

# The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women The Tradition in English

Part One

SANDRA M. CILBERT

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Printed in the United States of America.

The text of this book is composed in Electra, with display type set in Bernhard Modern. Composition by NETS. Manufacturing by R. R. Donnelley & Sons. Book design by Antonina Krass.

#### First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Gilbert, Sandra M.

The Norton anthology of literature by women.

Includes bibliographies and index.

1. American literature-Women authors.

2. English literature—Women authors. I. Gubar, Susan, 1944— . II. Title.

PS508.W7G54 1985 820'.8'09287 84-27276

{HT0JJ} E-04P10-EPE-0 N8ZI {R39AA9} 5-1PE2P-EPE-0 N8ZI

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
 W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 37 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3NU



#### Preface

"Books continue each other," Virginia Woolf reminds us in A Room of One's Own, advising her readers to consider contemporary fiction by women "as if it were the last volume in a fairly long series. . . ." She was recommending that her audience contemplate the connections between the Restoration iconoclast Aphra Behn, the eighteenth-century lyricist Anne Finch, and the four great novelists of the nineteenth century-Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, and George Eliot. By implication, moreover, Woolf was also arguing that such American writers as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Emily Dickinson, Sarah Orne lewett and Zora Neale Hurston, ought to be included in the tradition she was subtly defining. Yet sound as it is, her advice has been difficult to follow, for even now-half a century after she wrote A Room of One's Own—no single anthology has represented the exuberant variety yet strong continuity of the literature that English-speaking women have produced between the fourteenth century and the present. In the Norton Anthology of Literature by Women, we are attempting to do just that.

By gathering in a single volume a range of literary works in which women writers have expressed their sometimes problematic, sometimes triumphant relationship to culture and society, our collection seeks to recover a long and often neglected literary history. Although this history cannot be adequately defined by the categories and chronology customarily used to organize "mainstream" literature, its contours document Woolf's thesis that women's "books continue each other." Complementing and supplementing the standard Norton anthologies of English and American literature, NALW should help readers for the first time to appreciate fully the female literary tradition which, for several centuries, has coexisted with, revised, and influenced male literary models. Designed to serve as a "core-curriculum" text for the many courses in literature by women that have been developed over the past ten years, this collection includes examples of women's work in every genre and period; if thus carries on the tradition of a "course in a book" pioneered by the other Norton anthologies of British and American litérature which have proved so consistently useful.

Like all historically oriented Norton anthologies, our volume provides a broad chronological overview of every aspect of its subject—an overview, that is, of both the evolution and the revolutions of women's literature (and women's images of women) in England, America, Canada. Australia, and other English-speaking countries. Ranging from the fourteenth century, when women's writings were first preserved, through the seventeenth century, when women first began to publish their writings, to the rich vitality of the present, our table of contents includes distinguished selections from the works of such figures as Anne Bradstreet, Anne Finch, Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Margaret Fuller, Harriet Beecher Stowe, the Brontes, George Eliot, Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti, Kate Chopin, Olive Schreiner, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, H.D., Katherine Mansfield, Zora Neale Hurston, Doris Lessing, Flannery O'Connor, Adrienne Rich, Toni Morrison, Sylvia Plath, and Margaret Atwood, as well as samples of the works of many others. In a number of cases, moreover, the writings of both well-known and comparatively little-known authors are here made accessible to the general reader for the first time. (Our texts by Jane Lead, for instance, have heretofore only been available in rare book rooms; some of our selections by Cavendish, Finch, Edgeworth, Barrett Browning, Rossetti, and Eliot have never been reprinted in widely available popular editions; our texts by Lorraine Hansberry, Ruth Stone, and Margaret Drabble include work that has never before been published in book form.)

Perhaps it will be helpful to explain our principles of selection and organization. To begin with, we believe that, though conventional literary periodization does not suit women's literary history, women's history does have significant phases of its own. Thus, we have omitted references to the usual literary "ages" (i.e., Augustan, Romantic, Victorian) and instead organized our authors by birthdate into six eras, which our "period introductions" attempt to discuss in a way that will reveal the historical and thematic coherence of the material within each section: 1) Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; 2) Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries; 3) Literature of the Nineteenth Century; 4) Turn-of-the-Century Literature; 5) Modernist Literature; 6) Contemporary Literature. In addition, because we believe that what historians have begun to call "female culture" expresses itself across both generic and national boundaries, our anthology integrates generically diverse texts-poems, stories, essays, memoirs, plays, novels, and letters—produced in and about geographically various contexts-England, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Africa, and Australia; all these texts, of course, have in common the fact that they were originally composed in English.

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At the same time, because we wish to celebrate the continuing tradition Woolf implicitly defined in A Room of One's Own, we have allotted a special amount of space in this book to the notable literary achievements of the figures we listed earlier. We reprint a rich range of poems by Bradstreet and Dickinson, Barrett Browning and H. D., as well as long stories or novellas by, for example, Cather and Lessing. We have, furthermore, included, in their entirety, Charlotte Brontë's Jane Evre, Kate Chopin's The Awakening, and Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eve. not only because they are three novels frequently taught in women's literature courses but also because their plots, themes, and images have been especially important in delineating the distinctively female literary tradition that our anthology charts. In addition, because one of these novels is about Victorian England, another about turn-ofthe-century America, and the third about contemporary black culture. we feel that among them they indicate the varied historical roots as well as the thematic range of women's literary heritage. Finally, because these novels draw on modes and materials with which many women writers have characteristically worked—each is a form of Bildungsroman, and focuses on problems of gender—each novel summarizes influential earlier traditions and at the same time forecasts crucial later developments in those traditions.

Because it was impossible to reprint novels by all the major nineteenth- and twentieth-century women writers of prose fiction, for some figures—Iane Austen, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf—we have selected important but sometimes difficult-to-obtain shorter works, works which significantly illuminate the relationship between these artists and the female literary culture within which they knew they were writing. Thus we have represented Jane Austen by Love and Freindship, a witty early story that casts interesting light upon her later major novels while also illustrating both the sentimental education accorded Regency ladies and the parodic stance by which some women resisted that education. Similarly, we have represented George Eliot and Virginia Woolf by essays and stories that illuminate their longer works while also documenting the self-consciousness with which these writers situated themselves and their texts in specifically female and often feminist contexts. George Eliot's The Lifted Veil reveals a new aspect of this versatile artist, namely her awareness and dramatic use of what the literary critic Ellen Moers has called "female Gothic," while Eliot's Brother and Sister sonnet sequence glosses the ambivalent sibling relationship that is central to The Mill on the Floss. In the case of Virginia Woolf, we have included, along with some of her major critical and specifically feminist statements, autobiographical and fictional works which demonstrate her own persistent participation in the literary tradition which she herself defined.

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Less widely known figures such as Phillis Wheatley, Mary Elizabeth Coleridge, Alice Meynell, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Radclyffe Hall we have tried to represent by what we consider their most teachable and typical work; we have tried also, wherever possible, to place the writings of these women in their relevant sociocultural contexts by including important documents by feminist polemicists—Margaret Fuller, Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lorraine Hansberry. We are particularly glad that we have been able to recover works by comparatively neglected women artists—Jane Lead, Rebecca Cox Jackson, Elizabeth Drew Stoddard, Charlotte Mew, Anzia Yezierska, Mourning Dove, and Anna Wickham. Finally, we have sought to reprint texts by writers from as many English-speaking countries as possible, including selections by H. H. Richardson, Katharine Susannah Prichard, and Judith Wright (Australia); Dorothy Livesay, Alice Munro, P. K. Page. Margaret Laurence, and Margaret Atwood (Canada); Nadine Gordimer (South Africa); Lady Augusta Gregory and Edna O'Brien (Ireland); Kamala Das (India); and Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghana). Together, these texts not only emphasize the vitality of women's literary history, they also allow us to trace a number of traditions within that historythe black, the regional, the lesbian, the working-class, and the native-American traditions—as well as to document the many ways in which women poets and fiction writers have confronted female experiences of creation and procreation, marriage and maternity, adolescence and aging, desire and death.

Of course, no anthology can pretend to completeness. Editors inevitably find themselves unable to keep up with the rapid evolution of new literary movements and traditions. In addition, permissions problems sometimes lead to the exclusion of important texts, and space restrictions often require similar exclusions. Thus we regret that we have been unable to represent such increasingly self-aware movements as those currently being pioneered by Chicanas and Italian-American women. Similarly, we are sorry that we could not obtain permission to reprint works by the modernist poet/critic Laura (Riding) Jackson and by the contemporary British playwright Caryl Churchill. Finally, however, we regret that even in this compendious volume, we have not had room to include texts by countless women writers whose achievements we much admire. We are convinced, however, that the texts we have included in NALW will, at the very least, suggest the contours of the canon into which readers will be able to assimilate the works of many other women authors, both those who are writing now and those who have written in the past. In addition, whatever the subject, form, or provenance of NALW's texts, we believe that throughout this anthology we have reprinted works whose historical, intellectual, or aesthetic significance seems to us clearly to merit their inclusion.

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Adopting editorial procedures that have proved helpful in other Norton anthologies, we have in every case used what seemed to us the most accurate texts. In some instances, in order to make a work more easily accessible to the reader, we have modernized spelling and Americanized punctuation; otherwise, the spelling and punctuation of our texts is that of their authors or-as in the case of, say, Charlotte and Emily Brontë or Emily Dickinson—their editors. After every selection. we have indicated the date of first periodical or book publication (and. when appropriate, the date of a revised reprinting) on the right; whenever the facts are available, we have also indicated the date of composition on the left. Difficult allusions, foreign phrases, unfamiliar idioms, and arcane words have been glossed in annotations at the bottom of the page. Whenever we found it necessary to present a text only in part, we have indicated internal cuts by three asterisks, and prefaced the title of the work by the word "from." If we have supplied our own title for an excerpt, that title is enclosed in square brackets. A selected bibliography in standard Norton format has been provided at the end of the volume in order to encourage and expedite further reading and research by students.

In addition, we have tried to compose headnotes and period introductions that are as lucid and informative as possible, providing necessary historical and biographical background without interposing our own critical interpretations between the reader and the text. Following our usual collaborative procedures, each of the two editors drafted approximately half the headnotes, then exchanged and helped revise the drafts of the other editor. Two period introductions—those on Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and on Contemporary Literature—were written entirely in collaboration, while the other four were composed individually, then exchanged and revised: Susan Gubar drafted the introductions to Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries and Turn-of-the-Century Literature; Sandra Gilbert drafted the introductions to Literature of the Nineteenth Century and Modernist Literature.

In conclusion, we should note that much of the scholarly apparatus we have assembled, many of the texts we have included, and a good deal of the material we have incorporated into headnotes and period introductions would not have been available to us were it not for the work that feminist critics and scholars in women's studies have produced over the past fifteen years. We began these prefatory remarks with a reference to Virginia Woolf's pioneering essay on women and fiction; we want to acknowledge now our deep intellectual indebtedness to the hundreds of teachers all over the world who have recently responded to Woolf's impassioned explanation that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" by laboring to recover the fe-

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male literary inheritance that we have attempted to reconstitute here. We have included a separate list of acknowledgements in which we thank the many teachers, critics, and scholars who prepared detailed critiques of our material or offered special textual suggestions, but their ideas—like our own—seem to us to be part of a larger and ongoing collective enterprise on the part of countless researchers to whom we must all be profoundly grateful.

We want also to express our gratitude to a number of research and secretarial assistants, institutions, colleagues, friends, and relatives whose aid facilitated our work on this project. Specifically, we thank Vivienne Thompson, Catherine Thompson, and Huma Ibrahim for their library work. Susan Leonardi for her crucial bibliographical assistance, and Rachel Teplow for her consistent attention to countless editorial details. We thank too Reba Amerson, Anne Cabello, Kristi Hover, Gary Konas, and Janet Turner for secretarial assistance, and Tufts University, Indiana University, and the University of California. Davis, for financial support. In addition, we wish to thank a number of colleagues and friends-notably Edwin Barber, Mary Burgan, Gina Campbell, Joyce Gilbert, Donald Gray, Kenneth Gros Louis, Leonard Gubar, Carolyn Heilbrun, Nancy K. Palmquist, Charlotte Sheedy, Elaine Showalter, Barry Wade, Nancy Wechsler and Mary Io Weaver -for advice and assistance with many matters. Sandra Gilbert wishes to thank, as well, the members of her class at Williams College, English 219, during the fall of 1984; Susan Gubar wishes to thank Indiana University's Institute for Advanced Study. And we are grateful to members of our families—Elliot, Roger, Katherine, and Susanna Gilbert, and Edward, Molly, and Simone Gubar-for frequent acts of kindness and even of critical or secretarial assistance, as well as for what at times seemed almost superhuman tolerance and grace under pressure.

Finally, though, our greatest debt is to three co-workers who in some sense helped author this book. The scholarly diligence of Roger Gilbert, not only a family member but also a graduate student at Yale University, helped produce scrupulous and detailed annotations. The wise counsel of M. H. Abrams, Class of 1916 Professor of English at Cornell University and Norton's advisor on English texts, helped shape a strong table of contents along with historically balanced period introductions. The enthusiastic support, editorial expertise, and intellectual vitality of John Benedict, our editor at Norton, quite simply transformed a utopian project into a concrete reality. With his unflagging assistance, we have tried to fashion a book that will define the ways in which the female imagination has struggled to articulate visions and revisions of a literature energized by female consciousness, impelled by female creativity, and empowered by female community.



#### Acknowledgments

Among our many advisors and friends, the following were of special help in providing critiques of particular periods or of the anthology as a whole, or assisting in preparing texts and editorial matter: Elizabeth Abel (University of California, Berkeley), Jerry C. Beasley (University of Delaware), Ann Beltran (Indiana University), Dorothy Berkson (Lewis and Clark College), Frank Bidart (Wellesley College), Elyse Blankley (University of California, Davis), Sylvia Bowerbank (McMaster University), Claire Brooke, Lisa Browar (Vassar College). Lawrence Buell (Oberlin College), Carolyn Burke (University of California. Santa Cruz). Carol Christ (University of California, Berkeley). Barbara Christian (University of California, Berkeley), Keith Christiansen (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) Bonnie Costello (Boston University), Carmen Cramer (Southwestern Louisiana University), Philip Daghlian (Indiana University), Brenda Daly (University of Minnesota), Joanne Feit Diehl (University of California, Davis), Mary C. Erler (Fordham University), Stuart Friebert (Oberlin College). Susan Stanford Friedman (University of Wisconsin, Madison), Judith Kegan Gardiner (University of Illinois, Chicago Circle), Blanche Gelfant (Dartmouth College), Albert Gelpi (Stanford University), Barbara Gelpi (Stanford University), Barbara Godard (York University), Gayle Greene (Scripps College), Ron Hafft (Indiana University), Helen Hoy (Lethbridge University, Alberta), Gloria Hull (University of Delaware), Rhynette Hurd (Memphis State University), Kay Isenman, Marean Jordan (University of California, Davis), Barbara Johnson (Harvard University), Luke Johnson (Indiana University), Sydney Janet Kaplan (University of Washington), Philip Kelley (Wedgestone Press), Cynthia Kinnard (Indiana University) Joan Lidoff (University of Texas, Austin), Joanna Lipking (Northwestern University), Lawrence Lipking (Northwestern University), Marlene Longenecker (Ohio State University), Dolores Gros Louis (Indiana University), Nan Bauer Maglin (Manhattan Community College), Ann Mandel, Jane Marcus (University of Texas, Austin), Francis O. Mattson (Rare Book Room, New York Public Library), Nora McGuinnis (University of California, Davis), Elizabeth Meese (University of Alabama), Ann

Messenger (Simon Fraser University, British Columbia), Diane Middlebrook (Stanford University), Adalaide Morris (University of Iowa), Carolyn Naylor (University of Santa Clara), Mary Nyquist (University of Toronto), Nadine Ollman (Drew University), Tillie Olsen, Alicia Ostriker (Rutgers University), Dolores Palomo (University of Washington), Ruth Perry (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), John Pope-Hennessy (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), Marjorie Pryse (University of Tennessee), Jarold Ramsey (University of Rochester), Tey Diana Rebolledo (University of Nevada, Reno), Maureen Reddy (University of Minnesota), Dolores Rosenblum (Indiana University), Samuel Schuman (Guilford College), Lloyd Schwartz (University of Massachusetts, Boston), Anthony Shipps (Indiana University), Merrill Skaggs (Drew University), Catherine Smith (Bucknell University), Murray Sperber (Indiana University), Ann Stanford (California State University), Erlene Stetson (Indiana University), Catharine Stimpson (Rutgers University), Jennifer Sutherland, Martha Vicinus (University of Michigan), Alan Williamson (University of California, Davis), Sandra Zagarell (Oberlin College).



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