



The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century

Cynthia Sundberg Wall

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Virginia Woolf once commented that the central image in *Robinson Crusoe* is an object—a large earthenware pot. Woolf and other critics pointed out that early modern prose is full of things but bare of setting and description. Explaining how the empty, unvisualized spaces of such writings were transformed into the elaborate landscapes and richly upholstered interiors of the Victorian novel, Cynthia Sundberg Wall argues that the shift involved not just literary representation but an evolution in cultural perception.

In *The Prose of Things*, Wall analyzes literary works in the contexts of natural science, consumer culture, and philosophical change to show how and why the perception and representation of space in the eighteenth-century novel and other prose narratives became so textually visible. Wall examines maps, scientific publications, country house guides, and auction catalogs to highlight the thickening descriptions of domestic interiors. Considering the prose works of John Bunyan, Samuel Pepys, Aphra Behn, Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, David Hume, Ann Radcliffe, and Sir Walter Scott, *The Prose of Things* is the first full account of the historic shift in the art of describing.



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