ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDY SUPPORT WORKBOOK

NAME:_____

Strength and Sensibility

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Jane Austen's Admiration for Elinor Dashwood

Is Elinor's 'sense' excessive self-control or admirable determination to help her family survive the challenges for women in their situation? Alice Reeve-Tucker is clear about how she would answer that question.

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Set in the late eighteenth century, Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) depicts two sisters who face parallel situations of heartbreak when the relationships they expect to have with young men are dramatically obstructed. The girls respond in opposing ways: the nineteen-year-old Elinor Dashwood clearly embodies the 'sense' of the novel's title in her outwardly calm demeanour, whereas Marianne, her younger sister, is more 'emotional' in her, at times hysterical, response. Elinor's behaviour has been criticised for being unnecessarily restrained, with Mary Poovey describing Elinor as imbued with 'an excessive sense of duty', which leaves her 'rigidly self-controlled'. Yet, in repressing her emotional distress and ensuring that her feelings remain private, Elinor arguably embodies a striking grit and determination for her time. By appreciating that a genteel woman's good reputation was key to securing a marriage, Elinor's repression is fundamental for the preservation of her, and her family's, reputation. Her 'sense' can thus be interpreted as an admirable, not a prim, response to the pressures faced by young, unmarried upper-class women in a dangerously gossipy society that oppressively scrutinises women's behaviour.

Social Vulnerability

The Dashwood sisters are introduced in the first chapter of *Sense and Sensibility* as bereaved and financially insecure. Their father Henry has died and, due to laws of primogeniture, his son John inherits everything. Despite promising his father that he would take financial responsibility for his stepmother and half-sisters, John is persuaded by his conniving wife that he should save rather than share his inheritance, and that he should move into the family home. The sisters are left without financial stability and thus without the economic desirability that might lead to a proposal of marriage, severely limiting their prospects of marrying out of their anxious predicament. Without a father to guide the family, it falls on Elinor, who possesses

strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment [to] be the counsellor of her mother.

and to persuade her to move to a more modest dwelling, thereby reducing their outgoings. Alongside her pragmatism, Eleanor had 'an excellent heart' and 'her feelings were strong', but crucially, 'she knew how to govern them', unlike her mother, who 'had yet to learn' to 'govern' her feelings, and Marianne, who 'resolved never to be taught.' The repetition of this verb 'govern' is key here, as Austen is associating Elinor with the authoritative behaviour that her family lacks, positioning this elder daughter as acting head of the household in terms of her good sense.

Elinor's Private Heartbreak

Soon after Henry's death, the family's fortune changes when Marianne happens to attract the attention of the dashing, eligible young bachelor John Willoughby, and Elinor allows herself to hope that her deep connection with the family friend, Edward Ferrars, might turn into an engagement. However, by Chapter 22, Elinor's hopes are extinguished. In private conversation with Lucy Steele, who artfully reveals her secret engagement to Edward and knowingly causes deep pain to her listener, Elinor valiantly masks her agony and speaks with a

composure of voice, under which was concealed an emotion and distress beyond anything she had ever felt before.

She describes herself as 'mortified, shocked, confounded.' Augmenting Mary Poovey's critical view of Elinor, quoted above, Claudia Johnson maintains that Elinor's

'excessive control over her feelings verges on emotional paralysis.' Such a response condemns Elinor for being out of balance in her restraint, framing her behaviour as problematic.

Valiant Restraint

Yet, on closer inspection, Austen's language indicates praise for this resilient, restrained woman, who manages to protect her reputation by controlling her emotions. Through her third-person narrator, Austen indicates that Elinor's reasons for hiding her emotions are valid and that they indicate contextually masculine qualities of bravery and resilience. Elinor knows 'she could receive no assistance' from the 'counsel or conversation' of 'her mother or sisters', and that 'their tenderness and sorrow must add to her distress': 'She was stronger alone,' and 'her own good sense [...] well supported her'. This language of strength associated with sense recurs throughout Chapter 22 and communicates an idiom of military prowess:

she thought she could even now, under the first smart of the heavy blow, command herself enough to guard every suspicion of the truth from her mother and sisters.

Echoing the battlefield with the destructive physical metaphor of 'the heavy blow', alongside the reference to 'command[ing]' and 'guard[ing]' a few sentences later, Austen describes Elinor's 'unceasing exertion' in concealing the truth of the private engagement from her family. This is a language of strength, bravery and resilience, not censorious coldness or rigidity, suggesting Austen's intention for Elinor to be read as strong rather than repressed.

Marianne's Public Heartbreak

Austen establishes Elinor's valiant restraint concerning the collapse of her private hopes before contrasting it with Marianne's openly wretched behaviour when her very public relationship with Willoughby abruptly ends. On first meeting Willoughby in Chapter 9, Marianne forms an instantaneously intense bond with him, parading their affection and drawing society's notice. To Elinor's surprise, the gossipy Mrs Palmer confronts her about a non-existent engagement between Marianne and Willoughby, stating:

'your sister is to marry him. I am monstrous glad of it [...] it is what everybody talks of.'

Elinor later rationally discusses Marianne's predicament with her mother, knowing that protocol must be followed and a formal engagement announced:

'I want no proof of their affection [...] but of their engagement I do.'

However, her mother is 'perfectly satisfied of both', citing Willoughby's behaviour as proof that

'he loved and considered [Marianne] as his future wife.'

Elinor was right to be sceptical: in Chapter 28, Marianne is publicly snubbed by Willoughby at a social event in London and it is subsequently revealed that he is engaged to someone else. While at the party, Marianne's desperate interrogatives, made in 'the wildest anxiety', convey her extreme confusion and hurt:

'Here is some mistake I am sure – some dreadful mistake. What can be the meaning of it? Tell me, Willoughby; for heaven's sake tell me, what is the matter?'

After a cursory response, Willoughby hastily turns away 'with a slight bow' and ignores her, preferring to talk to one of his friends. Marianne immediately gives in to her devastation: 'looking dreadfully white, and unable to stand' she collapses into a chair. Elinor instinctively responds to protect her sister from society's harsh judgemental glare by trying

to screen her from the observation of others, while reviving her with lavender water.

The next morning, while staying with their host, Mrs Jennings, Elinor continues to protect her sister through distraction:

Elinor's attention was then all employed [...] in endeavouring to engage Mrs. Jennings's notice entirely to herself.

While Marianne's understandable distress is pitiable, her refusal to contain it in the private sphere is deeply problematic. Indeed, Elinor urges Marianne to modify her behaviour and to repress her pain, 'for my mother's sake and mine', only to be cut off by an impassioned Marianne:

'But to appear happy when I am so miserable – Oh! who can require it?'

Even worse, Marianne welcomes spectatorship.

'No, no,' she cries, 'misery such as mine has no pride. I care not who knows that I am wretched'

and she refuses to heed Elinor's pleas to calm herself:

'I must feel – I must be wretched – and they are welcome to enjoy the consciousness of it that can.'

A Response to the Cult of Sensibility

Though published in 1811, *Sense and Sensibility* was written in 1795, in response to the late eighteenth-century 'cult' of sensibility: a cultural and literary movement that reacted to the Enlightenment by prioritising emotional responses over rational ones, deeming them to indicate heightened moral awareness and expressive authenticity. Within this movement, the notion of 'sensibility' became associated specifically with female conduct: the ability to feel deeply came to mark praiseworthy, sensitive female behaviour. Austen arguably satirises this alignment between women and sensibility in her parodic characterisation of the theatrical behaviour of Marianne, exposing the dangers of her emotional excess.

Elinor's plea to Marianne to consider the impact of her behaviour on her mother and herself is significant: by enabling society to witness her grief, Marianne exposes her family to potentially damaging scrutiny. Without an engagement, Marianne's relationship with Willoughby looks morally dubious; by signalling her excessive emotions towards him, she could be jeopardising her, and her sisters', opportunities for marriage and security in the future.

Austen's interest in this women-specific predicament is further explored in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), whose protagonist, Elizabeth Bennet, is deeply concerned about her younger sister's exuberant nature, pleading with her father to check it for the sake of all their reputations:

'Our importance, our respectability in the world must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint, which mark Lydia's character.'

Elizabeth's concern is warranted. Lydia engages in a reckless affair with the dashing but unscrupulous Wickham, running away to London. It is only through Mr Darcy's intervention that Wickham can be persuaded to legitimise the affair by marrying the young girl, thus saving the family's reputation.

Sense is Rewarded

Ultimately, Austen contrasts Marianne's hysterical, public, response to heartbreak with Elinor's earlier restrained private reaction to emphasise the latter's admirable strength. Through Elinor's endeavours to mask her own heartbreak and to protect her sister from scrutiny, Austen exposes the lengths to which women must go in enduring the complex social codes of genteel eighteenth-century society. Far from being priggish or cold, Elinor is strong, has good judgement, and is skilled at navigating precarious social conditions; in these circumstances, protecting one's emotions ensures privacy and thus contributes to a 'good' reputation. Elinor's conduct is rewarded at the end of *Sense and Sensibility*: she can marry Edward, who ends his ill-suited engagement to Lucy. Austen depicts comparable happy endings for her other emotionally mature protagonists: Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* (1817), whose quiet endurance and inner strength characterises her behaviour throughout, marries Captain Wentworth; and Elizabeth Bennet ends *Pride and Prejudice* by marrying Mr Darcy. Marianne's sensibility is corrected: she matures and marries the older, wiser, and morally decent Colonel Brandon, reinforcing once more how, for Austen, 'sense' is the wiser option for the high-society women on whom her novels focus.

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- *Sense and Sensibility* – A Close Reading of Chapter 48, emagplus for *emagazine* 82, December 2018
- A Room of One's Own – *Sense and Sensibility*, *Jane Eyre*, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*, *emagazine* 84, April 2019

Read through this article, highlighting key AO3 observations

Create a mind map of all the ways you could bring this AO5 into an essay – what key events in the text could you link it to?

Narrative Style

One of the most fascinating aspects of imaginative literature, especially of novels, is the opportunity it offers to enter the consciousness of its characters, to share their thoughts, feelings and sensations while retaining a measure of detachment that enables us to see them as others might. This capacity of literature to provide mappings of different minds can expand the sympathies of readers, enable them to understand characters, from within, at a depth impossible in real life—even characters they might, in actuality, deplore, such as the corrupt Jason Compson in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) or the femicidal Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940).

Since the English novel as a form took off in the eighteenth century, many fiction writers have aimed to find vivid and precise ways to portray the consciousness of their characters in words. We can identify six main ways that have emerged:

- letters
- diaries/journals
- long first-person narrative
- free indirect discourse in third-person narrative
- interior monologue
- stream of consciousness.

In practice, these may blend and overlap within one novel; here we will consider each of them in turn.

Letters

An **epistolary novel** is a first-person narrative told largely or wholly in letters written by one or more of the characters (an epistle is a formal term for a letter). This approach proved popular early in the novel's development with works like Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) and Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778), and it has continued to attract writers and readers, for example in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), or Stephen Chobsky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999). The pervasiveness today of digital means of communication, such as blogs, chat, email, social media and text messaging, offers rich possibilities for twenty-first century epistolary fiction.

Diaries/Journals

A novel in the form of a **diary** or **journal** can disclose more than an epistolary novel, divulge secrets that characters might not tell even their closest friends or most intimate partners. Sometimes diaries form an important part of a longer narrative—in Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair* (1951), for example, the diaries of Sarah Miles reveal to her lover, Maurice Bendrix, the real reason why the affair ended. William Boyd's long novel *Any Human Heart: The Intimate Journals of Logan Mountstuart* (2002) is, as its subtitle suggests, almost wholly in the form of a journal, ranging vividly through a wide swathe of twentieth-century experiences. As with epistolary fiction, twenty-first-century digital technology offers a fruitful array of fresh formats for the diary or journal novel.

Long First-person Narrative

The **long first-person narrative** largely dispenses with the epistolary and diary/journal forms, though it may briefly incorporate both. Instead, it offers an extended first-person account of the key experiences of its narrator, which may take up the whole length of a novel or form part of it. In a long first-person narrative that runs to the length of a novel, the main narrator is sometimes the title character, as in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and sometimes a protagonist whose key experiences the title encapsulates, like Pip in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861).

Both these novels turn on the narrator's shock of recognition when each realizes they have been living under an illusion. Jane's belief that Mr Rochester is free to marry her shatters when, at the marriage altar, a stranger declares an insuperable impediment to their union: Mr Rochester has a wife now living.

> My nerves vibrated to those low-spoken words as they had never vibrated to thunder – my blood felt their subtle violence as it had never felt frost or fire; but I was collected, and in no danger of swooning. I looked at Mr Rochester; I made him look at me. His whole face was colourless rock; his eye was both spark and flint.

Pip's belief that his mysterious benefactor is Miss Havisham collapses when, in his London lodgings late at night, he suddenly recognizes an apparently strange visitor as the convict who terrified him in his local churchyard as a boy.

> I knew him! Even yet, I could not recall a single feature, but I knew him! If the wind and the rain had driven away the intervening years, had scattered all the intervening objects, had swept us to the churchyard where we first stood face to face on such different levels, I could not have known my convict more distinctly than I knew him now, as he sat in the chair before the fire.

In both cases, no outward action expresses the inward shock: Jane does not swoon, Pip does not recoil physically; but both experience, in their consciousness, a revelation that strikes at the root of their identity. The first-person narration vividly recreates how they thought and felt at this moment of truth.

In third-person narration, the storytellers are, necessarily, more detached from their characters. An important way of getting closer to their consciousness while retaining that detachment is **free indirect discourse**.

Free Indirect Discourse

One of the great exemplars of free indirect discourse is Jane Austen, and we can see an example of this from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). Here, Elizabeth Bennet is trying to grasp the reasons for the scandalous elopement of her youngest sister, Lydia, with Lieutenant George Wickham, an army officer of dubious character, and she lays the blame on her parents, especially her lackadaisical father:

> The mischief of neglect and mistaken indulgence towards such a girl. – Oh! How acutely did she now feel it.

A change of tense from present into past and of personal pronoun from 'she' to 'I' would turn this into **direct discourse**:

> The mischief of neglect and mistaken indulgence towards such a girl. – Oh! How acutely do I now feel it.

This has greater immediacy but loses the detachment that is crucial to the poise of Austen's art. Some writers, however, notably Charlotte Brontë, found Austen

too detached; and later authors developed two techniques that would immerse readers more deeply in the consciousness of their characters.

Interior Monologue

Interior monologue aims to present the consciousness of characters in complete, often well-shaped sentences with standard punctuation, but minimises the presence of a narrator. It was a technique that became prominent in the Modernist fiction of the early twentieth century.

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) is a virtuoso display of interior monologue that portrays the consciousness of a host of major and minor characters. In the following passage, the title character, Clarissa Dalloway, a married woman in her fifties with a grown-up daughter, walks along London's Bond Street on a bright June morning experiencing a sense of loss as an older woman:

> But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing – nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen, unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs Richard Dalloway.

This uses the third person but minimises overt commentary by a narrator or markers such as 'she thought', keeping its focus upon Mrs Dalloway's consciousness, what she is thinking and feeling. The diction and punctuation of the passage are precise—the positioning of semi-colons for instance, which gently divides the second 52-word sentence into smaller, more comprehensible units but maintains the rhythm and flow of the prose.

Stream of Consciousness

Stream of consciousness may use some standard sentences and punctuation, but it also employs sentence fragments and sometimes omits punctuation: both these features help to suggest that consciousness is a **flow**, like that of a stream. A classic example is the last chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), which aims to capture the flow of Molly Bloom's consciousness as she lies awake in bed late at night and, like Mrs Dalloway, reflects on loss, in this case the death of her infant son Rudi:

> I suppose I oughnt to have buried him in that little woolly jacket I knitted crying as I was but give it to some poor child but I knew well Id never have another our 1st death too it was we were never the same since O Im not going to think myself into the glooms about that any more

This omits any punctuation marks, even the apostrophes in contracted forms ('oughnt, Id, Im'), and sometimes departs from standard grammar ('give' not 'given'). In this way it accelerates the flow of Molly's interfused thoughts and feelings as they move through the poignant loss of her infant, compassion for needy children, the impact of the loss on her marriage, and a refusal to indulge a still profound grief.

As these examples suggest, it can enrich our experience of reading and writing about novels to identify the ways in which they portray the consciousness, map the minds, of their characters, and to explore the effects of these portrayals upon the reader.

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Where can any of these narrative styles be found in 'Sense and Sensibility' or 'Mrs Dalloway'?

How do they influence the overall narrative/story?

Write a list of examples with supporting quotations and significant moments.

Why did Austen and Woolf choose these styles?

How were they influenced by their contexts?

The enemy within?

Miss Prism (on the right) with Lady Bracknell and Dr Chasuble in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Harold Pinter Theatre, 2014)

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Nicola Onyett explores three representations of the governess in Victorian literature and examines how they can be interpreted through alternative critical lenses

This article examines how three influential nineteenth-century writers — Anne Brontë, Wilkie Collins and Oscar Wilde — represent the figure of the governess. Different critical positions are applied to each iteration of the character to demonstrate various ways of interpreting her narrative function and cultural significance. Comparing the governesses who feature in *Agnes Grey*, *Armadale* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a way into exploring some very distinct fictional responses to the spirit of the Victorian age.

Agnes Grey

A biographical reading

Agnes Grey (1847), published two months after Anne Brontë's sister Charlotte gave English literature its most famous governess in *Jane Eyre*, reflects the awful time Anne had working for the Inghams of Blake Hall near Huddersfield and the Robinsons of Thorp Green near York. One of the first novels to highlight the governess's plight, *Agnes Grey* came out just as society at large was beginning to take notice. Economic problems kept wages low in the 1830s, and by 1841 a Governesses' Benevolent Association had been founded to provide for aged and destitute members of the profession (Goreau 2004, p. 42).

Anne Brontë reveals the precarious, liminal and paradoxical position of the governess, '"hanging between two ranks" — not good enough to associate with [her] employers, but too good to be friendly with the servants' (Goreau 2004, p. 41). The governess often treasured her separateness from the servant class, while employing a genteel 'pro-mama' reflected well on a rich family. However as 'an unmarried woman living [with] middle-class men to whom she was not related', the governess was often deeply mistrusted, as Patricia Ingham notes (Ingham 2006, p. 103). A Catch-22 situation existed whereby while a governess must be genteel, she must also be designated a servant. In essence, *Agnes Grey* is a passionate plea for justice and fair treatment, tinged with that streak of defiant radicalism in the face of class oppression that characterises the Brontës' work.

An ecofeminist reading

Agnes Grey is well suited to an ecofeminist reading, with not just women but Mother Nature herself victimised by predatory patriarchalism. Agnes's first employers, the Bloomfields, are 'tradespeople' who have only recently bought their way into the landed gentry. The ironically misnamed Mr Bloomfield symbolises those mid-century manufacturers and industrialists whose wealth came from despoiling the Yorkshire landscape with which the Brontës had such an affinity. And while the land is exploited by entitled adults, animals are mistreated by their cruel children. When Agnes crushes a nest of birds beneath a stone to save them from being tortured by young Tom Bloomfield, she is told that animals were 'created for our convenience' and that '[his] amusement is scarcely to be weighed against the welfare of a soulless brute'. The boy's uncle applauds Tom's defiance of the 'petticoat government' of 'mother, granny governess, and all', promising him another clutch of birds to destroy (Ch. 5). In this toxic environment, vivisection goes hand in hand with misogyny.

As her next employer, Mr Murray, is a more firmly established member of the landed gentry than Mr Bloomfield, at first Agnes thinks that he may be a custodian of the countryside. His residence is 'not in a manufacturing district, where the people had nothing to do but make money… and doubtless he was one of those genuine thorough-bred gentry my mother spoke of' (Ch. 6). But no. Said to be 'a blustering, roystering, country squire, a devoted fox-hunter, a skilful horse-jockey and farrier, an active practical farmer, and a hearty *bon-vivant*', in fact he constantly 'swear[s] and blaspheme[s] against the footmen, groom, coachman, or some hapless dependent' (Ch. 6). His children are also foul bullies: daughter Matilda is 'gleeful' when her dog destroys a leveret, carrying its 'lacerated' corpse in her bare hands as evidence of 'a noble chase':

> Prince was determined to have her; and he clutched her by the back, and killed her in a minute!… didn't you hear it scream?… It cried out just like a child.
>
> (Ch. 18)

The harm done to the natural world mirrors the mistreatment of the poor by the decadent rich, and the governess's attempts to redress the power imbalance reveal Anne Brontë's lifelong interest in fairness and equality.

Armadale

A Marxist reading

As Marxist criticism often zooms in on representations of structural inequality, this is a very profitable critical lens through which to read *Armadale* (1866), the longest and most complex of the four great novels of the 1860s in which Wilkie Collins interrogated the legal, moral and social structures of mid-Victorian England. This exceptionally complicated sensation thriller is dominated by the unforgettable anti-heroine Lydia Gwilt; fittingly, her surname comes from the Welsh for 'wild', but also connotes 'guilt'. As she navigates the systemic corruption of the Victorian marriage market, Collins offers a profoundly subversive critique of economic inequality and class oppression.

Contemporary critics were appalled by Collins's sympathetic presentation of an adventuress 'fouler than the refuse of the streets, who [survives] the horrors of forgery, murder, theft, bigamy, gaol and attempted suicide, without any trace left on her beauty' (Peters 1992, p. 272). Yet, for Collins, this *femme fatale* is 'as much a victim as a villain — a social outsider in an economically and sexually vulnerable position who… learns exploitation from the adults who exploit her' (Pykett 2005, p. 143).

A psychoanalytic reading

Victorian critic Geraldine Jewsbury likened reading Collins to 'walking the moral hospital', claiming that 'his knowledge of human nature resembled a demonstration in morbid anatomy' (Jewsbury in Page 1974, p. 55). Collins's lifelong interest in 'abnormal' psychology makes his work well worth reading through a psychoanalytic critical lens, as he rejects the conservative notion of an underclass destined for a life of crime, with his protagonists often affected by childhood trauma and neglect. In *Armadale*, Lydia's behaviour certainly stems from her deprived and abusive upbringing, when she was 'beaten and half-starved' as an illegitimate orphan foundling (Book III, Ch. 15). Having an unknowable and unstable identity leads her to adopt a series of disguises in an attempt to secure her social position through marriage to a wealthy man.

Lydia's most successful gambit is becoming Neelie Milroy's governess; in this role the arch-impostor weaponises society's own hypocritical snobbery. As Catherine Peters notes, 'governessing' is the perfect cover: a ladylike manner and a good education, with a plausible [fake] reference, enable her to hide her criminal past and insinuate herself into country society by claiming to be drifting down rather than struggling up' (Peters 1989, p. xii). While both women marry a man called Allan Armadale (the plot is utterly byzantine), Neelie has it easy, whereas Lydia must dissemble. Perhaps only one contemporary critic really got the novel's subtext: calling Collins 'this most tragic of novel-writers', the *Reader*'s reviewer saw *Armadale* as a 'moral' story, praised its 'dissect[ion of] evil minds', and argued that all the author had done was expose the ugly truth about modern life (quoted in Peters 1992, p. 273).

The Importance of Being Earnest

A feminist reading

'Miss Prism' is a charactonym: a name given to establish a fictional character's personality. The adjective *prim* is often collocated with *proper* to suggest someone prudish and shockable. The legal term *misprision* (from the French 'to misunderstand') refers to having knowledge of criminal wrongdoing but failing to report it. The flat surfaces of a *prism* refract light to change the way we see things. All these allusions suggest a woman who is not quite what she seems.

Wilkie Collins

© Sonny Celeste/Alamy Stock Photo

> **Question**
>
> Think about one of your A-level set texts. Is a specific critical lens traditionally applied to it? (*The Handmaid's Tale*, for example, is most often read from a feminist standpoint.) What alternative ways of interpreting your set text can you find?

By the 1890s, the governess's anomalous social position was no longer tragic by default — although Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) was still to mine this seam. In *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), Miss Prism's age means she offers no sexual threat, and her desire to marry Dr Chasuble is a farcical refresh of Lydia Gwilt's efforts to entrap one of the Allan Armadales. Wilde relentlessly mocks this elderly 'female of repellent aspect, remotely connected with education' (Act III) for wishing to marry — yet, with the engagement of her only pupil, Cecily Cardew, Miss Prism's secure employment is at an end. What other social or economic options does she have?

Wilde lampoons both Miss Prism's intellectual pretensions and her desire to become a published advocate for conventional morality. Just below the surface of his subversive and sophisticated comedy is the hack manuscript she swapped decades earlier for the infant Jack: a 'three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality' (Act III). Her world view is exposed as a dated travesty: 'Anybody can write a three-volume novel,' Wilde wrote in 1890; 'it merely requires a complete ignorance of both life and literature' (quoted in Menke 2013). The play's denouement burlesques 'the clichéd plotlines of such standardised fiction [and] the sort of foundling or hidden identity plot beloved of many novelists', Menke suggests (Menke 2013).

Yet, Miss Prism is in many ways a downtrodden victim. Routinely ignored by Cecily (who will inherit a fortune), she is also intimidated and browbeaten by Lady Bracknell (who 'married up' when she hooked the fabulously rich Lord Bracknell). A feminist critic, interested in challenging patriarchal assumptions by unpicking gender stereotypes and interrogating how far they are upheld or resisted, might draw attention to the ways in which Miss Prism — female, unmarried, elderly, plain, culturally dispossessed and intellectually limited — is bullied by a pack of powerful and fashionable aristocrats whose wealth and social status are unassailable.

A queer reading

Queer theorists interrogate the default representation of heterosexuality as 'normal'. In a play in which 'Bunburying' (avoiding one's responsibilities by claiming to be visiting a fictional sick friend) is often interpreted as code for a homosexual double life, it is significant that the despised Miss Prism is concealing her shady past. Her role as a mouthpiece for conventional morality is clear from her verdict on Jack's (fake) brother Ernest — 'As a man sows, so shall he reap' (Act II). The extent to which *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a coded exposé of turn-of-the-century London life is consistently debated, with Miss Prism's unpublished manuscript a metafictional construct that allows us to explore this further.

The governess's simplistic morality tale promulgates an intolerant conservatism in which 'the good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means' (Act III). It symbolises a narrowly ideological worldview that aims to suppress all and any alternative — queer — stories. Algernon's declaration that 'A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it' has been read as accepting that heterosexual monogamy is intolerable; 'Bunburying' is an essential escape route into an alternative world. Within the comedy of manners genre, of course, Miss Prism's sanctimonious piety proves essentially harmless; no one takes any notice of her, and her novel gathers dust in Jack's library for 30 years. In the real world, of course, the exposure of Wilde's own secret life meant ruin, prison and death.

'The secret theatre of home'

In Jane Austen's *Emma* (1816), discussing 'the sale — not quite of human flesh — but of human intellect', Jane Fairfax likens the 'governess-trade' to the 'slave-trade' — 'widely different certainly as to the guilt of those who carry it on; but as to the greater misery of the victims, I do not know where it lies' (Ch. 35). Today it is hard to equate the lives led by enslaved people with a Victorian governess's life but Austen's metaphor remains powerful in expressing both forms of 'misery'. The later representations of the governess explored in this article allow us to investigate that closely guarded arena Wilkie Collins called 'the secret theatre of home', thus revealing the relationship between the governess and her employer as a microcosm of a contemporary psychodrama of mutual dependency and resentment. While some real-life employers eventually got it — one Lady Amberly wrote that after reading *Agnes Grey* she wanted 'to give it to every family with a governess and shall read it through again when I have a governess to remind me to be human' — in fiction this employer–employee relationship remained intensely contested throughout the Victorian age (Goreau 2004, p. 47).

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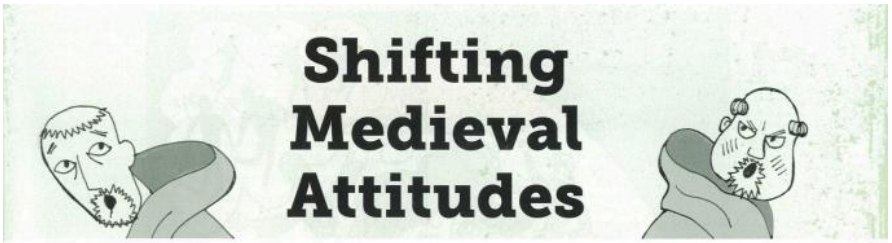
Read and highlight with relevant AO3 comments

How can you link these to the novels you've studied?



The Wife of Bath and Her Contemporaries

Dan Raphael places Chaucer's creation of the Wife in the context of recent scholarship about the lives of medieval women, arguing that many aspects of her character would have been recognisable to audiences at the time.

When we discuss Medieval reactions to 'The Wife of Bath's Prologue', we may imagine that the sole reaction of contemporary Medieval readers would be one of shock and horror – for Alison is of course an entrepreneurial, sexually explicit female narrator, who wrestles financial control from her five husbands (and counting). However, recent scholarship has thrown into question assumptions about the Wife being a complete outlier in Chaucer's time.

Setting the Scene – Radical Change in The Medieval Period

The fourteenth century in England was a time of radical social upheaval. A major contributor to this was the Black Death – a mass pandemic which caused the death of approximately 30-40% of the population. It is hard to imagine the psychological effect on survivors of this many people perishing– as a contemporary chronicler recounted:

there were hardly enough living to care for the sick and bury the dead.

Many historians point to the end of the first outbreak of the plague as the beginning of a major departure from the feudal system. Whilst the Medieval rulers of England tried to keep society in a pre-pandemic state, for example, by stunting higher wages, efforts to do so failed.

The peasant classes, hugely diminished in numbers due to being disproportionately affected by the plague, began to become a lot more expensive to hire, and far pickier about who they worked for. Importantly for our ideas about Chaucer's characterisation of Alison, the position of women in society changed dramatically along with this shift in class.

The Wife's Economic Independence

It is important that we view the Wife's character against this historical backdrop. One of the first indications we receive of her character from 'The General Prologue' is her entrepreneurial character

Of clooth-makyng she hadde swich an haunt
She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt.
(447-448)

In addition, her clothing shows her elevated status and wealth

Hir coverchiefs ful fyne weren of ground;
I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound
(453-454)

However, as Marion Turner states in her enlightening book *The Wife of Bath: A Biography*, The Wife is not unique in her times for being a successful working woman.

[Female workers] were involved in traditional female occupations, such as brewing, textile work, and service, and in more surprising occupations, as jewellers, artists, or founders, for example.

As Turner goes on to argue, it is not circumstantial that Chaucer describes Alison as involved in 'clooth-makyng'. English wool was at the centre of England's economic model, being prized for its quality across Europe, with wool being central to cloth-making. As a consequence, Alison can be seen to be involved in a trade that is key to fourteenth-century England's prosperity.

In addition, her 'ful fyne' clothes, and her financial ability to have travelled to Jerusalem 'thries', show us that she was someone who was not low down in the trade, but had status and stature.

The Wife's Sexual Explicitness

As Martha Gill makes clear in her article for the *Guardian* on the lives of Medieval women, much of what we know about the Medieval period is skewed by Victorian thinkers who were obsessed with the Middle Ages. As Gill states, the Victorians' very conservative sexual politics is 'infused' in our understanding of Medieval society.

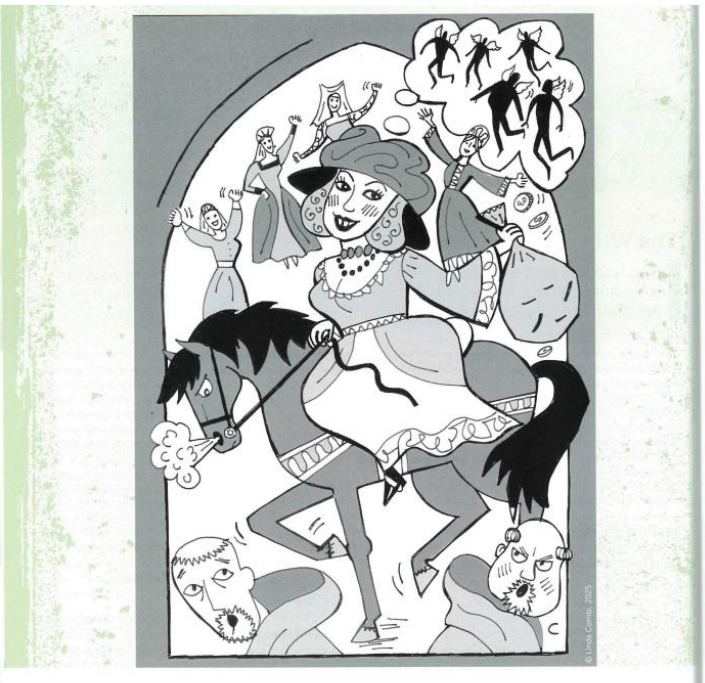
In fact, it was during the Victorian period that Chaucer gained the stature he now commonly holds as the father of English literature. However, with this came a vast amount of censorship of some of Chaucer's lewder writing, and his stories that went against Victorian morality more broadly.

As the Wife immodestly proposes

And trebly, as mine housbondes tolde me,
I hadde the beste quoniam mighte be.

Read through the articles exploring how you could use this for AO3

How do the points raised link to your studies of 'The Merchant's Tale'?



Whilst conservative Victorian authors may have been appalled by this statement, *The Canterbury Tales* as a whole has enough description of sex and lust to suggest by itself that the Medieval period was far less sexually conservative.

This becomes an even more compelling idea when we consider that Chaucer himself was a courtier (albeit of shifting fortunes) and is thought to have read aloud from *The Canterbury Tales* to men and women in King Richard II's court.

Alison's Voice

Whilst misogynistic literature was very popular in the fourteenth century, as exemplified by Jankyn's book 'of wikked wyves', along with growing economic independence, there arose Medieval women who had strong voices. One such Medieval woman was Margery Kempe, known for producing the first autobiography in the English language. Kempe was a self-proclaimed visionary, and she stated – to quite widespread belief – that she had had conversations with Christ. As the writer Cosey Fanni Tutti, says about Kempe's life [Kempe] was persecuted for her unorthodox ways, travelled extensively abroad on pilgrimages, and fiercely defended herself when arrested and charged with heresy – no fewer than seven times.

Whilst Kempe is not an influence for the Wife's character, the parallels of being unorthodox in her views, travelling extensively and defending herself against charges of heresy are impossible to ignore.

Therefore, when for example the Wife commands the Pardoner to 'Abydel' and stop interrupting her Prologue, we can appreciate that there was a historical precedent for women publicly arguing back against male dominance.

However, there are of course other factors that enable Alison's voice to be one of great command and charisma. Whilst we may mock her digressions (especially when at line 193 she says she is about to 'telle forth my tale', when in fact she doesn't do so until line 857), she is exceptionally funny:

Thou comest boom as dronken as a mous,
And prechest on thy bench, with ivel preef!

She is frank in her views on the topic of genitals:

they maked ben for bothe... for office, and for ese...

She is also emotionally heartfelt on the topic of ageing:

The flour is goon, ther is namoore to telle;
The bren, as I best kan, now most I selle.

Anticlericalism

Following on from the Wife's put down of the Pardoner, Chaucer's poem can be seen to be a satirical attack on clergymen. The Wife begins her Prologue famously by countering clerical 'auctoritee' – justifying her five marriages and arguing against Virginity being the only spiritual way of being, using accounts from the Bible to support her argument. However, how shocking it would be for someone to question the teachings of the Church's interpretations of the Bible should be seen in the context of growing anticlericalism.

Undoubtedly the Church held a lot of power in the fourteenth century, owning one-third of the country's wealth. However, the Medieval Church did not escape the wave of societal change that was ushered in by the effects of the Black Death. First of all, the Commons began questioning the Church's authority, including complaining about its influence over the treasury. In addition, The Peasants' Revolt saw monasteries attacked, as they were associated with the oppression of the peasant classes.

We might see the Wife's attack on lecherous friars at the beginning of her tale as a moment of brilliant characterisation by Chaucer; the Wife achieves her revenge against the Friar who criticises her Prologue as a 'long preamble'. However, this is no half-hearted criticism

In every bush or under every tree
Ther is noon other incubus but he

Chaucer, speaking through the voice of the Wife, is suggesting that Friars are not only beggars, but perpetrators of sexual violence. The Wife is not just committing an act of personal revenge here but reflecting a wider Medieval attitude that saw clergymen as hypocritical, exploitative and abusive. In this way, the Wife is not the target for Chaucer's satirical attack, but rather figures of the Church.

Sympathy for the Wife

One of the key literary influences for the Wife's character is La Vielle from Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*. However, there are crucial differences to keep in mind when drawing these parallels. Whilst La Vielle is a purely misogynistic stereotype – a retired prostitute who deliberately seeks to hurt men, Alison is a wealthy widow, who does not vindictively seek her husbands' destruction.

This is not to deny that there are some misogynistic aspects to Chaucer's writing – Alison's love for deceit for one ('Thus should ye speke and bere hem wrong on honde') and her argumentativeness ('I chidde hem spitously'), and the fact that she is known as 'The Wife' – but Alison's character is ultimately more nuanced than source material such as *Roman de la Rose*.

Therefore, when writing about and interpreting *The Wife of Bath*, whilst of course there were many conservative Medieval readers who would be appalled by the Wife, it is important to see her not as an anomaly, but as a character who reflects the changing lives of ordinary Medieval women.

Dan Raphael was an English teacher at Barking Abbey school from 2018. He recently completed an MA in English Education, focusing on talk in the classroom whilst teaching nineteenth-century novels.

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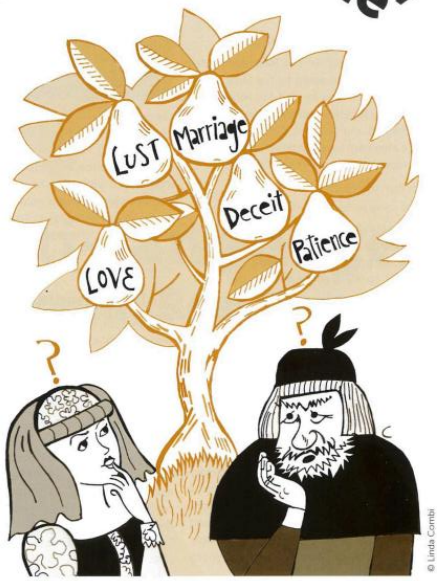
Read through the articles exploring how you could use this for AO3

How could you bring this into an essay about 'The Merchant's Tale'?

'The Merchant's Tale'



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Allegorical and Other Readings

Teacher Paul Dryhurst explains how 'The Merchant's Tale' is part of a tradition of allegory and allegorical readings that opens up multiple possibilities and allows you to interpret the text in many different ways, all of them interesting and valid.

Multiple Readings

The names in 'The Merchant's Tale' are notable. January and May are apt for an old man and a young woman. Placebo, the name of the character who tells January what he wants to hear, literally translates from Latin as *I will flatter* and Justinus, who tells him the truth, has a name formed by adding the suffix *-inus* to the adjective justus to make something that means the righteous man. Damian seems like the odd one out, but it would not be too much to suggest that its Greek etymology relates it to a verb (*damazao*) that means to win the heart of someone. It feels as though we are reading an allegory.

Allegory

To understand this word, it helps to bear in mind its roots: *allos*, or other, and *agorueo*, or to say, both of them Greek. Allegory means to speak about something else and occurs when, beyond the literal sense of a text, there is another hidden and less immediately understood meaning. It is a kind of cryptography and one to which medieval readers were accustomed.

Allegorical readings were particularly important when considering the Bible, in which there were supposed to be four senses to every passage. In addition to the **allegorical**, there were the **literal**, the **anagogic** and the **moral** ways of reading. A literal interpretation found historical fact, while an anagogic one looked for links between the Old Testament and the New and would see in the readiness of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, for example, a shadow of the readiness of God to sacrifice Jesus. The moral sense of a text, meanwhile, survives today when we speak of 'the moral of the story' and provides lessons about how one should live in the present.

It was not only Scripture and, by extension, religious writing that asked for multiple readings, but secular works of literature, too. In fact, poems with an allegorical dimension were enjoying something of a vogue in Chaucer's day. *The Vision of Piers Plowman* (c. 1370-86) by William Langland, for example, is an allegory that survives in around 50 manuscripts more or less fragmentary, making it a bestseller by medieval standards (for comparison, *The Canterbury Tales* survives in 84). Moreover, Chaucer appears to have contributed to a Middle English translation of *Le Roman de la Rose* (c. 1237-1280), an allegory, originally in Old French and of enormous influence.

An Allegorical Reading

In the 'Prologue' to 'The Merchant's Tale', the Merchant is asked by the Host to tell the pilgrims why he and his wife are so unhappy together and the invitation is both accepted and declined. On the one hand, the Merchant says that he will 'gladly' speak on the theme, but on the other that

of myn owene soore
For soory herte, I telle may namoore.

This sounds very much like an instruction to read for allegory, because by speaking of one thing the Merchant claims, in his own words, to tell us about another, too.

Secular allegory tends to consist of an extended metaphor and to employ personification. *Le Roman de la Rose* presents the psychology of a love affair as siege warfare and casts figures such as Reason, Jealousy and Wicked-Tongue among its characters. By analogy, we might see in January the gullible older husband, in May his deceitful and beautiful wife, in Damian the disloyal servant. In their interactions, there might be a commentary on how a loveless marriage feels to a husband. This reading is all the more appealing given that the characters and situation seem to be easily recognisable types from folklore, fabliau and jokes in bad taste.

Limitations

This does not necessarily help much, though. How would Pluto and Proserpina fit into this scheme? And is it accurate to reduce the other characters to a type in this way? May, for one, is surely more than that. The 'Prologue' may lead us to expect an unsympathetic figure. After all, the Merchant says that she could wrestle the Devil himself into submission. However, even during her affair with Damian, inasmuch as January gives her good reason for it, readers are probably prepared to extend her their sympathy. She is said to endure the bedding ceremony, in which she is carried to the bridal bed, 'as stille as stoon'. Her wedding night itself is presented as a grotesquely unpleasant experience

(January's cheek is compared to the 'skyn of houndfyssh', used by medieval carpenters as sandpaper). Furthermore, in the face of the combination of possessiveness and indifference with which her husband treats her, her silence speaks volumes. In short, to the extent that May could represent a deceitful wife, she could also show us a miserable one. If 'The Merchant's Tale' is an allegory, it is evidently not a simple one.

Multiple Readings

The division of meaning between four senses might create the impression that a medieval reader could neatly distinguish literal readings on the one hand from figurative ones on the other (i.e. allegorical, anagogic and moral). In reality, there is no strict distinction between different interpretations and for multiple meanings to suggest themselves simultaneously is common in medieval literature. Figurative readings do not reduce historical or literal ones. On the contrary, the former are enabled by the latter. The Virgin Mary, for example, gives birth to the son of God. She raises him and follows him to Jerusalem. She is present at the crucifixion. Later, she grieves for and she buries her son. Figuratively, she is also, with no contradiction, the perfect example of the happy and of the despairing mother. May is similar, in that she might, without contradiction, represent both a villain and a victim.

Freedom to Read for Different Meanings

Perhaps this is banal, but it is also liberating. An understanding of the richness of the fourfold sense of medieval texts allows the reader, you, to find in Chaucer's lines a play of meanings that come and that go. It gives you the strength to resist reading the poem either as though it is a realist novel and so be perplexed by its decidedly unrealist conclusion up the pear tree, or as though it is (solely) a misogynist diatribe. You can see in May the moral message that

whan tendre youthe hath wedded stoupyng age,
ther is swich myrthe that it may not be written

or, as the Wife of Bath might, that husbands need to look after their wives better. You can also read her as a personification of deceit or of patience (eventually limited). In fact, this openness to interpretation is something that *The Canterbury Tales* is clearly in favour of. It dramatises the audience that receives the tales and shares with us the conversations that result.

Diverse folk diversely they seyde.

Paul Dryhurst teaches English at a state school in the West Midlands.

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emagplus

- If you enjoyed this article, do take a look at the article by Paul Dryhurst on 'The Merchant's Tale' and Courtly Love in emagplus, on the *emagazine* website.

Activity 3: Christine de Pizan (b.1365), *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405)

Between 1390 and 1429 Christine de Pizan produced a substantial body of work in verse and prose. Her *Book of the City of Ladies* was finished in 1405 and was first translated from French into English by Brian Anslay in 1521; the version below was translated by Earl Jeffrey Richards in 1982. This extract explains how, in response to the prejudice of male authors in scholarly texts, 'Lady Reason' prompts Pizan to construct an allegorical fortress (her *Book of the City of Ladies*) within which the stories of women of courage, virtue and intellect can be collected, protected and defended.

One day as I was sitting alone in my study surrounded by books on all kinds of subjects, devoting myself to literary studies, my usual habit, my mind dwelt at length on the weighty opinions of various authors whom I had studied for a long time.

By chance a strange volume came into my hands, not one of my own, but one which had been given to me along with some others. When I held it open and saw from its title page that it was by Mathéolus, I smiled, for though I had never seen it before, I had often heard that like other books it discussed respect for women ... I started to read it and went on for a little while. Because the subject seemed to me not very pleasant for people who do not enjoy lies and of no use in developing virtue and manners, given its lack of integrity in diction and theme, and after browsing here and there and reading the end, I put it down in order to turn my attention to more elevated and useful study. But just the sight of this book, even though it was of no authority, made me wonder how it happened that so many men – and learned men among them – have been and are so inclined to express both in speaking and in their treatises and writings so many wicked insults about women and their behaviour. Not only one or two and not even just Mathéolus (for his book had a bad name anyway and was intended as a satire) but, more generally, judging from all the treatises of all philosophers and poets and from all the orators – it seems that they all speak from one and the same mouth. They all concur in one conclusion: that the behaviour of women is inclined to and full of every vice. Thinking deeply about these matters, I began to examine my character and conduct as a natural woman and, similarly, I considered other women whose company I frequently kept ... hoping that I could judge impartially and in good conscience whether the testimony of so many notable men could be true. ... it would be impossible that so many famous men – such solemn scholars, possessed of such deep and great understanding, so clear-sighted in all things, as it seemed – could have spoken falsely on so many occasions that I could hardly find a book on morals where, even before I had read it in its entirety, I did not find several chapters or certain sections attacking women, no matter who the author was ...

Then Lady Reason responded and said, 'Get up, daughter! Without waiting any longer, let us go to the Field of Letters. There the City of Ladies will be founded.

'The causes which have moved and still move men to attack women, even those authors in those books, are diverse and varied, just as you have discovered. For some have attacked women with good intentions, that is, in order to draw men who have gone astray away from the company of vicious and dissolute women, with whom they might be infatuated, or in order to keep these men from going mad on account of such women, and also so that that every man might avoid an obscene and lustful life.'

Activity 5: Maria Edgeworth, 'Letter From A Gentleman To His Friend, Upon The Birth Of A Daughter' from *Letters For Literary Ladies* (1795)

Maria Edgeworth's *Letters For Literary Ladies* is a satire upon male opposition to female education as characterised by late 18th century debates. In her 'Letter From A Gentleman To His Friend Upon The Birth Of A Daughter,' Edgeworth adopts a male persona to voice contemporaneous fears about the possible dangers and consequences of female equality. The Gentleman here warns his friend (whom Edgeworth presents as an advocate in favour of female emancipation) of the threat to the social order that will ensue if fathers of females assume their daughters capable of benefitting from the social and educational privileges that sons can take for granted.

I congratulate you, my dear sir, upon the birth of your daughter; and I wish that some of the fairies of ancient times were at hand to endow the damsel with health, wealth, wit and beauty. Wit? – I should make a long pause before I accepted this gift for a daughter – you would make none.

As I know it to be your opinion that it is in the power of education, more certainly than it was ever believed to be in the power of fairies, to bestow all mental gifts; and as I have heard you say that education should begin as early as possible, I am in haste to offer you my sentiments, lest my advice should come too late ...

You are a champion for the rights of woman, and insist upon the equality of the sexes. ... I may confess to you that I see neither from experience nor analogy much reason to believe that, in the human species alone, there are no marks of inferiority in the female ... I have always observed in the understandings of women who have been too much cultivated, some disproportion between the different faculties of their minds. One power of the mind undoubtedly may be cultivated at the expense of the health of the whole body. I cannot think this desirable, either for the individual or society. ... Much attention has lately been paid to the education of the female sex; and you will say that we have been amply repaid for our care, – that ladies have lately exhibited such brilliant proofs of genius, as must dazzle and confound their critics. I do not ask for proofs of genius, I ask for proofs of utility. In which of the useful arts, in which of the exact sciences, have we been assisted by female sagacity or penetration? I should be glad to see a list of discoveries, inventions, of observations, evincing patient research, of truths established by just reasoning from previous principles:– if these or any of these, can be presented by a female champion for her sex, I shall be the first to clear the way for her to the temple of Fame ... there are some few instances of great talents applied to useful purposes:– but, except these, what have been the literary productions of women! In poetry, plays, and romances, in the art of imposing upon the understanding by means of imagination, they have excelled; – but to useful literature they have scarcely turned their thoughts.

Extract1

1) What impression of Christine de Pizan's intellectual life and her access to literary texts does this passage give (think particularly about the following comments: '*my* study,' '*devoting myself* to literary studies, *my usual habit*,' 'authors whom *I had studied for a long time*')?
2) Does anything surprise you about Pizan's access to and familiarity with scholarly texts, given her gender and the period in which she lived?
3) Do you think that Pizan would have been a typical representative of her gender? **Explain your response**.
4) Does the fact that, in spite of her gender and the age in which she lived, Pizan was nonetheless able to produce texts that, in spite of their criticism of male attitudes, were deemed worthy of publication, challenge any of your ideas about women of her time and/or the power of men to silence women? **Explain your response**.
5) What qualities does Pizan suggest make writing, regardless of the gender of the author, worthy of being read?

   Does she consider that the work of male writers such as Mathéolus and others embodies such qualities?
6) What roles do you think would have been available to most women in Pizan's period?

   Does this passage: a) reinforce or b) challenge stereotypical ideas held today about women in the 15th century? **Explain your responses by quoting from the extract**.
7) Do you recognise in the comments Christine de Pizan attributes to male authors any stereotypical views still voiced today? What does this suggest about relations between the genders today and the degree of 'progress' made since this text was written?

Extract 2

1) The Gentleman opens by referring to the fairy tale convention that female babies are endowed by fairies with the necessary 'gifts' (health, wealth and beauty) to ensure they prosper in society (which, in fairy tale terms, means to find a 'handsome prince' and 'live happily ever after'). Assuming the Gentleman (whom Edgeworth presents as believing himself a rational being) cannot really believe in fairies, what does the Gentleman imply should actually determine female 'success' in society (magic? chance? beauty? paternity?)? **Explain your response**.
2) What do you think the Gentleman understands by the term 'Wit'?
   - Does this word have a specific definition as applied at the time Edgeworth was writing?
   - Why does the Gentleman imply criticism of his Friend's lack of 'pause' in desiring the gift of 'Wit' for his baby daughter?
3) What do the Gentleman's fears lest his 'advice should come too late' suggest about the extent to which ideas about female education and intellectual equality might *already* have progressed at the time that Edgeworth's text was written?
4) What advantages in argument does Edgeworth gain by presenting the male Friend as 'a champion for the rights of woman'?
5) Would a dialogue between a man and a woman or between two women have been as convincing or carried the same authority as that implied by this conversation between two 'rational' and 'educated' males?
6) What do you think the Gentleman means when he speaks of 'women who have been too much cultivated'?
   - What kinds of 'cultivation' was it appropriate for women to gain?
   - What does the Gentleman believe will happen to women's bodies as a whole if the 'power of their mind' is unleashed?
7) The Gentleman concedes that there *are* 'proofs of [female] genius.' But to him this does not justify female education without 'solid proofs of utility' such as 'a list of discoveries, of inventions, or observations...' Given the restrictions upon women's education at the time Edgeworth wrote, is the lack of 'proofs' due to women's inability to excel in discovering, inventing or observing, or because women have been excluded from the knowledge that would produce such proofs?
8) The Gentleman has finally to admit that amongst women there are 'great talents applied to useful purposes.' How does he attempt to undermine and dismiss such talents?

Complete this grid for 2 texts from the list below:

- The Awakening by Kate Chopin
- A Room of One's Own by Virginia Woolf
- Herland by Charlotte Perkins Gilman
- Far from the Madding Crowd by Thomas Hardy
- Vanity Fair by William Makepeace Thackeray

	Text A	Text B	Connections
Date of publication. Sub-genre (e.g. realist, modernist)			
Prominent novels published during the same period			
Prominent texts/genres popular during the same period			
Readership (levels of literacy, access to texts)			
Format (e.g. serialisation, triple decker)			
Author: literary tradition; gender and/or gender restrictions			
Social class/marital status/ race of protagonist/ characters			
Representation of women			
Power relations between genders			