

Exposure to Light:  
Virginia Woolf's Work in Illuminating Women's  
Complex Interiority as Conforming to and Deviating from  
Notions of Traditional Femininity

by  
Meredith Perry



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For my parents, who have provided continuous kindness, love, and support in my journey of growth, applauding and recognizing my own complex interiority.



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## Abstract

In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf faults male authors for depicting women solely in terms of their relationships with men, rather than giving them a three-dimensional, full subjectivity. This thesis posits that Woolf's characters contrast with the male author model and that through her novels, she attempts to discover women in all of their complexities, which often contrast, but still sometimes conform, to normative notions of femininity. These normative notions include those in which women are not generally thought of as psychologically or philosophically attuned, as being closely intimate with other women, or as existing well, or at all, in metaphorical or literal spaces without men. I argue that women in Woolf's novels encompass all three of these traits, and that she purposefully creates subversive characters in order to show that women are much more multi-faceted and elaborate than stereotypes of womanhood and femininity would suggest.

Simply put, I argue that Woolf creates women characters as complex, yet who still sometimes conform to normative notions of femininity. By focusing on three of Woolf's novels, briefly on *A Room of One's Own* and more deeply in chapters on *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), I will use close readings of several female characters in order to show Woolf's practice of creating a new genre of complex women in literature. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa Dalloway is a wife and society woman, yet sustains an incredibly active psychological life, and dreams of a past love with another woman. In *To the Lighthouse*, Lily Briscoe temporarily longs for a traditional family life, and reveres Mrs. Ramsay, a pinnacle of traditional femininity, and yet is a budding artist who ultimately rejects marriage and chooses a life of individuality and creativity. These women are thus most complex in their intimacies with other women and in spaces without men, who systemically serve to limit them in each novel.

Significantly, Woolf does not provide an easy or explicit answer to what, exactly, these women are, if they are not normatively feminine: she refuses to label them. When these women characters do not conform to traditional notions of femininity, Woolf resists labeling them, because, as Judith Butler theorizes, Woolf refuses to introduce new normalizing categories that would in turn participate in new or further oppressive structures.



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Short Titles

*AR*: Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Ed. Mark Hussey. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2005.

Print.

*MD*: Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1990. Print.

*TTL*: Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*. Trans. Stella McNichol. New York: Penguin Group, 2000.

Print.



## Introduction

This essay explores Virginia Woolf's exploration of women in her novels, focusing particularly on aspects of their inner lives, their same-sex intimacies, and their representation in spaces with and without men. As an author by craft, Woolf is most concerned with women's problematic representation in literature, and thus attempts to alleviate their lack of visibility or too simplistic visibility by exploring women's complex interiority through her fiction.

Furthermore, Woolf suggests that women are often assumed to be a congruous group of nearly identical people, rather than as truly diverse (AR 81). Here, feminist theorist Terese de Lauretis' coining of Woman is relevant. In *Alice Doesn't*, de Lauretis establishes the distinction between Woman, "a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western cultures... which works as both their vanishing point and their specific condition of existence," and women, "the real historical beings who cannot as yet be defined outside of those discursive formations, but whose material existence is nonetheless certain" (5). Individual identity is "an ongoing construction, not a fixed point," based on "those relations—material, economic, interpersonal—which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective, historical" (5). A gap, then, exists between what is constructed by society, Woman, and what is the true life, every day experience of women, which is much more complicated than a one-dimensional ideal and/or stereotype.

Woolf offers her own definition of this Woman as represented in Western literature in *A Room of One's Own* (1929):

All the great women of fiction were... seen only in relation to the other sex. And how small a part of a woman's life is that; and how little can a man know even of that when he observes it through the black or rosy spectacles which sex puts upon his

nose. Hence, perhaps, *the peculiar nature of woman in fiction; the astonishing extremes of her beauty and horror; her alternations between heavenly goodness and hellish depravity* [emphasis mine]" (81).

Adhering to the figure of Woman, most Western male authors of the past ignored female subjectivity, and instead focused on stereotypical performances of femininity, or merely described women in terms of their relationships to men. Woolf allows her female characters to exist in all of their complexities, which contradict but sometimes conform to Woman. Feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray, as inspired by Jacques Lacan, also provides a useful definition of Woman, defining it as "lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject" ("The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine" 796). Woman is consistently described in opposition to men, idealized in terms of her maternal instinct and feminine wiles, yet also represented as encompassing no stereotypically positive (masculine) traits and embodying many stereotypically negative or useless (feminine) traits. Woolf resists this dichotomous structure, allowing her characters to encompass a spectrum of traits regardless of their traditional gendered meanings, and refuses to attach value to these traits. Thus, women are not merely a mirror image of Woman, or merely an opposite of men; they exist as much more complicated figures that deviate from norms and challenge identity labels such as Woman.

I will interpret Woolf's characters as offering, for the first time in Western literature as she suggests, insight into the rich and distinct inner lives of women (AR 81). I will rely on her characters' relationships with other women in order to intensify and complicate their inner lives, showing that women's interiority cannot be described simply, and that women do not fit neatly into socially constructed categories of "woman," "feminine," or "wife." Instead, I will show that Woolf's women characters often complicate and subvert these norms, failing to adhere to labels

of identity. Lastly, I will suggest that it is only in a space without men that these women characters' full inner lives are able to prosper. These women are highly affected by both the men and the women in their lives: men often oppress their intellectual, emotional, or artistic abilities, while women often promote them. Woolf's exploration of women is nuanced and complex, giving women complicated selves that think and interact with others in equally complicated ways. Nonetheless, these women are still clothed in much of the unknown that society and Woolf's male counterparts have kept them in, showing the enormity of the task at hand for Woolf, in which she must shine a light on women, for perhaps the first time in Western literature. This process is difficult, though, because Woolf must both work within and outside of the constraints of the patriarchal language system that has limited women thus far: When these women characters do not conform to traditional notions of femininity, Woolf resists labeling them, because, as gender theorist Judith Butler theorizes, Woolf refuses to introduce new normalizing categories that would in turn participate in new or further oppressive structures.

Previous literary critics have acknowledged Woolf's great task in illuminating women characters, and have taken various lines of thought in theorizing this work; two main critiques include centering on Woolf's autobiography and her purported feminism(s), with both often being used in conjunction. Hermione Lee wrote what is popularly considered the most complete and thoughtful biography of Woolf, and makes many allusions to Woolf's autobiography as influencing her work (*Virginia Woolf*). Suzanne Raitt famously referred to Woolf's relationship with Vita Sackville-West as one existing between two "married lesbians," arguing that lesbianism and marriage were "effortlessly continuous identities" for the two women, but that their intimate relationship resulted in some of the most creative and "lesbian" works of either woman's career (*Vita and Virginia: The Work and Friendship of V. Sackville-West and Virginia*

Woolf 4-5). Woolf scholar Louise DeSalvo makes a similar argument, stating the import of reading Woolf's works with her relationship with Sackville-West in mind, as Vita both contributed to Woolf's works creatively and can be seen as influencing women's intimacy with other women in several of Woolf's novels, most notably *Orlando* (1928) ("Lighting the Cave: The Relationship Between Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf"). Literary Critic Karyn Z. Sproles also reads Woolf's works in terms of her relationship with Sackville-West, focusing particularly on how Woolf conceives of desire during the years of her relationship with Vita (*Desiring Women: The Partnership of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West*). Modernist and queer critic Georgia Johnston reads Woolf as rewriting autobiography, in terms of the autobiography genre as well as in terms of rewriting autobiography for the lesbian character, arguing that many of Woolf's (lesbian) characters are othered and therefore exist in a space of deviancy and/or pathology (*The Formation of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Queer Autobiography: Reading Vita Sackville-West, Virginia Woolf, Hilda Doolittle, and Gertude Stein* 9).

Many of Woolf's scholars also believe that her work takes on a variety of feminist meanings, and specifically that she often writes novels that encompass a lesbian narrative. Woolf scholar Eileen Barrett argues against only using biography as a mode of interpretation, instead suggesting that other critical lenses are equally or more helpful, specifically lesbian studies (*Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings*). Johnston takes a feminist stance in *The Formation of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Queer Autobiography* in stating that Woolf's texts are purposefully self-censoring in that they are laden with hidden lesbian undertones. These lesbian themes are not hidden because of shame, though; they take a stab against patriarchy and censorship, as well as satirize these concepts. In contrast, literary critic Diana L. Swanson argues that Woolf includes lesbian desire, imagery, and narrative as "intratext" rather than subtext, because the "'lesbian text' of the novel

is not subordinate or additional to the ordinate or ‘central’ text, but is intrinsic to the novel and its meanings” (“The Lesbian Feminism in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*” 38). Literary critic Kathleen McKenna takes a less specific stance, arguing that Woolf is not concerned with lesbian sexuality, but the broader expression of female sexuality in all of its forms. She calls Woolf’s practice of writing about female sexuality “femography,” and believes that many of Woolf’s texts include erotic and even orgasmic moments during seemingly sterile activities (“The Language of Orgasm” 29). Woolf scholar Ann Ronchetti points to the overlaps between artistic and creative characters in Woolf’s novels and subversive sexuality (*The Artist, Society, and Sexuality in Virginia Woolf’s Novels*). Literary critics Annamarie Jagose (*Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence; Lesbian Utopics*) Karen Kaivola (“Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West, and the Question of Sexual Identity”), Colleen Lamos (“Virginia Woolf’s Greek Lessons”), Elizabeth Meese (“When Virginia Looked at Vita, What did She See; or, Lesbian : Feminist : Woman– What’s the Differ(e/a)ance?”), Christopher Wiley (“‘When a Woman Speaks the Truth About Her Body’: Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and the Challenges of Lesbian Auto/Biography”), and Bonnie Zimmerman (“Is ‘Chloe Liked Olivia’ a Lesbian Plot?”) have also notably grappled with Woolf’s expression of female sexuality in her novels. Finally, feminist psychoanalyst scholar Rachel Bowlby balks against constant reclaimings of Woolf’s work as feminist, stating that feminism is one lens through which to view her work, but that Woolf’s work cannot only be seen in this light or as encompassing “feminism,” “the real nature of woman,” “literature,” or “feminist literature,” because these labels and figures come with modern associations and meanings that distract from what is actually on the page (*Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations* 14).

Although I find each of these texts useful and illuminating, and am indebted to previous critics work with Woolf, I do not identify with the method of interpretation used in many of the texts. Bowlby is the critic that I come closest to aligning with, in that she questions the usefulness of labels and feminism's frequent use as a static term, rather than one full of complexity. As such, I will read Woolf's characters as being similarly complex, and not attempt to label them because I find this to be ultimately confining, as I argue Woolf does in the Conclusion to this thesis. As such, I will begin the thesis by discussing Chloe and Olivia from *A Room of One's Own* in this Introduction, and argue that these characters give the reader insight into Woolf's work with female characters, showing her desire to illuminate women's intimacies with other women and women's subjectivity in spaces without men, and how this has not been accomplished by Western male authors of the past. *A Room of One's Own* puts into words the project that Woolf undertakes implicitly in her other novels, and provides an analytical model for the rest of this thesis. As such, *A Room of One's Own* points to Woolf's attempt to bring women to light in her previous works, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Chapter I of this thesis focuses on Clarissa Dalloway from *Mrs. Dalloway*; as the first chapter and chronologically first novel to be written by Woolf as featured in this thesis, we will see how Clarissa both embodies and defies norms of femininity and society life, ultimately showing a complexity of character that while very much a pinnacle of society, is also capable of non-normative action, thought, and desire. Chapter II of this thesis focuses on Lily Briscoe from *To The Lighthouse*; as the second chapter and chronologically second novel to be written by Woolf as featured in this thesis, we will see that Lily is Woolf's first character to fully defy Woman, despite still existing in the shadows for much of the narrative, and even though it takes her until the last page of the novel to do so. The Conclusion will be focused on why Woolf undertook this

project, and why she did it in such an abstruse manner: each character remains largely cloaked in shadow, despite Woolf's desire to bring her to light, leaving her definition of womanhood uncertain. I will use Butler to theorize why Woolf would refuse to label her characters as any particular form of femininity, even when labels could have easily distanced them from the damaging figure of Woman.

*A Room of One's Own* is regarded as a formative feminist text, written as nonfiction with the use of many fictional elements, in which Woolf calls for all women to have a room of their own; that is, an income and physical space in which to achieve "intellectual freedom" (106). Woolf shares her views through the voice of a privileged, educated (white) woman, who guides the reader through a series of thought experiments, analyses of patriarchal structures, and an overarching message that women should have equal intellectual and artistic possibilities to men. Despite the narrator's seeming privilege, the text serves as a critique of the systems that do not allow women the freedom to so much as cross the lawn of a university, much less participate in normatively intellectual or artistic endeavors (6). Significant to this thesis is Woolf's discussion of women's absence from Western literature. The following scenes, which I will refer to as the "Chloe and Olivia" passage, are only a few pages in length, and consist of the narrator reading a novel by an imaginary female author, Mary Carmichael. Carmichael, while not necessarily a talented writer, has been invented by Woolf as the "first" Western woman author to explore women's relationships with one another: namely, Chloe's relationship with Olivia.

The narrator describes Mary Carmichael's attempt to grapple with the issue:

For if Chloe likes Olivia and Mary Carmichael knows how to express it she will light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been. It is all half lights and profound

shadows like those serpentine caves where one goes with a candle peering up and down, now knowing where one is stepping (AR 83).

Thus, we see the issue Woolf is working with: intimate, complex exploration of women, that has as yet been “all half lights and profound shadows.” This knowledge about women has remained absent from literature, as it is “dark, “shadowy,” and unexplored, signified by a cave. The narrator earlier stated men’s lives have been fully illuminated within Western literature as both interesting and normative (AR 82). This passage then alludes to certain narratives of selfhood being normalized and given value while others are not. Women’s inner lives and relationships with one another are systematically considered less normal, important, and worthwhile than those of men’s: they exist merely in the darkness of a cave.

This quote serves as a metaphor for both Woolf’s work in her novels and my own work in this thesis. Through her novels, Woolf wishes to bring women to the light of day; Woolf wants to see what happens when women are taken out of the cave. She accomplishes this by gradually brings women out of the cave in her novels, progressively offering more detail about their inner lives and intimacies with others as she continues to write, from *Mrs. Dalloway* to *To the Lighthouse*. My own work will proceed accordingly: I will provide close readings of Woolf’s women characters in these novels in order to shed light on their nuanced selves, as well as to offer insight as to their purpose. Each work offers a progressively more detailed analysis of women’s lives, and yet still leaves much of the complexities of women’s lives in mystery. While fascinated by taking women out of the cave, Woolf does not allow her female characters to be completely illuminated, refusing to offer a generalized interpretation of womanhood (etc.) for her readers. Thus, her characters, while exposed to light, are still often vulnerable to shadow, as Woolf alludes to their significance and possible meanings, but never explicitly. Instead of

directly focusing attention upon issues of women's interiority, or upon issues of intimacy between women, Woolf indirectly guides the reader in those directions, gently nudging towards what can only be an incomplete conclusion.

As representative of the newness and thus constraint of writing about women at this time and the complexity of writing about women in general, *A Room of One's Own* is a nonfiction work that relies heavily on fictional elements. Woolf uses a fictive narrator instead of her own voice, who reacts to fictive situations throughout the essay. Woolf employs fiction in order to distance herself from very real truths that she is stating, and to allow her work to stand more generally rather than as her opinion. The fiction is especially thick in "Chloe and Olivia," in which Woolf's fictive narrator reads a fictive author's (Mary Carmichael) fictive novel with fictive characters (Chloe and Olivia). Woolf is separated from Chloe and Olivia by four layers of fiction, showing the distance that she strives to keep from offering a conclusion or meaning of their relationship or identity. Instead, she lets Mary Carmichael and the narrator do all of the work, yet even Mary Carmichael provides very little detail about Chloe and Olivia and the narrator merely reacts to this passage rather than giving an interpretation of their significance as two of the first women interacting as friends in a Western novel. Thus, we see how difficult it is to express or bring to light what is in "that vast chamber where nobody has yet been." This may truly be the first time that women's intimacy have been explored in Western literature, and this exploration can only be tentative, partial, and constrained due to the sensitivity, complexity, and gravity of the situation. Women's experiences have been repressed and illegitimate until this point.

I will elaborate on these ideas and provide a model for the rest of my work by providing a short close reading of "Chloe and Olivia." Fittingly, as one of the most famous passages in *A*

*Room of One's Own*, "Chloe and Olivia" is also one whose meaning, despite much scrutiny, is inconclusive for Woolf's scholars. While the reader is given little information about Chloe and Olivia, hardly more detail than "Chloe liked Olivia... They shared a laboratory together," the passage suggests a variety of meanings and interpretations (AR 82). The passage has been appropriated by lesbian studies critic Lillian Faderman as a lesbian subplot; popular culture has also claimed "Chloe and Olivia" as a groundbreaking homosexual relationship (*Chloe Plus Olivia: An Anthology of Lesbian and Bisexual Literature from the 17th Century to the Present*). Lesbian-feminist critic Pamela J. Olano suggests that "Chloe and Olivia" is not merely a subplot, but is rather an "undisguised lesbian text" ("'Women Alone Stir my Imagination': Reading Virginia Woolf as a Lesbian" 158). Faderman furthermore argues,

"In attributing to the fictive woman novelist the declaration 'Chloe liked Olivia' surely she [Woolf] meant to indicate an emotion far more intense than mere 'liking.' Imagining a novel of the future about Chloe and Olivia, Woolf was predicting what must have seemed all but impossible in her day: a nonmedical literature that would unmask the subject of love between women" (viii).

Woolf scholar Anne Herrmann also reinforces the import of having two women represented in an amicable relationship without men, and to the significance of the passage's suggestion that women's representation in literature has remained too simple until this point ("Woolf, Virginia 1882-1941" 763). I argue that "Chloe and Olivia" could be read as both lesbian and heterosexual, but more importantly depicts a tension between traditional femininity and nontraditional occupations and desired life courses, as well as the value of women's friendship in a space without men.

Chloe and Olivia are unique in that they share a relationship with one another; they like each other, or at least Chloe likes Olivia. This refers to the cave that Woolf describes, in which women's relationships with one another are left unexplored: "Chloe liked Olivia' . . . it struck me [the narrator] how immense a change was there. Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature" (81). The narrator argues that this relationship represents a significant moment in literature, in which women are represented as friends, in terms of one another, rather than in terms of their relations to men. She laments that literature has not focused on women's friendship:

But how interesting it would [be] if the relationship between two women [was] more complicated. All these relationships between women, I thought, rapidly recalling the splendid gallery of fictitious women, are too simple. So much has been left out, unattempted. And I tried to remember any case in the course of my reading where two women are represented as friends (81).

Thus, the vast intricacies of the cave, including intimacies between women, have been left out of literature, left out of the public sphere, but the narrator suggests that Mary Carmichael will be able to illuminate the subjects of the cave if she continues to focus on Chloe and Olivia. The importance of women's intimacy, and women's interiority as revealed in a relationship not based on sex, is made apparent.

Fittingly, as the narrator "turned the page and read," she pauses: "I am sorry to break off so abruptly. Are there no men present? Do you promise me that behind that curtain over there the figure of Sir Cartres Biron is not concealed? We are all women, you assure me?" (80). Men have inadequately and incorrectly represented women in literature for hundreds of years, and thus the narrator can only mention "Chloe and Olivia," women's interiority and intimacies with one

another, in a space without the oppressive influence of men. Similarly, Chloe and Olivia work in a laboratory in which no men are mentioned, and in which moments of extraordinary light are thus able to occur. The narrator begins to blush at the thought of two women interacting in a space without men, struck by the unfamiliarity of reading about women's private intimacy, having to remind herself "that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women" (81). She continues to read

"How Chloe watched Olivia put a jar on a shelf and say how it was time to go home to her children. That is a sight that has never been seen since the world began, I exclaimed. And I watched too, very curiously. For I wanted to see how Mary Carmichael set to work to catch those unrecorded gestures, those unsaid or half-said words, which form themselves, no more palpably than the shadows of moths of the ceiling, when women are alone, unlit by the capricious and coloured light of the other sex" (83).

The seemingly mundane act of placing a jar on a shelf suddenly becomes monumental when viewed through the lens of a female who has not seen women performing mundane activities, or friendly activities, or intellectual activities, in literature. Men have been explored in literature through all of their mundaneness as well as complexity, they have been "coloured" and given life, while women have been depicted merely "in their relation to men" (81). Chloe and Olivia are able to "like" each other in a space without men, unseen before in literature, because women were depicted as hostile toward one another, often as rivals. They are able to perform mundane activities, and not exist as just the polar extremes of good and evil. They are able to pursue intellectualism or interests outside of the home, because, as Woolf simply states, "women, like men, have other interests besides the perennial interests of domesticity" (82). Clearly, Woolf is

insinuating that these women best exist, or at least are able to be most complex and least comparable to Woman in a space without men.

Given the miniscule detail provided about Chloe and Olivia and the layers of fiction that Woolf employs in order to even bring them into her essay, “Chloe and Olivia” may be a story that the world (Woolf’s world) is not ready to read. Literature and society have provided little guidance up to this point for how to interpret characters such as this or a relationship such as this. Interpretation of women has long been expressed merely in terms of their relationship to men. Literature has failed to provide details for these alternative qualities and relationships that women may possess. “Chloe and Olivia” is a story that can only take place in the future: it can only be fully comprehended by a future audience, perhaps even future to our modern audience. However, Woolf continues to envision this future in her other novels, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To The Lighthouse*, in which she continues to grapple with women’s intimacy with other women and women existing in spaces without men, and begins to focus more deeply on women’s interiority.

Chapter I: Clarissa Dalloway's Search for an "Inner Meaning" in *Mrs. Dalloway*

*Mrs. Dalloway* tells the story of one woman, Clarissa Dalloway, by giving the reader a glimpse into one day of her life, and through flashbacks and free indirect discourse, a glimpse into her mind. Throughout the day, Clarissa is preoccupied with preparations for a party to be hosted at her house. Despite her surface-level perfect society-wife characteristics, the reader comes to realize that Clarissa is much more than her proper manners and taste for socializing. Her similarities to *Woman* are contrasted with her deviancy in psychological skill and intense memories of her desire for another woman. Clarissa is a complex individual who is haunted by the life choices that she has made, and spends much of the day ruminating on memories of her past. Clarissa wonders if she chose the right partner of two male suitors, if she is too enveloped in superficial society life, if she will maintain a rich relationship with her daughter, Elizabeth, and, last but not least, if she has had sufficient enough meaning in her life to grow old without regrets.

Clarissa tells us that she must be read by contemplating her relationships with those around her:

“So that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them...

Since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that... perhaps—perhaps” (153).

And so Clarissa shares her belief that she is made up of several people with whom she shares “odd affinities,” and that only by knowing these people could one truly know her (153).

Clarissa's completeness is as a result of relationships with her husband, Richard Dalloway, her daughter, Elizabeth, a former lover, Peter Walsh, and a former intimate friend, Sally Seton,

among others. As a person with extraordinary interpersonal insights and connections, or “odd affinities” with others, Clarissa’s life is largely built upon not only the current state of these relationships, but also upon their past states. She spends much of the novel reminiscing about those closest to her, and often reconsiders her life decisions based on these memories and alternative imagined futures. Through these recollections, we come to see that not only is Clarissa psychologically fluent and interpersonally perceptive, but that these relationships point to a crack in the society wife stereotype that she seems to embody at first glance.

Perhaps most obvious is her love for Sally Seton, a friend from Clarissa’s years as a young woman. The two women share an extremely close friendship that culminates in a kiss. We thus learn that unlike earlier literary depictions, Clarissa has a true friendship with another woman, as opposed to being Sally’s competitor or enemy, and that her life is based upon more than just her role in relation to men (*AR* 81). We also learn that she may have or at least have been amenable to lesbian inclinations, which, as a society wife, is subversive to stereotypes. Less apparent in terms of Clarissa’s transgression of norms, though, may be her mental capacity, as she is psychologically gifted. As previously stated, Clarissa spends a large portion of the novel recounting her memories, in which she thoroughly analyzes them and hypothesizes about their current and potential consequence. Furthermore, she displays acute awareness of her own thoughts as well as the thoughts of those around her, truly developing spoken and unspoken “odd affinities” with others. Although her intelligence is less acknowledged, we come to see that Clarissa likes to read and is only less active in intellectual pursuit because of the constraints placed upon her by the males in her life.

I will first focus on Clarissa’s mental capacity as proof of the richness of her inner life and thus her diversion from the stereotypes associated with Woman, and more specifically,

society wives. I will simultaneously explore her relationships with others, as they give the truest insight to Clarissa's character. I will then suggest that some of the same people in Clarissa's life who serve to "complete" her also serve to fragment her, and that she was most able to be herself when she was with Sally Seton. I will finally read Clarissa's character as subversive due to her closeness to women, especially Sally. This suggests that Clarissa's character best exists in a space without men, and that Woolf uses her as a female character that rejects labels explicitly and implicitly. Clarissa's transgression of norms points to the importance of taking women out of the cave in order to shine a light on their true selves, which are (almost) always different than socially constructed, heteropatriarchal depictions of women. Fittingly, literary and feminist critic Annis Pratt suggests this work can be seen as giving insight "into the psychological destruction inherent in traditional... female roles" ("Sexual Imagery in *To the Lighthouse*: A New Feminist Approach" 418).

As previously stated, one of Clarissa's most prominent characteristics is her constant stream of thought concerning her decisions in life. While contemplating the choices she has made, Clarissa often wonders whether or not she has made the right choices, and shapes her memories as multiplicitous in meaning and possibility to the point of imagining an alternative life. At several points, Clarissa reconsiders her decision to marry Richard over Peter. Within the space of two pages, Clarissa switches from thinking about Peter's "silly unconventionality, his weakness; his lack of a ghost of a notion what any one else was feeling" to kissing him, knowing that "if [she] had married him, [the] gaiety [she was experiencing with him at that moment] would have been [hers] all day! It was all over for her" (46-7). Thus, we see that Clarissa's feelings for Peter are contradictory, in which one second she can barely stand to be in his company and the next she desires physical closeness and the happiness that they could have had,

going so far as to deem her life and possibility of happiness “all over.” Although Clarissa ultimately comes to the conclusion that she has made the right choice, it is only after careful reexamination of each choice, in its entire positive and negative possibility, that she can do so. We see that Clarissa is able to completely immerse herself in whatever feeling or thought she may be having at a particular time, showing her psychological sensitivity. Clarissa’s capacity for analysis is also made apparent, in which she can vividly imagine two opposite possible life courses within minutes. Although we see that Clarissa may have difficult and confusing feelings for Peter, we also can tell that he “completes” her: her person would be incomprehensible without first knowing her relationship to Peter, showing the importance of her relationships with others.

Even though Clarissa is largely affected by her relationships with others, especially with men, she also desires to exist in a space without men, or at least often feels uncomfortable or unhappy in men’s presence. She feels “skimpy” and “schoolgirlish” compared to one of her male friends, and is accused of being “the perfect hostess” by one of her former suitors, Peter, bringing her so far as to “cry over it in her bedroom” (6-7). Men make her feel unconfident and undervalued, and ride on her insecurities. One of Clarissa’s greatest worries is that she is a disappointment to her former bohemian self and friends: the men in her life merely reinforce this insecurity, causing her to merge her own conception of self with theirs, resulting in a split in what could have been a happy sense of self into something always questioning and worried.

While Clarissa seems to desire to play the role that society has deemed appropriate for her, as a “perfect hostess” and society wife, she also has a rich inner life that society, and that these men do not recognize or support. Even Clarissa herself does not seem to recognize that she is capable of high functioning self-reflection and interpretation of the world around her; instead,

she, too, seems to see herself as more of a wife and hostess than anything else, and also states a dwindling in her intellectual pursuits. In her youth, Clarissa “read Plato in bed before breakfast; read Morris; read Shelley by the hour” (33). Now, she merely reads biographies before bed, leaving her to feel inadequate as compared to her male counterparts who continued with their intellectual endeavors. And yet she is still obviously capable of enacting the same types of inquiries, as her most current read is a serious memoir about the “retreat from Moscow” (31). However, due to her feeling of obligation to her role, she is unable, either due to the insecurities that men in her life produce or due to the larger heteropatriarchal society that she exists in, to outwardly explore her former intellectual pursuits. “Oh if she could have had her life over again!” Clarissa thinks, considering that Richard could pursue intellectualism because he “did things for [himself]”; she, on the other hand, does not do things for herself, but for other people, as per society’s expectation of women (10). As scholar Emily Jensen suggests, Clarissa knows that she has committed “one of the most common of suicides for women, that respectable destruction of the self in the interest of the other” (“Clarissa Dalloway’s Respectable Suicide” 178).

Woolf’s contemporary Arnold Bennett agrees with Clarissa’s view of herself, in which she is void of dimensionality: “As regards character-drawing, Mrs. Woolf (in my opinion) told us ten thousand things about Mrs. Dalloway, but did not show us Mrs. Dalloway”; literary reviewer A.D. Moody states that Clarissa’s “non-life” is a “tissue of shallow impressions and fantasies”; and literary critic Frank Baldanza furthermore believes Clarissa to be simple (Bennett, “Another Criticism of the New School” 190; Moody, “The Unmasking of Clarissa Dalloway” 68); Baldanza, “Clarissa Dalloway’s ‘Party Consciousness.’”). However, I argue that through close reading we see that Clarissa does embody a rich inner life, and come to realize that Clarissa is

only capable of this higher level of consciousness when alone or in a space without men.

Although Clarissa's thoughts are often presented in a stream of consciousness style and offer, as stated before, a multitude of meaning and possibilities for every topic she thinks about, it is precisely this mode of thinking, in which every aspect of a topic is explored, that points to her mental capacity. Clarissa is able to consider multiple parts of a person's personality, of a relationship, of an event, of a situation in which she did or did not participate, and offer meaningful insight, however varied and complex. She has an almost existential moment in which she considers her life after marriage, in which she has lost much of her individual personality in becoming Mrs. Dalloway: "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" (11). This is not the thought of a simple woman; instead, this is a complex exploration of society's assumption of Clarissa as a simple woman with a predetermined life course, as well as the exploration of her true self and existence after marriage. What does it mean to be middle-aged and married, when the time period leading up to marriage, and then the childbearing years, are so important for women? What does it mean that women become "invisible, unseen, unknown" after marriage? What does it mean that women may have existed differently before marriage? What is the import of a name? What, if anything, changes within oneself upon changing one's name? Clarissa takes understanding these deep, meaningful questions to task. Clearly, Clarissa feels some sort of identity loss in becoming "Mrs. Richard Dalloway." As she states, she is not even Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway; she has taken on the first and last name of her husband. Thus, her loss of name is congruent with her loss of identity, period, and her identity as a woman. Even though Clarissa

declares that her self is completed by those around her, it also seems as though this self is fragmented by these same people.

In fact, Clarissa and Sally “spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe” (34). This quote has further implications for my analysis of Clarissa and Sally’s relationship, but also is telling of Clarissa and Richard’s relationship. While at first glance Clarissa and Richard’s marriage may not seem to fit the negative qualities associated with a catastrophe, their marriage does inhibit Clarissa’s singular identity as a complexly psychologically capable woman, as she is constantly aware of her othered identity as a married woman defined by her husband (Mrs. *Richard* Dalloway) and of the contrast between Richard’s political pursuits and what she believes to be her own trivial interests, of which she merely is a “perfect hostess” who reads biographies rather than the “Plato,” etc., of her youth (6, 33). This fragmentation of self leads to much of Clarissa’s self-doubt, that is both her strength, in which she is capable of intense psychological analysis, and also her weakness, in which she devalues her worth.

Clarissa’s devaluation of self is furthered by Richard, Peter, and other men’s trivialization of her pursuit. Richard “thought it foolish of her to like excitement [throwing parties] when she knew it was bad for her heart. It was childish, he thought” (121). Instead of focusing on Clarissa’s rich inner life and mental capacities, Richard merely focuses on what could be considered her most superficial interests, her party-throwing, and its effect on her health. Even worse, her longtime friend Peter further “thought, that she enjoyed imposing herself; liked to have famous people about her; great names; was simply a snob in short” (121). Peter refuses to acknowledge any sort of skill involved in party-throwing, in bringing a diverse group together, in encouraging socialization, and in inspiring her own close connections with others. In fact, “both [Richard and Peter] were quite wrong. What she liked simply was life” (121). As succinctly as

that Clarissa implies that she enjoys life, part of which includes social gatherings. With deeper analysis, we can understand that Clarissa views her parties as a microcosm of life, in which people from all walks of life come together to enjoy culture, knowledge, and society; Richard and Peter fail to recognize the greater implications of Clarissa's acts, or her deep analytic side, and thus her true self. By doing so, they continue to fragment her self, and although they may provide a complete picture of who she is, fragmentation and all, they do not complete her in a positive way.

Thus, with whom is Clarissa truly allowed to be herself, in all of her inner complexity, safe from fragmentation? The most significant relationship in Clarissa's space without men is with Sally Seton. Clarissa's feelings for Sally are manifested in a series of memories and thoughts about Sally specifically and women in general. Clarissa is sometimes plagued by them, and at other times pleased by them, both later in her life as well as during an intimate friendship and kiss that they share in their youth. In fact, "the strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown" (34). Although Clarissa refers to her relationship with Sally as "strange," we come to see that it is only strange in terms of its contrast to her relationship with men. Clarissa's feelings for Peter and Richard are stormy, switching between bursts of adoration and then periods of doubt and even dislike. However, Clarissa differentiates her feelings for Sally, remarking on their wholeness and unmarred condition. She states that women's feelings for one another are not motivated by reasons of personal advantage, as a woman's feelings for a man might: a woman might purposely marry a rich or renowned man for her own personal gain, but a woman could not marry another woman. Thus, a woman's intimacy with another woman is

much purer than that between a man and a woman, especially in the days of one's youth in which all actions seem to be motivated by the purest of intentions.

We first learn about Clarissa's strong feelings for women as she ruminates over some of Richard's inadequacies, trying to remember active, passionate love. When Clarissa confesses that she "sometimes yields to the charm of a woman," she experiences

A sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus, an inner meaning almost expressed (32).

Although the language is imagistic and sensual, it is also highly imaginative and elusive. It attempts to describe an emotional and even intellectual process of knowing a woman, or discovering a woman, in terms of Clarissa's sensory perceptions, suggesting an almost synthesesetic mode of knowing. The passage is ecstatic, rapturous, almost orgasmic in its discovery of some characteristic of women or a woman, and yet the discovery itself is left unstated, even for Clarissa. The meaning is only "almost expressed." Clarissa does not describe her relationships or feelings for men with this type of sensuous, almost sexual language at any point during the novel. It is only during Clarissa's questioning of the love and passion that she shares with a man, her husband, that she is able to conjure these sexual feelings— not for him, but for another woman. This holds true for other revelations that Clarissa has about Sally Seton. We again see Clarissa's penchant for "odd affinities" with others, but begin to understand that she experiences the intensest such affinities with women.

This passage seems to be describing the excitement of true intimacy between women, and Clarissa is practically speechless, capable only of sensual metaphors, to describe this connection. Woolf alludes to the rich inner lives of women, capable of extreme emotion and powers of knowing, and the even richer possibilities that result when women build intimate friendships. Despite society's disapproval, when Clarissa finally "yields" to another woman's mind, she discovers the wonders of that particular woman and perhaps even of herself, as her own "inner meaning" basks in the light of another woman's self being brought forward. Clarissa's epiphany of another woman is a "revelation" that allows the "world to come closer," that allows her own self to become illuminated. Woolf implies that this world or "inner meaning" that Clarissa is able to see is of great value, and thus we can see that intimacy with other women allows for a type of higher knowledge, perhaps impossible for women who do not partake in intimate relationships with one another and perhaps impossible between men and women or between two men. However, this realization seems to be merely fleeting, and despite the strong bond between Clarissa and another woman, her realization does not last, and instead returns to the dark, shadowy place from which it came: the cave.

The relationship expressed in this passage might even verge toward the erotic if one considers the language literally. As previously stated, Woolf uses highly sensual, even sexual language to describe Clarissa's process of discovery, ending in an almost orgasmic climax. This is the type of language that McKenna refers to with the term "femography," or expression of female sexuality ("The Language of Orgasm" 29). Clarissa's revelation seems to be about both the intellectual and/or emotional capacity of the other woman and the "blush" that Clarissa tries but fails to conceal. This revelation might be a sexual one, during which Clarissa realizes the full

power of her sexuality and the possibilities of erotic passion between women. The “crocus alighting” could even be Clarissa’s clitoris, signaling the realization, perhaps a literal physical feeling or perhaps just metaphorical, of her passionate feelings towards women, which are barely allowed to surface of her consciousness, or to reach the light of day. Clarissa sees an illumination, but it passes; it is visible for one moment, the meaning is “almost expressed,” and then her realization retreats into the cave, where it has been hidden her entire life, as dictated by the society that she is a part of and the heteropatriarchal history upon which it is based.

If Clarissa is intimate, emotionally or physically, with another woman, she can fully be herself, and allow her true feelings to come forth from the cave. We can see Clarissa’s full expression of herself in her relationship with Sally: “But this question of love... this falling love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love?” (32). Clarissa refers to the “inner meaning almost expressed” upon “yielding to the charm of a woman” as falling in love with women, and believes that she had been in love with Sally, a visitor at Clarissa’s family house during a summer in her early adulthood. Although Sally initially causes envy (due to her look of “abandonment, as if she could say anything, do anything”) and Clarissa’s realization of how sheltered she was (Clarissa “knew nothing about sex—nothing about social problems”), it is also these traits that encourage Clarissa to become her best self (33). Just as Clarissa begins to desire the autonomy awarded to men, to “say anything, do anything,” she becomes interested in socio-political issues. The two spent “hour after hour... talking about life, how they were going to reform the world. They meant to found a society to abolish private property... The ideas were Sally’s, of course—but very soon she was just as excited—read Plato in bed before breakfast; read Morris; read Shelly by the hour” (33). In contrast to Clarissa’s previous declaration, “her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct”

and other humble descriptions of her abilities, Clarissa begins to actively pursue knowledge, worldly and informed discussions, and socio-political stances. We see that Clarissa seems to feel most exhilarated and proud during this period of her life.

In addition to Clarissa's pursuits of knowledge with Sally, she also experiences a self-proclaimed ecstasy around her (34). Clarissa spends several pages describing her feelings for Sally. Her

Charm was overpowering, to her at least, so that she could remember standing in her bedroom at the top of the house holding the hot-water can in her hands and saying aloud, 'She is beneath this roof... She is beneath this roof!'... She could remember going cold with excitement, and doing her hair in a kind of ecstasy... 'If it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy.' That was her feeling—Othello's feeling, and she felt it, she was convinced, as strongly as Shakespeare meant Othello to feel it, all because she was coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton! (34-5).

Clarissa is clearly enamored of Sally, and her feelings prove to be genuine and not prey to others' input when she states that Sally is charming, "to her at least." Clarissa is excited and even in a state of ecstasy merely thinking about Sally occupying the same house. Clarissa's "odd affinity" with Sally reaches a higher plateau of emotional and physical intensity.

We are given insight into this possibility after dinner. After a walk outside, Clarissa and Sally

Fell a little behind. Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just

to keep it, not to look at it—a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked, she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling! (35-6).

Here, Clarissa experiences the “most exquisite moment of her whole life.” This moment does not take place with a member of the opposite sex, and not with the other two people with whom she has shared romantic inclinations, Richard and Peter. This moment takes place with Sally Seton, “between two women just grown”; a moment that could not have taken place with a man (34).

Although the kiss is physical and potentially sexual in nature, it seems as though it is the emotional repercussions that Clarissa feels the most. Her world is “turned upside down,” as life-changing experiences are often described, and she feels as though she has been given an “infinitely precious” gift. An allusion to the cave is made: diamonds are mined from caves and then taken out to show their radiance, their brilliance when exposed to light. The metaphor of the present being unwrapped further fits the cave, as Woolf is bringing intensely complex characters from the dark by exposing them to light. The moment is highly spiritual, even “religious” in nature, and allows for Clarissa’s “revelation,” or the “inner meaning almost expressed” to finally reach to light (32). We learn that this inner meaning is a discovery of self and of an other.

Clarissa is made whole in this moment, pointing to a feeling of oneness and happiness that is never again expressed in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Clarissa furthermore discovers Sally, in all of her light, beauty, and glory. Clarissa is finally able to discover this unknown part of herself, a complexly hidden part of herself that only reaches the light of day around Sally. Her cave, or her inner self that is not made public, is finally made apparent.

By illuminating Clarissa’s cave, Sally allows Clarissa to be subversive. In the most obvious way, Sally allows Clarissa to subvert heteronormative beliefs with a simple kiss. In this

vein, the principle of consistency is thwarted, in which one's biological sex matches with society's expectations of one's gender performance, which includes society's expectations of one's sexual desires. As a female, Clarissa must perform as a stereotypically feminine woman, which includes deferring to men sexually: however, with Sally, Clarissa refuses these norms. Sally even allows Clarissa to subvert expectations of her capacity to gain knowledge and stay psychologically active. Society ignores the rich complexities of women's minds: Sally encourages Clarissa to pursue knowledge through being a role model and companion. We can see that Clarissa was likely psychologically attuned in her youth due to her ability to recall such vivid emotions from that period of her life. Her relationship with Sally, in part, as well as with Richard and Peter, have led to her life as a still psychologically active middle-aged woman. Unlike Richard and Peter, who either tie Clarissa to societal ideals or criticize her for falling prey to norms, fragmenting Clarissa's true, complex self, Sally coaxes this inner self to come forth. Only when Clarissa and Sally are "alone," or Clarissa is by herself, can this inner self come to light for one moment.

It seems as though Clarissa and Sally being together is good for both of them, and certainly feels exciting and right for Clarissa. As Sally picks a flower and kisses Clarissa, a moment so full of life that it turns Clarissa's world upside down, the couple pass a stone urn, a receptacle for the ashes of the deceased. The possible relationship and real moment that make Clarissa feel ecstatic is already before it began; it cannot flourish forever. Sally was never a possible life partner: Clarissa and Sally only exist in the past. The two women are eventually interrupted in their kiss by Peter:

It was like running one's face against a granite wall in the darkness! It was shocking; it was horrible! Not for herself. She felt only how Sally was being mauled already,

maltreated; she felt his hostility; his jealousy; his determination to break into their companionship... 'Oh this horror!' she said to herself, as if she had known all along that something would interrupt, would embitter her moment of happiness (36).

Clarissa has a disproportionately violent reaction to Peter interrupting her and Sally's privacy. She has a physical and emotional feeling of shock, despite the men being just a few yards away during the walk, and expresses the pain of blindly knocking one's face, into hard granite. In her shock, Clarissa twice repeats the "horror" of this situation. However, it is not just for herself that Clarissa feels shock and horror; Clarissa imagines Peter, who is romantically interested in Clarissa at the time, as immediately giving off signals of his rivalry, "mauling" and "maltreating" Sally for their action. Sally is visibly enabling Clarissa to subvert norms, and Peter stands as a disapproving figure of heteropatriarchal society who physically and mentally blocks the women from continuing their kiss and, after this point, their relationship: Clarissa and Sally remain acquaintances, but are never as close as they were during this moment.

In addition to interrupting the kiss, Peter also serves to interrupt Clarissa's experience of wholeness of being. Clarissa describes the "integrity" of her intimacy with Sally, implying that she is made whole by their relationship; she describes this moment as the "most exquisite moment of her whole life," "her moment of happiness," encompassed by feelings of ecstasy and a "religious" revelation (34-6). These feelings led her to finally express that "inner meaning" of herself that was "almost expressed" before, and Peter takes this "revelation" away from her (32, 36). Clarissa not only loses her intimate friendship with Sally, but what Sally meant to her: a vehicle through which she could pursue knowledge, express her complexity, and explore subverting norms. While it is clear that Peter and Clarissa share an intimacy, lending Clarissa's self to semi-completion, Peter also inhibits her self, fragmenting her. Peter's interruption of

Clarissa and Sally's kiss is a physical representation of the fragmentation that he wreaks on Clarissa emotionally.

In this scene, we see shades of Woolf's work from *A Room of One's Own*, when she calls for a metaphorical space for women to exist without men, in which they can be fully bathed in light, rather than subject to the expectations and norms valued by heteropatriarchal society. Clarissa exists best in this space (sometimes physical, sometimes mental) without men: in her youth with Sally, and in her adulthood by herself. Men ride on Clarissa's insecurities, and serve to inhibit her whole self. Furthermore, Woolf states that women only serve in relation to men, and do not exist in relationships outside of these patterns, and we see that Clarissa, too, cannot be intimate with another woman, Sally, around men (*AR* 81). As Clarissa states, it was "as if she had known all along that something would interrupt" her "moment of happiness" (*TTL* 36). Heteropatriarchal society is systemic and pervasive, and as we see throughout Clarissa's life, impossible to escape. A relationship with Sally would have literally been impossible because of these factors.

This theme of interrupting women's intimacy with the compulsion of heterosexuality continues throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, especially when Clarissa is only able to think about Sally through remembering Peter. As previously mentioned, Clarissa asks of her relationship with Sally, "Had not that, after all, been love?" (32). Clarissa must ask this question because she is uncertain of the answer; the question will always remain a question, because Clarissa could never have plausibly shared a life with Sally. We see that Woolf is creating a character that is just as ambivalent and ambiguous about labels and definitions as she is. Clarissa refuses to label either the people that she associates with or her relationships: "She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that" (8).

To further complicate matters, Clarissa spends little time describing her same-sex relationships, instead focusing on the relationships she shares with men. A large part of the narration is spent describing her marriage with Richard in comparison to the possible future she could have had with Peter. At one point, Clarissa thinks about escaping with Peter: “Take me with you, Clarissa thought impulsively, as if he were starting directly upon some great voyage; and then, next moment, it was as if five acts of a play that had been very exciting and moving were now over... it was now over” (47). We again see her complicated feelings in regards to her heterosexual relationships, in which she has spent her life as a society wife with Richard but could as easily have had a more exciting and emotionally intense life with Peter. She chooses the safer option of the two, the stability and comfort of Richard rather than the rashness of a bohemian Peter.

Significantly, it is her examination of what could have been a “very exciting and moving” life with Peter, one she deems would never have been a truly “good” decision in the first place, that allows her to think about another impossible relationship: the one she could have shared with Sally Seton. Clarissa describes her and Peter’s life as a play, in “five acts,” and her relationship with Sally likewise could have only existed in a fictional world where social norms can be eschewed because art only imitates, does not truly depict, life. While considering an alternate future with Peter, Clarissa considers all of her alternative futures, however unrealistic they may be. Clarissa and Sally share a monumental, “revelatory” and “religious” kiss, and yet the person Clarissa hesitates to say she shared a true love with is, significantly, Sally (35). A life with Sally would be an extreme example of “exciting and moving”; it would be an extreme version of her bohemian lifestyle with Peter. When Clarissa is finally able to (indirectly) think

about the possibility of her and Sally being together, we see that it was barely a possibility.

Loving Sally was out of the question, and living an openly romantic or even highly intimate life together would have been impossible. Clarissa's only hope for a life with Sally would have been one veiled in secrecy, and yet even this was nearly impossible given the expectations that society had for her. Clarissa's detailing of her relationship with Sally is located only in the past.

Although Clarissa's socio-historical position places her in a situation in which same-sex intimacy is unacceptable, making the male-dominated heteropatriarchal space that she exists in extremely constricting, we see that her mind is limitless, allowing her to deviate from norms via memories of Sally.

## Chapter II: Lily Briscoe's Completed Vision in *To The Lighthouse*

At its surface, *To The Lighthouse* serves as an impressionistic depiction of a family on vacation; the narrative more broadly explores themes of marriage, parenthood, childhood, selfhood, and gender through Woolf's use of stream of consciousness and shifting perspectives. The Ramsay family, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and their eight children, spend the summer at their vacation house, to which they invite several guests, including the young artist, Lily Briscoe, the budding academic, Charles Tansley, the widowed intellectual Mr. Bankes, and the couple who become engaged at the summer house: Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle. Beginning with this vacation and ending 10 years later with the Ramsays and Lily revisiting both the house and the memories from that summer, the book creates a truly deviant female character in Lily Briscoe. Lily begins the novel revering, however cautiously, Mrs. Ramsay, a paragon of traditional femininity, and ends by rejecting Mrs. Ramsay's hold over herself and her art, symbolically rejecting heteropatriarchal forces. She comes to see Mr. Ramsay and Tansley reinforcing and ultimately causing Mrs. Ramsay's staunch adherence to normative femininity, and perhaps, Mrs. Ramsay's demise.

Based on how others describe Lily, we immediately learn that she is not a traditional female character, and instead exhibits unique physical traits, extreme independence, artistry, and an interest in marriage and family in so much as they are an unfamiliar spectacle to her, but in fact relationships in which she is ultimately disinterested. Our first impression of Lily is one of dismissal, in which Mrs. Ramsay states that it "did not matter" that Lily should hear Mr. Ramsay quirkily singing, and then goes on to describe Lily: "With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face she [Lily] would never marry; one could not take her painting very seriously; she was an independent little creature" (21). We see that Lily is so different as to be described as

foreign. Furthermore, Herrmann suggests that Lily's "little Chinese eyes" "[connote] an exoticism associated with a younger generation of independent women" ("Woolf, Virginia [1882-1941]" 764). Fittingly, we come to see that Lily and Mrs. Ramsay exist at opposite poles of femininity. Mrs. Ramsay describes Lily as deviant from normative standards of beauty, and states that her implied ugliness will keep her from attracting a man to marry. Lily is immediately described in terms of her marriagability, foreshadowing Mrs. Ramsay's obsession with encouraging her younger guests to marry, and the implicit conflict that results between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily concerning marriage. Mrs. Ramsay again dismisses Lily by stating that one could not take her painting "seriously." Finally, Lily is a "little creature," likely described as less than a woman due to her looks, unmarriageable/unmarried status, and independence, all modern and untraditional traits compared with the very conventional Mrs. Ramsay, whose constant attention on her husband, children, and guests underlines her domesticity.

Literary critic Theresa L. Crater argues that Lily Briscoe is the first of Woolf's characters to escape the totalizing image of Woman. Woman is "represented in the novel as Mrs. Ramsay, and the silencing presence of the Law-of-the-Father, appearing as Mr. Ramsay. [Lily finds a] way to represent a reality of women's lives which is different from the figure of Woman" ("Lily Briscoe's Vision: The Articulation of Silence" 122). In other words, Lily is the first female character created by Woolf who is completely removed from the cave, bathed in light, and not subject to many of the shadows of her predecessors. Literary critic Ozlem Uzundemir furthermore argues that *To the Lighthouse* allows us to see the contrast between the traditional Woman, Mrs. Ramsay, and a modern, intricate woman with a non-monolithic experience, Lily Briscoe ("Challenging Gender Roles Through Narrative Techniques: Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*" 8). *To the Lighthouse* expands Woolf's work to take women out of the cave in both

*A Room of One's Own* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. Similarly to my previous readings of both novels, Lily functions as a subversive female, but instead of implicitly questioning femininity and heteronormative traditions, she explicitly questions these ideas. Lily, too, shows that she is a deep thinker, psychologically gifted in analyzing herself and others, as well as intellectually and artistically capable of questioning the norms around her.

While I do not believe Mrs. Ramsay and Lily are completely dichotomous, I do find it useful for this Chapter to create a contrast between the two, because both women almost completely fit stereotypes of tradition and modernity. In some senses, Lily is enthralled with marriage (she had an “impulse to fling herself [thank heaven she had always resisted so far] at Mrs. Ramsay’s knee and say to her—but what could one say to her? ‘I’m in love with you?’ No, that was not true. ‘I’m in love with this all,’ waving her hand at the hedge, at the house, at the children. It was absurd, it was impossible” [24]). At the same time, Lily finds herself struggling against much of what the Ramsay’s marriage stands for: in the broadest sense, Mrs. Ramsay’s complete deferral to Mr. Ramsay. While Lily is an independent artist, Mrs. Ramsay exists as a microcosm of traditional femininity and the marriage system of the day. Lily imagines Mrs. Ramsay in “the shape of a dome,” signifying her encompassing, social nature (58). Lily “liked to be alone,” and comes to realize that she exists best in a space without men. However, she only has this realization after a series of transgressions against traditional femininity and heteropatriarchy. Lily increases her expression of deviance as time passes through the novel: at first she reveres Mrs. Ramsay, despite her misgivings about marriage and endures, however unhappily, Mr. Ramsay’s needy tendencies. But Lily finally comes to renounce Mrs. Ramsay and rejects her meddling and proclamations in favor of marriage and refuses to bow to Mr. Ramsay’s narcissism, and, in a sense, blames him for Mrs. Ramsay’s death.

Despite their contrast in character, Mrs. Ramsay and Lily share a deeply intimate bond, mostly invoked by Lily, providing one aspect of Lily's deviance to society's expectation of femininity, which does not include close relations to women who are not one's mother. I will first focus on this relationship in order to provide an example of Lily's subversions. I will next explore how Lily's relationship with Mrs. Ramsay allows her to develop a rich interiority, and to consider stereotypically unfeminine philosophical questions of being, alluding to the cave. I will then suggest that despite the closeness that Lily desires to share with Mrs. Ramsay, this closeness is ultimately harmful in her pursuit of self-actualization, which she is most able to achieve (and arguably does achieve at the end of the novel) while painting. I will finally show Lily's evolution of deviance in which she ultimately completely rejects patriarchy. I will argue that these close readings suggest that Lily's character best exists in a space without the presence of needy and/or commandeering men, who inhibit her art, as well as anyone, male or female, who continues to reinforce patriarchy through his or her actions. Finally, I will argue that Lily exists without a label due to her complexity, but that she most importantly does not fit the label of Woman as assigned to women so often by male authors: as Crater suggests, she "finds an alternative to the identity they offer through her art ("Lily Briscoe's Vision: The Articulation of Silence" 125).

Lily makes multiple allusions to the cave while considering Mrs. Ramsay. She "imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of the woman [Mrs. Ramsay] who was, physically touching her, were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out would teach one everything, but they would never be offered openly, never made public" (*TTL* 57). These chambers are "treasures," containing knowledge, insight, beauty, *pure information* that has yet been undiscovered, that have the potential to "teach one everything," similar to the "inner meaning" that is "almost expressed" to

Clarissa during her kiss with Sally, alluding to their powerful ability to teach one about oneself and others. However, they will remain covered because they do not fit within the paradigm of Woman; instead they suggest a complex interiority beyond the grasp (or perhaps beyond the wishes) of male authors. This quote appears during a moment within the text in which we see that Lily may have romantic, sexual, and/or highly intimate feelings toward Mrs. Ramsay.

While Mrs. Ramsay is clearly not interested in Lily in a romantic or sexual way because she states at multiple points how happy, though complicated, her relationship with Mr. Ramsay is, and because she continuously tries to marry Lily off instead of focusing on her as an individual with unique needs and an artistic ambition, Lily reveres Mrs. Ramsay to the point of romantic desire. The passage begins with Lily laying her head on Mrs. Ramsay's lap, and as Lily "sit[s] on the floor with her arms round Mrs. Ramsay's knees, close as she could get, [she] smiles to think that Mrs. Ramsay would never know the reason of that pressure" (*TTL*, 57). The sexual closeness of her positioning is evident, and Lily placing her arms around Mrs. Ramsay, trying to be as "close as she could get," further heightening their physical proximity. Although Mrs. Ramsay seems to be amenable to this physical closeness, she does not think of it as anything more than a physical manifestation of an intimate conversation between women, significantly about marriage in which Mrs. Ramsay wishes a husband for Lily; Lily, however, sees her closeness, or the "pressure" she is placing upon Mrs. Ramsay with her arms clasped as something different, something special, signifying an unspoken (unspeakable) closeness.

Lily will never tell Mrs. Ramsay how she feels, and Mrs. Ramsay will never guess that Lily may have romantic feelings towards her, thus Lily smiles to herself, comfortable with the secret because she "liked to be alone" (56). She also probably was aware of the impossibility of their relationship, given Mrs. Ramsay's marriage and the difference in their philosophies about

gender roles. Nonetheless, she still daydreams about the possibilities of the love that they could share: “Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? For it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought, learning her head on Mrs. Ramsay’s knee” (*TTL*, 57). Lily longs for a more intimate connection with Mrs. Ramsay, one that involves love “as people called it.” This seems to infer that Lily is speaking of love as intimacy or sex, not so easily defined by oneself or others, and something she has not experienced yet except toward Mrs. Ramsay. This would make her and Mrs. Ramsey “one,” perhaps sexually or perhaps in terms of becoming more intimate with one another as their hearts and minds became one. Mrs. Ramsay, as a symbol of society, expects Lily to get married and enjoy the society of others; Lily, on the other hand, is most invested in her deviant preference for both being alone and being one with Mrs. Ramsay.

Although Woolf has made it clear that the “inscribed tablets” of women’s experiences and relationships with one another are worth exposing, Lily is not so much interested in the type of information one might gain from the tablet’s exposure. Instead of completely understanding Mrs. Ramsay as a person and woman, she wants unity with her, a different type of knowledge that comes through intimacy, both physical and emotional. She wants the experience of being close to a woman: a deep, meaningful connection with Mrs. Ramsay, “intimacy itself, which is knowledge.” She tries to achieve this unity through her painting of Mrs. Ramsay, which Mrs. Ramsay merely “smiles” at, dismissing Lily yet again (21). Here we see Lily’s subversions: not only does she have romantic feelings toward Mrs. Ramsay, and desire a “unity” that is very intimate for two women to share, she also seems to have a complex interiority, sparked by closeness with another woman, capable of theorizing about knowledge and unity and intimacy.

She asks grandiose questions: “What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? Could the body achieve, or the mind, subtly mingling in the intricate passage of the brain? Or the heart? Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one?” (57). This type of philosophizing is unexpected of Lily: Mr. Ramsay is supposedly the great thinker in the house and novel, as both the male head of house and also a symbol of patriarchy, and yet Lily seems to intrinsically understand very difficult theoretical subjects without a known education. Finally, Lily attempts to understand and garner this unity via painting, a nontraditional occupation for woman, and a profession significantly known for its members’ bohemian, nonconventional lifestyles. Instead of using a standard male mode of analysis, reason, or a standard female mode of analysis, emotion, Lily uses abstraction.

While Lily is in Mrs. Ramsay’s presence, she is able to fully exert her subjectivity. Lily’s subjectivity is exerted both in Mrs. Ramsay’s physical presence, such as when Lily is painting her or when she is wrapped around her knees, but also in her emotional presence, in which Lily’s thoughts are centered upon others, but somehow always draw to Mrs. Ramsay, either by explicitly referring to her or more implicitly thinking about the Ramsay family structure and the norms that Lily wishes to and does eventually defy. Lily becomes lost in thought while painting, considering and evaluating the lives of those around her, dismissing the norms that Mrs. Ramsay is prey to and that Lily herself must constantly try to escape, and thinking about the nature of identity and intimacy. Lily muses about Mrs. Ramsay, but also considers the other Ramsay family members and guests. Lily thinks about Mr. Bankes, how he is “generous, pure-hearted, heroic,” yet also is easily angered, spoiled with wealth, and proud (29). She then reaches an almost existential moment, asking, “How then did it work out, all this? How did one judge people, think of them? How did one add up this and that and conclude that it was liking one felt,

or disliking? And to those words, what meaning attached, after all?” (29). Lily is similar to Clarissa Dalloway in that she is constantly evaluating those around her; she differs in that instead of just being psychologically and philosophically gifted, she is also intellectually gifted, able to not only conceive of, but also critically question matters to which others are not attuned.

In contrast to Clarissa’s sexually charged friendship with Sally Seton, Mrs. Ramsay serves as both a romantic and a maternal figure for Lily. While Mrs. Ramsay has provided a way for Lily to fully commandeer her inner life, she has also dismissed Lily as a person and also her painting, which is of utmost importance to Lily (56). For, “Mrs. Ramsay cared not a fig for her [Lily’s] painting, or triumphs won by her” (56). The only triumph that Mrs. Ramsay is capable of rewarding is Lily’s marriage; the triumph that Lily wishes to be rewarded for is her painting. In fact, as Lily leaves Mrs. Ramsay after a period of painting,

The demons set on her who often brought her to the verge of tears and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child. Such she often felt herself – struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say: ‘But this is what I see; this is what I see’, and so to clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to puck from her (24).

The language in this passage is vivid, describing the fear of a child in the dark, and hinting at demons grasping at Lily as she tries her best to defend herself. We thus see that for Lily to complete her work, she must compete against “a thousand forces”– Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay, the rest of the houseguests, society, patriarchy, her own self-doubt as caused by the preceding forces– in order to complete her vision, in order to even maintain her vision. While the passage can be read literally as about her painting, which for anyone would be difficult to complete with the judgmental eyes of others constantly hovering, it can also be read as Lily’s vision standing in

for herself, in all of her complexity and subversions to norms, attempting to stay true in the face of society and heteropatriarchy. Mrs. Ramsay, a perfect example of feminine sensibility and adherence to tradition, reminds Lily of the consequences of defeat in struggle.

While Mrs. Ramsay is capable of allowing Lily's complex interiority to come to light, she also inhibits her, by her frequent dismissals as well as by her constant nagging about the importance of marriage. Despite Lily's strong feelings of professed love, we soon discover that Lily is ambivalent in her feelings toward Mrs. Ramsay. Even during Lily's moment of physical intimacy with Mrs. Ramsay, in which she is literally wrapped around her lap, she cannot help but to criticize Mrs. Ramsay "and laugh and laugh and laugh, laugh almost hysterically at the thought of Mrs. Ramsay presiding with immutable calm over destinies which she completely failed to understand" (56). Mrs. Ramsay believes that marriage is the best and only pathway available to her young houseguests, because "an unmarried woman has missed the best of life" (56). However, Lily does not believe this sentiment (although sometimes she does feel a bit sad when considering the miserable future others imagine her having), and instead thinks that Mrs. Ramsay's meddling is unnecessary, a sign of ignorance. An essential difference exists between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily, in which Mrs. Ramsay is too swaddled in the hegemony of traditional married life to even consider Lily's modern sentiments about remaining unmarried, and more importantly, happily unmarried. Thus, Mrs. Ramsay "completely fail[s] to understand" Lily's desired future or very real future, which we come to see is a mostly happy life fulfilled by art, and instead writes her off as unsuccessful and missing "the best of life."

This failure to understand Lily's desires and true self causes Mrs. Ramsay to continuously mull over marrying Lily, imagining her marrying the widowed Mr. Bankes, who, ironically, Lily had earlier stated her respect yet ultimate disdain for. After merely sighting the two walking

together, Mrs. Ramsay thinks, “Ah, but was that not Lily Briscoe strolling along with William Bankes? ... Yes, indeed it was. Did that not mean that they would marry? Yes, it must! ... Lily’s charm was her Chinese eyes, aslant in her white, puckered little face, but it would take a clever man to see it... Smiling, for an admirable idea had flashed upon her this very second – William and Lily should marry” (78, 31). Fittingly, Mrs. Ramsay focuses on Lily’s outward appearance, because she is unable to comprehend Lily’s complex interiority, which would illuminate that Lily does not desire a marriage to Mr. Bankes. However, Mrs. Ramsay is completely oblivious, happily thinking this an “admirable idea,” and does not stop to consider the absurdity of desiring to marry two people after only seeing them strolling on the lawn together. This absurdity is even clearer to the reader who has discovered that Lily rejects the notion of marriage, and Mr. Bankes, too, prefers to be alone. Mrs. Ramsay believes that she would be doing Lily and Mr. Bankes a favor by coupling them; in fact, she would be doing damage to each character’s true self.

Lily never hears of Mrs. Ramsay’s idea to marry her off to Mr. Bankes, but is hyperaware of Mrs. Ramsay’s desire for her to get married, period. Lily constantly thinks about Mrs. Ramsay’s belief that “an unmarried woman has missed the best of life,” and while she ultimately finds that this is untrue, she is still hurt by someone whom she so admires making so little of Lily as an intelligent, creative, and capable individual (56). Mrs. Ramsay’s judgment and lack of understanding begin to weigh on Lily, as she states that Mrs. Ramsay is “unquestionably the loveliest of people,” but that she has a certain “highhandedness”: “she was not willful; she was commanding” (55). After professing such words of love and praise, we see that Lily actually feels depressed and resentful because of Mrs. Ramsay’s behavior. Mrs. Ramsay would

Insist that she [Lily] must, Minta must, they all must marry, since in the whole world, whatever laurels might be tossed to her (but Mrs. Ramsay cares not a fig for her

painting), or triumphs won by her (probably Mr. Ramsay had had her share of those), and here she saddened, darkened, and came back to her chair, there could be no disputing this: ... an unmarried woman has missed the best of life, again dismissing and attempting to constrain Lily (56). Mrs. Ramsay's equation of happiness and even life with marriage saddens Lily, because she knows that she will never fit this equation, and that Mrs. Ramsay pities her. Lily attempts to argue back: "Oh but, Lily would say, there was her father; her home; even, had she dared to say it, her painting. But all this seemed so little, so virginal, against the other. Yet, as the night wore on... gathering a desperate courage she would urge her own exemption from the universal law; plead for it; she liked to be alone; she liked to be herself; she was not made for that" (56). Lily knows that she has a full life outside of marriage, consisting of her family, her home, and her art, and yet, because of constant societal pressure, and recently, Mrs. Ramsay's pressure, to be Woman, and to get married, and to abide by "the universal law," she feels as if this life may not be as full as she once thought. She needs this "desperate courage" to rally against Mrs. Ramsay's "commanding" wishes. Luckily, she is able to console herself, courageously convincing herself that what she wants is right for her, and that she does experience a fullness of life through herself. Unfortunately, Lily knows that "Mrs. Ramsay's simple certainty... that her dear Lily... was a fool" (56). However, Lily concludes that Mrs. Ramsay has "limited, old-fashioned ideas," and while not explicitly stating these thoughts, or arguing with Mrs. Ramsay during the first part of the book, she does eventually overcome Mrs. Ramsay, and by extension, heteropatriarchal society, by completing her painting at the end of the novel.

Mrs. Ramsay is not the only destructive force in Lily's life; Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Tansley also serve to limit her. Both limit her differently, Mr. Ramsay with implicit pleas to be

acknowledged and to be made to feel important, while Mr. Tansley explicitly denounces women. Although Mr. Ramsay is seemingly intelligent, progressing through the alphabet of knowledge, he also extremely needy in the company of others, especially women. Lily finds him “rather pitiable and distasteful” because of his constant need to be positively reinforced (51). As a nontraditional woman, Lily is not versed in serving as a mirror of admiration for men<sup>1</sup>, and thus feels uncomfortable when Mr. Ramsay presents himself for compliments. She also finds Mr. Ramsay to be intrusive while she is painting. At several points throughout the novel, she is unable to paint, which the reader comes to realize is her main mode of expression, because of his presence: “But with Mr. Ramsay bearing down on her, she could do nothing. Every time he approached... ruin approached, chaos approached. She could not paint” (162). Mr. Ramsay’s male presence, as a patriarch, inhibits Lily’s creativity, in much the same way that he limits Mrs. Ramsay and the rest of the members of the household in an almost comically tyrannical way. Lily’s painting is something that cannot be discovered in “any language known to man,” and expresses similarly Clarissa Dalloway’s “inner meaning” that is only present, or nearly present, among women.

Mr. Tansley, a perfect example of the professor<sup>2</sup> whom Woolf discusses in *A Room of One’s Own*, also serves as both a metaphorical and literal block to Lily’s creativity. Their

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<sup>1</sup> 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” (AR 35). Women are mirrors that reflect men’s ideas, accomplishments, and egos, and in order to comply with society’s expectations, women must encourage, magnify, and compliment them in return. Women are compared to mirrors, which have no purpose in and of themselves other than to reflect what or whomever may peer into them, very fitting for a patriarchal view of the unimportance of females as unique human beings.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Tansley is a highly patriarchal and egotistically needy man, serving as a check against any progress or freedom that is attempted by the talented and independent Lily Briscoe. He is a manifestation of the professor who “was the power and the money and the influence” (AR 33).

relationship can be seen when Lily poignantly says that Mr. Tansley sat “precisely in the middle of the view” of the window (93). Not only is Mr. Tansley literally blocking her view of the outside world, but also metaphorically blocking her as an artist and as a woman attempting to rise above tradition. By obstructing the view, Mr. Tansley in turn hampers Lily’s creativity, which prevents her from achieving anything intellectually or artistically, and blocks her path to independence. Mr. Tansley, as a professor, believes that women “can’t write, can’t paint” (94). Significantly, Mr. Tansley attacks women’s intellectual and creative endeavors, which are exactly the pursuits that Lily is most involved in. Lily realizes, “He was really... the most uncharming human being she [Lily] had ever met. Then why did she mind what he said? Women can’t write, women can’t paint – what did that matter coming from him, since clearly it was not true to him but for some reason helpful to him, and that was why he said it?” (94). Although Lily realizes that much of Mr. Tansley’s talk comes from his own insecurity, she is still bothered and even threatened by his dismissal of women. Through these incidents, we see that Lily best exists in both a metaphorical and literal space without men. This space is where Lily is best able to complete her painting.

Despite these constraints, Lily overcomes both men and Mrs. Ramsay, who in her constant push for marriage, we see has served as a stand in for heteropatriarchal society, encouraging Lily to conform to norms rather than accepting Lily as an independent artist. Lily first defies Mr. Tansley, by refusing to adhere to the norm of serving as his “looking glass.” Toward the end of the visit to the Ramsay house, Mr. Tansley sits stewing during a conversation of which he is not a part, wondering why his opinion has not been asked:

Lily Briscoe knew [this]. Sitting opposite him could she not see, as in an X-ray photograph, the ribs and thigh bones of the young man’s desire to impress himself lying

dark in the mist of his flesh – that thin mist which convention had laid over his burning desire to break into the conversation? But, she thought, screwing up her Chinese eyes, and remembering how he sneered at women, ‘can’t paint, can’t write’, why should I help him to relieve himself? There is a code of behavior she knew, whose seventh article (it may be) says that on occasions of this sort it behoves the woman, whatever her own occupation may be, to go to the help of the young man opposite so that he may expose and relieve the thigh bones, the ribs, of his vanity, of his urgent desire to assert himself... [Instead] she sat there smiling (99).

Thus, we see Lily has triumphed over Mr. Tansley by not subscribing to the game of being a “proper” woman in order to let him be a “proper” man. Lily’s triumph not only rests on resisting patriarchal norms, but also upon her view of traditional gender roles: she will not play the role of his mirror, much less actually *be* his mirror. She even gains some satisfaction out of her subversion in this scenario, “smiling” to herself over the absurdity of Mr. Tansley and the situation itself.

Lily next defies Mr. Ramsay, 10 years after her initial visit to the Ramsay house, by refusing to comply with his egotistical neediness. After Mrs. Ramsay has passed away, Mr. Ramsay is in need of even more reinforcement of his power and intelligence, and Lily finds herself, as the female in the house, being burdened with this responsibility. Lily imagines Mr. Ramsay saying, “You [Lily] shan’t touch your canvas, he [Mr. Ramsay] seemed to say, bearing down on her, till you’ve given me what I want of you” (164). Lily struggles with how to respond when Mr. Ramsay presents himself for admiration, stating that she is uncertain how to proceed in mimicry of femininity, and also that she does not wish to submit to his patriarchy. Eventually, Crater argues that Lily accidentally finds a solution in complimenting his boots:

The response to Mr. Ramsay she does give which finally gratifies him is sincere, not insincere like the relations of men and women she deplored ten years ago sitting at the dinner table. She admires his boots, and this, quite by accident, allows him a chance to assert himself. After he has shown off his superiority to this female by assuring her that these are the best boots in the world and showing her that he can tie better knots than she can, he is restored and goes off happy... She helps him without dissolving into romantic thralldom or powerful self-abnegation, an important distinction from Mrs. Ramsay's way ("Lily Briscoe's Vision: The Articulation of Silence" 132).

Thus, Lily is able to stay true to herself by not merely becoming a mirror, but also to gratify someone whom, deep down, she truly cares for and pities, despite his neediness and patriarchal tyranny.

Finally, although Mrs. Ramsay is dead, Lily is able to triumph over her, largely by not choosing marriage, but also by completing her painting. Mrs. Ramsay had attacked Lily's character throughout the novel by calling her a "fool" for not wanting to get married and constantly berating her with the need to get married, reinforcing that an "unmarried woman had missed the best of life." However, Lily overcomes this by refusing to get married, and not marrying Mr. Bankes in particular. Lily thinks, "summing up the Rayleys, [that she had] triumphed over Mrs. Ramsay, who would never know how Paul went to coffeehouses and had a mistress; how she stood here painting, had never married, not even William Bankes... What was this mania of hers for marriage?" (190). Literary critic Sharon Wood Proudfit argues that it is at this moment that Lily finally accepts that Mrs. Ramsay was truly misguided and controlled by patriarchy ("Lily Briscoe's Painting: A Key to Personal Relationships in *To the Lighthouse* 38). By refusing to get married, Lily is finally free of the constraint that Mrs. Ramsay put on her,

keeping her from completely committing to a deviant life as an unmarried woman. “For really, what did she feel, come back after all these years and Mrs. Ramsay dead? Nothing, nothing – nothing that she could express at all” (159). We thus see that although Mrs. Ramsay has clearly had an enormous impact on Lily’s life, both positive and negative, that this cannot be put into words, and that moving on is Lily’s only option.

Despite the constraints faced by Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Tansley, Lily ultimately overcomes their control at the end of the novel, signifying her complete breach from society and desire to live outside of norms. Although Lily had implicitly defied norms throughout the novel, and thought heavily about her subversions, she does not explicitly act on these feelings until the end of the novel. Early in the novel, Lily considers her painting, and we see her dabbling with an explicit act of subversion: “It was a question, she remembered, how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left. She might do it by bringing the line of the branch across so... but the danger was that by doing that the unity of the whole might be broken” (60). We see that early on, Lily was hesitant to break norms, as seen in her painting. Although the painting was of Mrs. Ramsay, it can also be thought of as representing Lily’s desire to break norms and yet early hesitancy to do so with full commitment. However, thoughts of breaking free from Mrs. Ramsay flit through Lily’s mind as she finally returns to her painting 10 years after starting it. She experiences revelations about Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay, Mr. Tansley, and her entire experience all those summers ago. Suddenly, “It had flashed upon her that she would move the tree to the middle [of the painting], and need never marry anybody, and she had felt an enormous exultation” (191). She frantically begins to paint, moving objects around, and finally decides what to do with those two masses that she had painted earlier in her life. Lily “looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line

there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision” (226). Finally, Lily connects her desire to break norms with her true self, and is able to act on these desires without constraint, as seen in her triumphs over Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Tansley. Just as the painting has finally been made whole, so too, has Lily.

Lily’s final brush stroke has been much theorized about, with Proudfit suggesting that it is a “symbol of masculine achievement, the line integrating the painting, just as Mr. Ramsay’s success in toppling Mrs. Ramsay’s matriarchy brings about the integration of the family” (“Lily Briscoe’s Painting: A Key to Personal Relationships in *To the Lighthouse*” 26). While this is an interesting theory, I believe that the line is more of a symbol of toppling patriarchy (at least for one individual, Lily), as Lily is finally able to have her “vision” in which she is able to be happily single, to live alone, and to create freely, significantly after she has “defeated” Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Tansley, symbols of patriarchy and heteropatriarchy that attempted to control her from the beginning of the novel. Lily finally completes a work that was not taken seriously by any of the other characters of the novel, showing her triumph. “When Lily Briscoe finishes her painting, not only is she proving Charles Tansley wrong when he told her ‘women can’t write, women can’t paint’ (94), she is, for the first time in Woolf’s fiction, directly expressing female subjectivity... Lily [is] capable of articulating her vision of being a woman other than the prescribed role of Woman” (Crater, “Lily Briscoe’s Vision: The Articulation of Silence” 121). While Clarissa and Chloe and Olivia hinted at and even at some points illuminated female subjectivity, it is only Lily who is finally able to completely achieve it.

The ending of *To The Lighthouse* \ can also be read as a defeat of heteropatriarchy in Mrs. Ramsay’s honor. As Lily attempts to resolve her feelings for Mrs. Ramsay at the end of the

novel, she considers Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's marriage, lamenting that Mr. Ramsay "is petty, selfish, vain, egotistical; he is spoilt; he is a tyrant; he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death," and that "That man [Mr. Ramsay], she thought, her anger rising in her, never gave; that man took. She, on the other hand, would be forced to give. Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died—and had left all this. Really, she was angry with Mrs. Ramsay" (29, 163). Thus, Mrs. Ramsay was a victim of heteropatriarchy via her marriage, and also a victim of patriarchy via Mr. Ramsay's tyranny. Lily foreshadows that Mr. Ramsay's constant need for a mirror has been "wear[ing] Mrs. Ramsay to death," and eventually Mrs. Ramsay does die, possibly because of the strain put on her by Mr. Ramsay to be the perfect wife, mother, and Woman. Mrs. Ramsay was, in many ways, good, and constantly was "giving," as Lily describes, attempting to make others happy, even if it was only within the confines of her own hegemonic thinking. As Crater suggests, Lily is angry not only with Mr. Ramsay, for forcing this role upon Mrs. Ramsay, thus making her constantly act as an advocate to heteropatriarchy around Lily, but also at Mrs. Ramsay, for allowing this to happen, and not having the strength that Lily possesses to be deviant ("Lily Briscoe's Vision: The Articulation of Silence" 131). However, this anger finally seemed to be resolved when Lily makes the final stroke of her painting, thereby destroying heteropatriarchy's hold on her own life, and presumably on the life of Mrs. Ramsay, who was so integral, ironically, to her art.

## Conclusion

Through this thesis, I have come to realize that two of Woolf's characters that I thought I understood are incredibly more complex than my original thinking, and that these same two women characters share significant similarities, instead of being complete opposites via my original thinking. I originally conceived of Clarissa Dalloway as a society wife, most concerned with throwing a party; I thought of Lily Briscoe as an insecure artist, longing for the maternal love of Mrs. Ramsay. After reading (and re-reading) these novels through my studies at the University and for this project, though, I realize that I, like the many Western male authors that Woolf criticizes, was reading these characters as too simplistic. Clarissa is much more than her party: she is made up of the interactions, and perhaps more significantly, her contemplation of these interactions, that she has shared with those closest to her over many years. Thoughts of the past and present weigh heavily on her, and she encompasses a remarkable psychological capacity and intuition. Clarissa's kiss with Sally is not merely a crush or an experiment: it is truly one of the defining moments of her life. Lily, on the other hand, endures an incredible journey of self-discovery and ultimate rejection of heteropatriarchy. Her insecurities are not selfish, but a mixture of ambivalence toward family life, conviction against marriage, and the discouragement that accompanies these views, not because she is embarrassed of or disappointed with them, but because she knows that society, and significantly Mrs. Ramsay, find fault with her because of them. Lily is courageous in that she overcomes Mrs. Ramsay as a symbol of Woman, despite her reverence and love for Mrs. Ramsay, and in that she completes a painting that symbolizes this struggle.

Clarissa and Lily do share many differences: Clarissa is a society wife while Lily is unmarried and prefers to be alone; Clarissa has no occupation while Lily is an artist; Clarissa

does not regret her marriage to Richard while Lily is violently opposed to marriage; etc.

However, this thesis has shown me their similarities. As Ronchetti suggests, both women are, in fact, artists (*The Artist, Society, and Sexuality in Virginia Woolf's Novels*). Lily's artistry is more obvious, in her visual skills in creating a painting. Clarissa can also be thought of as artistic in her party throwing: she brings together diverse people in a decorated setting in order to achieve enjoyable society; she is a "social artist" (Ronchetti 52). Lily also brings people together: she spends much of *To the Lighthouse* struggling with how to effectively paint Mrs. Ramsay and James' relationship. Bowlby suggests that Clarissa and Lily are analogous in that they must bring together disparate entities: Clarissa via her party in her attempt to join people from all aspects of her life and Lily via her painting in her attempt to understand familial relations in contrast with her own feelings about family and marriage (*Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations*). Clarissa and Lily share highly intimate physical moments with other women that lead to psychological revelations. Clarissa desires to be unbothered by Peter's judgment and Richard's dismissal; Lily desires to be completely removed from the men in *To the Lighthouse*, especially Mr. Ramsay and Charles Tansley. Clarissa thrives alone in her attic and when able to think in peace; Lily thrives when she is able to paint alone without the judgment or interruption of others. Each woman heavily relies on memory, significantly of women (Sally Seton and Mrs. Ramsay), which again results in revelations about themselves and intimacies with women. Finally, both women significantly reach a moment of happiness or completion at the end of their respective novels: Clarissa throws a successful party in *Mrs. Dalloway* and Lily completes her vision in *To the Lighthouse*.

Thus, I have learned to not categorize characters too quickly, or to label them too simply, or at all. I believe that this is Woolf's intention with these novels, to maintain the notion that

labeling characters is not useful and ultimately constricting; the important work that remains is to keep characters complex, as people are. Other literary critics do not agree. Many of the critics listed in the Introduction to this thesis heavily rely on labels in order to claim Woolf for their particular discourse. Lesbian-feminist critic Toni A. H. McNaron in particular thinks that for Woolf's characters, "fragmentation and approximation become a way of life" ("The Albanians of was it the Armenians?": Virginia Woolf's Lesbianism as Gloss on Her Modernism" 135). She argues that Woolf is unable to portray women as "integrated and whole" because of Woolf's "inability to give full play to her lesbian self" (136). Thus, Chloe and Olivia, Clarissa Dalloway, and Lily Briscoe are each difficult and significantly incomplete characters because of Woolf's failure to come to terms with her sexuality in either her personal life or her writing. I think that Woolf labeling her characters as lesbian would have been limiting: Borrowing from Butler, Woolf labeling her characters would have merely reinforced already existing heteropatriarchal systems of power, "the power of language to subordinate and exclude women" (*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* 26). While Woolf does not go so far as to subscribe to Irigaray's proposed entirely new discourse for women, in which femininity is not erased by phallogocentrism, she does refuse to partake in much of the politicized, gendered, and sexualized, thus stigmatized, language as offered by heteropatriarchal society. In fact, in opposition to Irigaray, Butler argues,

That the power regimes of heterosexism and phallogocentrism seek to augment themselves through a constant repetition of their logic, their metaphysic, and their naturalized ontologies does not imply that repetition itself ought to be stopped— as if it could be. If repetition is bound to persist as the mechanism of the cultural reproduction of identities, then the crucial question emerges: What kind of subversive repetition might

call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself? (*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* 32).

Butler states that language as it exists now relies on a heteropatriarchal system of meaning, and thus to use words within this system is to promote this meaning. She argues, however, that to solve this problem, language is too pervasive to be stopped, so language must be used in new, subversive ways in order to serve as a critique.

As example, Irigaray offers a view of Woman that is other to man, the opposite, or negative, of everything that is masculine. This negative image is signified each time the label, or identity, “woman” or “feminine” is spoken or written, thus repeating the hegemonic belief in women’s inferiority to men. The same can be said for other labels of subversion, such as “lesbian.” Post-structuralist philosopher Michel Foucault might argue that the affirmation of “woman” is an extension of sexism. Language reinforces power relations, in which norms are the subject, and deviations from the norm are othered, because of the creation of signifiers, or words, that exist only in opposition to other signifiers. Thus, Butler argues patriarchy is reinforced via power relations as signified by language: “identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes... as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures” (“Imitation and Gender Insubordination” 301). Thus, Butler’s notion of using language to counteract heteropatriarchy: I argue that Woolf subscribes to this system of using language repetition in subversive ways, in which she refuses to label her characters with what could only be deviant identities, which would reinforce power structures. However, due to not creating a new Irigaray-inspired language, Woolf must work within the system by “call[ing] into question the regulatory practice of identity” by implying subversive identities while still using language as created by patriarchy. This practice can be seen as the subversive language that Butler theorizes and as a

statement against patriarchy. As Foucault states, “discourses can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance, and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (*The History of Sexuality: Vol. I* 101).

I had to negotiate the pervasive labeling of my Women’s Studies background with a tolerance for the womanhood that Woolf creates, which is incompletely illuminated and uncategorized. This was a difficult task, but ultimately rewarding: I have learned that complexity is to be valued over simplicity in terms of providing an effective critique of heteropatriarchy, and is necessary so as not to fall prey to the same power relations that the dominant system reproduces. I have learned that Woolf’s characters’ complexity saves them from the damaging effects of a label of subversion, just as the label Woman is damaging. I have learned that literature can take on a role of subverting heteropatriarchy, by both resisting and using to advantage the dominant system of power’s own tool against it: namely, the art of language.

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