Contents

INTRODUCTION

- This offers a brief survey of the changing critical reception of Woolf's work, and discusses *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* in relation to the rest of her œuvre. The impact on criticism is acknowledged of biographical work on Woolf, and of her autobiographical writings and published criticism. The criticism represented in this guide is discussed in relation to three main theoretical areas: modernism, feminism, and postmodernism.

CHAPTER ONE

Contemporary Reviews

This chapter records some of Woolf's private projections in composition and reflections on completion of *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, as well as the responses, on publication, of some of those close to her. These private reviews, which years later found their way into print when the Bloomsbury industry took off, are discussed alongside a selection from the published critical reception, for which *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin, remains the standard source.

CHAPTER TWO

The 1930s and 40s: Summing Up

This chapter covers the period after the publication of *The Waves* in the 1930s up to Woolf's death in 1941 and beyond to the critical aftermath of the 1940s. One major extract dominates here: Erich Auerbach's impressive reading of a section of *To the Lighthouse* with which he closes his classic critical work, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946), which remains one of the most important, stimulating, and highly influential, points of reference for Woolf studies. There are briefer extracts of other significant readings of *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*. Critics discussed include William Empson, M.C. Bradbrook, Q.D. Leavis, F.R. Leavis, Winifred Holtby, and E.M. Forster.

CHAPTER THREE

The 1950s and 60s: Unifying Strategies – Myth, Philosophy, Psychology

Criticism in this period developed in two ways: firstly in attempts to account for the whole œuvre, and secondly, in attempts at detailed analytical readings of particular works. Common to both projects was the
desire to come up with a unifying way of understanding Woolf's work — whether by looking for a totalising Woolfian philosophy evident throughout the œuvre, or by scrutinising individual works in terms of a unifying philosophical, mythic, psychoanalytic or psychological approach. In 1953 selections from Woolf's diary were published in *A Writer's Diary* which had considerable impact on such attempts to account for her achievement. The four main extracts are from: Joseph Blotner's (1956) essay, offering a mythic and Freudian analysis of *To the Lighthouse*; Shiv Kumar's (1962) study of Bergsonism and modern fiction; extracts on *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* from Guiguet's classic study of Woolf's œuvre (1962); and Frank McConnell's (1968) essay on romanticism and phenomenology in *The Waves*.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**The 1970s and 80s: Diverging Approaches — Androgyny, Art, Feminism**

This discusses the groundwork done in the 1970s for the major developments in feminist criticism that followed in the 1980s and 90s. The three main extracts are from readings which make use of important spheres of influence on Woolf's work: Allen McLaurin, in *Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved* (1973), draws on the visual arts and the aesthetic theories of Roger Fry; Perry Meisel's book, *The Absent Father: Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater* (1980), is a fascinating meditation on literary influence; and Gillian Beer's essay, 'Hume, Stephen, and Elegy in *To the Lighthouse'* (1984), looks at the combining influences of the philosophical, biographical and elegiac.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**The 1980s: Sexual/Textual Readings**

This chapter is devoted to textually based, deconstructive, and psychoanalytic approaches. The four main extracts from the work of Toril Moi, Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, Garrett Stewart and Rachel Bowlby, are all from the 1980s, but their arguments and concerns continue in much criticism of the 1990s.

**CHAPTER SIX**

**The 1990s: Historical, Materialist, Post-colonialist Readings**

This chapter looks at contextually based, historical and post-colonialist readings. The extracts are from Jane Marcus's ground-breaking essay on *The Waves* as anti-imperialist text (1992); and Janet Winston's recent analysis of imperial discourses in *To the Lighthouse* (1996).