodox book that defies genre. Unlike Thoreau's *Walden*, where the author's imagination speaks for nature, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* allows nature itself to reveal the divine. James A. Papa, Jr. stated that, "For Dillard nature is an oracle: she wants it to speak to her." Not surprisingly, criticism has centered on the concept of vision in her work with great attention paid to Dillard's reliance on Emerson's "transparent eyeball," but as Gretchen Legler noted, "The unself-conscious position is rare and hard to maintain." Critics praised Dillard's explorations of spirituality in *Holy the Firm* and *Teaching a Stone to Talk*. Commentators focused on the unusual structure in *For the Time Being*, where each chapter covers ten subjects, creating a circular narrative. Critics questioned the generalized title of *An American Childhood*; many consider Dillard's childhood as relatively privileged. This book focuses on beliefs Dillard developed during her teen years. The work examines her notions concerning society's expectations for girls, traditionally regarded as inferiors, and Dillard ultimately rejects such categorizations. Most scholars have concurred Dillard's work is thought-provoking, insightful, and enthusiastic, asserting it effectively draws from her own experiences and her passion for writing.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Pilgrim at Tinker Creek (nonfiction) 1974
Tickets for a Prayer Wheel (poetry) 1974
Holy the Firm (nonfiction) 1977
Living by Fiction (essays) 1982
Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters (essays) 1982
Encounters with Chinese Writers (essays) 1984
An American Childhood (memoir) 1987
The Writing Life (essays) 1989
The Living (novel) 1992
Mornings Like This: Found Poems (poetry) 1995
For the Time Being (nonfiction) 1999

CRITICISM

Carolyn Foster Segal (essay date 1998)

SOURCE: Segal, Caroline Foster. "Rambling with Annie Dillard: Pilgrims in the Nature/Composition Class." *Pennsylvania English* 21, no. 2 (1998): 140-48.

[In the essay below, Segal relates methods for teaching *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* as part of a nature writing course.]

Over the past five years, I have developed several nature writing courses.¹ “Visions of the Earth: Nature Writing” is an upper-level course offered as part of Lehigh University’s summer program. The students are, needless to say, engaged with the material. They are already familiar with many of the names on the syllabus; some are involved in local environmental programs, and nearly all of them come into the class thinking of themselves as writers. Discussions are lively and thoughtful from the start, with little prompting on my part.

If that course is like a ramble through a much-loved park, the obvious metaphor for the second one—a freshman comp and lit class—is a mountain-climbing expedition. Titled “Reading Nature,” it is one of several options for the second semester of freshman English at Lehigh. The students who choose this course fall into three general categories: those who have some theoretical or practical interest in the subject (high school readings and extra-curricular environmental programs); those who like to be outdoors and who have experience fishing, backpacking, etc.; and those who think it sounds easier than other options like “Masterpieces.” The nature class draws engineering, biology, and environmental studies majors. Out of the eighty students enrolled in my sections, there have been two English minors and one writing minor. In essence, I’m teaching Poetry for Physicists.

With just fourteen weeks to persuade the audience described above that reading and writing matter, I have discovered that nature literature is, in fact, particularly well-suited to this task. As a teacher of composition, I need to provide works that will provoke discussion and provide models; I have found that the nature course—more successfully than other comp classes that combine literature and writing—closes the gap between reading material and student writing. In “The Greening of the Humanities,” Jay Parini explains that environmental studies “signals a dismissal of theory’s more solipsistic tendencies. From a literary aspect, it marks a re-engagement with realism, with the actual universe of rocks, trees and rivers that lies behind the wilderness of signs” (52). The general subject is accessible and relevant to these students. And the genre affords a wide range of sub-categories—personal narratives, “how to” articles, information essays, profiles, editorials, meditations, rambles inviting readers to walk and reflect along with the authors, short stories, novels, and poems—that make for stimulating talks and that demonstrate the strategies writers use to be effective. Nature literature shows how to build from personal experience, how to construct a reasoned argument, and how to evaluate others’ arguments. And by a few weeks into the semester, the students begin to realize that nature writing is where the man/woman of science and the man/woman of letters meet.

All nature sections are required to use the same anthology; in spring, 1995, we used *Reading the Environment* (Norton), edited by Melissa Walker.² In addition, each instructor may choose three other texts. I introduce Annie Dillard’s *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* in the middle of the semester. By this time, the students have written and revised two full-length papers: a reflective piece about a natural place that had significance for them when they were younger and a researched editorial. At this point in the term, the students have an overview of developments in nature writing as a genre and have looked at samples from such writers as Thoreau, Muir, Leopold, and Carson. They are also familiar with the writing routine of the course, which involves discovery exercises leading up to each paper.

My reasons for using *Pilgrim* [*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*] can best be summed up by saying that it meets (splendidly) Edward Hoagland’s description of contemporary nature writing: a combination of rhapsody and science (295). This is the “ecstatic science which [Alfred North] Whitehead invokes,” as John Elder says in *Imagining the Earth* (3). The word “ecstatic” is worth dwelling on here for a moment because it is a perfect description of Dillard’s voice—exuberant, even exultant—a voice that prompts students to investigate what inspires such enthusiasm. As Dillard joyfully explores, she encourages readers to do the same. Even those who begin the course protesting that they don’t like poetry respond to this “lyrical science” (Elder 178). Moreover, Dillard shows us that we can be serious without being solemn; another aspect of her voice is its wry humor. The lesson that this voice delivers—that the starting point is informed awareness—is an essential one not just for nature students but for all composition students.

When I make the first reading assignment in *Pilgrim* (Chapters 1-3), I also hand out the topic for the next essay:

Write an evaluation of one chapter from Annie Dillard’s *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*: analyze content and form; explain how the chapter fits into the overall pattern of the book; explain how it fits into the overall pattern of the genre of nature writing.

Students can begin reading with these concerns in mind. They also have the option of creating a critical topic, and for the fifth essay, at the end of the semester, students may return to Dillard’s book, creating their own reflective rambles and process papers.

To help the students read critically, I tell them that this is an example of two kinds of nature writing: the ramble and the natural history meditation. I also suggest that they treat Chapter 1, “Heaven and Earth in Jest,” as an introduction to Dillard’s main points and to her writing strategies. I ask them to locate and annotate sentences where she presents her purpose. I expect them to be prepared to talk about Dillard’s style and about the levels of seeing that she describes in Chapter 2.

At the beginning of the first class on *Pilgrim*. I ask my students to write down their responses to the first three chapters. Beyond the obvious check on who is doing the reading assignments, this serves several purposes: it tells me what students are picking up on and what they're missing; it shows me very early what the students find appealing—or problematic; and it gives the students a bit of non-threatening practice in evaluating a piece of writing.

After collecting the paragraphs, I then ask volunteers to share with the rest of the class some of the comments they've made. Virtually everyone will have included a sentence or two on the by-now famous giant water bug that sucks out the insides of a frog. It's a perfect opening. Everyone agrees this scene is "gross," and that is Dillard's—and my—starting point: the world shows us "grace tangled in a rapture with violence" (8). As Dillard says:

We must somehow take a wider view, look at the whole landscape, really see it, and describe what's going on here. Then we can at least wail the right question into the swaddling band of darkness, or, if it comes to that, choir the proper praise.

(9)

The first step is to establish two of the dominant themes of *Pilgrim*—both neatly contained in the opening pages—the paradoxical coexistence of a "brute game" and beauty in nature and the importance of observing.

Chapter 2 takes up various meanings and ways of "seeing" (its title); the best way into that chapter is to spend a few more minutes on the giant water bug, which looms so large on page six and in the reader's imagination. Nearly every student description includes Dillard's word "enormous"; we look again at the passage:

"Giant water bug" is really the name of the creature, which is an enormous, heavy-bodied brown bug. It eats insects, tadpoles, fish and frogs. Its grasping forelegs are mighty and hooked inward. It seizes a victim with these legs.

(6)

Enough? How big, do you suppose, I now ask the students, is the giant water bug? The answer, of course, is two inches, but Dillard's description has brought this insect to cinematic proportions.

The graphic description, however, is only part of Dillard's lesson here about observing. We are able to envision the scene, even though, as she points out in the first and usually overlooked sentence of that paragraph, she "had read about the giant water bug, but never seen one." She has deduced its presence from the evidence—a small green frog "shrinking" and "deflating" and "an oval shadow [that] hung in the water behind

the drained frog." Thus Dillard has brought to bear on this scene several elements of observation: curiosity, imagination, and a willingness to apply research.

Comments that this section is actually a flashback—a memory of an earlier excursion that Dillard recalls as she sits by the creek in the present story time—usually lead to the first of a number of discussions on form. Some students are put off by what seems initially to be a series of rambling, unconnected thoughts. This is a good time to talk about the overall form: the book uses the common and organic structure of the calendar year, beginning with January and ending with December. The second framing device consists of a series of walks or excursions along the banks of Tinker Creek: rambles that are physical and mental. It can be helpful in the beginning to ask students to think about what happens to their thoughts as they walk in the woods or even walk to class. Within those basic structures, Dillard meditates on the processes of nature and of seeing or consciousness.

The book, in fact, is about the process of discovery; Dillard not only describes this process, she demonstrates it. At this point, it is enough to reassure students that if Dillard brings up a subject, she will eventually show how it "connects." That, after all, is one of her subjects, and she is inviting readers to "make connections," among the parts of this book as well as among the parts of the wide world (96). Asking the students how Dillard herself describes the book should result in their recalling this passage:

I propose to keep here what Thoreau called "a meteorological journal of the mind," telling some tales and describing some of the sights of this rather tamed valley, and exploring, in fear and trembling, some of the unmapped dim reaches and unholy fastnesses to which those tales and sights so dizzily lead.

(11)

It is important to remind students that this is a crafted ramble. During the second or third class meeting on *Pilgrim*, I like to introduce several lines from Dillard's *Writing Life*:

It was on summer nights in Roanoke, Virginia that I wrote the second half of a book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. (I wrote the first half in the spring, at home.)

. . .

I had a room—a study carrel—in the Hollins College library, on the second floor. . . .

My working the graveyard shift in Virginia affected the book. It was a nature book full of sunsets; it wholly lacked dawns, and even mornings.

(27, 34)

As the students read further, they begin to see for themselves what I reassure them of on the first day: if Dillard digresses after introducing a topic, she will still

carefully return to that original subject and conclude it. *Pilgrim* is artfully random and carefully organized. The reader's sense of the book's texture and fullness derives from several sources: allusions to other writers, the complexity of Dillard's sentences, and cross references between chapters and subsections of chapters. Nevertheless, as the students soon realize, "What you see is what you get" (*Pilgrim* 15)—attentive readers find that Dillard's prose is quite clear and accessible.

In addition to the general structuring devices, each of the chapters shows an incremental progression, which mimics the stages of thought.³ Dillard starts out with a simple anecdotal observation, allusion, or memory; provides additional concrete examples from nature; and then employs more abstract reasoning with reflections involving theology, philosophy, biology, cognitive science, and physics.

In Chapter 2, "Seeing," Dillard shows us that everything hinges on seeing, and that if we look long enough and attentively enough, we will see in new ways. She begins by describing one of her childhood pastimes: she would hide pennies for strangers to find. Her point is that nature too offers many of these pennies or "free gift[s]," and as the book amply demonstrates with its many examples, she is "always on the lookout" (17). Who truly "sees"? "The lover can see, and the knowledgeable" (18). And the gift or reward is the discovery of "an astonishing bloom of life" at Tinker Creek (19).

Halfway into the chapter, Dillard begins a discussion of Marius von Senden's *Space and Sight*, a series of case studies of people who had been blinded by cataracts since birth and who, after gaining their sight after surgery, had to learn how to see. Students generally find this section intriguing, and a few have even followed up by reading more recent case studies by Oliver Sacks. They like to speculate about the experiences of the newly sighted and about their own experiences as infants, and they try to determine Dillard's reason for this "digression." Her purpose here may be twofold: to try to comprehend this different way of seeing (without depth perception, "vision is pure sensation unencumbered by meaning") and to remind readers that we all learn to see and that we must continue to practice. One student suggested, and several others took up the discussion, that seeing is a metaphor for all the senses.

There is still another stage of seeing, or "vision," and in the final pages of this chapter, Dillard is preparing for later musings on consciousness: "But there is another kind of seeing that involves a letting go. When I see this way I sway transfixed and emptied" (31). Like grace, this "illumination" is "a gift and a total surprise" (33). In concluding this chapter, Dillard is setting up topics for subsequent chapters such as Chapter 6, "The Present," in which she describes the processes of a

sunset *and* watching the sunset. Students sometimes question the point of the passage that begins "Seeing is of course very much a matter of verbalization" (30). I ask them to speculate and remind them that this is, after all, what Dillard is wrestling with in her book—verbalizing physical and metaphysical experiences.

Detailing one other chapter here should suffice to introduce Dillard's methods. Chapter 11, "Stalking," is in many ways a companion to Chapter 2 and the climax of the book. In "Seeing," Dillard "stayed too late" at the creek one night; when a muskrat finally appeared, she "saw only a cylindrical sleekness. . . . only one ebony fling" (21). Now she returns to the subject of muskrats in full force. In Section I, she begins with a reference to Eskimos' stalking, then segues into her two methods of stalking, which parallel ways of seeing: she can "wait, emptied" or "forge [her] own passage seeking the creature" (184). In fact, Dillard alternates between these methods just as she does different ways of seeing, and this first section describes a number of things she discovers while looking—and waiting—for muskrats: fish, heron, water striders ("For when the muskrats don't show, something else does" [187]).

The muskrats show in Section II; the central episodes are two sightings, one which occurred "three years ago," the other "last night." The discussion here includes descriptions of the events, an encyclopedic entry's worth of concrete details about muskrats, a miniature guidebook on stalking, and reflections on the necessary loss of self-consciousness (one more connection to earlier chapters). A student who chose to write on this chapter titled her paper, aptly enough, "Stalking Animals and Ideas," for by Section III, Dillard has moved on to the subject of stalking knowledge. Taking her metaphors once again from science (Elder 179), she alludes to the Principle of Indeterminacy. The electron, and in fact all knowledge, is as slippery as "a muskrat": "it cannot be perfectly stalked" (*Pilgrim* 203).

The paragraphs that follow suggest connections between physics and faith and physics and writing: "[P]hysicists are saying that they cannot study nature per se, but only their own investigation of nature" (203). Here Dillard describes precisely what she has been doing all along: reflecting on her investigation of nature. Her advice to us is "to stalk everything" (205).

As the students continue reading and preparing for their essays, I encourage them to "map" the chapters, noting paradoxes, the repetition of key words like "seeing" and "grace," and the way in which each chapter fits into the progression of the book. For example, the very title of Chapter 4, "The Fixed," seems initially to contradict the overall plan. However, its subject—"failures to adapt"—is part of the process of nature and thus it becomes part of the design of *Pilgrim*.

Along with the second reading assignment, Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7, I ask students to select one or two sentences that they think would make a good epigraph and to write a paragraph showing how the quotation is central to the first seven chapters.

The reading assignment for the third day covers Chapters 9, 11, 14, and 15. Chapters 8, 10, 12, and 13 are optional; I have found that using eleven of the fifteen chapters works best in this particular writing course. The selected chapters provide a detailed overview of Dillard's intention and style, as well as plenty of material for papers. Some students do, in fact, read the entire book, during or after the semester, and as we discuss the assigned chapters, I will make occasional references to the other sections.

On the third day, I give them an in-class writing assignment. They are to start with a line from Chapter 11—"I wander the banks; what I find, I follow" (184)—and write for ten minutes on this as a description of *Pilgrim*; they must include two other supporting lines from the book.

At this meeting, I reinforce earlier comments about sentence structure (variety, complexity, parallelism) and language (vividness, precision, clarity) by calling the students' attention to a passage near the end of Chapter 14. Here Dillard describes her sighting of three Canada geese; to recreate their arrival, she evokes three senses—sight, hearing, and touch. In her description of their departure, she takes up the senses in reverse order:

Last year I saw three migrating Canada geese flying low over the frozen duck pond where I stood. I heard a heart-stopping blast of speed before I saw them; I felt the flayed air slap at my face. They thundered across the pond, and back, and back again: I swear I have never seen such speed, such single-mindedness, such flailing of wings. They froze the duck pond as they flew; they rang the air; they disappeared. I think of this now, and my brain vibrates to the blurred bastinado of feathered bone.

(258-59)

Each class is built around the writing exercises and the students' questions and comments. I use the beginning of the fourth class meeting to wrap up any loose ends. If students have questions, I redirect them to other members of the class. I take five minutes to give a few general, concluding remarks on what I see as the dominant themes; then the students break up into small groups and begin a peer editing session. Their papers are due at the beginning of the next class.

Here are some sample passages from students' papers culled from two semesters, spring, 1994, and spring, 1995. The students whose papers I quote from gave me permission to use their work.

Cheryl Scott discusses the relationship of "Seeing" to other chapters in *Pilgrim*:

In Chapter 2, Dillard shows the reader how different methods of seeing can help him or her become more aware of the magnificence of the natural world. With this awareness, the individual can then begin to figure out his or her place in nature. . . .

Dillard regards human life as the "faint tracing on the surface of a mystery" ("Intricacy" 143). Being able to see provides one with clues to solve the mystery. If people have not really learned to observe, they can only "see out dimly, like goldfish in bowls" ("Flood" 155). In "Stalking," Dillard uses a personal experience to exemplify the second way of seeing, described in Chapter 2, by standing on the bridge, "wait[ing], emptied" (184). By discussing the stalking of muskrats and fish, she further emphasizes the fact that a person must really look, even if it may be difficult, if he/she expects to find. . . . The pleasure she gets from seeing the muskrats swim upside down in "Stalking" and her appreciation of the monarchs in "Northing" both testify to this. She carries the importance of truly seeing one's surroundings through to the last page of the book. In the last chapter, she brings forth the shadows of Chapter 2 and shows how these shadows that the "blind" cannot see define what is real and how, as a result of them, one comes to know life.

In his essay on "Stalking," Brad Goldschmidt reflects on the significance of the ramble as a device:

The third section of "Stalking" reveals the overall purpose of the book, suggests the purpose of nature writing in general, and lays out the principle by which nature itself exists. This is the Principle of Indeterminacy. The muskrats show us that nature cannot be predicted. Dillard says that "the electron is a muskrat; it cannot be perfectly stalked" (203). . . . It is in this section that the reader understands that all of the rambles represent not only a walk through nature, but more important the unpredictability of nature itself.

Some students choose to create their own topics. In her essay titled "The Comic and the Cruel," Carly Forgham contrasts Dillard's and Edward Abbey's "styles of humor":

The image of Dillard's rushing at a herd of cows, "flailing [her] arms and hollering, 'Lightning! Copperhead! Swedish meatball!'" (4) paints a comical picture that provides relief from the dismal viewpoint that cows are human products. Her humor is entertaining, and it allows us to laugh at nature, at the author, and even at ourselves. . . .

Abbey's humor contains more harshness. . . .

In "The Child and the Naturalist," Michael Hollock focuses on Dillard's references to children's curiosity and their lack of self-consciousness:

One of the themes of Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* is the similarity between the child and the naturalist. They share curiosity, imagination, and a delight in seeing.

In the final section of his paper, Hollock notes parallels between *Pilgrim* and Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality," Sarah Orne Jewett's "White Heron," and Edwin Way Teale's *Lost Woods: Adventures of a Naturalist*.

Pilgrim has also inspired rambles on time, tree houses, and suburban creeks; narrative accounts of stalking beavers, living in Haiti, and traveling to Alaska; and process papers on making a goldfish pond and painting wildlife.⁴

In the final chapter, "The Waters of Separation," Dillard goes out for a walk on December 22, the winter solstice. She begins a list, "I smelled silt on the wind, turkey, laundry, leaves . . .," and then, as if overcome, breaks off to conclude, "my God what a world." It is an ordinary phrase, a cliché any one of us might use when other words fail us, but her details have revitalized this dead metaphor and our jaded sensibilities. Here the phrase carries and conveys the sheer "abundance" that Dillard has found in her sojourn on the banks of Tinker Creek: "Come on, I say to the creek, surprise me; and it does" (266). Students are surprised by the depth of their response to this book, but that, I tell them, is one of the "gifts" of nature writing.

Notes

1. The two courses discussed here were developed for Lehigh University between 1991 and 1996. Since writing this article, I have developed a third course for my American Themes series at Cedar Crest College.
2. For upper level courses, I use *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*, edited by Robert Finch and John Elder.
3. I am indebted to David Whitman—Lehigh '98—for first using the word "incremental" when talking about the early chapters.
4. See Dillard's reference to "a treatise on making a snowman" (49).

Works Consulted

Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. 1974. New York: Harper, 1985, 1988.

———. *The Writing Life*. 1989. New York: Harper, 1990.

Elder, John. *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1985.

Finch, Robert and John Elder, eds. *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*. New York: Norton, 1990.

Hoagland, Edward. "Natural History: An Annotated Booklist." *On Nature: Nature, Landscape, and Natural History*. Ed. Daniel Halpern. 1986. New York: Antaeus; San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987.

Klooster, David J., and Patricia L. Bloem. *The Writer's Community*. New York: St. Martin's, 1995.

Parini, Jay. "The Greening of the Humanities." *New York Times*. 29 Oct. 1995, sec. 6: 52-3.

Ross, Carolyn, ed. *Writing Nature: An Ecological Reader for Writers*. New York: St. Martin's, 1995.

Walker, Melissa, ed. *Reading the Environment*. New York: Norton, 1994.

Jocelyn Bartkevicius (essay date winter 1999)

SOURCE: Bartkevicius, Jocelyn. "Thinking Back through Our (Naturalist) Mother: Woolf, Dillard, and the Nature Essay." *Isle: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 6, no. 1 (winter 1999): 41-50.

[In the essay below, Bartkevicius compares Dillard's essays to the little-known nature writing of Virginia Woolf.]

I

When they think of Virginia Woolf, most readers and critics picture an elitist Londoner gossiping in a drawing room or writing modernist novels and feminist manifestos. Yet Woolf was a vigorous outdoorswoman who walked miles across England's countryside and shore, and wrote prolifically about the natural world. Many readers may be familiar with her uses of St. Ives in fiction, but it is seldom noted that, like Dorothy Wordsworth, as a young woman hard at work shaping herself into a writer, Virginia Stephen set out walking in the natural world and observing it closely. In addition, she was an avid reader of nature writers; one of her earliest diaries, the Warboys diary of 1899, indicates that she read Gilbert White, from whom, as writers such as Edward Hoagland see it, "nature writing" evolved (1). As a young woman aspiring to be a writer, Virginia Stephen imagines that "a year or two of such gardens & green fields would infallibly sweeten one & soothe one & simplify one into the kind of Gilbert White old gentleman . . . that only grew till now for me inside the cover of books" (Leaska 137).

Throughout her life, Woolf maintained this early interest in exploring the natural world though direct experience and writing. Many of her works have as a central concern the relationship between consciousness, the body, and the natural world, and they challenge the assumption that human life occurs apart from the natural world. These works posit a complex web of relationships between the human and natural worlds, and explore the place of consciousness and the human body in the world of animals, plants, sun, and sky. As Woolf