

A Woolfian Analysis of Wollstonecraft.

Rachel Bechtel

Honors Scholars Program Capstone, Carroll College, Helena, Montana
rbechtel@carroll.edu

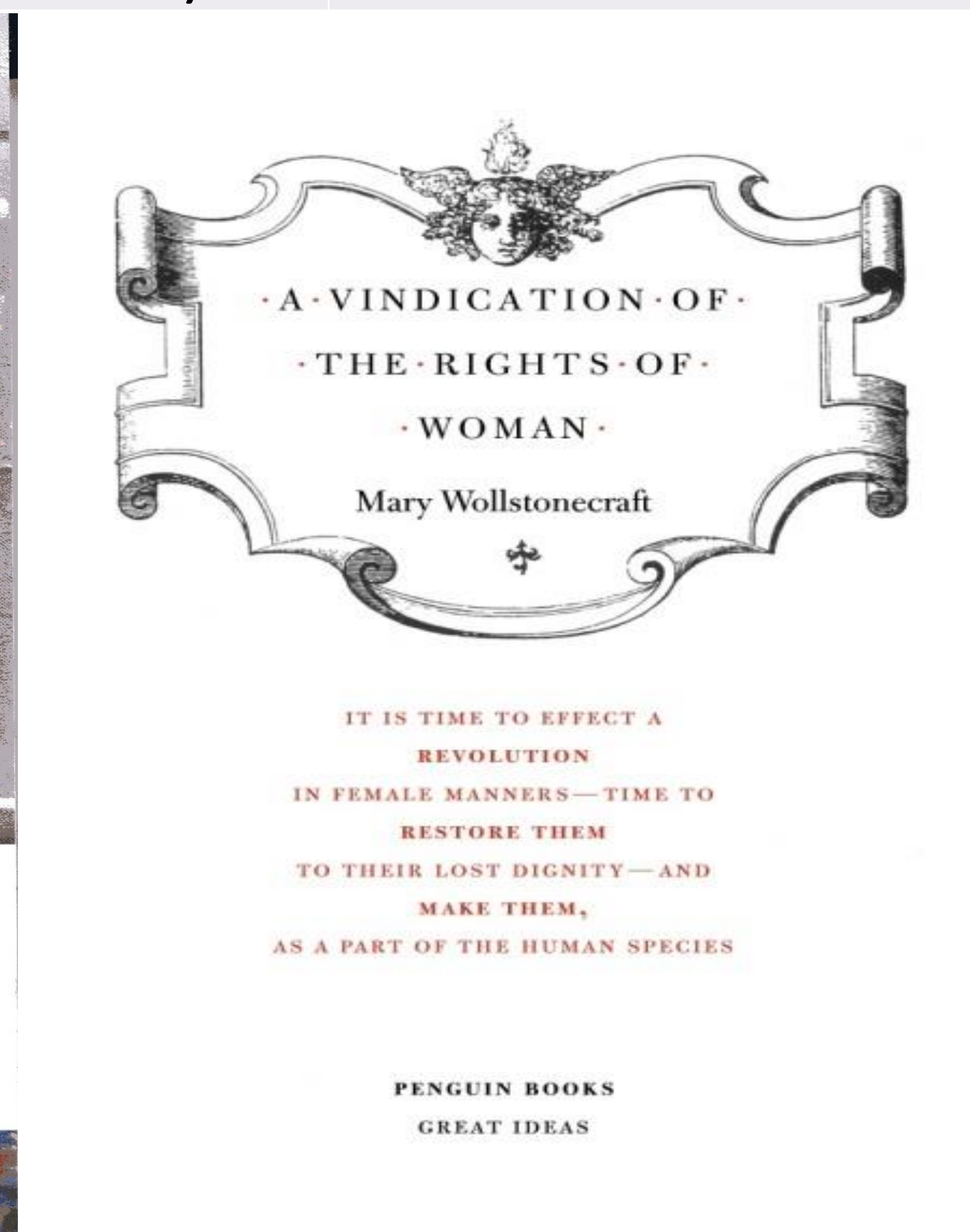
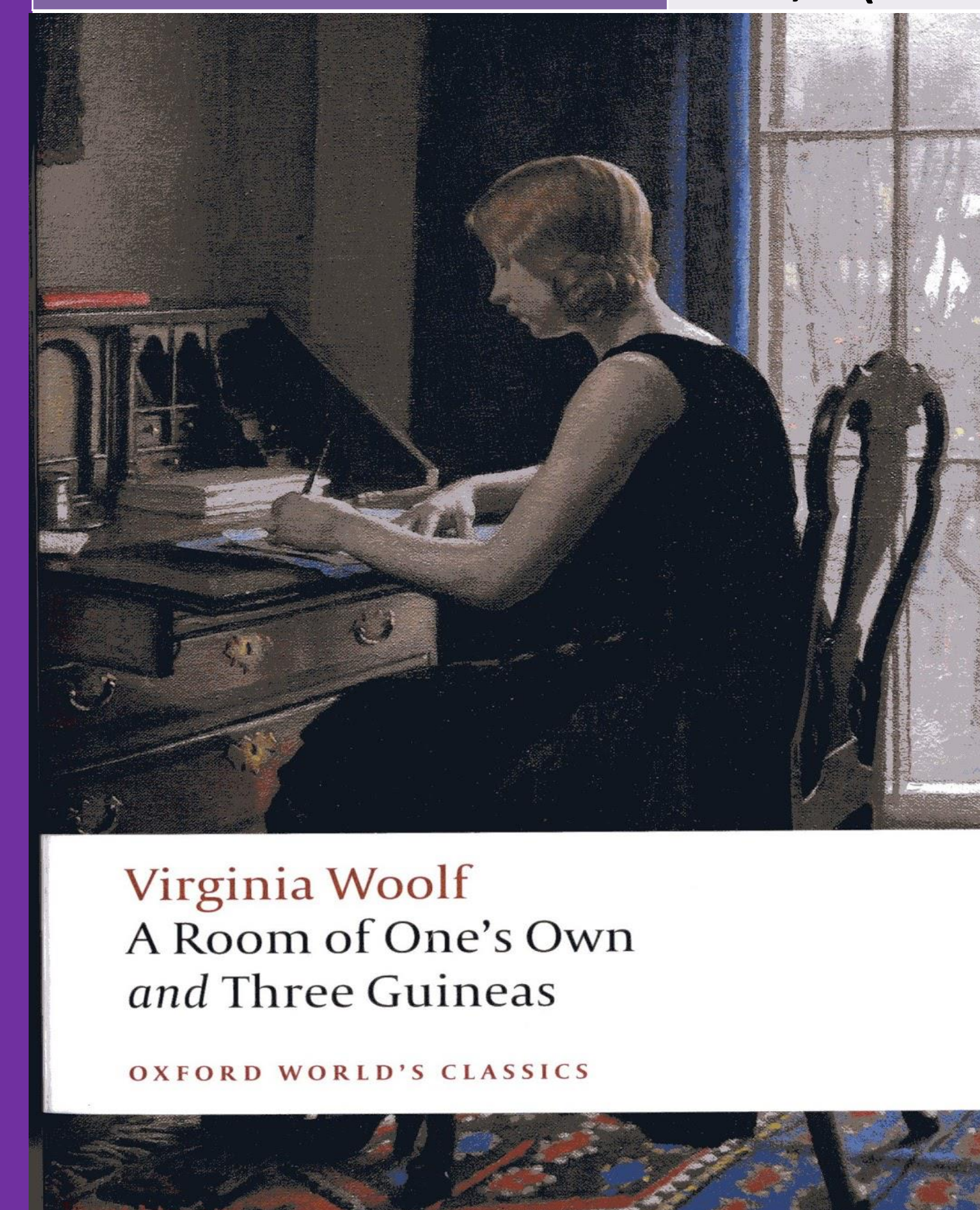
Fundamental Questions:

- What is most necessary to improve the human (specifically female) condition?
- Does Wollstonecraft's writing conform to the feminist ideal that Woolf establishes?

Abstract:

Both Virginia Woolf in "A Room of One's Own" and Mary Wollstonecraft in "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" advocate for the intellectual development and independence of women, in order to improve their condition. Woolf argues for the end of the treatment of women as the "protected sex," and that they should be exposed "to the same exertions and activities [as men]," (Woolf, 52). In "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," Wollstonecraft ventures to convince her audience of female personhood. While Wollstonecraft lacks the bold goals of Virginia Woolf, her argument for the humanity of women was truly radical for her time (Wollstonecraft, 91). Throughout "A Room of One's Own," Woolf provides commentary on how female writers must approach their work in order to be valued as writers and not only illustrations of the female sex. While Wollstonecraft wrote with the same ultimate goal as Woolf, of furthering women's rights, she was unable to fulfill the androgynous standard that Woolf set for female writers. This was due, in part, to the rhetoric necessitated by her patriarchal conservative audience, but also to seemingly self-imposed constraints resulting from the acknowledgement of physical differences between the sexes that may lead to the development of different "duties" (Wollstonecraft 55). Wollstonecraft also lacked the materialistic wealth that Woolf necessitated for an androgynous lifestyle (Woolf 149).

	Woolf	Wollstonecraft
Goals	Androgyny (Woolf 9)	Female Personhood (Wollstonecraft 91)
Context	Female Personhood has already been realized	Patriarchal Christian society (Wollstonecraft 100)
Means Necessitated to Achieve Goal	Material Wealth (Woolf 52)	Independence through personhood, specifically to allow the pursuit of human virtue (Wollstonecraft 53)
Rhetoric	Looking Glass Theory: "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size," (Woolf 45)	Utilizes modest rhetoric to not threaten looking glass dynamic or traditional gender roles



Conclusions

Woolf's aspirations for female writers were not independent of her aspirations for the world they live in. Woolf, due to her time and the progress the women's rights movement had seen, was allowed the freedom to embody her ideal female writer Wollstonecraft however, was not afforded this same freedom if she had any hope of successfully convincing her audience of female personhood. While Wollstonecraft deviated from Woolf's ideal, she largely applied Woolf's ideas to the greatest extent that her context allowed. However, Wollstonecraft failed to advocate for the androgyny that Woolf argued for as she allowed for the existence of physical differences between the sexes that would result in "different duties" (Wollstonecraft 55). Wollstonecraft demonstrates the necessity of the material wealth that Woolf describes. As Wollstonecraft did not have "five hundred a year," she also did not have "the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think," that this wealth allows (Woolf 149).

Definitions

Androgyny: lifestyle void of the rules that gender imposes (Woolf 9)

Female Personhood: the idea that women are individual human beings (Wollstonecraft 91)

Works Cited

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. London: Penguin Books, 2004. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. "A Room of One's Own." *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, Oxford World's Classics, 2008, pp. 3–149.