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Hannah Moriarty April 15, 2015

The Artistic Vision of the Androgynous Female: An Exploration of Patterned Symbolism and Gender Constructs in the Lifework of Virginia Woolf

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Abstract

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By Hannah Moriarty

Throughout her novels, Virginia Woolf maintains a constant awareness of normative gender roles and the means by which masculine and feminine identities fit within these societal conventions. One means by which Woolf repeatedly returns the reader's attention to these pervasive gendered identities is through her patterned and cross-textual use of imagery. In particular, I have chosen to trace the presence of, and explore the language surrounding, the seemingly banal objects of the tree and the table. The analysis of their function within the text will shed insight into this dilemma of a gendered binary that our female creator Virginia Woolf faced in the writing of her masterpieces *Orlando, To the Lighthouse,* and *Between the Acts.* I will detail the way in which the perceived legacy of males and females is inherently different and the means by which, in each of her three novels, Woolf entertains a similar figure of female androgyny in order to mediate this tension between the gender binary. Woolf advocates for a world in which women can venture outside of their traditionally defined sphere of domesticity and illuminates the voice of female intuition that has previously been silenced. She questions: What voice has society deprived from the male-dominated sphere of academia? What can the women bring to the table? I propose that the androgynous female creators Orlando the poet, Lily Briscoe the painter, and Miss La Trobe the playwright, will embody not only this tension between the binary but also illuminate a liminal space in which a meeting of the minds can occur, a means to attain the hallowed "man-womanly" or "woman-manly" mindset that Woolf sets forth in *A Room of One's Own.*

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Synopsis of Thesis:

Throughout her novels, Virginia Woolf maintains a constant awareness of normative gender roles and the means by which masculine and feminine identities fit within these societal conventions. One means by which Woolf repeatedly returns the reader's attention to these pervasive gendered identities is through her patterned and cross-textual use of imagery. In particular, I have chosen to trace the presence of, and explore the language surrounding, the seemingly banal objects of the tree and the table. The analysis of their function within the text will shed insight into this dilemma of a gendered binary that our female creator Virginia Woolf faced in the writing of her masterpieces *Orlando, To the Lighthouse,* and *Between the Acts.* I will detail the way in which the perceived legacy of males and females is inherently different and the means by which, in each of her three novels, Woolf entertains a similar figure of female androgyny in order to mediate this tension between the gender binary. Woolf advocates for a world in which women can venture outside of their traditionally defined sphere of domesticity and illuminates the voice of female intuition that has previously been silenced. She questions: What voice has society deprived from the male-dominated sphere of academia? What can the women bring to the table? I propose that the androgynous female creators Orlando the poet, Lily Briscoe the painter, and Miss La Trobe the playwright, will embody not only this tension between the binary but also illuminate a liminal space in which a meeting of the minds can occur, a means to attain the hallowed "man-womanly" or "woman-manly" mindset that Woolf sets forth in *A Room of One's Own.*

CHAPTER 1

TRADITIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

In December of 1929 Virginia Woolf published a short story titled "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection," in which she offers her reader a brief insight into the life of a woman named Isabella. I believe that this story very carefully embodies the notions that I attempt to illuminate throughout the course of this thesis. And thus, I would like to use it as foundation for my critical approach to Woolf's literature. The story opens with its focus upon the looking-glass within Isabella's home in which "one could see reflected in the Italian glass not only the marble-topped table opposite, but a stretch of the garden beyond. One could see a long grass path leading between banks of tall flowers until, slicing off an angle, the gold rim cut it off." As the movements and noises of the room and its neighboring garden ebb and flow around the looking-glass, in "strange contrast" the world within the looking-glass remains utterly still, reflecting "the hall table, the sunflowers, the garden path so accurately and so fixedly that they seemed held there in their reality unescapably." We are suddenly made aware through the arrival of the post that the externally serene furniture of Isabella's home abounds with tucked away letters— secret tales of bygone lovers, of intimacies, betrayals, and partings. All the while her room is alive with these locked away sentiments, Isabella stands alone in her garden clipping branches of the flowering tree and collecting blossoms within her basket. In the final moments of the story, Isabella approaches the table, basket of flowers in hand, and fixes herself (and the reader) with an unblinking stare as she gazes at herself within the looking-glass (CSFVW 215-19).

This story serves as both a starting and an end point for this thesis, as well as a means for exploring the concepts I wish to present along the middle journey. It is my hope that by the end of this thesis Isabella, and her world that we fleetingly glimpse, can be returned to with strengthened understanding. The story supports the notion of the table as a collector of knowledge, reflects upon historical traditions of masculine and feminine intellect, introduces a strongly independent female, superimposes the image of the table and the tree, inspires an understanding of female legacy, and questions the nature of present reality and the existence of truth. The short story ends, as this thesis will, with looking at the convergence of the moment. All of these perspectives on "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection" will be interpreted in depth throughout later portions of this thesis.

Before analysis of this story and the means by which Virginia Woolf will overlay imagery of the tree and the table throughout her lifework, I would first like to substantiate the literary tradition of Woolf's contemporaries and the ways in which she chooses to respond to them. This chapter will elucidate Woolf's understanding of both masculine and feminine traditions of knowledge, in order to then uncover Woolf's response to her inherited literary culture and the means by which she creatively reimagines these traditions. Let us first begin with a discussion on the symbol of the table of knowledge and the means by which Woolf will use this symbolic tool to create a pattern within her text that constantly evokes the presence of the gender binary.

In her book *The Phantom Table*, Ann Banfield focuses her discussion of Woolf's works largely in light of philosopher Bertrand Russell's writings. Russell was not only a British contemporary of Virginia Woolf but also a foundational contributor to underlying

thought of the Bloomsbury Group of which Virginia Woolf was an active member (Banfield 11). The Bloomsbury Group was, in plain form, a collection of especially intellectual individuals who thrived upon discussion of subject matter often belittled or ignored by their less progressive contemporaries, and amongst its members could be found both Virginia and her husband Leonard Woolf. In her description of the Bloomsbury Group, Woolf wrote, "It was I think a great advance in civilization" (*Moments of Being* 174). For "there was always some new idea afoot; always some new picture standing on a chair to be looked at, some new poet fished out from obscurity and stood in the light of day" (*Moments of Being* 175). As prominent contemporary theorists, Woolf and Russell would have engaged in constructive discussion and it is thus conceivable that Woolf, whether consciously or at times subconsciously, would have incorporated into her own works Russell's notion that the table embodies the essence of knowledge.

While debate raged on the Oxford and Cambridge campuses from 1896-7 as to whether or not women should be granted degrees, it is clear that the individuals of the Bloomsbury Group valued female intellect and hoped for its official acknowledgement within the world of academia (Banfield 20). For within the Bloomsbury Group, "the presence of two women at 46 Gordon Square for Thoby Stephen's Thursday evening in 1904 answered some need felt even beyond this group of Cambridge graduates. Far from being an accidental feature of Bloomsbury, it was an essential expression of its ethos" (Banfield 21).

Thus Virginia Woolf critically entered the writing scene just as the university debate of women's right to education was becoming a matter of academic, political, and social conscience. She stood as witness to both the constraints of traditional Victorian femininity

and the exciting change of modernism. She could see at once both the traditional tea and dining tables of yore and the novel notion of women approaching the conference tables and desks of academia. It is my belief that this historical witnessing in collaboration with her active participation amongst Bloomsbury theorists led Virginia to an involved discussion of gender politics within her novels that can be traced through the image of the table of knowledge.

Banfield claims that "any philosophy addressing our knowledge of the external world first addresses the problem of the table" (Banfield 66). She then traces several moments throughout different essays and novels of Woolf where "a table, long the paradigmatic object of knowledge in 'the history of English thought,' is, then, planted squarely in the center of Woolf's novelistic scenery" (Banfield 66). Such as in *The Voyage Out: "*for those solid objects 'made of wood, separately of great importance, and possessed of shapes like tables and chairs,' " and in *The Years:* "the immense solidity of chairs and tables,' " or in *Night and Day:* " 'Dear things!...Dear chairs and tables!' " (Banfield 66). Banfield posits that "from Mr. Ambrose's 'kitchen table' in *The Voyage Out* to Katherine Hilbery's table" in *Night and Day*; from "Mr. Ramsay's kitchen table, to the dining table on which Mrs. Ramsay serves the Boeuf en Daube…to 'the table, the chairs' of the chapter openings of *The Waves…*the table signals the entry of the problem of knowledge into the novels" (Banfield 66-67). Thus, Banfield aligns the presence of the table within Woolf's literature to moments of preoccupation with the manifestation of knowledge. Woolf preoccupies herself with this literary existence of the table as a symbol of traditional knowledge and in her lifework will enrich this table to be one that not only celebrates masculine intellect but also welcomes the presence of woman's intellect, a table that,

through incorporation of masculine and feminine perspectives, culminates in a final vision of a future that challenges the gender binary.

THOUGHTS ON PEACE

While Banfield quite convincingly suggests Woolf's use of table imagery in her novels to represent instances of academic knowledge, I would like to advance that the table also incorporates a knowledge inherent to the gender binary, a binary that Woolf was both acutely experiencing at the turn of the century as well as beginning to subvert through her efforts with the Bloomsbury Group. Woolf was attempting to answer the ways in which masculine and feminine understandings differ, the ways by which societal gender constructions limit each gender. This thesis will be an analysis of the means by which Woolf permeates her novels with this discussion of gender politics through the use of the table of knowledge.

In her essay "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," Virginia Woolf laments that there is "no woman in the Cabinet; nor in any responsible post. All the idea makers who are in a position to make ideas effective are men." Nancy Topping Bazin addressed precisely this issue in her book *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision*; she remarks that Woolf was constantly made aware of the fact "that she lived in a patriarchal society and saw that in a male-dominated society not only are the women oppressed but also that which is considered female is suppressed" (Bazin 167). Woolf stands firm in the face of such gendered opposition. She prompts her female readers, then "Why not bury the head in the pillow, plug the ears, and cease this futile activity of idea making?" ("Thoughts on Peace in

an Air Raid") Woolf's own thought-provoking response to her posed question is one that I will again and again delve into during the course of this thesis:

> Because there are other tables besides officer tables and conference tables. Are we not leaving the young Englishman without a weapon that might be of value to him if we give up private thinking, tea-table thinking, because it seems useless? Are we not stressing our disability because our ability exposes us perhaps to abuse, perhaps to contempt? …Mental fight means thinking against the current, not with it. ("Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid")

Her answer lies in the fact that certain tables, certain gender spheres, imply a different perspective, a gendered knowledge. Woolf admonishes those male rulers who "repress the female or yin within themselves and, in turn, create social and political structures which likewise exclude or minimize the feminine, for instance, the contemplative, the receptive, the co-operative" (Bazin 167). Rather she advocates that femininity and masculinity are both essential to society, and thus that these assets of "contemplative," "receptive," "co-operative" femininity be awarded their due place at the conference tables of societal affairs. In addition, Woolf views the tea-table as a serious sphere that can in its own way be productive to society. Woolf's discussion becomes one in which women are not only welcomed to the conference table but also respected for the unique perspective, inculcated at the tea-tables of history, that they offer. In the due incorporation of feminine intellect, society can buttress "the young Englishman" to lead a more valuable life.

As her essay continues, Woolf ridicules:

> do the current thinkers honestly believe that by writing "Disarmament" on a sheet of paper at a conference table they will have done all that is needful? Othello's occupation will be gone but he will remain Othello. The young airman up in the sky is driven not only by the voices of loudspeakers; he is driven by voices in himself—ancient instincts, instincts fostered and cherished by education and tradition.
> …
> Could we switch off the maternal instinct at the command of a table full of politicians? Suppose that imperative among the peace terms was: "Childbearing is to be restricted to a very small class of specially selected women," would we submit? Should we not say, "The maternal instinct is a woman's glory, It was for

> this that my whole life has been dedicated, my education, training, everything." … But if it were necessary for the sake of humanity, for the peace of the world, that childbearing should be restricted, the maternal instinct subdued, women would attempt it. Men would help them…They would give them other openings for their creative power…We must help the young Englishmen to root out from themselves the love of medals and decorations… if we are to compensate the young man for the loss of his glory and of his gun, we must give him access to the creative feelings. We must make happiness. We must free him from the machine.
> ("Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid")

The preceding passage aligns the traditional creative powers of the female with childbirth and the traditional aspirations of the male with seeking "medals and decorations"; one serving as a form of natural legacy, another as a form of man-made legacy. Woolf believes that the "current thinkers" are lacking a crucially important element in their efforts towards peace—inclusion of the feminine intellect. While writing their work on feminist theory *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar realize that they "were trying to recover…a whole (neglected) female history" (Gilbert and Gubar xii). In the historical absence of women from the conference tables of war, masculine tradition has abounded, unbalanced, to love "medals and decorations." Woolf advocates that society owes it to the young Englishmen to compensate this drive for glories with "access to the creative feelings"— an access arising from the consideration and incorporation of the feminine sphere. Woolf points to an era in which the maternal instinct will not be pre-decided for all women and to the "happiness" that this revised understanding will produce. Thus the question is raised, what happened at the close of the Victorian era when women tried "to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of self, art, and society" (Gilbert and Gubar xi-xii)? In her novels *Orlando, To the Lighthouse,* and *Between the Acts,* Woolf will explore the form of these "creative feelings" that are born

in the balancing of the masculine and feminine intellects, and the ensuing peace that they can bestow.

MASCULINE KNOWLEDGE

The most explicit use of table imagery in the three novels I will be analyzing comes by way of Mr. Ramsay's "phantom table" in *To the Lighthouse.* Lily "always saw, when she thought of Mr. Ramsay's work, a scrubbed kitchen table…whose virtue seems to have been laid bare by years of muscular integrity" (TTL 23). In similarity to his table, Mr. Ramsay's knowledge is later described: "it was his power, his gift, suddenly to shed all superfluities, to shrink and diminish so that he looked barer and felt sparer, even physically, yet lost none of his intensity of mind" (TTL 44). Thus, at the desk (table) of academia Mr. Ramsay's mind is honed beyond that of stark simplicity to that of the extraordinary. Mr. Ramsay functions as the archetypal form of male intelligence in this book in which a male's success is accounted for by his contributions to the world of academia.

Mr. Ramsay's unflagging effort to reach the letter "Z" in his alphabet of ideas allows the reader to perceive his philosophic understanding on a linear alphabetical continuum– underpinning the conception of masculine legacy as that of one linearly driven towards and obsessed with "the love of medals and decorations," with the attainment of "glory" ("Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid"). Fittingly, the majority of Mr. Ramsay's life is "weighed down with the greatness of his labours…and his fame or his failure" (TTL 99).

In *Orlando,* Orlando as a man realizes he wants to be a writer and conceives of his possible immortal glory. For "he paused, and into the breach thus made, leapt Ambition, the harridan, and Poetry, the witch, and Desire of Fame, the strumpet; all joined hands and

made of his heart their dancing ground...he vowed that he would be the first poet of his race and bring immortal lustre upon his name" (*Orlando* 80-1). Thus the writing table, traditionally a masculine sphere, is imbued with a desire for immortality, for a legacy of eternally worshipped recognition.

Man does not live for the present moment but is in constant pursuit of future fame. In thinking of her husband, Mrs. Ramsay realizes:

> Indeed he seemed to be sometimes made differently from other people, born blind, deaf, and dumb, to the ordinary things, but to the extraordinary things, with an eye like an eagle's. His understanding often astonished her. But did he notice the flowers? No. Did he notice the view? No. Did he even notice his own daughter's beauty, or whether there was pudding on his plate or roast beef? He would sit at table with them like a person in a dream. (TTL 70)

While Mr. Ramsay is assuredly on an extreme end of the gender continuum, his exaggerated personality traits serve to represent normative gender roles. Mr. Ramsay sits at the table engrossed in philosophical thought, recognizing none of the elements of a traditionally feminine domain: the flowers of nature, or the domestic life centered around children and meals. He sees not the view in front of him but the one in his mind's eye, the view of the future.

While at the public table, Mr. Ramsay remains at his private table, absorbed in thought. This insight into the internal life of Mr. Ramsay is indicative of the ways in which "an interest in the private self characterizes contemporary culture as profoundly as the commemoration of public life marked the Victorian age"(Massey 177). Anne Massey suggests in her book *Biography, Identity, and the Modern Interior* that one of the crucial moments for this inward turn and focus upon the individual came "in the early decades of the twentieth century arising from the work of the Bloomsbury Group, with its twin heritage in visual arts and in writing, and its 'new' lifestyle defined by friends and lovers

rather than political party, church regiment, business or even family" (Massey 178). Thus, even in the more traditional character of Mr. Ramsay, Woolf challenges literary tradition through this inward focus. Interestingly, Mr. Ramsay's inner obsession still revolves around masculine legacy and matters of public reputation as opposed to the inner life of his wife that will be explored later in this thesis.

William Bankes, too, though seated at the public table longs for his private table:

> he preferred dining alone. All those interruptions annoyed him… if he had been alone dinner would have been almost over now; he would have been free to work. Yes, he thought, it is a terrible waste of time…How trifling it all is, how boring it all is, he thought, compared with the other thing—work. Here he sat drumming his fingers on the table-cloth when he might have been—he took a flashing bird's-eye view of his work. (TTL 89)

Woolf focuses upon the internal life of the characters within her works, demonstrating this changing sphere of knowledge through her use of the table.

In *Orlando,* this natural inclination of males to the writing table is depicted as "Orlando slowly drew in his head, sat down at the table, and, with the half-conscious air of one doing what he does every day of his life at this hour, took out a writing book…dipped an old stained goose quill in the ink. Soon he had covered ten pages and more with poetry" (*Orlando* 16).

In the hopes of avoiding a completely negative stereotyped perception of masculine knowledge, I want to acknowledge that Woolf provides us a nuanced perspective on masculine legacy. While, obsessed with desire for fame, the masculine intellectual drive for arriving at the truth of philosophy is admirable. She sarcastically denigrates the man of fortune who continues to seek undiscovered knowledge in his writings, but also shows that she still finds value in this pursuit:

> For once the disease of reading has laid hold upon the system it weakens it so that it falls an easy prey to that other scourge which dwells in the ink pot and festers in the quill. The wretch takes to writing. And while this is bad enough in a poor man, whose only property is a chair and table set beneath a leaky roof—for he has not much to lose, after all—the plight of a rich man, who has houses and cattle, maid-servants, asses and linen, and yet writes books, is pitiable in the extreme. (*Orlando* 75)

Woolf's nuanced perspective continues, when Orlando running to the great hall stops "in the back quarters where the servants lived" as he observed that "there, sitting at the servants' dinner table with a tankard beside him and paper in front of him, sat a rather fat, rather shabby man" who "held a pen in his hand" and "seemed in the act of rolling some thought up and down, to and fro in his mind till it gathered shape or momentum to his liking…Was this a poet? Was he writing poetry?" (*Orlando* 21) Why is it that the poet has sought out this innermost chamber of the domestic sphere? Why in the kitchenmaid's corner, does the male poet find his artistic voice? Does the male poet need to embrace the feminine sphere in order to achieve the privacy seemingly necessary for writing?

It seems, at least, that Orlando is overcome by the influence of the feminine sphere:

> Thus, the most ordinary movement in the world, such as sitting down at a table and pulling the inkstand towards one, may agitate a thousand odd, disconnected fragments, now bright, now dim, hanging and bobbing and dipping and flaunting … Thus it was that Orlando, dipping his pen in the ink, saw the mocking face of the lost Princess…as if to vent his agony somewhere, he plunged his quill so deep into the inkhorn that ink spirted over the table, which act, explain it how one may (and no explanation perhaps is possible—Memory is inexplicable), at once substituted for the face of the Princess a face of a very different sort. But whose was it, he asked himself? And he had to wait, perhaps half a minute, looking at the new picture which lay on top of the old, as one lantern slide is half seen through the next, before he could say to himself, "This is the face of that rather fat, shabby man who sat in Twitchett's room ever so many years ago when old Bess came here to dine; and I saw him… sitting at the table, as I peeped in on my way downstairs… a poet, I dare say." (*Orlando* 78-9, 80)

This passage, in its turn, begs the question: why does Orlando see the face of the male poet in that of a woman's? Why does the image of the male poet reside upon the image of the female? Perhaps, this event in some ways foreshadows Orlando's own gender change and

his understanding of an androgynous perspective. I will posit that Orlando's poetry is eventually met with such overwhelming success for the very reason that he is so easily able to superimpose the male and female spheres. These questions and positions on androgynous perspective will be analyzed more closely in future chapters.

In the course of this thesis, it is noteworthy to consider the time in which Woolf was adding her craft to a developing feminine literary tradition in the face of opposition from the majority of male society. Though nuanced, her views towards masculine legacy often appear harsh. However, it was through this means that she was able to carve out a space in literature for the previously silenced voices of female intellect. William Handley points out in his article "The Housemaid and the Kitchen Table," that "rather than consisting in the lives of great men, Woolf's view heightens what is left out by traditional patriarchal frames in order to show both the limits of masculinist understanding and the ways in which such categorizing judgments about human value are implicated in the most destructive forms of masculine violence" (Handley 32). Thus, in *To the Lighthouse, Between the Acts,* and *Orlando*, Woolf will deliberately shift the focus from dominant masculinity to unassuming femininity in order to highlight not the patriarchal triumphs but rather the drawbacks to a society limited by these normative gender constructions. Her shifting focus will draw attention to the female voices that have been silenced throughout the centuries of male vocalization and education in order to bring all perspectives to the table.

FEMININE KNOWLEDGE

In her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous speaks for womankind when she advises, "let's leave it to the worriers, to masculine anxiety and its obsession with how to

dominate the way things work—knowing 'how it works' in order to 'make it work.' For us the point is not to take possession in order to internalize or manipulate, but rather to dash through and to fly" (Cixous 887). Cixous outlines a difference in the way in which men and women internalize their surroundings, arrive at their private tables, with men having particularly more interest in the "possession" of their environment. She argues that women "have all learned the art of flying and its numerous techniques; for centuries…we've lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers" (Cixous 887). It is said of Flavinda from Miss La Trobe's play when she escapes from her irrational aunt, "*In plain words, Sir, Flavinda's flown. The cage is empty*" (italics original) (BTA 130). The historical oppression of womankind has inculcated within them a rather different relationship to their environment than that of their male counterparts. And thus women "take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture…emptying structures and turning propriety upside down" (Cixous 887). Women alter the relations around the "furniture" of the house, alter the relationships of knowledge around the tables of their domestic spheres. Intrinsic to the feminine perspective, later discussed, will be this sense of profound and productive emptiness at the heart of their understanding.

In *Between the Acts*, Isa flies. She hums, " '[w]here we know not, where we go not, neither know nor care…Flying, rushing through the ambient, incandescent, summer silent…' " (BTA 14). She flies in her inner, secret life in a subtle rebellion against the confines of patriarchal society. When Bart, a traditional male figure of patriarchy, antagonized her sense of stasis, Isa "sighed, pegged down on a chair arm, like a captive balloon, by a myriad of hair-thin ties into domesticity…And she loathed the domestic, the

possessive; the maternal. And he knew it and did it on purpose to tease her, the old brute, her father-in-law" (BTA 17). In this excerpt from *Between the Acts,* Woolf reflects her notion from "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" in which she challenges the view that all women must necessarily desire to be maternal. For indeed Isa even characterizes herself as "abortive" (BTA 14). Isa's figure stands in contrast to Woolf's figure of Mrs. Ramsay from *To the Lighthouse* who indeed seems to thrive within her domesticity, intimating that there are many ways in which to be feminine and that endowment of the maternal instinct is only one outlet for woman's "creative power."

Of utmost importance to the essay "Theories on Peace in an Air Raid" is that Woolf is not only commenting on the lack of female representation in positions of legal power; she is not simply advocating for women to have equal rights; rather there is a subtler argument that pervades. Just as men have been bred through the centuries for this conference-table-thinking, in a parallel sense women have been bred through the centuries for their tea-table-thinking. While men have "ancient instincts, instincts fostered and cherished by education and tradition," women too have a knowledge implicit to their gender, honed by centuries of foremothers who have "in flight" sought the secrecy of "narrow passageways, hidden crossovers" (Cixous 887). For "in woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history" (Cixous 882). Women have an inherent connection with their foremothers, a sense of continual cyclical legacy. This generational insight allows woman to see past the temporary disunity of the present to the prospect of unity for man and womankind. Woolf's argument is not simply a claim for justified equal rights, but also a belief that with female incorporation into public society a

previously silenced perspective on war can now be voiced at the table. She questions, what will occur when the thinkers of the conference and tea tables meet?

Perhaps, as Cixous in "The Laugh of the Medusa" suggests, women's presence at the conference tables can impart new perspective to the raging disunity of war. For "as a militant, [woman] is an integral part of all liberations"(Cixous 882). For the woman "foresees that her liberation will do more than modify power relations or toss the ball over to the other camp; she will bring about a mutation in human relations, in thought, in all praxis" (Cixous 882). Thus, in appreciating feminine presence and inviting her to the conference table, society can initiate the long overdue incorporation of both masculine and feminine knowledge. The recognition and encouragement of an intellectual feminine presence will alter both the exterior table of "human relations" and the internal table of "thought."

Woolf alerts us to this cause through her pervasive use of imagery in which, in addition to the "conference tables" of war and the desks of academia, she meditates on the powers intrinsic to the knowledge of the "tea table" and dining table. In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay is in command of the familial dining scene, allowing her "creative powers" to take form as she becomes the artist of the dinner table. For indeed there exists a sense of ritualistic beauty as the varying individuals gather together into a union. In "Thoughts on Peace in Air Raid," Woolf suggests that there is a more passive peaceful element suggested by the juxtaposition of the female's tea table to the male's conference table of war. In the scene around Mrs. Ramsay's family dining table we see that there is indeed an art in being able to bring a group of people of various backgrounds and beliefs into a cohesive whole; there exists a union around the dinner table. The artistry of the maternal role revolves

around the raising and nurturing of a family. Thus while the gender spheres are composed of constructed differences, elements of both genders are capable of being represented by the image of the table.

Woolf further complicates her position on the tea-tables of tradition. The domestic tables represent both a history of oppression, yet also the beautiful rebellious power of the feminine intellect that takes form in its subtlety, in its powers of suggestions. As Handley notes, the "image of the kitchen table chosen to represent Mr. Ramsay's philosophy is inseparable from the frames of class and gender that determine who eats, who cooks, and who gets 'eaten' "(Handley 30). And as Nancy Topping Bazin points out in Woolf's novel *Jacob's Room*, "Jacob's life of intellectual contacts, friendships, sexual experiences, and travels is contrasted with his sweetheart's dull life of tea and supper parties" (Bazin 4). Thus whether consciously or not, Woolf uses the imagery of tea and the tea-table to indicate the continued oppression of women within the domestic sphere.

In a passage from *Between the Acts*, Isa contrasts her public persona of a woman "in love" with her husband, positioned upon the external dressing table, with that of her private passion for Mr. Haines that resides "in her eyes."

> 'In love,' was in her eyes. But outside, on the washstand, on the dressing-table… was the other love; love for her husband, the stockbroker— 'The father of my children', she added, slipping into the cliché conveniently provided by fiction. Inner love was in the eyes, outer love on the dressing-table… 'In love', she must be… since the words he said, handing her a teacup…could so attach themselves to a certain spot in her; and thus lie between them like a wire, tingling, tangling, vibrating. (BTA 13)

Interestingly, the image of the teacup is overlaid upon that of the dressing table. A double standard exists in the novel as Giles, wishing for relations with Mrs. Manresa, is able to fulfill them; whereas Isa in wishing for relations with another man, is reminded by the teacup, by the dressing table, of her confinement to the duties of domesticity.

Later, Isa reflects again upon Mr. Haines who "had given her a cup of tea at a tennis party" (BTA 187). She cries, while "in passing she stripped the bitter leaf that grew, as it happened, outside the nursery window. Old Man's Beard. Shrivelling the shreds in lieu of words, for no words grow there, nor roses either" (BTA 187). This is a very telling moment rife with the suggestive power of Woolf's writing, with meaning that imbues the silent actions, with meaning breathed into every seemingly trivial action and mundane object. The mysterious and elusive "man in grey" offering her tea is a nod towards Isa's seemingly inescapable traditional role of a domesticated tea server. Outside of the nursery window grows the "Old Man's Beard" plant, an echo to an earlier passage during the play in which one woman in the audience mused upon the need for change in society for, if it

> had met with no resistance, she mused, nothing wrong, they'd still be going round and round and round. The Home would have remained; and Papa's beard, she thought, would have grown and grown; and Mama's knitting—what did she do with all her knitting?—Change had to come, she said to herself, or there'd have been yards and yards of Papa's beard, of Mama's knitting. (BTA 156)

Yet, change is slow to come. The Old Man's Beard of timeworn antiquity has taken up residence outside of the nursery window, reinforcing the age-old mindset of a patriarchal society that relegates women to the solely domestic life of childbirth and endless knitting. Isa shreds the leaves of the bitter plant, adding her own silent rebellion into the movement for change. "Shrivelling the shreds in lieu of words, for no words grow there," the Old Man of antiquity signals a sterile environment for the intellectual and emotional growth of the female, silencing her at every moment; effectually sterilizing her mind as he fertilizes her womb**.**

Isa becomes a testament to an age in which women were silenced within their confining homes of domesticity, yet becomes a figure for women who learned to take

refuge and power in this position of relegated silence and thereby internalized their strengths of subtlety and suggestion in order to survive in their male-dominant worlds. Isa becomes a harbinger of change as she shreds the yards of ancient "Papa's beard" and signifies that "change had to come" (BTA 156). Isa will contribute her small part in the changing climate for women's rights, adding her silence and "its unmistakable contribution to talk" (BTA 36).

The woman's sphere is relegated to the domestic tables. As seen when Mr. Giles will arrive late to dinner, Mrs. Sands silently and dutifully must revolve her schedule around the male agenda; "what it meant to Mrs. Sands, when people missed their trains, and she, whatever she might want to do, must wait by the oven, keeping meat hot, no one knew" (BTA 32). Yet, despite this gendered confinement, Woolf shows that the female sphere has a power of its own, a power of subtlety and communion with nature. She prompts the reader, "Did Nature supplement what man advanced? Did she complete what he began?" (TTL 134). Additionally, Massey argues that, "the spotlight moves from the public to the private self in the early twentieth century, and this move affects male lives as profoundly as female ones" (Massey 179). Thus, whereas the private table of the masculine mind resided at the writing table, the private table of the feminine mind resides in nature:

> The scullery maid, before the plates came out, was cooling her cheeks by the lily pond.
>
> There had always been lilies there, self-sown from wind-dropped seed, floating red and white on the green plates of their leaves. Water, for hundreds of years, had silted down into the hollow, and lay there four or five feet deep over a black cushion of mud. Under the thick plate of green water, glazed in their self-centred world, fish swam… A grain fell and spiraled down; a petal fell, filled and sank. At that the fleet of boat-shaped bodies paused; poised; equipped; mailed; then with a waver of undulation off they flashed.
>
> It was in that deep centre, in that black heart, that the lady had drowned herself. Ten years since the pool had been dredged and a thigh bone recovered. Alas, it was a sheep's, not a lady's. And sheep have no ghosts, for sheep have no souls. But, the servants insisted, they must have a ghost; the ghost must be a

> lady's, who had drowned herself for love. So one of them would walk by the lily pool at night, only now when the sun shone and the gentry still sat at table.
>
> The flower petal sank; the maid returned to the kitchen. (BTA 39-40)

This excerpt intervenes in the midst of the family sitting down to eat their fillets of sole at the table. If one imagines the pond as a dining table, and the "green plates of [the lilies'] leaves" with fish intermittently darting past, one can see in their mind's eye a more natural replica of the scullery maid outdoors that is occurring in parallel time to the family gathered around their plates of filleted sole at the dining room table within the domestic walls of the house.

The "boat-shaped bodies" of the fish serve as a reminder of the "mailed" males of society, as males are frequently represented by boat and ship imagery within Woolf's texts. Woolf is commenting on the burden of female history, a history of forced confinement to the domestic sphere, a history with a black heart of female unhappiness: "Water, for hundred of years, had silted down into the hollow, and lay there four or five feet deep over a black cushion of mud." For indeed it is this root cause of unhappiness, this stifling of female individuality, that led to the lady of yore drowning herself: "it was in that deep centre, in that black heart, that the lady had drowned herself. The passage ends on the disheartening note that "the maid returned to the kitchen," an implicit commentary that despite changing times, societal expectations persist.

Another element of this passage is the superstitious nature behind the belief in a female ghost even when proven that the bones of the lady were merely those of a sheep. The women of the household believe in the ghost, indeed need to believe in the ghost, whereas the men brush aside the tall-tale as unfounded and irrelevant. I would like to suggest that the women keep this tale alive because, even if unfounded in this particular

instance, it speaks to the larger struggle that womankind has battled for centuries; their tales of "superstition" become a means of memorializing history and perhaps gathering strength against the continued oppression, a means of sympathizing with their foremothers. Woolf implies this loyalty to the memory of womankind, " 'Servants,' [Bartholomew] said, 'must have their ghost.' Kitchenmaids must have their drowned lady. 'But so must I!' cried the wild child of nature" (BTA 41). Mrs. Manresa, the spokeswoman for the dawning of a new age of female individuality, invokes the need for this drowned lady. This drowned lady represents a foremother in the history of female struggle, and whether a woman (such as the scullery maid) who is still confined to this traditional realm of domesticity or a woman of a new era of feminism and female independence (such as Mrs. Manresa), all women must remember the life of a woman killed by societal expectations; each modern-day woman a collage-like history of the women that struggled before her. At the dining table, Mrs. Ramsay observes Charles Tansley's demeanor "rather than listening to what he said":

> She could see how it was from his manner—he wanted to assert himself, and so it would always be with him till he got his Professorship or married his wife…He was thinking of himself and the impression he was making…It could not last, she knew but at the moment her eyes were so clear that they seemed to go round the table unveiling each of these people, and their thoughts and their feelings, without effort like a light stealing under water so that its ripples and the reeds in it and the minnows balancing themselves, and the sudden silent rout are all lit up hanging, trembling. So she saw them; she heard them; but what-ever they said had also this quality, as if what they said was like the movement of a trout when, at the same time, one can see the ripple and the gravel, something to the right, something to the left; and the whole is held together. (TTL 106-7)

In this passage from *To the Lighthouse,* we see a reversal in the table at the pond imagery; here, Mrs. Ramsay has brought the pond to the table. Feminine knowledge is intrinsically linked to an understanding of nature. The artist of the familial meal, though at the public table, sits at her private table by the pond. She is one with nature. Additionally, while

Charles Tansley is consumed by his desire to fulfill the masculine tradition of award-winning legacy, Mrs. Ramsay practices her own, arguably feminine, knowledge as she goes "round the table unveiling each of these people, and their thoughts and their feelings." The subtlety and suggestive power of her thinking is admirable as she links the impressions of her surroundings to those of the lily pond. In Mrs. Ramsay's appreciation of both the masculine and feminine intellects at her dining table, she creates a sense of harmony and "at the moment…the whole is held together."

The table as representative of feminine knowledge appears to have an element of superstition, a communion with death itself. As Cixous states in "The Laugh of the Medusa," "Men say that there are two unrepresentable things: death and the feminine sex. That's because they need femininity to be associated with death…They need to be afraid of us" (Cixous 885). In this excerpt from *Between the Acts,* the male perspective certainly links femininity with the "superstition" of death that preoccupies the minds of Isa and Mrs. Swithin:

> 'And baby? No sign of measles?'
> Isa shook her head, 'Touch wood,' she added, tapping the table.
> 'Tell me, Bart,' said Mrs. Swithin turning to her brother, 'what's the origin of that? Touch wood….Antaeus, didn't he touch earth?'
> …
> 'Touch wood; touch earth; Antaeus,' he muttered, bringing the scattered bits together. Lempriére would settle it; or the Encyclopaedia. But it was not in books the answer to his question—why, in Lucy's skull shaped so much like his own, there existed a prayable being?
> …
> The love, he was thinking, that they should give to flesh and blood they give to the church … when Lucy rapping her fingers on the table said:
> 'What's the origin—the origin—of that?'
> 'Superstition,' he said.
> …
> But, brother and sister, flesh and blood was not a barrier, but a mist. Nothing changed their affection; no argument; no fact; no truth. What she saw he didn't what he saw she didn't—and so on, *ad infinitum*. (italics original)(BTA 22-3)

Mrs. Swithin asks, "tapping the table," "what's the origin of that?" This passage emphasizes Woolf's belief that at the center of this almost tangible tension between brother and sister, between male and female intellect, lies the table. The table is the source of knowledge, the "origin," for both genders but resonates with them differently. While Bart reaches for his Encyclopedia and means of modernized academics to explain the "superstition," Batty takes a less traditional perspective in referencing the Greek mythology of Antaeus. In mythology, Antaeus is a giant of immense strength who challenges others in battles to the death. The source of Antaeus's strength comes through the earth as his mother is Gaia, Mother Nature. Antaeus eventually meets his downfall when his opponent learns of his secret source of strength and lifts him off the ground to weaken and then kill him (Smith). Importantly, the female's power is imbued in the earth, intrinsically linked to nature. The female is cast as the natural counterpart to the wood from which the synthetic table is made.

The female's perspective on the table is implicitly tied to death. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue in *The Madwoman in the Attic* that, in regard to the traditional feminine Angel of the House, "to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead. A life that has no story…is really a life of death, a death-in-life" (Gilbert and Gubar 25). And thus, this deathlike quality intrinsic to the feminine perspective, indeed forced upon them by the masculine perspective, accounts for the strong feminine link to what males perceive as "superstition." For if "besides ministering to the dying, she is herself already dead," then "the angel-woman in some curious way simultaneously inhabits both this world and the next" (Gilbert and Gubar 24). In *To the Lighthouse,* Mrs. Ramsay herself the Angel of the House ruminates, "Never should she forget Herbert killing a wasp with a teaspoon on the bank! And it was still going on, Mrs. Ramsay mused, gliding like a ghost among the chairs

and tables of that drawing-room on the banks of the Thames" (TTL 87). She herself is a deathlike ghost trying to navigate the depths of knowledge, winding through the collection of "chairs and tables." Ironically, "Herbert killing a wasp with a teaspoon" can be interpreted as him killing Mrs. Ramsay into a ghost by the enforcement of societal expectations of femininity, of killing her into a life resigned to tea-tables. Importantly, this constant companionship of the female with death suggests the cyclical and natural legacy to which the feminine intellect abides. Rather than the award-driven legacy of masculine tradition, the feminine tradition is one tied to both the generational quality of childbirth and the cyclical return to the earth as appropriated by their strong relationship with nature.

Fittingly, like her perception of masculine legacy, Woolf's perception of feminine legacy is nuanced as well. Woolf's desire is that the cyclical and natural legacy of females will finally be given voice and add new perspective to society and literary culture. However, in the figure of Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf explores the alternative in which this cyclical legacy potentially deceives the Angels into a cyclical, generational, entrapment. Mrs. Ramsay pauses to think "how, wound about in their hearts, however long they lived she would be woven," indicating her ability to overcome death through her cyclical legacy and live on in the lives of her loved ones. Yet, she goes on to consider "the sofa on the landing (her mother's); at the rocking-chair (her father's); at the map of the Hebrides. All that would be revived again in the lives of Paul and Minta…It was all one stream, and chairs, tables, maps, were hers, were theirs…and Paul and Minta would carry it on when she was dead" (TTL 113-14). I would argue that Mrs. Ramsay borders the fine line between cyclical legacy and generational entrapment in that "the things she imagines will remain in the household are

in fact not things in themselves but her things, their things, things framed by a map and a domestic life determined to perpetuate itself through property, marriage and inheritance" (Handley 34). Handley argues that Mrs. Ramsay falls into the generational entrapment of domesticity, her cyclical legacy starts to cycle out of control, as she is "too firmly woven into the aesthetic weave of the traditional patriarchal family truly to detach anything that might bring to her an effectual realization of the externally determined, limited, and fragile frame of her life" (Handley 34).

This passage clearly shows that the lives of tables and chairs resonate with the quality of gendered legacy, of passing knowledge, passing societal patriarchal constructions, through the ages. Paul and Minta, the recently married couple, have inherited the gender binary and, in their turn, will continue it into the next generation.

Woolf's speech "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" echoes this idea within *To the Lighthouse* that gender constructions have been inculcating for generations upon generations, ultimately resulting in a heightened system of binaries in which the legacy of reproduction seen in the "maternal instinct" which is a "woman's glory" is in stark contrast to the linearly-driven and fame-oriented legacy of "love of medals and decorations" ("Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid"). In her traditionally feminine perspective, Mrs. Ramsay has the maternal desire to reproduce for the young couple the safety of her own domestic situation as she is unable to truly appreciate the external constraints placed upon her by the patriarchal society in which she dutifully plays her role. For at times "Lily feels Mrs. Ramsay 'somehow laughed, led her victims [Paul and Minta] to the altar' (101) of marriage that she worships and to the altar of the dinner table itself" (Handley 28). Indeed while Mrs. Ramsay is the artist of her familial dining table, her artistic powers are

conceived out of a world of oppression: "Framed…by the social world it feeds, her art is implicated in that world. Her relation to that world is thus precarious; if it changes, it will unravel her" (Handley 33). Thus, seen in this light, the Boeuf en Daube dinner becomes "Mrs. Ramsay's attempt, both metaphorically and literally, to have everyone incorporate and reproduce the frame of her own life, especially by 'framing' Paul and Minta into marrying" (Handley 28). In her writing of Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf seems to be advocating for due caution in striking the balance between the weighing of old and new traditions of both femininity and masculinity.

Thus, while Woolf is reacting against these age-old traditions of masculinity and femininity, she is also aware of their intricate complexities, nuances, and to some extent advantages. The table of knowledge not only represents the void between the polarized gender binary, but is complicated by also introducing a beneficial balance that has its "origin" at the table (BTA 23). For instance, while there exists a tension in the table-tapping passage from *Between the Acts* between the perceptions of Bart and Batty, there is also a mutual appreciation for what one does not understand in the other. Despite lack of understanding, there is no lack of affection, and their relationship will last "*ad finitum.*" Though of the same blood, Bart and Batty are not of the same mind, but have grown to appreciate the balancing force of the other in their life.

TABLE AS REPRESENTATION OF SOCIETY

The table, as the locus of both feminine and masculine perspectives, serves to represent a microcosm of society. For instance,

> all round the table, beginning with Andrew in the middle, like a fire leaping from tuft to tuft of furze, her children laughed; her husband laughed; she was laughed at, fire-encircled, and forced to veil her crest, dismount her batteries, and only retaliate by displaying the raillery and ridicule of the table to Mr. Bankes as an example of what one suffered if one attracted the prejudices of the British Public. (TTL 103)

The party around the table consists of Mrs. Ramsay's entire external world, and indeed she compares her people to the "British Public." Her family's opinions, laughter, and ridicule comprise her everyday relations with the world and have become her own republic.

In the scenes that center around the table in *Between the Acts, Orlando,* and *To the Lighthouse,* the dominant male and female are always seated at opposite ends of the table. Though there is the widest gulf between them, they occupy equal positions within the format of the dining room seating and are able to communicate with each other across its breadth. The reader again and again sees this meeting of masculine and feminine perspectives at the familial dining table; for instance, in the silent communication between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay at the heads of the table, or when Paul and Minta "came in together…[and] found their way to different ends of the table" (TTL 98). Woolf represents a hope for the future generations of children in this balancing of the gender spheres at the table of knowledge as "some anticipation of happiness was reflected in [Prue], as if the sun of the love of men and women rose over the rim of the table-cloth, and without knowing what it was she bent towards it and greeted it" (TTL 109).

At the time for the Ramsay family dinner, the scattered perspectives of the Ramsay household join together at the table of knowledge to create a moment of unity,

> When the great clangour of the gong announced solemnly, authoritatively, that all those scattered about, in attics, in bedrooms, on little perches of their own, reading, writing, putting the last smooth to their hair, or fastening dresses, must leave all that, and the little odds and ends on their washing tables and dressing tables, and the novel on the bed-tables, and the diaries which were so private, and assemble in the dining-room for dinner. (TTL 82)

At the time of dinner, at the meeting of multiple perspectives, everyone leaves off from their tables of privacies (from their thoughts at the vanity, in the closet, or at the bedside) to assemble at the public table of the dining room. A tension exists between the privacy of the tables of the minds assembled and that of the public table to which they gather. For indeed "in so far as it is possible to ascribe the shift of attention from public to private, it is clear that Bloomsbury played a major role" (Massey 179). Thus, Woolf focused description upon "the rich detail of household interiors in order to reveal the family secrets behind the Victorian façade" (Massey 180). Woolf illuminates this realm of union between internalized and externalized knowledge, between feminine and masculine understandings. In finally forming a "party round a table" (TTL 97), Banfield argues that "the private, unobserved table of Mr. Ramsay's philosophy is transformed, by Mrs. Ramsay, into the public table" (Banfield 120). Banfield points out that "in this way, as around a table in *The Waves*, many perspectives come together…to make one thing, not enduring—for what endures?—but seen by many eyes simultaneously (*W,* 127)" (Banfield 120).

Thus, Woolf has succeeded in creation of a "logical construction, public, neutral object or person" (Banfield 120). Woolf has begun to create a novelistic atmosphere in which not only the perspective of the traditionally dominant male is emphasized, but that each individual, regardless of gender, is able to bring a unique perspective to the table. The transference of each individual's private table of knowledge to the communal knowledge of the public dinner table serves to support Woolf's ideal society of a meeting of the minds. And we shall see in the next chapter how this "neutral person" is indeed able to orchestrate the meeting of multiple perspectives.

We remember Isabella from "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection." The civilization of the room consists entirely of the lives of the furniture, as "the quiet old country room with its rugs and stone chimney pieces, its sunken book-cases and red and gold lacquer cabinets… the room had its passions and rages and envies and sorrows coming over it and clouding it, like a human being" (CSFVW 215). Indeed, the furniture (and the flowers) seem to be Isabella's closest and only friends, as the narrator intones that "it seemed as if" "the rugs, the chairs, the cabinets…knew more about her than we, who sat on them, wrote at them, and trod on them so carefully, were allowed to know" (CSFVW 216). Despite the attempts of traditional masculinity to attain knowledge through means of education, the furniture seems to harmoniously connect with Isabella through a natural sympathy. Her tables and chairs even react in sympathy to Isabella when "under the stress of thinking about Isabella, her room became more shadowy and symbolic; the corners seemed darker, the legs of chairs and tables more spindly and hieroglyphic" (CSFVW 217). As the marble-topped table is consistently aligned with the educational tradition of hieroglyphics and the literary tradition of writing, it also comes to represent a sympathetic knowledge of the inner life of our silent Isabella.

In the moment in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection" when reality intrudes upon this isolated civilization, upon the "nocturnal life" of the furniture, the attention is again drawn to the table as the grounds for tension between the quiet feminine sphere and the imposing masculine sphere of societal pressures (CSFVW 216). For suddenly, "a large black form loomed into the looking-glass; blotted out everything, strewed the table with a packet of marble tablets…the man had brought the post" (CSFVW 217). Dominant male society intrudes upon the secret life of the woman's table, imposing

its own sacred tablets of time-worn tradition. And in its brash entry it caused the image stilled within the looking-glass to be "unrecognizable and irrational and entirely out of focus" (CSFVW 217). For at first "one could not relate these tablets to any human purpose"; suggesting that through the chronicles of history, through the continual construction of laws and confining modes of behavior, society has gradually increased its distance from the truth of human purpose (CSFVW 217). The proposed understanding of the masculine and feminine knowledge presented within this chapter reveal new depth to this short story. In the meeting of the traditional masculine and feminine intellects of Isabella's world, the image of society blurs "entirely out of focus"; Woolf intimates this will of course happen in society too, at first, when the conference and tea-tables meet. Yet, Woolf provides hope for a changed future, for an altered perception of masculinity and femininity, in that soon the tablets of antiquated knowledge become "invested with a new reality and significance."

In an excerpt from *Between the Acts*, the reader is able to explicitly see that the familial dining table represents a society like that suggested by "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection." Mrs. Manresa, on arriving unannounced to the house of Giles and Isa invokes, " '[w]e were going to sit alone in a field. And I said: 'Why not ask our dear friends,' seeing the signpost, 'to shelter us?' A seat at the table—that's all we want. We have our grub. We have our glasses. We ask nothing but—' society apparently, to be with her kind" (BTA 34-5). The table is imbued with not only a meaning for civilization but also with protection and shelter.

The excerpt continues:

> Then they went in to lunch, and Mrs. Manresa bubbled up, enjoying her own capacity to surmount, without turning a hair, this minor social crisis—this laying of two more places. For had she not complete faith in flesh and blood? and aren't we all flesh and blood? and how silly to make bones of trifles when we're all flesh and

> blood under the skin—men and women too! But she preferred men—obviously. (BTA 35-6)

Mrs. Manresa intones that though men and women occupy different spheres, there is an underlying commonality; both are made of the same raw material. As a spokeswoman for the modern era of feminism, Mrs. Manresa is able to easily overcome the ensuing awkwardness of her societal faux pas. The strangely sexual ending of this passage speaks to the fact that Woolf's focus on the interior design of the table "pushed the boundaries of socially acceptable conversation deep into the realms of sexuality" and gender (Massey 181).

THE FIGURE OF THE ANDROGYNOUS FEMALE ARTIST

As William Handley states in his article "The Housemaid and the Kitchen Table," "patriarchy and capitalism are for Woolf the divisive framers of women's lives; her advice to women, disagreeable to most of her closest friends, is to resist uncompromisingly inclusion in either of those frames" (Handley 37). While this vision can be explicit in some of Woolf's essays, such as "Professions for Women," it often takes a subtler and more nuanced perspective in her novelistic forms. Woolf builds binary gender positions in order to deconstruct them. In *To the Lighthouse, Between the Acts,* and *Orlando,* Woolf mediates this binary through the figure of the female androgynous creator. This artistic figure who stands somewhat outside the bounds of hetero-normative culture, is able to offer her nuanced perspective on gender roles and facilitate the meeting of the masculine and feminine intellects.

In *To the Lighthouse,* Lily Briscoe, the painter, is the artistic figure of female androgyny. In his article "Table in Trees: Realism in *To the Lighthouse*," Bruce Bassoff

suggests that for Lily to define the "razor edge" of her painting, she must "achieve not only a balance between Mr. Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay but also a balance between her differing views of each" (Bassoff 431). Mrs. Ramsay smiles at Lily and thinks "with her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face, she would never marry; one could not take her painting very seriously; she was an independent little creature," and later notices that "there was in Lily a thread of something; a flare of something; something of her own which Mrs. Ramsay liked very much indeed, but no man would, she feared" (TTL 17, 104). Even Lily herself is aware that "there was some quality which she herself had not, some lustre, some richness, which attracted [Mr. Ramsay], amused him, led him to make favourites of girls like Minta" (TTL 99).

Miss La Trobe, the artistic playwright, called "Bossy" behind her back "had the look of a commander pacing his deck. The leaning graceful trees with black bracelets circling the silver bark were distant about a ship's length" (BTA 57-8). Thus, while still tied to feminized nature, Miss La Trobe is also aligned with seafaring masculine tradition. The narrator of *Between the Acts* ponders,

> But where did she spring from? With that name she wasn't presumably pure English. From the Channel Islands perhaps?...Rumour said that she had kept a tea shop at Winchester; that had failed. She had bought a four-roomed cottage and shared it with an actress. They had quarreled. Very little was actually known about her. Outwardly she was swarthy, sturdy, and thick set; strode about the fields in a smock frock; sometimes with a cigarette in her mouth; often with a whip in her hand; and used rather strong language—perhaps, then, she wasn't altogether a lady? At any rate, she had a passion for getting things up. (BTA 53)

Fittingly, Miss La Trobe's efforts to conform to the tea-tables of domesticity failed. There are also possible lesbian undertones seen in the cottage she bought and shared with an actress. Miss La Trobe, like Lily, is untraditionally beautiful and also displays several of the

mannerisms typically associated with the traditional male such as “strong language,” use of a whip, and “a passion for getting things up.”

And, of course, Orlando represents the most clear example of androgyny within Woolf’s works as Orlando quite literally transforms during the novel from a man to a woman.

We remember Isabella from “The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection” as an independent woman who “had never married, and yet, judging from the mask-like indifference of her face, she had gone through twenty times more of passion and experience than those whose loves are trumpeted forth for all the world to hear”(CSFVW 216-17). Isabella is a figure on the outskirts of hetero-normative society as she has defied the marital tradition, and become a modern female figure with income and a room of her own. For “she was a spinster… she was rich…she had bought this house and collected with her own hands—often in the most obscure corners of the world and at great risk…the rugs, the chairs, the cabinets” (CSFVW 216). Isabella represents the independent woman, a harbinger of the progressive change that Woolf adamantly addresses in her essay “Professions for Women.”

As this figure of feminine independence, Isabella is endowed with insightful perspective: she “would come in, and take [the letters], one by one, very slowly, and open them, and read them carefully word by word, and then with a profound sigh of comprehension, as if she had seen to the bottom of everything, she would…tie the letters together and lock the cabinet drawer” (CSFVW 217). In parallel to her own mind, with the inclusion of these letters into their midst, her furniture too manifests a rich inner life of knowledge. In an echo of a *A Room of One’s Own*, Isabella’s “mind was like her room, in

which lights advanced and retreated, came pirouetting and stepping delicately…then her whole being was suffused, like the room again, with a cloud of some profound knowledge…and then she was full of locked drawers, stuffed with letters, like her cabinets" (CSFVW 219). The figure of Isabella is endowed with this secret inner life of the female's legacy, yet also represents the possibility in reinventing this legacy through her "profound knowledge" as she maintains a room of her own.

Naturally, the question may arise in the mind of the reader: If the artist is androgynous, why is she consistently a female figure? I posit that Woolf endows the artist with femininity in order to endow a modern woman with the voice of silenced feminine antiquity. The female androgynous artist is able to give us insight into the secret inner life of the female and her notion of cyclical legacy. Woolf provides us with a figure that not only benefits our understanding with knowledge of the traditional feminine legacy, but also embodies the possibility of reinventing this legacy. Additionally, Cixous argues that "at present, for historico-cultural reasons, it is women who are opening up to and benefiting from this vatic bisexuality which doesn't annul differences but stirs them up, pursues them, increases their number. In a certain way, 'woman is bisexual'; man—it's a secret to no one—being poised to keep glorious phallic monosexuality in view" (Cixous 884). Thus, it seems that perhaps Woolf chose the androgynous woman because both history and culture have provided her with the means for a subtler understanding of bi-sexuality, for a meeting of the minds. And indeed Bazin comments that "as a female, [Woolf] believed that her vision, though ideally bisexual, should on the whole be distinctly feminine, that is, 'woman-manly' as opposed to 'man-womanly' " (Bazin 5). Woolf believes that women have a new perspective to bestow upon literary tradition, that *she* has a new perspective to bestow.

"The new history is coming; it's not a dream, though it does extend beyond men's imagination, and for good reason" (Cixous 883). In revisiting Woolf's essay, "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," she concludes by telling this anecdotal story:

> One of the pilots landed safe in a field near here the other day. He said to his captors, speaking fairly good English, "How glad I am that the fight is over!" Then an Englishman gave him a cigarette, and an English woman made him a cup of tea. That would seem to show that if you can free the man from the machine, the seed does not fall upon altogether stony ground. The seed may be fertile. ("Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid")

Woolf is invoking that tradition and change do not have to be mutually exclusive. A man can be freed from the machine of traditionalism but still be offered a cup of tea from an Englishwoman. As a result of female confinement to the domestic sphere, certain feminine values and intuitions have arisen and been inculcated through the generations. It is my belief that Woolf wishes for these traditional values to inform a new understanding of the gender continuum.

Cixous argues that:

> It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded—which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate. (Cixous 883)

Those "peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate" take form in the figure of the female androgynous as she has separated herself enough from traditional hetero-normative marriage to gain an outsider's perspective, while simultaneously maintaining her own independent and professional artistic career. And indeed Cixous' statement points to the fact that this thesis can by no means attempt to define or enclose Woolf's writing (a charge I hope to have avoided by detailing several of the complexities and nuances within

my argument); rather it is an attempt to gain a further understanding, to bring one more perspective to the public table.

In her three novels *Between the Acts*, *Orlando*, and *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf will introduce a third figure that will mediate this seemingly opposed gender binary. This figure will serve to free the genders from the machine of traditionalism, from constricting conventions. Her figure of the female androgynous artist will seek to attain peace through a novel means of creative power—a power based neither in child-rearing nor glory. Perhaps, Woolf is proffering this figure as the key to overcoming inherent gender boundaries, to unlocking feelings of creative happiness in the male and to freeing women from the confines of a solely domestic lifestyle.

In the course of this thesis I will return to the concepts introduced within this chapter, to masculine and feminine perceptions of knowledge and legacy, and to the traditionally underappreciated values of feminine silence and subtle suggestive power, with the aim of looking at them through the lens of this intermediate figure: the female androgynous artist.

CHAPTER 2

INTERSECTION OF THE TABLE AND THE TREE

This chapter will continue analysis on the use of table imagery within Virginia Woolf's literature, and in particular the means by which she superimposes onto the table the image of the feminized tree as origin, support, and integral counterpart to the table. The figure of the female androgynous artist, with her unique perspective, will serve as orchestrator of this meeting of the table and tree, this intersection and unification of both the masculine and feminine intellects.

THE MARK ON THE WALL

Virginia Woolf published her first short story "The Mark on the Wall" in 1917, in which she explores several concepts revisited in her subsequent lifework and throughout the course of this thesis. In "The Mark on the Wall," the narrator first notices a mark on the wall after her afternoon tea. From her sitting chair she attempts to decipher what the mark could be or from whence it has come. As her musings wander, she begins to consider the future writing forms in which novelists will partake. She considers how the shape of the novel and what it aims to convey will dramatically change. In stream of consciousness, the narrator considers the changes her own life has seen and the parallel changes of novelistic form.

She considers the "whole class of things indeed which as a child one thought the thing itself, the standard thing, the real thing, from which one could not depart save at the risk of nameless damnation" (CSFVW 80). In her naïveté she had thought that intrinsically

"there was a rule for everything"; for instance "the rule for tablecloths at that particular period was that they should be made of tapestry with little yellow compartments marked upon them…Tablecloths of a different kind were not real tablecloths" (CSFVW 80). She remembers in the course of her own maturation, "how shocking, and yet how wonderful it was to discover that these real things, Sunday luncheons, Sunday walks, country houses, and tablecloths were not entirely real, were indeed half phantoms, and the damnation which visited the disbeliever in them was only a sense of illegitimate freedom" (CSFVW 80).

The narrator has realized the ridiculous nature of perceived reality. The phantom table of *To the Lighthouse* is now covered with this phantom tablecloth. A harmonious knowledge of the gender binary is obscured by the phantom reality of societal expectations, expectations in large part ruled by the masculine dominancy. In unveiling and challenging the societal belief that only those tablecloths with "little yellow compartments marked upon them" were legitimate, she has discovered not damnation but a remarkable freedom. She has loosed herself from the societal constraints of preconceived notions and expectations of the nature of knowledge, notions that are indeed phantoms of the public's imagination. The narrator has identified a critical flaw in societal ideals and yet also created a hope for society's future in that, like an adult matured from childhood, society can mature generationally to discover their phantom realities.

She continues to speculate,

> What now takes the place of those things I wonder, those real standard things? Men perhaps, should you be a woman; the masculine point of view which governs our lives, which sets the standard, which establishes Whitaker's Table of Precedency, which has become, I suppose, since the war half a phantom to many men and women, which soon, one may hope, will be laughed into the dustbin where the phantoms go, the mahogany sideboards and the Landseer prints, Gods and Devils,

> Hell and so forth, leaving us all with an intoxicating sense of illegitimate freedom—if freedom exists… (CSFVW 80)

Like the tablecloths of yore, the masculine viewpoint and the rules men apply to everything, are "not entirely real." They are only one part to the whole. She foresees a changing time in which the point of view determined by Whitaker's Table of Precedency will no longer constitute what is perceived as "the real thing." The masculine Table of knowledge and generational precedent will no longer strip men and women of their freedom.

And indeed the narrator expresses her current frustration with a world that is still relegated to interactions determined by Whitaker's Table of Precedency. She imagines a future of peace in the absence of gendered precedence, a "pleasant world. A quiet spacious world…a world which one could slice with one's thought as a fish slices the water with his fin, grazing the stems of the water-lilies, hanging suspended over nests of white sea eggs" (CSFVW 81). She likens her world of balanced gender intellects to that of a pond. Like Mrs. Ramsay stationed at her family's dining table but residing at her private table of the pond, this narrator imaginatively encounters an internalized knowledge of nature. For "how peaceful it is down here, rooted in the centre of the world and gazing up through the grey waters, with their sudden gleams of light, and their reflections—if it were not for Whitaker's Almanack—if it were not for the Table of Precedency!" (CSFVW 81-2) The "masculine point of view" which has established the Table of Precedency threatens the natural feminine sphere of the pond.

For our narrator, what does constitute "the real"? She considers the beauty of the tree and its fate, as creators of the real:

> Thus, waking from a midnight dream of horror, one hastily turns on the light and lies quiescent, worshipping the chest of drawers worshipping solidity, worshipping reality, worshipping the impersonal world which is proof of some existence other than ours. That is what one wants to be sure of…Wood is a pleasant thing to think about. It comes from a tree; and trees grow, and we don't know how they grow. For years and years they grow, without paying any attention to us, in meadows, in forests, and by the side of rivers—all things one likes to think about. The cows swish their tails beneath them on hot afternoons; they paint rivers so green that when a moorhen dives one expects to see its feathers all green when it comes up again… I like to think of the tree itself: first the close dry sensation of being wood; then the grinding of the storm; then the slow, delicious ooze of sap. I like to think of it, too, on winter's nights standing in the empty field with all leaves close-furled, nothing tender exposed to the iron bullets of the moon, a naked mast upon an earth that goes tumbling, tumbling all night long. The songs of birds must sound very loud and strange in June; and how cold the feet of insects must feel upon it, as they make laborious progresses up the creases of the bark, or sun themselves upon the thin green awning of the leaves, and look straight in front of them with diamond-cut red eyes….One by one the fibres snap beneath the immense cold pressure of the earth, then the last storm comes and falling, the highest branches drive deep into the ground again. Even so, life isn't done with; there are a million patient, watchful lives still for a tree, all over the world, in bedrooms, in ships, on the pavement, lining rooms, where men and women sit after tea… It is full of peaceful thoughts, happy thoughts, this tree. (CSFVW 82-3)

This passage beautifully elucidates Woolf's stance on the fundamental importance of the tree and its deep roots in her thought processes, an essential element around which her thinking revolves throughout her subsequent writings. Our narrator no longer considers the tablecloth and Table of Whitaker's Almanack to be the only constituents of the real. Rather, the fated tree too constitutes the real. The consideration of the origins and journey of the table's wood illuminates Woolf's goal of crediting all parts of the whole, of acknowledging not only the table but also its genesis in the tree. Woolf advocates for the complete image—for the incorporation of the natural feminine sphere of the garden and pond with the masculine Table of Precedency.

Yet, despite her hopeful ruminations, the narrator fears that all of her musings on the beauty of the tree are pointless, for perhaps the dominant culture of thought will always prevail. She considers: "Here is Nature once more at her old game of self-

preservation. This train of thought…is threatening mere waste of energy, even some collision with reality, for who will ever be able to lift a finger against Whitaker's Table of Precedency?" (CSFVW 82) Though hopeful, the future is still doubtful. In her novels *Orlando, To the Lighthouse,* and *Between the Acts,* Woolf will introduce her figure of female androgyny as hope for a changing world. The artist will challenge the masculine Table of Precedency with her knowledge of feminized Nature.

THE MOMENT

Virginia Woolf's short essay "The Moment" opens with: "The night was falling so that the table in the garden among the trees grew whiter and whiter; and the people round it more indistinct" (*The Moment and Other Essays* 3). As the lights burn out and are relit, the "wider circumference of the moment" becomes "laced about with these weavings to and fro, these inevitable downsinkings, flights, lamp lightings" (*The Moment and Other Essays* 4). Yet, despite the renewed lamplighting, the table amidst the trees seems to stand out in starker and starker contrast to the increasing blackness of the night.

The table of knowledge in the garden becomes the focal point of the moment. "Here in the centre is a knot of consciousness; a nucleus divided up into four heads, eight legs, eight arms, and four separate bodies. They are not subject to the law of the sun and the owl and the lamp. They assist it. For sometimes a hand rests on the table; sometimes a leg is thrown over a leg" (*The Moment and Other Essays* 4). It seems as if Woolf is advocating that at the very centre of the fleeting moment, at the center of consciousness, lies this "table in the garden among the trees." The completed moment incorporates both the table of knowledge and the knowledge of the surrounding garden trees, it incorporates the

perspectives of the "four heads, eight legs, eight arms, and four separate bodies" at the table, and it transcends time as it is not relegated to the "law of the sun and the owl and the lamp."

This serene centralizing image of the table in the garden at twilight is at the same time bombarded by the millions of perspectives, of storylines, converging at the present instant. Woolf goes on to depict an ugly facet of the moment:

> "He beats her every Saturday; from boredom, I should say; not drink; there's nothing else to do." The moment runs like quicksilver on a sloping board into the cottage parlour; there are the tea things on the table; the hard Windsor chairs; tea caddies on the shelf for ornament…two children crawling on the floor; and Liz comes in and John catches her a blow on the side of her head as she slopes past him, dirty, with her hair loose and one hairpin sticking out about to fall…and John sits himself down with a thump at the table and carves a hunk of bread and munches because there is nothing to be done…Let us do something then, something to end this horrible moment, this plausible glistening moment that reflects in its smooth sides this intolerable kitchen, this squalor. (*The Moment and Other Essays* 7)

Woolf depicts the deplorable state of the domestic life. The reader is alerted to this alarming call for change in the heavily weighted gender binary by the images of the "tea things on the table." While we have seen that there is a value in the feminine perspective at the tea table, this passage shows that masculine and feminine powers are in a severe predicament of imbalance. The scene of domestic violence exposes the underbelly of the austere phantom table. Not only does the female partner suffer in her forced submission, but also her male counterpart suffers from a profound boredom in his unfulfilled, unbalanced state. In the final sentence, Woolf vocalizes a need for change. This facet of "The Moment," with its centre at the "intolerable kitchen" table, must be challenged; this squalid boredom can be reversed and enlivened through fortification of the female's role as equal counterpart:

> Yet what composed the present moment? If you are young, the future lies upon the present, like a piece of glass, making it tremble and quiver. If you are old, the past

> lies upon the present, like a thick glass, making it waver, distorting it. All the same, everybody believes that the present is something, seeks out the different elements in this situation in order to compose the truth of it, the whole of it.
> (*The Moment and Other Essays* 3)

A single moment consists of a convergence of time, experiences of past, future, and present, all communicating in the same instant. A single moment is a convergence of everyone's perspectives "in order to compose the truth of it, the whole of it." Woolf seems to be arguing within this short story that appreciation of the feminine perspective is essential in the quest for understanding what composes the present moment.

The short story ends with the following passage:

> And then one shape heaves and surges and rises, and we pass, trailing coats down the path toward the lighted windows, the dim glow behind the branches, and so enter the door, and the square draws its lines round us, and here is a chair, a table, glasses, knives, and thus we are boxed and housed, and will soon require a draught of soda-water and to find something to read in bed.
> (*The Moment and Other Essays* 8)

Interestingly, while the story began with the natural image of "table in a garden of trees," it concludes with the forced domestication of this table. The confines of tradition have drawn their lines around us. Will we submit to being "boxed and housed" or will we lobby for the inclusion of historically-silenced feminine perspective?

IN THE ORCHARD

In her short story, "In the Orchard," Woolf describes a young girl asleep amongst the orchard noises. The short story represents a tension between escape and service, between death and life, between freedom and limitations.

> There were twenty-four apple-trees in the orchard…Each apple-tree had sufficient space. The sky exactly fitted the leaves. When the breeze blew, the line of the boughs against the wall slanted slightly and then returned…the whole was compacted by the orchard walls…The wind changing, one bunch of apples was tossed so high that

> it blotted out two cows in the meadow ('Oh, I shall be late for tea!' cried Miranda), and the apples hung straight across the wall again. (CSFVW 145)

There is a sense of an imposed ordering of nature in this passage. When the wind breaks this order in causing the trees to sway and the apples to bounce, the trees soon return to their prior stance and the apples again hang "straight across the wall." A rigid tension underlies their natural ebb and flow. In Miranda's remembrance of her societal duties at the tea-table, the trees re-conform to their imposed order.

It is crucial for the reader to remain aware that while female strength and beauty is frequently represented in Nature's tree, the tree as part of a garden, as part of an orchard, is not entirely free. It is bound by societal limitations, by garden and orchard walls; a contrived order can be imposed upon Nature's naturalness. In her book *In the Hollow of the Wave,* Bonnie Kime Scott states that, "Woolf constantly makes us aware that even though gardens and flowers encountered in her writing may provide stimulus to the senses and a queer space for sensual exploration or lively conversation, they are also arenas of control and confinement" (Scott 101). Thus though dreaming under the seemingly free nature of the apple trees, Miranda and the trees are not actually free—they are pawns in a contrived societal structure, enclosed within man-built walls.

In a moment reminiscent of Orlando, Miranda "let her body sink all its weight on to the enormous earth which rises, she thought, to carry me on its back as if I were a leaf, or a queen (here the children said the multiplication table)…Miranda slept in the orchard, or was she asleep or was she not asleep? Her purple dress stretched between the two apple-trees" (CSFVW 144-5). In a deathlike slumber underneath the apple trees, like that of Orlando beneath the oak tree, Miranda becomes one with the surrounding nature, the

surrounding trees. However, the orchard is a contrived space of nature and though quiet, is infiltrated by the traditional education tables of knowledge.

Once again we see the image of tables amongst the tree boughs when Miranda dozing in the orchard could faintly hear "the school-children saying the multiplication table in unison, stopped by the teacher, scolded, and beginning to say the multiplication table over again. But this clamour passed four feet above Miranda's head, went through the apple boughs" (CSFVW 143). The scene seems to echo that of Lily Briscoe imagining Mr. Ramsay's table of knowledge propped amongst the pear tree boughs.

Three times in the course of this short story Miranda is awakened from her deathlike sleep by an overwhelming anxiety. Miranda suddenly awakens from her slumber, "Miles below, in a space as big as the eye of a needle, Miranda stood upright and cried aloud: 'Oh I shall be late for tea!' " (CSFVW 144). She is awakened from her dreaming of distant corners of the globe to an anxiety over domestic duties and societal expectations. Like the illusion of the freedom of the trees, Miranda herself is enclosed within the orchard walls of masculine society's limitations. She dwells on the cusp of a deathlike slumber and an awakenment into a deathly life of servitude at the tea-table.

Quite beautifully, the imagery of the pond explored in Chapter 1 reappears in "The Orchard." In which "the very topmost leaves of the apple tree, flat like little fish against the blue, thirty feet above the earth, chimed with a pensive and lugubrious note" (CSFVW 143). The fish leaves with the blue backdrop of the sky resemble a pond lifted into the air. Whereas previously in *Between the Acts* we saw the pond as a natural table with the lily pads serving as plates, we can now see the pond in connection with the tree. The fish that

served at the table of the domestic dining scene in *Between the Acts* become linked to elements of the tree.

ORLANDO

Vita Sackville-West, understood to be the muse for Virginia Woolf's *Orlando,* published a poem called the "The Land" just two years prior to the publication of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* in 1928. I believe that as the inspiring force for her novel, Sackville-West likely influenced Virginia through her own poetry, particularly in this case through her characterization of trees.

In "The Land," Sackville-West repeatedly characterizes her trees as feminine in nature such as in the lines when Nature: *"walks among the loveliness she made … Each flower her son, and every tree her daughter"* (italics original) (Sackville West, "The Land"). Sackville-West's lines place particular emphasis on the idea of female legacy inherently linked to that of the tree, such as in the following stanza:

> And women still have memories of woods,
> Older than any personal memories;
> Writhen, primeval roots, though heads be fair,
> Like trees that fan the air with delicacies,
> With leaves and birds among the upper air,
> High, lifted canopies,
> Green and black fingers of the trees, dividing
> And reaching out towards an otherwhere …
> Of such a tall and airy world are they,
> Women and woods, with shadowed aisles profound
> That none explore.
> —Birches, frail whispering company, are these?
> Or lovely women rooted into trees?
> Daughters of Norsemen, on a foreign shore
> Left hostage, while the galley draws away,
> Beating its rise and fall on manifold oar,
> Beating a pathway to the broken coasts,
> Forgetful of its ghosts?
> (Sackville-West, "The Land")

Crucial to our understanding of the link between Sackville-West's work and Woolf's work, is the unpacking of this notion of female legacy, for perhaps the most profound aspect of Orlando is her ability to transcend mortality and live for centuries. In the preceding excerpt, Sackville-West speaks to a memory of female history preserved amongst the trees. The memories of the trees transcend that of the individual, as the memories of one's foremothers "older than personal memories" have been inscribed within the woods. The notion of "women and woods, with shadowed aisles profound / That none explore" speaks to the rich inner life of woman's mind that has remained largely undiscovered due to societal constrictions—a mind shrouded in shadows and "whispering" hushes due to the constraints placed upon it by society. Yet the passage suggests strength in this womanly silence, profoundness in its shadows, and a subtlety in the "delicacies" of woman's understanding. The legacy of these "lovely women rooted into trees" is akin to that of "ghosts," of women living a deathly self-less existence. This notion of a death-in-life is the legacy of historic domestication written in the trees of womanly memory.

In a stanza that seems to stand as direct inspiration for Woolf's *Orlando*, Sackville-West writes,

> *In deserts of Bohemia,*
> *A wood near Athens, or this wood*
> *Where these grown oaks as saplings stood*
> *Three hundred English years gone by,*
> *'And yet I love her till I die.'*
> (italics original) (Sackville-West, "The Land")

Orlando herself living several centuries, and traveling across the globe, consistently loves the oak tree throughout his and her entire lifetime.

And again in reflection of Orlando's poetic character writing century after century of "The Oak Tree" at home,

> Whether with stylus or with share and heft
> The record of his passage he engrave,
> And still, in toil, takes heart to love the rose.
> …
> Thou took'st the waxen tablets in thy hand,
> And out of anger cut calm tales of home.
> (Sackville-West, "The Land")

In her work *In the Hollow of the Wave*, Bonnie Kime Scott concludes, "trees repeatedly stand out from broader landscapes to move Woolf's characters to definitional moments" (Scott 146*)*. And indeed within *Orlando* it does seem as if the oak tree deserves the reader's particular attention as the first time we hear our protagonist's voice is when he arrives at the oak tree on the summit of the hill. Orlando happily asserts, " 'I am alone,' he breathed at last, opening his lips for the first time in this record. He had walked very quickly … to a place crowned by a single oak tree" (*Orlando* 18). Not only are Orlando's first words issued in the presence of the oak tree, but the oak tree too, from its perch atop the summit, looks out over his entire kingdom.

In similar fashion to that of Miranda in "The Orchard," Orlando "sighed profoundly, and flung himself—there was a passion in his movements which deserves the word—on the earth at the foot of the oak tree" (*Orlando* 19). For he loved "to feel the earth's spine beneath him; for such he took the hard root of the oak tree to be" (*Orlando* 19). Orlando draws solace and a maternal comfort from the solidity of the oak tree.

Significantly different than "In The Orchard," is that Orlando's oak tree lies outside of the garden walls for he "let himself out at a little gate in the garden wall" (*Orlando* 17). This early hint within the novel that Orlando will find his solace outside of the cultural confinements of gender begins to prepare the reader for Orlando's eventual transcendence of time, gender, and cultural expectations.

As Orlando flings himself down at the foot of the oak tree, "he felt the need of something which he could attach his floating heart to…To the oak tree he tied it" (*Orlando* 19). And as he lay at the oak tree, "gradually the flutter in and about him stilled itself…his limbs grew heavy on the ground; and he lay so still that by degrees the deer stepped nearer and the rooks wheeled round him… as if all the fertility and amorous activity of a summer's evening were woven web-like about his body" (*Orlando* 19). The fertility of the maternal oak tree calms Orlando's fluttering heart, allowing him to engage in a deathlike sleep not unlike that of Miranda's in "The Orchard." While he attaches his heart to the oak tree in this initial scene of introduction, the oak tree will forever remain next to his heart as Orlando literally carries "The Oak Tree" manuscript against his breast for centuries. The hearts of the tree and Orlando are indivisibly tied together.

In parallel to the excerpt given previously from Woolf's short story "The Mark on the Wall" in which she traces the journey of the "million patient, watchful lives" of the tree to the rooms "where men and women sit after tea," Vita Sackville-West in her poem "The Land" also invokes this journey in her discussion of the poet at his craft:

> Among the chips and lumber of his trade, …
> The little focus that his words enclose;
> As the poor joiner, working at his wood,
> Knew not the tree from which the planks were taken,
> Knew not the glade from which the trunk was brought,
> Knew not the soil in which the roots were fast,
> Nor by what centuries of gales the boughs were shaken,
> But holds them all beneath his hands at last
> (Sackville-West, "The Land")

The poet, "working at his wood" table, not only is inspired by the table made of "tree from which the planks were taken" but also in the "lumber of his trade" draws upon the tree's legacy as he holds his poem's papers "beneath his hands at last"—paper a man-made

descendent of the tree. In his book *Neatness Counts: Essays on the Writer's Desk*, Kevin Kopelson describes this metonymic connection between the desk and the text, "by 'metonymic,' I mean that texts are created—or constantly re-created—on desks, and that desks are constantly re-created under and around texts"(Kopelson 57). He suggests the intimate connection between "our bodies, our desks, our texts," as the body resides both at the desk and within the text, "figuratively there freeing itself of its image-repertoire" (Kopelson 57). In *Orlando*, the oak tree serves as the inspiration for Orlando's poeticism through the ages. The tree too serves as the wooden desk upon which Orlando writes his poetry on the tree-derived papers. In the end of the novel, Orlando will bring this relationship full circle in attempting to bury her bound poem "The Oak Tree" beneath its original inspiration as tribute to the poetic legacy it engendered.

However, Orlando stops short of actually burying her poem—perhaps as a nod to the complexity in deciphering the gendered line between masculine and feminine legacy; for we remember a bygone male Orlando obsessed with famed legacy when he appointed himself "the first poet of his race, the first writer of his age, conferring eternal immortality upon his soul and granting his body a grave among laurels and the intangible banners of a people's reverence perpetually" (*Orlando* 104). This difficulty in the final entombment of her text could suggest Orlando's now nuanced understanding of literary and personal legacy, and her unwillingness to fulfill the celebratory rituals that she had once long ago desired. Orlando's decision to attain public fame for her poem but then subsequent return to nature's inspiration and grappling with how to achieve memorialization for the oak tree, suggests a truly androgynous mindset—or perhaps even a figure that has moved beyond the gender continuum.

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

Like feminine presence in *Orlando,* in *To the Lighthouse* "Mrs. Ramsay's character is repeatedly essentialized in nature. Woolf's narrator, other characters, and Mrs. Ramsay herself all participate in this" (Scott 104). For instance, Mrs. Ramsay "grew still like a tree which has been tossing and quivering and now, when the breeze falls, settles, leaf by leaf, into quiet" (TTL 118).

Mrs. Ramsay is further aligned with natural imagery:

> Mrs. Ramsay's own imagination abounds with natural images…At dinner, she listens to Mr. Ramsay reciting a poem that represents courtship in a garden. It supports her essentialist position, in terms of feminine fecundity, in the garden. '*Come out and climb the garden path Luriana Lurilee'…*She imagines 'the words…as if they were floating like flowers on water' out the window (112)…Mrs.Ramsay adapts a language of nature to her own exploration of relationships and ideas. (italics original) (Scott 104-5)

Indeed as "she turned and felt on the table beside her for a book," Mrs. Ramsay murmurs "*And all the lives we ever lived, And all the lives to be, Are full of trees and changing leaves,* … sticking her needles into the stocking" (TTL 119). In this scene of domestic knitting, Mrs. Ramsay's ruminations dwell in the lives of the trees, in the natural perspective of feminine legacy and procreation. As "she opened the book and began reading here and there at random…she felt that she was climbing backwards, upwards, shoving her way up under petals that curved over her, so that she only knew this is white, or this is red. She did not know at first what the words meant at all" (TTL 119). Rather than intellectually understanding the words on the page, Mrs. Ramsay first instinctually feels their relationship to nature, senses the imaginative inner life that the words are able to convey. She reads, "*Steer, hither steer your winged pines, all beaten Mariners,* She read and turned

the page, swinging herself, zigzagging this way and that, from one line to another as from one branch to another, from one red and white flower to another" (BTA 119). She senses freedom amongst the trees as she momentarily escapes her life of domestic confinement.

Yet, Mrs. Ramsay's rich inner life of natural understanding remains unappreciated by her husband. At the same time that Mrs. Ramsay was "climbing up those branches, this way and that, laying hands on one flower and then another," her husband sat in judgment, watching her and thinking "Go on reading. You don't look sad now, he thought. And he wondered what she was reading, and exaggerated her ignorance, her simplicity, for he liked to think that she was not clever, not book-learned at all. He wondered if she understood what she was reading. Probably not, he thought. She was astonishingly beautiful" (TTL 121). Mr. Ramsay relegates his wife to the prototypical Angel of the House, to a woman consisting of no intellect but immense beauty, a woman he is able to simultaneously denigrate and worship.

When Mrs. Ramsay understands this domestic denigration, William Handley argues that:

> The elm trees outside the house help Mrs. Ramsay to survive the shock of this momentary sensation that there is no independent thing, no independent form for her own life, detached from the judges who determine its value. That she uses the elm trees for the purpose of stability "unconsciously and incongruously" suggests an incipient capacity of her eyes to see the things that lie beyond her frame, to see how those things suggest the relativity and mutability of her domestic world.
> (Handley 34)

The trees represent not only herself and her imaginative escape, but also her stabilizing force within a culture that strips the individual of her identity in relegating her to a societal norm.

Yet, in regards to this reading scene between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, Howard Harper in *Between Language and Silence* intones that, “the difference in how they read is as dramatic as in what they read”; while Mr. Ramsay uses reading “to indulge his own sentimentality and his own ego,” Mrs. Ramsay “loses herself in the music of the sonnets” (Harper 145). Mr. Ramsay reads to fulfill his male-centric ideology, whereas Mrs. Ramsay reads as an exercise in taking part in the world around her. Thus, “because her awareness is so much more comprehensive and powerful than her husband’s, her ‘triumph’ is inevitable” (Harper 145).

In Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* her representations of masculine and feminine knowledge in the figures of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay seem to be polarized differences of austerity and sympathy, respectively. Yet, at the same time that Woolf often creates scenes in which female and male knowledge seem incompatible, she inspires these scenes with imagery of a symbiotic support system. Woolf skillfully underlies her scenes with the symbolism of the pear tree and table as a means of providing hope for an understanding of love and knowledge within her human relationships.

In one of the introductory scenes of the novel, Lily is walking with Mr. Bankes while thinking to herself on the nature of Mr. Ramsay's work. Due to imagery provided by the young Andrew Ramsay, Lily now "always saw, when she thought of Mr. Ramsay's work, a scrubbed kitchen table. It lodged now in the fork of a pear tree" (TTL 23). Woolf imagines masculine knowledge as an unadorned and austere wooden table, a table "whose virtue seems to have been laid bare by years of muscular integrity" (TTL 23). Mr. Ramsay functions as the archetypal form of male intelligence in this book in which success is accounted for by one's contributions to the world of academia. The table represents a

world in which it is necessary to completely strip away superfluous meaning in order to arrive at the true meaning of life, in order to reach the letter "Z" in Mr. Ramsay's alphabet of ideas.

In a jarring juxtaposition to this image of the table, is the pear tree, which has ungrounded and lifted the table in its branches. The branches of the pear tree have enveloped the table imagined by Lily Briscoe. The lush and fruitful tree serves as the maternal image that harbors the table in the protection of her boughs. While Woolf describes masculine knowledge as academic in nature, she represents female knowledge in terms of the social sphere and the intimate knowledge of interpersonal relationships and interactions. This warmth of physical proximity is portrayed in the repeated image of Mrs. Ramsay nestled closely to her son James while reading. In another scene of female intelligence imbued with close physical contact, Lily herself wonders, "Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one?" and whether this sympathy of spirits was "nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee" (TTL 51). As the table becomes enveloped by the orchard tree, Woolf's scene becomes dominated by nature.

After a marital argument between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, Mrs. Ramsay "would go to him...and they would walk off together among the pear trees...They would have it out together...until it was time for dinner, and then there they were, he at one end of the table, she at the other" and that "usual sight of the children sitting round their soup plates had freshened itself in their eyes after that hour among the pears" (TTL 200). This Edenic allusion to a sympathy between man and woman found amongst the orchard trees validates the primordial importance of tree symbolism within Woolf's works. The pear

trees provide a nurturing aspect to the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, healing their incongruities—allowing them to return to the table as a functioning whole. The experience in nature's exterior is able to salvage and complete that of the domestic interior. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are to find the harmony in their relationship by providing for the other what he or she lacks.

In the next scene the environment changes from that of the orchard to that of the social sphere of familial intimacy. The reader sees the table and pear tree placed within the very dining room of the Ramsay's summer home. As the focal scene of the dinner at the Ramsay's unfolds, the interactions between the family and friends gathered around the table feel awkward and forced, as if the gap between masculine and feminine sympathies is almost tangible. This is particularly evident in Mrs. Ramsay's reflections:

> "Andrew," [Mrs. Ramsay] said, "hold your plate lower, or I shall spill it." (The Boeuf en Daube was a perfect triumph.) Here, she felt, putting the spoon down, was the still space that lies about the heart of things, where one could move or rest; could wait now (they were all helped) listening; could then, like a hawk which lapses suddenly from its high station, flaunt and sink on laughter easily, resting her whole weight upon what at the other end of the table her husband was saying about the square root of one thousand two hundred and fifty-three. …What did it all mean? To this day she had no notion. A square root? What was that? Her sons knew. (TTL 105)

Mrs. Ramsay is clearly aware of her own intellectual inadequacies. She takes pride in her domestic expertise ("The Boeuf en Daube was a perfect triumph"), but "to this day she had no notion" of the analytical mathematics practiced by her husband and sons. The disconnect in gendered education is tangible. It seems as if the void between masculine and feminine knowledge is insurmountable, the chasm in understanding too great. It is as if the tree has had to be destroyed in the making of the table, in constantly holding the table up amongst its boughs. The fruitfulness of the maternal pear tree has been sucked dry, as Mrs. Ramsay reflects:

> But what have I done with my life?...taking her place at the head of the table... She [had] only this—an infinitely long table and plates and knives. At the far end, was her husband, sitting down, all in a heap, frowning...She could not understand how she had ever felt any emotion or affection for him. She had a sense of being past everything, through everything, out of everything...It's all come to an end, she thought (TTL 82-3)

Yet, Mrs. Ramsay is soon reminded of what she has accomplished in her life: the nurturing of her children. Mrs. Ramsay has a skill set of her own in her ability to understand and complete the needs of each of her children. It is not until the lighting of the candles that the scene around the table suddenly transforms to one in which differences are appreciated and sympathies reconciled. The "eight candles were stood down the table...and drew with them into visibility the long table entire, and in the middle a yellow and purple dish of fruit" (TTL 97). The fruit bowl becomes the object of looking for all around the table, and although all see something different in the arrangement, this "looking together united them" (TTL 97).

The eight candles, the force that dispels of the shadows that skulk and feed on the gaps between feminine and masculine knowledge, are representative of the Ramsay's eight children. The children, as both the fruits of the maternal tree and the candles of the paternal table, have become the mediating saving grace; "For one's children so often gave one's own perceptions a little thrust forwards" (TTL 80). The location of the candles down the centerline of the table on either side of the fruit bowl centerpiece serves as a physical representation of the joining of the two heads of the table, as the direct link between the knowledges of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. In a connection that transcends words "they looked at each other down the long table sending these questions and answers across, each knowing exactly what the other felt" (TTL 96). The separate feminine and masculine knowledges

travel towards the center of the table, helped along by the light of their children between them, to unite in the tree of knowledge, in the pears at the center of the dining table. Interestingly, the image of the table of knowledge first conceived by the child (Andrew) has now become illuminated by the child's presence.

An interesting twist is introduced to this dining room scene of presumably advantageous matrimony by the constant ruminations of Lily that she must alter her painting, that she "must move the tree to the middle; that matters—nothing else" (TTL 86). Lily reflects that by putting "the tree further in the middle" she shall "avoid that awkward space" that has been "puzzling" her (TTL 85). Thus it seems as if Lily, a woman who herself will never experience the hardships and successes of marriage, has been able to synthesize her own understanding of knowledge from a world divided along gender lines. She has created her own tree of knowledge to bridge the gap in gender differences and thus dispose of any awkward spaces in her painting, in her life.

In this dining room scene, Lily, by placing a salt cellar on a sprig pattern in the tablecloth, reminds herself that she must move the tree to the center of her painting. Thus if the reader were to superimpose this mental imagery, the tree would replace the salt cellar as being moved towards the center of the table; the tree would overlap with the centerpiece bowl of fruit and thus Woolf gives the reader the image of a fruit tree supported by a wooden table. Whereas in our original scene Lily imagined the pear tree as the support for the barren table, the image has now been inverted to supply the reader with the reciprocal image of the table as support for the luscious pear tree. Male and female knowledge have become equally important in supporting the other, indeed both benefitting from the symbiotic relationship. The ideal fusion of masculine and feminine knowledge is

seen by Woolf's depictions of the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. She provides two scenes of especially heavy symbolism in which the interdependent pear tree and table represent the austere but sturdy responsibility of masculinity with the maternally fertile and sympathetic responsibility of feminine knowledge.

Interestingly, Lily is only able to synthesize this fundamental change to her painting when amongst the illuminated presence of all those round the dinner table. Thus, although not directly involved in a matrimonial relationship she has become indirectly influenced by the married couple and by the insights of their children. Lily, the female androgynous creator, has orchestrated the meeting of the feminine and masculine genders at the dinner table through her movement of the tree to the center of the discussion of knowledge. In this moment the orchard's phantom table in the exterior has met the domestic interior table of familial dining.

Years later, after the death of Mrs. Ramsay, Lily wonders while sitting alone at the same kitchen table: "Why is one sitting here after all? Sitting alone...among the clean cups at the long table, she felt cut off from other people, and able only to go on watching, asking, wondering" (TTL 146). Without the balances of knowledge present in the family dinner scene, Lily feels misplaced and unfulfilled. For during that long-gone summer Lily had described the way she felt while staying with the Ramsays as "to be made to feel violently two opposite things at the same time... so beautiful, so exciting, this love, that [she] tremble[d] on the verge of it...also it [was] the stupidest, the most barbaric of human passions... there is nothing more tedious, puerile, and inhumane than this; yet it is also beautiful and necessary" (TTL 102-3). Through her artwork, Lily attempts to mediate the tension between this dual blessing and curse of the gender binaries. In the words of Bruce

Bassoff in his article "Tables in Trees: Realism in *To the Lighthouse,"* Lily "must achieve not only a balance between Mr. Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay but also a balance between her differing views of each" (Bassoff 431).

In Mrs. Ramsay's absence, Mr. Ramsay suffers, unable to balance his masculine intuition with that of his female counterpart. It is through Lily's thoughts that we hear:

> Thinking, night after night, she supposed—about the reality of kitchen tables... He must have had his doubts about that table she supposed; whether the table was a real table; whether it was worth the time he gave to it; whether he was able after all to find it. He had had doubts, she felt, or he would have asked less of people. That was what they talked about late at night sometimes, she suspected… But now he had nobody to talk to about that table. (TTL 155-6)

Thus, Lily as the female androgynous artist seems to understand the natural give and take between the gender spheres, is able to understand the need for a mediating power between the opposite ends of the continuum. She accepts that men and women are not always at odds with one another but can revivify each other, and supply what the other half is missing.

In Mrs. Ramsay's absence, the familial table has also been redefined for Lily. In the absence of Mrs. Ramsay from this final section of the novel, as one of the integral pillars of love, the tree of knowledge has been disturbed. What in the beginning section of the book served as a familial space of dining permeated by the maternal role of Mrs. Ramsay, has now become an empty table in which Lily is able to think uninterrupted about her artistic creation.

> As if any interruption would break the frail shape she was building on the table she turned her back to the window lest Mr. Ramsay should see her. She must escape somewhere, be alone somewhere. Suddenly she remembered. When she had sat there last ten years ago there had been a little sprig or leaf pattern on the table-cloth, which she had looked at in a moment of revelation. There had been a problem about a foreground of a picture. Move the tree to the middle, she had said. She had never finished that picture. She would paint that picture now. (TTL 147)

Ironically, the artist Lily Briscoe realizes how to furnish “a room of her own,” her painting, while seated around the familial dinner table (AROO 4). Her perception of the confines of domesticity is necessary to stimulate and engender a counter-response. The familial sphere is needed to reach the culmination of her artwork, to inspire her final brush stroke as a defiance of the gendered system.

In the final scene of the novel, Lily Briscoe completes her painting, her understanding of the knowledge of the world, by drawing a line "in the centre" (TTL 209). It is presumable to think that, given this reading, the line of completion through the centre is an abstract tree as she has already determined she “must move the tree to the middle” (TTL 85). In his article “The Housemaid and the Kitchen Table,” William Handley posits that the centre line is indeed the abstract figure of Mrs. Ramsay “that holds her painting together” (Handley 27). Thus, again, we see the overlap in imagery of the prototypical female Angel of the House with that of the tree of Nature.

In the placing of Mrs. Ramsay the tree as the center of Lily’s painting, I think Woolf recognizes that there is a need for some aspect of the traditional domestic sphere, but she is advocating for the rethinking of what this sphere entails. There is a potent feeling of disjointed falling apart in the years after the death of Mrs. Ramsay. And indeed it is not until this central maternal figure is reinstated at the end, by the final center-line of Briscoe’s work, that her artwork has reached completion—it serves to unify her piece and hold together its separate parts. Thus, Woolf appreciates the protective powers of maternity. Interestingly, the furnishing of Lily Briscoe’s room of her own, her painting that in essence defies her normative gender role, her personal revolt against the system of starkly separate gender spheres, revolves around this central figure of domesticity.

Woolf's ambiguity in this final image of drawing a line through "the centre" is essential to the understanding of the novel: the line is able to represent both the tree (vertical line through the center) and the table (horizontal line through the center). Although reconciliation of male and female intelligence is often times challenging, Woolf is proposing that in their differences female and masculine knowledge are able to provide both a horizontal and vertical support system for society's youth. The tree and table are equally important in holding up and centering Lily's image of life.

In *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision*, Bazin notes that before Lily "can feel harmony in her mind and attain it in her painting, she realizes that she must 'achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces'… In other words, she must bring into equilibrium the masculine and feminine approaches to life represented by Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay" (Bazin 9). Bazin notes that in the final construction of the center-line, "it seems to symbolize for [Lily] the place at which the masculine and feminine forces meet in the 'androgynous' mind" (Bazin 9).

Importantly to the discussion of this thesis, the female androgynous artist is crucial in orchestrating the meeting of opposite ends of the gender binary, the movement of the salt cellar "tree" to the center of the table and the subsequent incorporation of this symbolism into Lily's own artwork. Bruce Bassoff argues that for Virginia Woolf "writing from nature is realizing certain psychological states—states of desire, dependency, and conflict—that may be particularly acute in the sensitized artist but that are common to others" (Bassoff 424). In all three of Woolf's novels here explored, *To the Lighthouse, Between the Acts,* and *Orlando,* the androgynous artist is in female form as she inherently is

linked to the natural tree and thus able to challenge the dominant male perspective on knowledge from a foundationally female perspective.

While the androgynous Lily "does not fit into Mrs. Ramsay's reproductive scheme, does not marry, and feels left out of the patriarchal household's economy, that which such a household cannot assimilate: an independent, working woman," it is precisely this outsider perspective due to "the Victorian household exclud[ing] the possibility of combining work and family life for women" that allows Lily to mediate the gender binary (Handley 32). Indeed, Handley argues that "the table that the philosopher writes on has lost its ground when Lily places it in her artistic mind" becoming "a thing with legs that have no purpose, an absurd-phantom that laughs in a pear tree. The philosopher cannot write 'on' the table impossibly lodged there, its legs in air" (Handley 30-1). Lily subverts the gender binary.

Lily's nuanced perspective as an undomesticated feminine artist allows her to somewhat alter the sheer austerity of the male's "scrubbed kitchen table," and elucidate the severe lack in masculine philosophy in the absence of appreciated feminine presence.

Throughout the novel, "Woolf's work reveals what that male gaze does not see…While women have long been aesthetically represented, Woolf suggests in her work, they have rarely been seen. Lily's fleeting vision of Mrs. Ramsay points toward that work of restitution" (Handley 38-9). Lily, a female of new modernism, is ironically able to subvert this traditional female aestheticism through creation of an aesthetic artwork all her own. Handley argues that "Lily knows unity with Mrs. Ramsay when her life is sacrificed; the Boeuf en Daube scene can be read as a Last Supper in which her memory will be insured. Lily's art is her own offering toward this unity in the labor of mourning and representation"

(Handley 26). Lily's aesthetic perspective serves to mediate the gender binary, unifying its dichotomous parts, its table and tree, into a harmonious whole.

BETWEEN THE ACTS

In their work *The Madwoman in the Attic,* Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar claim that men have created two prototypes for the female character, and their relegation of the female into either category is an attempt to "possess her more thoroughly" (Gilbert and Gubar 17). These two prototypes are the "angel" and the "monster" (Gilbert and Gubar 17). Gubar and Gilbert claim that to truly reach literary autonomy, the female writer must abolish these superficial conceptions of the angel and the monster. How does Woolf attempt to redefine the angel and the monster within her own works?

In *Between the Acts,* the elderly Mrs. Swithin has an extremely rich imagination, embellishing history with a natural beauty and in understanding history as a cyclical phenomenon through the overlap of past and present moments. As Mrs. Swithin muses about prehistoric times, the maid Grace enters the library and "[i]t took [Mrs. Swithin] five seconds in actual time, in mind time ever so much longer, to separate Grace herself, with blue china on a tray, from the leather-covered grunting monster who was about, as the door opened, to demolish a whole tree in the green steaming undergrowth of the primeval forest. Naturally, she jumped, as Grace put the tray down" (BTA 8). As Grace enters the scene with her portable tea table, Mrs. Swithin has difficulty in differentiating her from the tree-dominated scene of her mind's eye. Grace, the maid, "felt on her face the divided glance that was half meant for a beast in a swamp, half for a maid in a print frock and white apron" (BTA 8). Woolf thus satirically impresses upon Grace the masculine fantasy of a

domesticated female servant, the angel of the house in a "print frock and white apron," with that of their utter nightmare in the female's split persona, the "grunting monster."

This overlay of the angel at the tea table in present day with that of the prehistoric monster's eminent destruction of a whole tree serves to address a critical moment in the tradition out of which Woolf is writing, in regards to the understanding of female personhood. Woolf imbues this masculine perception of female personhood as a mere dichotomy of angel and monster with new meaning. She satirizes this masculine perception of femininity by observing the scene through Mrs. Swithin's eyes and mind, through an imagination of lush creativity and complexity. For Mrs. Swithin was "tempted by the sight" of nature outside her window "to continue her imaginative reconstruction of the past, Mrs. Swithin paused; she was given to increasing the bounds of the moment by flights into past or future; or sidelong down corridors and alleys" (BTA 8-9). We see again, as discussed in Chapter 1, the flight of the woman of antiquity into "narrow passageways, hidden crossovers" (Cixous 887). Mrs. Swithin's understanding of history and legacy are not relegated to a linear path but rather are labyrinthine in nature, constantly fluctuating between present, past, and future, as seen in her overlap of the prehistoric monster with her everyday kitchen maid. The passage ends with Mrs. Swithin sitting down "to morning tea, like any other old lady with a high nose, thin cheeks, a ring on her finger" (BTA 9). Mrs. Swithin, though having lived an external life of traditional femininity, has maintained a rich internal life of creative subtlety and an understanding of cyclical legacy. In Woolf's creation of strong female characters that view the world differently from their dominating male counterparts, she redefines the traditional angel and monster of female domesticity.

The next table scene within *Between the Acts* is the familial dining scene of filleted soles into which Mrs. Manresa and William Dodge invite themselves. Mrs. Manresa asks for " 'A seat at the table—that's all we want…We ask nothing but—' society apparently, to be with her kind" (BTA 35). Woolf clearly associates the table as symbol for and staple of society. There is an interesting amount of overlap between the ensuing scene of family dining and that of the familial dining scene already analyzed from *To the Lighthouse.*

Giles arrives to the table thinking to himself that, "Given his choice, he would have chosen to farm. But he was not given his choice. So one thing led to another; and the conglomeration of things pressed you flat; held you fast, like a fish in water… and [he] ate his fillet of sole" (BTA 43). Like his wife Isa, Giles too feels entrapped by expected gender fulfillments, in an internal agony that has "afflicted him for ten years" (BTA 43). Woolf humorously satirizes the situation with Giles eating "his fillet of sole," his soul in duress from societal expectations. Both man and woman have been killed into stasis by enforced gender constructs.

Candish the gardener arranges a centerpiece of flowers for the familial dining table: "[y]ellow, white, carnation red—he placed them. He loved flowers, and arranging them… Now all was ready—silver and white, forks and napkins, and in the middle the splashed bowl of variegated roses" (BTA 32-3). This natural centerpiece of flowers is reminiscent of the bowl of pears placed within the center of the Ramsay's dinner table. Additionally, like the flowers that will be hung by the children in the rafters of the Barn above the intermission scene of tea-table drinking, this bowl of flowers arranged by Candish the gardener introduces nature into the interior domestic scene.

In a moment reminiscent of the silent communication across the bowl of pears in the center of the Ramsay's table, Giles "nodded to [Isa] across the table" to which she thinks:

> "He is my husband," Isabella thought, as they nodded across the bunch of many-coloured flowers. "The father of my children." It worked, that old cliché; she felt pride; and affection; then pride again in herself, whom he had chosen… how much she felt when he came in… of love; and of hate. (BTA 44)

Once again, like in *To the Lighthouse,* the thought of children act as a compelling force that links the two gender binaries, creating a unity. Additionally, the emotions of love and hate are felt strongly here within the gender binary surrounding the dining table. These emotions will later be analyzed in terms of a mediating force that comes through the Peace of the androgynous female artist.

Importantly, the androgynous Miss La Trobe chooses the location for her play based upon the presence of the trees. " 'That's the place for a pageant, Mr. Oliver!' she had exclaimed. 'Winding in and out between the trees…' She waved her hand at the trees standing bare in the clear light of January" (ellipses original) (BTA 53). In creating a play that attempts to elucidate the confines of the gender binary, Miss La Trobe is aware that the surroundings of nature will profoundly influence and complete her play, imbuing her play with the necessary (and oft silenced) feminine perspective. The ambiance of the play is created through nature's presence: "The lawn was as flat as the floor of a theatre. The terrace, rising, made a natural stage. The trees barred the stage like pillars" (BTA 70). The family members sit by "the shelter of the old wall" where the relationship between orchard trees and confining walls is revisited:

> For by some lucky chance a wall had been built continuing the house, it might be with the intention of adding another wing… But funds were lacking; the plan was abandoned, and the wall remained, nothing but a wall. Later, another generation

> had planted fruit trees, which in time had spread their arms widely across the red orange weathered brick. (BTA 48)

The relevance of the orchard within closed walls reappears: a space of nature that is simultaneously inhibited by societal constructs. Interestingly these confined fruit trees never reach their potential for "Mrs. Sands called it a good year if she could make six pots of apricot jam from them—the fruit was never sweet enough for dessert. Perhaps three apricots were worth enclosing in muslin bags" (BTA 48). Yet, Mrs. Swithin still believes these fruits to be "so beautiful, naked, with one flushed cheek, one green, that Mrs. Swithin left them naked, and the wasps burrowed holes" (BTA 48). Mrs. Swithin has an understanding with nature, desiring the fruit trees to remain in their natural state as provision for those other elements of nature.

This excerpt is followed by one in which Mrs. Manresa says, " 'about this entertainment—this pageant, into which we've gone and butted'—she made it, too, seem ripe like the apricot into which the wasps were burrowing…she heard laughter, down among the bushes, where the terrace dipped to the bushes" (BTA 52). In this space wherein the domestic sphere of the home meets with that of the natural sphere, mirth emanates. In this moment, Woolf draws a parallel between the ripened apricot and the pageant of Miss La Trobe. The creation of female artwork and its inclusion of the natural sphere have potentiated the apricot for ripeness, for attaining a mediation in the gender binary.

Between the acts of the play, the actors and audience break for "half an hour's interval, for tea" at the table in the Barn (BTA 86). In the Barn, "festoons of paper roses, left over from the Coronation, drooped from the rafters. A long table, on which stood an urn, plates and cups, cakes and bread and butter, stretched across one end" (BTA 90). Yet, as the villagers file into the empty Barn, Mrs. Manresa realizes that "the villagers still hung back.

They must have someone to start the ball rolling" (BTA 92). As such Mrs. Manresa proclaims, " 'Well, I'm dying for my tea!' she said in her public voice; and strode forward" (BTA 92). Mrs. Manresa initiates the gathering. "She laid hold of a thick china mug…She was the first to drink, the first to bite" (BTA 92). Mrs. Manresa, unafraid of broaching societal constructions (as demonstrated by her unconcern for inviting herself to the Olivers' dining table previously), allows for the meeting of the minds at the tea table in the Barn. For " 'It's all my eye about democracy,' she concluded. So did Mrs. Parker, taking her mug too. The people looked to them. They led; the rest followed. 'What delicious tea!' each exclaimed, disgusting though it was…But they had a duty to society" (BTA 92-3). These women felt they had a duty to society to continue the façade of traditional tea-table etiquette.

At the same time that Mrs. Manresa feels she has brought society together by her actions at the tea-table, "Isa pressed her way to the table," murmuring "'Dispersed are we'" (BTA 93). As her cup is filled with tea, she thinks to herself " 'Let me turn away…from the array'—she looked desolately round her—'of china faces, glazed and hard' " (BTA 93). Whether Isa is thinking of the faces of the china plates on the table or the faces of those eating their cake at the table, she feels confined by this traditional domestic scene. Her thoughts are characterized with a feeling of disunity amongst her peers and a necessity to extricate herself from societal constructs. She thinks of going " '[d]own the ride, that leads under the nut tree and the may tree, away, till I come to the wishing well…' she dropped sugar, two lumps, into her tea… 'But what wish should I drop into the well?...That the waters should cover me' " (BTA 93). Surrounded by the historical culture of confinement that surrounds the tea-table, Isa contemplates suicide. While standing at the tea-table, in her mind she follows the trail between "the nut tree and the may tree" to her wishful

demise. Tired of the daily fight against the confinements of tradition, as Isa drops her sugar-lump wishes into her tea cup well, she contemplates yielding to the overpowering tea waters of antiquity. This preoccupation with a drowned death reminds us of the lily pond and the ghost of the maid who supposedly drowned. Though the female's intellect is linked with death, the death resides in a pool of liquid renewal—ushering in the notion of feminine cyclical legacy.

Ironically enough, "[t]he noise of china and chatter drowned her murmur. 'Sugar for you?' they were saying. 'Just a spot of milk?' " (BTA 93) Even Isa's desire for death by the wishing well, is drowned by its very same inspiration. Yet, in her contemplation of death, Isa questions herself, " '[s]hould I mind not again to see may tree or nut tree?' " (BTA 94). The trees are endowed with a lifesaving quality, causing Isa to pause in her quest for an escape from the tables of domesticity.

William Dodge startles Isa out of her musings, and thinks to himself, "She was handsome. He wanted to see her, not against the tea urn, but with her glass green eyes and thick body, the neck was broad as a pillar, against an arum lily or a vine" (BTA 95). William Dodge, the male artist within *Between the Acts*, desires to see Isa without the traditional backdrop of femininity, that of a deathly tea urn, but rather in an environment of nature. He admires her untraditional beauty and envisions her in a domain outside of the confines of traditional femininity.

At the other end of the Barn, Mrs. Manresa and Giles "came upon the old couple, Lucy and Bartholomew, sitting on their Windsor chairs" apart from the rest of the company (BTA 97). For "chairs had been reserved for them. Mrs. Sands had sent them tea" and it "would have caused more bother than it was worth—asserting the democratic principle;

standing in the crowd at the table" (BTA 97). Again the table is seen as the locus of civilization, like the "British Republic" of Mrs. Ramsay's dining table (TTL 103). As Giles and Mrs. Manresa approach the older couple, "Bart rose from his chair. But Mrs. Manresa absolutely refused to take his seat. 'Go on sitting, go on sitting,' she pressed him down again. 'I'll squat on the floor.' She squatted. The surly knight remained in attendance" (BTA 97-8). This passage shows the generational gap in understanding between the older generation and the new age of progressive feminism. While the older pair avoids the democracy of mingling intellects at the tea-table, Mrs. Manresa subsequently flouts traditionalism in her refusal to accept Bartholomew's chivalry.

When Bart and Giles both leave the Barn to retake their seats in the audience, "Mrs. Manresa was nettled. What for had she squatted on the floor then? Were her charms fading?...But woman of action as she was, deserted by the male sex," she too gets up and leaves the bored company of the "refeened old lady" Mrs. Swithin (BTA 99). Yet all the while, "Cobbet in his corner saw through her little game. He had known human nature in the East. It was the same in the West…and observed the little game of the woman following the man to the table in the West as in the East" (BTA 99). This observation by Cobbet suggests that there is a universal aspect to the woman following the man to the table. His suggestion leaves a lingering residue within the reader's mind that the female characters in *Between the Acts* have, to some degree, still maintained this traditional sense of woman living to serve man's needs.

The audience returns to their seats, and one of the final acts of Miss La Trobe's play ensues. This act serves as a play within a play, in which *Where there's a Will there's a Way* spans two scenes. It begins with the entrance of a beautiful yet mysterious woman:

> Who was she? What did she represent? She was beautiful—very. Her cheeks had been powdered; her colour glowed smooth and clear underneath. Her grey satin robe (a bedspread), pinned in stone-like folds gave her the majesty of a statue… Who was she? She spoke too low at first; all they heard was …*reason holds sway.* (ellipses original) (BTA 110-11)

This majestic feminine figure named Reason, is an image of what will later be discussed in Chapter 3 in light of *The Madwoman in the Attic* and the figure of a female "killed" into a piece of art. Praised by males as if she resides on a pedestal, the female is adored and expected to fulfill the masculine fantasy of deathly sexual attraction:

> the aesthetic cult of ladylike fragility and delicate beauty—no doubt associated with the moral cult of the angel-woman—obliged "genteel" women to "kill" themselves…into art objects: slim, pale, passive beings whose "charms" eerily recalled the snowy, porcelain immobility of the dead. (Gilbert and Gubar 25)

In this feminine figure of Reason, the actress has been powdered into a deathly paleness and dressed in a grey bedspread that represents not only her role within the domestic bedroom but also emphasizes her deathlike, stony, and statuesque appearance; she is a woman that has been "killed" into art. Woolf, acting through the female androgynous artist Miss La Trobe, makes a distinctive choice in making Reason a woman as the intellectual discourse in 18th century England is almost entirely masculine. The jarring presence of the figure of feminine Reason during this era of enlightenment culture within the play seems to be Woolf almost explicitly acknowledging the absence of appreciated feminine intellect during this time—and the role in which women could have participated had their presence been respected for its intellectual value. The irony in the deathlike Lady Reason is that women *could* have had a role in this intellectual discourse, but rather were "killed" into objects of art-like beauty.

Yet in the course of her play, the androgynous creator Miss La Trobe is able to transform this traditional figure of feminine knowledge as mere statuesque art into a

dynamic creature of feminine agency. Miss La Trobe breathes new life into this human statue by incorporating her into her own artwork of the play.

In preparation for the first scene,

> helpers from the bushes arranged round [Reason] what appeared to be the three sides of a room. In the middle they stood a table. On the table they placed a china tea service. Reason surveyed this domestic scene from her lofty eminence unmoved. There was a pause. (BTA 112-13)

In this exterior outside setting of the play, Miss La Trobe has orchestrated the construction of an interior, imposing the domestic upon the natural. While on the table is spread the "china tea service," the irony is that Lady Reason existed all along, even within the silent trappings of the oppressive domestic sphere.

In the second and final scene of this act, the setting surrounding the table is replaced by one that surrounds a tree. The forbidden lovers Valentine and Flavinda determine to rendezvous at "The Orange Tree in the Mall" (BTA 122). Flavinda arriving to the tree first starts to believe that Valentine is a fraud and has set her up, when Valentine then enters the scene Flavinda thinks aloud,

> *Hist, what's there among the trees? It's come—it's gone. The breeze is it? In the shade now—in the sun now…Valentine on my life! It's he! Quick, I'll hide. Let the tree conceal me!*
> (Flavinda hides behind the tree.)
> (italics original) (BTA 123)

At fear of Valentine committing suicide in her supposed absence, Flavinda reveals herself from behind the tree and the lovers embrace. At the table of the first scene: a marriage is contrived for gain; at the tree of the second scene: an instinctual love prevails.

This mutual love of Flavinda and Valentine is accompanied by an audience member calling, " 'All that fuss about nothing!' a voice exclaimed. People laughed. The voice stopped. But the voice had seen; the voice had heard. For a moment Miss La Trobe behind her tree

glowed with glory" (BTA 124). Miss La Trobe, like the Flavinda of her story, conceals herself by means of the tree's protection. She draws power from her anonymity and her noted absence breathes new meaning into an artistry created as a gift for others and not as a means for self-aggrandizement. The two scenes, one at the table and one at the tree, make up the whole of this miniature play within Miss La Trobe's larger production. The female androgynous creator has orchestrated the meeting of the minds. In centering her act around that of the table and tree, she has gifted to her audience a moment of insight into the possibilities that abound in the union of masculine and feminine knowledge.

The image of the pear tree reappears in *Between the Acts.* In a crucial passage from *Between the Acts* in the development of this theory of female legacy residing in Nature, in the trees, we focus in on Isa as she reflects on the pear tree:

> She had come into the stable yard where the dogs were chained; where the buckets stood; where the great pear tree spread its ladder of branches against the wall. The tree whose roots went beneath the flags, was weighted with hard green pears. Fingering one of them she murmured: "How am I burdened with what they drew from the earth; memories; possessions. This is the burden that the past laid on me, last little donkey in the long caravanserai crossing the desert. 'Kneel down,' said the past. 'Fill your pannier from our tree. Rise up donkey. Go your way till your heels blister and your hoofs crack.' "
> The pear was hard as stone… "That was the burden," she mused, "laid on me in the cradle; murmured by waves; breathed by restless elm trees; crooned by singing women; what we must remember; what we would forget. " (BTA 139)

Isa has inherited the oppressive burden of domesticity from her foremothers. The un-ripened daughter pears of the tree of generational female history have been unable to ripen into their full potential. Represented as another tree in the orchard, the burden of domesticity has been laid on Isa "in the cradle" and she has become the most recent addition to the long history of females "crossing the desert" of non-educated barrenness. She has filled her pannier and drunken from the legacy of woman's forced domestication. Fully aware at this point to her husband's affair with Mrs. Manresa, Isa feels the burden of

remaining with an unappreciative partner, of being tied down in a life of children and domesticity.

Yet, despite these raw feelings of neglect, in her work *In the Hollow of the Wave*, Bonnie Kime Scott remarks that there is hope for the vulnerable relationship between Giles and Isa at novel's end:

> Thanks to Miss La Trobe, conjuring up her next play, a similar landscape is perceived from two vantage points at the close of this novel. The suggestion is made that, through art, the curtain can rise on a new environment—something that is to be hoped for in successive crises of culture and (in our own time) nature. (Scott 153)

Miss La Trobe's play, providing an androgynous perspective on the role of gender within an increasingly more modern society, is a piece of artwork that provides hope for a future of reconfigured gender relationships—relationships that will find strength in a "new environment" supported by nature.

THE LADY IN THE LOOKING-GLASS: A REFLECTION

We remember Isabella from the start of this thesis and how "the looking-glass reflected the hall table, the sunflowers, the garden path so accurately and so fixedly that they seemed held there in their reality unescapably" (CSFVW 215). Isabella, like Orlando, defies the walls of the enclosed garden; she descends "presumably into the lower garden to pick flowers; or as it seemed more natural to suppose… one of those elegant sprays of convolvulus that twine round ugly walls and burst here and there into white and violet blossoms" (CSFVW 216). Isabella aligns herself with the blossoming nature of female intellect that is leaving its mark upon the constricting walls of society.

Even the narrator, surveying the scene from the eye of the looking-glass feels "like one of those naturalists who, covered with grass and leaves, lie watching" (CSFVW 215). The narrator, herself enveloped in nature's protection, perceives past the marble-topped table to the woman standing beneath the flowering trees. The narrator invokes, "one must fix one's mind upon her at that very moment…standing under the high hedge in the lower part of the garden, raising the scissors that were tied to her waist to cut some dead flower, some overgrown branch" (CSFVW 218). As Isabella approaches the looking-glass she brings blossoms from the flowering trees with her in a basket:

> she came lingering and pausing, here straightening a rose, there lifting a pink to smell it but she never stopped.; and all the time she became larger and larger in the looking glass, more and more completely the person into whose mind one had been trying to penetrate…She came so gradually that she did not seem to derange the pattern in the glass, but only to bring in some new element which gently moved and altered the other objects as if asking them, courteously, to make room for her. And the letters and table and the grass walk and the sunflowers which had been waiting in the looking-glass separated and opened out so that she might be received among them. At last, there she was in the hall. She stopped dead. She stood by the table. She stood perfectly still. (CSFVW 219)

Isabella, our androgynous female, gradually becomes focused within the eye of the looking-glass as she ambles amongst the flower trees. In her final approach to the table, she is "courteously" welcomed by the table and the letters so that she can "bring in some new element"—her basket of flowers, her understanding of the natural and feminine legacy. And as the table and the garden walk receive Isabella she becomes "perfectly still" within the reflection of the glass, the three overlaid elements of the tree, the table, and the androgynous woman fixed "still into a trance of immortality" (CSFVW 216).

In Isabella's short story we see the grander design of Woolf's novels in the meeting of the tree and the table. Bazin posits that in reading Woolf the reader experiences a "sense of liberation in part because he is suddenly conscious of the unity which exists beneath the

complexity, in part because, suddenly realizing that the novel is symbolic, he experiences at the same time the impact of its greater significance" (Bazin 33). Woolf's works of vision free the reader from societal constructs and her overall " 'Design' provides the wholeness which makes the reader's moment of vision possible. In Virginia Woolf's novel the design is a harmonious combination of rhythms and patterns…established by the periodic repetition or variation of a symbol, a phrase, or a theme" that "may even appear superimposed" (Bazin 33).

THE ART OF FICTION

In her essay "The Art of Fiction," Virginia Woolf characterizes fiction as a lady in trouble whom many gentleman writers have attempted to rescue. Though many writers have approached and failed this rescue with "a great deal of knowledge of her, but not much intimacy with her," E. M. Forster's approach to the novel, in which he has intimacy with the lady while denying any knowledge, seems to Woolf a more successful rescue mission (*The Moment and Other Essays* 106). His approach aids him and the lady fiction in "drawing up their chairs to the fire they talk easily, wittily, subtly, like old friends who have no illusions" (*The Moment and Other Essays* 106). Thus, Woolf suggests the sympathy inherent to the feminine intellect.

E. M. Forster advocates for "life" within fiction, within the lady. Yet Woolf pushes back against this characterization, asking:

> "What is this 'Life' that keeps on cropping up so mysteriously and so complacently in books about fiction? Why is it absent in a pattern and present in a tea party? Why is the pleasure that we get from the pattern in *The Golden Bowl* less valuable than the emotion which Trollope gives us when he describes a lady drinking tea in a parsonage?" (*The Moment and Other Essays* 109)

Her implied answer is that "Life" is more than just the external "pattern" of society, but rather gains vitality within the inner workings of the mind, within the rich inner life of a woman thinking alone "drinking tea in a parsonage." At the same time that Woolf wishes to break free from the forced tradition of the tea-table, she simultaneously is aware that women have a life and understanding all their own within this sphere. This life inherent to the "lady drinking tea" directly informs the life of the lady fiction. Woolf is attempting to unveil the previously silenced perspective that women bring to the table of knowledge.

In E.M. Forster's criticism, Woolf believes that

> fiction is treated as a parasite which draws sustenance from life and must in gratitude resemble life or perish. In poetry, in drama, words may excite and stimulate and deepen without this allegiance; but in fiction they must first and foremost hold themselves at the service of the teapot and the pug dog, and to be found wanting is to be found lacking. (*The Moment and Other Essays* 111)

Woolf implies that the sphere of the teapot contains life and that perception and documentation of this aspect of life is essential for the writing of stimulating fiction. And yet, as it stands, this domestic life is nuanced. This passage ironically echoes the argument of Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert in *The Madwoman in the Attic* in which they document the female experience as one of a life in death, as a self-less individual living only to serve those around her. Woolf has ironically twisted this self-less lady into the parasite lady-fiction who has no self outside of her male host, a parasite unable to survive on one's own due to the confines of a domesticated culture. Woman embodies yet another form of death in the parasitic image; a death continually impressed upon her as the male authors of lady-fiction "must first and foremost hold themselves at the service of the teapot," must define their lady by her domestic sphere.

This inescapable death takes form in the "eternal tea-table." Woolf satirizes:

> If the English critic were less domestic, less assiduous to protect the rights of what it pleases him to call life, the novelist might be bolder too. He might cut adrift from the eternal tea-table and the plausible and preposterous formulas which are supposed to represent the whole of our human adventure. But then the story might wobble; the plot might crumble; ruin might seize upon the characters. The novel, in short, might become a work of art. (*The Moment and Other Essays* 112)

Woolf posits the novel will become an art-form when the lady (fiction) is no longer relegated to the "eternal tea-table," when the "preposterous formulas" that define the gender spheres are challenged. I am arguing that in the creation of her figure of the female androgynous artist, Woolf challenges the eternal tea-table and traditional feminine figure of domesticity; her novels become "a work of art."

CHAPTER 3

ANDROGYNOUS ARTISTRY

In Chapter 2, we explored the means by which Woolf advocates for the mutual respect and dependence of the masculine and feminine intellects through the symbolism of the united table and tree. This chapter will explore the silent suggestive power and cyclical legacy that women bring to the table in this new discussion of gender politics, and the hallmarks of the androgynous female artist who orchestrates the union of intellects.

THE FEMININE POWER OF SILENCE AND SUGGESTION

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert argue that the ideal female of patriarchal society, "the angel," was raised to a position of idol worship for her physical attributes and yet experienced at the same time an ironic debasement of her humanity. Throughout history "the aesthetic cult of ladylike fragility and delicate beauty—no doubt associated with the moral cult of the angel-woman—obliged 'genteel' women to 'kill' themselves…into art objects"(Gilbert and Gubar 25). Relegated to an image of constant perfection, women were stripped of their humanity and thus continually "killed" by their male counterparts into enduring, static images of art. For patriarchal society expected women to "live" their lives in a state of perpetual selflessness; and in living a constantly "self-less" existence—without a self—these women were killed while still in the flesh by devoting their lives to others (Gilbert and Gubar 25).

In *To the Lighthouse,* Woolf creates the character of Mrs. Ramsay who functions as the prototypical Angel of the House. In characterizing her as the silent nurturing figure of the domestic sphere, Woolf defines one end of the gender spectrum: a female figure whose extreme beauty both elevates her to a state of idol worship and simultaneously "kills" her into a piece of artwork. As the Angel of her own household, Mrs. Ramsay functions as an instance of the "domestication of death," her acts of self-less-ness causing her to lead a "posthumous existence in her own lifetime" (Gilbert and Gubar 25).

As the prototypical female, and thus closely linked with death, Mrs. Ramsay is frequently portrayed within the text as a silent presence. Mrs. Ramsay serves as the epitome of the silent figure of feminine beauty "killed" into artwork,

> when, suddenly, in she came, stood for a moment silent (as if she had been pretending up there, and for a moment let herself be now), stood quite motionless for a moment against a picture of Queen Victoria wearing the blue ribbon of the Garter; when all at once he realized that it was this: she was the most beautiful person he had ever seen. (TTL 14)

Charles Tansley, her male observer, has "killed" her into art by superimposing her own personhood upon this framed portrait. Tansley, who later asserts that "women can't paint, can't write," worships Mrs. Ramsay for her physical beauty (TTL 159). Her beauty has become paramount at the moment in which she is "killed" into art, the moment she becomes silent. Yet it is important to note that Mrs. Ramsay is in command of the silence; it is when she is most at ease in her natural state that we find her silent. When allowed to be in communion with herself, she relishes in the moment of silence.

While Gilbert and Gubar argue within *The Madwoman in the Attic* that the woman has been the traditional figure killed into artwork by limiting gender constructs, I would

argue that men too have been limited by their own gender's constructs. Interestingly in *Between the Acts* around the family dining table,

> Two pictures hung opposite the window. In real life they had never met, the long lady and the man holding his horse by the rein. The lady was a picture, bought by Oliver because he liked the picture; the man was an ancestor. He had a name. He held the rein in his hand. He had said to the painter:
> "If you want my likeness, dang it sir, take it when the leaves are on the trees." There were leaves on the trees. (BTA 33)

The suggestion is that both the prototypical female and prototypical male have been killed into artwork, surveying the domestic scene. Yet, the man and the woman have been killed into artwork in very different ways. It seems as if the male ancestor represents traditional masculine obsession with name commemoration and dominancy (in wanting to include both his horse and his dog in the portrait). He is killed into artwork out of the reader's own sense of boredom at this scripted legacy and the portrait's subsequent loss of personality.

On the other hand the woman is an unnamed figure of mystique, her namelessness allowing her to represent women of the ages. The portrait of the woman is of unknown origins, unknown name: " 'Who was she?' [Mrs. Swithin] gazed. 'Who painted her?' She shook her head" (BTA 63). Mrs. Swithin's questions go unanswered, as the female portrait, again, is inherently silent. Harper denotes that "there seem to be two kinds of paintings in *Between the Acts*: historical portraits of ancestors, which lead the viewers into talk; and more mysterious pictures, which lead the viewers into silence" (Harper 306). For the picture of the woman in the yellow robe "drew them down the path of silence" (BTA 42).

Massey suggests that the "portraits and interiors which depict walls with other interiors or other portraits represent a typical circle of Bloomsbury self-referentiality and *mise-en-abyme*" (Massey 181). Thus, the placement of these portraits is meant to reverberate the social interactions that they overlook, occurring within Woolf's very own

portrait of the familial dining table. This mysterious portrait of the woman in *Between the Acts* leads the onlookers into "the heart of darkness at the center of all of Virginia Woolf's works, from *The Voyage Out* to *Between the Acts*, which the characters are drawn toward, but from which they cannot return…they die there. (And that is another meaning of the 'peace' that they seek)" (Harper 307). Note this sense of "peace" that is born from an understanding of death, as it shall be returned to later in this chapter.

While Mrs. Ramsay's silence can represent inner harmony, it also illuminates the disparate tension and lack of communication that exists between Mrs. Ramsay and her spouse. Mrs. Ramsay struggles to find words within the domestic sphere: "He wanted something—wanted the thing she always found it so difficult to give him; wanted her to tell him that she loved him. And that, no, she could not do. He found talking so much easier than she did. He could say things—she never could" (TTL 123). Mrs. Ramsay, as the prototypical female, represents a history of women who have been oppressed into silence within their domestic sphere—unable to voice their opinions within the male-dominated society.

And yet, Mrs. Ramsay speaks volumes despite her silence. She has taken refuge in the imposed silence and transformed it into her own form of communication. She allows her feminine silence to imbue her household, reinventing from the oppression a sense of rebellious power:

> like some queen who, finding her people gathered in the hall, looks down upon them, and descends among them, and acknowledges their tributes silently, and accepts their devotion and their prostration before her…she went down, and crossed the hall and bowed her head very slightly, as if she accepted what they could not say: their tribute to her beauty. (TTL 82)

Mrs. Ramsay is a silent nurturer. She buttresses her husband in his moments of deepest self-doubt about the legitimacy of his academic legacy. In her silence, there is a sense of

power: “And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew, that she loved him. He could not deny it. And smiling she looked out of the window…For she had triumphed again. She had not said it: yet he knew” (TTL 124). Mrs. Ramsay as the figure of prototypical femininity has mastered the art of silence, of suggestive power. She “uses reticence as subtle retaliation” (Bassoff 428). She represents within *To the Lighthouse* an integral counter-balance of feminine knowledge to that of the male intelligentsia. She triumphs in her silence.

Mrs. Ramsay, the prototypical female of traditionalism, represents all that Cixous inscribes to femininity:

> On the one hand she has constituted herself necessarily as that “person” capable of losing a part of herself without losing her integrity. But secretly, silently, deep down inside, she grows and multiplies, for, on the other hand, she knows far more about living and about the relation between the economy of the drives and the management of the ego than any man. Unlike man, who holds so dearly to his title and his titles, his pouches of value, his cap, crown, and everything connected with his head, woman couldn’t care less about the fear of decapitation…adventuring, without the masculine temerity, into anonymity, which she can merge with without annihilating herself: because she’s a giver. (Cixous 888)

Women have transformed their anonymity born as result of their oppression into their own unique means of feminine legacy. Mrs. Ramsay leaves a legacy that allows for her own children and Lily to create their own; her “sympathy survives in Cam, in James and in Lily” (Bassoff 433). In constantly living life as a giver, living for multiple people, the internal woman “secretly, silently, deep down inside… grows and multiplies.” Thus, her ability to commune with multiple selves is a result in part of living a life as a giver. Lily too is a giver; “her role in the realm of art is analogous to that of Mrs. Ramsay in the realm of ‘life itself’: giving, giving, giving to the point of exhaustion” (Harper 156). To Mr. Ramsay, Lily has given her sympathy— though “hers has been the more impersonal but no less valuable

sympathy of the artist: the effort to see and express the essential meaning of his life. And in her painting she has helped to guard that meaning against the ravages of time, just as *To the Lighthouse* itself confers an immortality upon the Ramsays" (Harper 156-7). Thus, through her writing, Woolf also gives. Indeed even in *Between the Acts*, the androgynous female artist Miss La Trobe believes her play to be a gift. Miss La Trobe wants nothing more than to "say to the world, You have taken my gift! Glory possessed her—for one moment. But what had she given?...It was in the giving that the triumph was" (BTA 188). As Mrs. Ramsay triumphs in her silence, Miss La Trobe triumphs in her giving.

Isa, in opposition to the Angel of the House Mrs. Ramsay, redefines what a feminine angel can be; in speaking of Mrs. Swithin she admires, "What an angel she was—the old woman! Thus to salute the children; to beat up against those immensities and the old man's irreverences her skinny hands, her laughing eyes!" (BTA 22) Mrs. Swithin's "laughing eyes" seem to directly reflect the writing of Cixous in regard to the "monster" of femininity: "you only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (Cixous 885). Cixous disrupts this male-imposed binary upon femininity of relegation to either the "angel" or the "monster," by her assertion that the monster too is beautiful. Thus, Woolf's feminine texts are able to overcome the male literary tradition, the supposed "truth," by breaking it up with laughter (Cixous 888). Mrs. Swithin and Isa laugh in the face of patriarchy.

In her 1931 essay "Professions for Women," Virginia Woolf is concerned about this Angel of the House, this patriarchal figure of stasis that is preventing her contemporary women from accomplishing professional careers. She lectures that before women can pursue a successful career they must first extricate from the minds of the patriarchy this

static figure of the "Angel of the House." For Woolf, the Angel of the House is a figural embodiment of patriarchal ideals that will suffocate the autonomy of the female entrepreneur and artist, threatening to "kill" her into the same "objet d'art" that Woolf is attempting to redefine. In order to assert their new contemporary place within the professional world, Woolf believes that women need to be active participants in altering this static emblem of female idolatry, of women as mere objects of art. Yet, we must remember that her position is nuanced, for indeed Woolf's character of Mrs. Ramsay, the Angel, is endowed with an unfathomable and indefinable beauty. Thus, it is not that Woolf wants the person of Mrs. Ramsay to be "killed" but rather the superficial conception of her as an Angel of the House to be "killed." Woolf wishes for the secret, silent, inner life of Mrs. Ramsay to be appreciated for its own beauty. She wants women to be given the respect to decide for themselves how to live, to have the option to be a domestic figure or a female professional, to be a Mrs. Ramsay or a Lily.

In *To the Lighthouse*, the woman that will alter this patriarchal image of the Angel of the House will take form in the androgynous female creator Lily Briscoe. Lily will translate feminine secrecy into her artwork, thus begetting a new form of legacy in her painting, while simultaneously mediating the tension between the masculine and feminine gender spheres; Lily brings new life to this inculcated scene of death. At the same time that the dead maternal figure completes Lily's artwork, Lily simultaneously is creating a new form of legacy, a new form of memorialized life. For Lily "has recaptured the world of Mrs. Ramsay's consciousness and made it eternal in her painting" (Harper 149). Mrs. Ramsay is in a sense brought back to life through her presence in Lily's painting, a gesture

representative of her presence within Lily's mind. In similar fashion, as we saw in Chapter 2, the androgynous Miss La Trobe breathed new life into deathlike Lady Reason.

Lily's painting defies the age-old male-dominant ideal of artistic legacy. Her abstract painting intrinsically implies the suggestive sphere, indicating that the abstract has potential for giving a more realistic interpretation of reality than the straightforward portrait. In explaining her picture to Mr. Bankes she must elaborate on the shape that she has chosen to represent Mrs. Ramsay and her son:

> But the picture was not of them, she said. Or, not in his sense. There were other senses too in which one might reverence them. By a shadow here and a light there, for instance. Her tribute took that form if, as she vaguely supposed, a picture must be a tribute…He considered…The truth was that all his prejudices were on the other side, he explained. The largest picture in his drawing-room, which painters had praised, and valued at a higher price than he had given for it, was of the cherry trees in blossom on the banks of the Kennet. (TTL 52-3)

Lily's opinionated stance on her artwork illuminates that there are several "senses" from which to view artwork and its role in legacy. Mr. Bankes struggles to understand the suggestive nature of Lily's painting. For how can a venerated figure of mother and child "be reduced, he pondered, to a purple shadow without irreverence" (TTL 52)? Bankes immediately compares her work to a high-ticket item within his own collection, an item that very objectively portrays the actual cherry blossoms as painted blossoms upon the canvas. Yet, Lily is unconcerned with this traditional male sense of legacy and even admits to herself that her painting will likely end up stuffed away in the attic somewhere. Rather her act of painting functions as a tribute to the life of Mrs. Ramsay, a more heartfelt communion with the painting's muse.

In Mr. Bankes's viewing of Lily's art, the reader becomes aware of this tension between the expected traditional masculine art form and his attempt to understand this

new suggestive means of artistic portrayal. The liminal quality of Lily's androgynous sexual state will be transferred into liminal qualities within her artwork; her final vision is a culmination of this liminal tension between unity and dispersity, between solidity and empty spaces. Indeed, this same liminal tension occurs at the final moment of Miss La Trobe's play in *Between the Acts* when her "gramophone gurgled *Unity—Dispersity.* It gurgled *Un…dis…*And ceased" (BTA 181). Her masterpiece ends in silence, in a liminal silence that drowns out the unity and dispersity reflective of societal binaries.

The notion of woman's legacy and a reinvented silence are inextricably linked. In one moment in the novel *To the Lighthouse,* silence befalls Mr. Bankes as he casts a rapturous stare upon Mrs. Ramsay, enamored by her beauty. Lily's androgynous mind recognizes the meeting of the minds and capitalizes on this quiet energy, turning to her painting to infuse it with this newly meaningful silence. Lily thinks, "this silent stare, for which she felt intense gratitude; for nothing so solaced her, eased her of the perplexity of life, and miraculously raised its burdens, as this sublime power, this heavenly gift…Let him gaze; she would steal a look at her picture" (TTL 48). Our androgynous creator is able to not only recognize the spirit of the silence around her but to then integrate it into her work, into her legacy. The "heavenly gift" of silence is a harbinger of the "sublime power" of Peace it is able to bestow. This realization of Peace brought to significance by the androgynous female creator will be explored in a later section of this chapter.

Lily is able to mediate the gender binary through her projection of and her appreciation for the female's perspective on a secret silence. Lily imbues new meaning to this silence by incorporating it into her artistic legacy. Lily is obsessed by this element of feminine secrecy within the figure of the prototypical female Mrs. Ramsay:

> did she lock up within her some secret which certainly Lily Briscoe believed people must have for the world to go on at all? …Sitting on the floor with her arms round Mrs. Ramsay's knees, close as she could get, smiling to think that Mrs. Ramsay would never know the reason of that pressure, she imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of the woman 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. What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? …Could the body achieve, or the mind, subtly mingling in the intricate passages of the brain? Or the heart? 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, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee…she knew knowledge and wisdom were stored up in Mrs. Ramsay's heart. (TTL 50-1)

The androgynous vision brings a new perspective on the intimacy of knowledge; a knowledge that need not be relegated to the traditional male legacy of the languages of books and laws upon tablets promoted publicly within society, but rather a secrecy in understanding that resides not in the brain but in the heart, a silent secrecy that will "never be offered openly, never made public." These private internal tablets of knowledge, are inherent to the female intellect, "sacred inscriptions" wrought by generations of foremothers.

Lily's admiration for this feminine intellect of Mrs. Ramsay borders on sexual tension as she smiles "to think that Mrs. Ramsay would never know the reason of that pressure"; her liminal state of sexuality will transfer into a meeting of masculine and feminine knowledge within her artwork. The secret catacombs of the female mind will be incorporated into Lily's legacy, into her artwork.

In *Between the Acts* there is a similar preoccupation with secret treasures of the mind shrouded in silence. The deeply internalized treasures of the feminine perspective

speak to the disparity between masculine and feminine mindsets. In reference to poetry, Bartholomew says:

> "That proves it! What springs touched, what secret drawer displays its treasures, if I say"—he raised more fingers—"Reynolds! Constable! Crome!" …
> "We haven't the words—we haven't the words," Mrs. Swithin protested. "Behind the eyes; not on the lips; that's all."
> "Thoughts without words," her brother mused. "Can that be?" (BTA 50)

Constable and Crome are landscape painters (BTA endnotes), thus painting inspires the opening of a secret space within the individuals gathered, a secret, silent space that has difficulty finding expression in words. In the recesses of the mind, "behind the eyes," the secret drawer of appreciation for the painting's treasures are maintained in silence. Bartholomew, like Mr. Bankes in *To the Lighthouse,* has difficulty in understanding this traditionally female means of silence, this unspoken legacy of internalized silence, seemingly at odds with his normative, fame-centric, masculine tradition of legacy.

Again in *Between the Acts*, Bartholomew touches upon the difference in masculine and feminine intellect. He turns to the silent artist figure William Dodge and asks, " 'Since you're interested in pictures… why, tell me, are we, as a race, so incurious, irresponsive and insensitive…to that noble art, whereas, Mrs. Manresa, if she'll allow me my old man's liberty, has her Shakespeare by heart?' " (BTA 49-50). William Dodge too, a homosexual man within *Between the Acts*, embodies this silence intrinsic to the feminine intellect, perhaps suggesting that Woolf is not only examining gender constraints but also perceptions of sexuality. Mrs. Manresa, a modernist woman freer than most from the traditional patriarchal limitations, still, like Mrs. Ramsay, stores up knowledge and wisdom within her heart. This connection between the heart of the female and her creative work

can also be seen in *Orlando* as she kept "The Oak Tree" poem close to her heart her entire lifetime.

In *A Room of One's Own*, the narrator rather explicitly points out: "the fact is that neither Mr. Galsworthy nor Mr. Kipling has a spark of the woman in him. Thus all their qualities seem to a woman, if one may generalize, crude and immature. They lack suggestive power" (AROO 101). Thus it appears that for Woolf the power of suggestion is a female attribute. In regards to the brief description of Mrs. Ramsay's death in "Time Passes," Harper questions, "how can the center of meaning for almost two hundred pages suddenly just vanish, in a single sentence?"(Harper 145) I would like to posit that this ability of Mrs. Ramsay to disappear by means of a single sentence is suggestive of the unassuming female legacy of which she is a part. The female knows that the importance of life does not reside in an individual's linear legacy but rather that the individual is a small part of the cyclical whole of humanity's legacy. Her death draws little verbalized attention and thus falls into the natural ebb and flow of life. Though few words are dispensed by Woolf to summarize Mrs. Ramsay's death, in the traditional feminine way the powerful impact of her death is felt within the lack of words on the page, within the silence in regards to her death. As Harper acknowledges, "the account of Mrs. Ramsay's death, for instance, becomes even more powerful because it is understated" (Harper 145).

Thus, Woolf's lecture "Professions for Women" takes fictional form in her novel *To the Lighthouse*, as Lily Briscoe figuratively "kills" the Angel of the House, Mrs. Ramsay, into her artwork. By the time of this final act of artistic completion, Mrs. Ramsay has already been literally dead for several years. Thus Mrs. Ramsay was not only an "objet d'art" in life, but also in death as she figures in Lily's painting. Lily Briscoe has "killed" the Angel of the

House into her own artwork and her dead body becomes the silently incorporated corpse. Yet this "killing" of female by female is inherently different from that of the "killing" by the dominant patriarchy.

How does Woolf's androgynous female artist transform the traditional feminine legacy of death in herself to one of death in her artwork? Lily alters the conception of static femininity by paying tribute to the liminal space between the gender binaries, and to her own navigation of this intermediate sphere. As Harper notes: "By recognizing and expressing the essence both of the Ramsays' world and of the yearning to know that world, the artist discovers the center of all illumination—and of the surrounding darkness as well" (Harper 160). In the moment of final vision, light and dark take form in Lily's painting; there exists a balance of tensions.

Importantly, in this final gesture of drawing a line through the centre of her painting, Lily Briscoe has defied history. In seemingly edifying a norm of patriarchal society, Lily Briscoe has indeed subverted a cultural history of female oppression. Ironically, though she follows in the footsteps of her male predecessors by this act of "killing" the female into art, the very nature of her being a woman herself—a woman who is not being slain into art but is rather the executioner—places Lily Briscoe as a woman on the frontier of a new age of female independence, autonomy, and creation. Her self-assured act of "sudden intensity" creates in her the decisive executioner (TTL 209). She has forever altered the superficial idolatry of the feminine figure as a static piece of art. Lily Briscoe has entered this traditionally male-dominated sphere of transforming a woman's personhood into a two-dimensional figure of stasis, of static existence, and, in doing so, has subverted it.

In the energetic final stroke of marking Mrs. Ramsay's supposed stasis, she herself becomes a dynamic new female figure: the female artist.

FEMININE LEGACY

In her book *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision*, Nancy Topping Bazin posits that Woolf's manic-depressive illness actually gifted her with androgynous insight. For she believed "Woolf's experience during mania is related to what she would have considered an essentially feminine vision of life and that her experience during depression is related to what she would have considered an essentially masculine vision of life" (Bazin 6). Bazin believes the feminized manic state to provide perspective on the wholeness of universal understanding, whereas the masculinized depressive state becomes God-less and isolating (Bazin 18-19). Thus the feminized intellect assumes a legacy of unity through the generations, of wholeness. Mrs. Ramsay "alone thinks of the sacred responsibility of raising children: she knows that our lives are lived in the perspective of eternity" (Harper 141).

Indeed,

> there were many moments in Virginia Woolf's life when she shared her mother's way of seeing things whole. For instance, she knew the ecstasy of artistic creation. Her mother, like Mrs. Ramsay, practiced the art of bringing people together and then managing them so that momentarily, despite personality differences, they felt themselves to be part of a harmonious whole, one which, in Mrs. Ramsay's words, partook "of eternity." Noel Annan clarifies why Julia Stephen excelled in the art of personal relationships: "She responded to other people's feelings instinctively; she could…read thoughts before they were uttered." (Bazin 15-16)

There is a certain art about the ritual of the tea and dinner tables. In her essay "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" there is an implied hope for peace in the juxtaposition of the female's tea table to the men's conference tables of war. As previously noted in Chapter 1, there is indeed an art in being able to bring a group of people of various backgrounds and

beliefs into a cohesive whole, a union around the dinner table. For as Cixous notes: "in women there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation" (Cixous 882). As woman "stands up against separation" she becomes the artist of the familial dining table, actively facilitating the convergence of perspectives into the present moment. Bazin's citing of Noel Annan shows that there is an intrinsic quality within females of the power of suggestion in that Julia Stephen (the model for Mrs. Ramsay) operates most effectively within the silence—her ability to sense other's emotions, excellencies, and discomforts allows her to be an exceptional artist of the dinner table. Lily too will become an artist of the dinner table, though hers will undertake a nuanced meaning as she looks upon the table from her androgynous viewpoint.

The traditional masculine perspective is concerned with Miss La Trobe's portrayal of humankind's legacy:

> "The Nineteenth Century." Colonel Mayhew did not dispute the producer's right to skip two hundred years in less than fifteen minutes. But the choice of scenes baffled him.
>
> "Why leave out the British Army? What's history without the Army, eh?" he mused…Meanwhile, there was the view. They looked at the view. (BTA 141)

The male perspective is once again aligned with traditional aspects of modernity and civilization, whereas the female perspective has a different appreciation for time and the incorporation of the natural. In *Between the Acts,* the discussion of traditional male legacy is mediated by the presence of nature.

Nature again mediates the discussion of historical legacy in a conversation between Mrs. Swithin and Mr. Dodge:

> "The Victorians," Mrs. Swithin mused. "I don't believe" she said with her odd little smile, "that there ever were such people. Only you and me and William dressed differently."
> "You don't believe in history," said William.
> The stage remained empty. The cows moved in the field. The shadows were deeper under the trees. (BTA 156-7)

William Dodge criticizes Mrs. Swithin's understanding of history. When Mrs. Swithin advocates that people have not changed through the ages, but rather change manifests in the conventions by which they are bound— she is immediately dismissed by Dodge for her lack of historical understanding. Yet it seems as if Woolf in her turn is critiquing Dodge's oversight of Mrs. Swithin's subtlety in thinking; the passage continues with the description of darkness closing in upon the feminine trees while in the center there is a lack where "the stage remained empty." In her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous posits that women "have internalized this horror of the dark" imposed upon them by the dominant patriarchy (Cixous 878). Thus the feminine intellect embraces the shadowy, the natural, the empty; when female intellect is devalued, Woolf intervenes with a silent acknowledgment of what has been a naturally subtle and significantly silent feminine presence throughout the ages of history.

> Mrs. Swithin…gazed vaguely at the view. She was off, they guessed, on a circular tour of the imagination—one-making. Sheep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves—all are one. If discordant, producing harmony—if not to us, to a gigantic ear attached to a gigantic head. And thus—she was smiling benignly—the agony of the particular sheep, cow, or human being is necessary; and so—she was beaming seraphically at the gilt vane in the distance—we reach the conclusion that *all* is harmony, could we hear it. And we shall. (BTA 156-7)

Beautifully in this final masterpiece of her lifework, Woolf still seems to draw on her muse Vita Sackville-West's poem "The Land" in which "all the harmonies were joined and whole, / Silence was music, music silence made, / Till each was both or either, and the soul / Was not afraid" (Sackville-West, "The Land"). Mrs. Swithin is attuned to this liminal space

between silence and music. Woolf and Sackville-West impart to us the hope that through androgynous vision "we shall" someday hear that "*all* is harmony" "joined and whole." Tellingly in this passage, Swithin does not believe in the linear sense of male legacy but rather unifies her world through a "circular tour of the imagination." The female perspective is not only cyclical due to its understanding of the natural life-death cycle, but is also imaginative, suggestive. Her feminine perspective allows Mrs. Swithin to see the unity between the elements of nature, the "sheep, cows, grass, trees" and "ourselves." Mrs. Swithin, an enlightened elderly female within *Between the Acts* understands this notion of the tension between discordancy and harmony, this liminal tension that our female androgynous Miss La Trobe will execute within her play. For "the inner voice, the other voice was saying: How can we deny that this brave music, wafted from the bushes, is expressive of some inner harmony?" (BTA 107) The rich inner life, the inner harmony of selves, is reflected in the music chosen by Miss La Trobe.

And when the harmonizing music ceases, the audience members "were neither one thing nor the other; neither Victorians nor themselves. They were suspended, without being, in limbo. Tick, tick, tick went the machine" (BTA 159). Thus part of Miss La Trobe's androgynous power is in elevating everyone in her audience to this liminal state of being, this "limbo," in which each is painfully aware of their corrupt individuality—and yet as all the individuals in the audience experience this disunity of self, they become a single unit, a unified disharmony.

Like Lily in *To the Lighthouse,* the androgynous female creator in *Between the Acts*, the playwright Miss La Trobe, will also explore this means of a reinvented silence within art. Miss La Trobe will simultaneously create and mediate tension between the traditional

male forms of theater and the feminine knowledge of nature. She intermingles, and even relies upon, elements of nature to complete the meaning of her scenes. This tension created between the traditional theatrical scenes and the moments of integrated nature result in a reinvented silence, a peaceful silence. The silence is transformed from one of the prototypical figure of death-like femininity into one of communion with oneself and with the surrounding world. The silence becomes a provocative form of communication, a liminal state between the dualistic gender discussion. The following excerpt illuminates the pervasive silence within the play that simultaneously holds the audience together yet pulls them apart:

> They were silent. They stared at the view, as if something might happen in one of those fields to relieve them of the intolerable burden of remaining silent, doing nothing, in company. Their minds and bodies were too close, yet not close enough. We aren't free, each of them felt separately, to feel or think separately, nor yet to fall asleep. We're too close; but not close enough. So they fidgeted…The view laid bare by the sun was flattened, silenced, stilled. (BTA 60)

The silence has become an intolerable burden. Although they are together in their silence they are somehow not fully connected, the silence is the tension between the cacophony and the harmony. The silence is binding, is powerful.

Importantly, the stage for the play is the grassy knoll outside of the house. Thus, implicitly nature surrounds and incorporates itself into Miss La Trobe's theatrical scenes. Nature does not have an explicit voice but suggestively participates. Intrinsic to this sense of nature is also an ever-present sense of impending death. In the reinvention of the deathly silence of feminine obscurity, the androgynous creator introduces an understanding of nature's cycle of life and death into her artistic legacy.

The play is a representation of England through the ages. In the climactic scene of the play, Miss La Trobe attempts to make the audience feel "present time" by simply doing

nothing, allowing the audience members to commune with their present time surroundings:

> Miss La Trobe stood there with her eyes on her script. "After Vic." she had written, "try ten mins. of present time. Swallows, cows, etc." She wanted to expose them, as it were, to douche them, with present-time reality. But something was going wrong with the experiment. "Reality too strong," she muttered. "Curse 'em!" …Every second they were slipping the noose. Her little game had gone wrong. If only she'd a back-cloth to hang between the trees—to shut out cows, swallows, present time! But she had nothing. She had forbidden music. Grating her fingers in the bark, she damned the audience…This is death, death, death, she noted in the margin of her mind; when illusion fails. (BTA 161-2)

Miss La Trobe, in the liminal position between the gender spheres, has an acute awareness for the sense of death intrinsic to her femininity. She feels imminent death approaching from the silence, from the strong natural elements, for "Every second they were slipping the noose" and she berates herself for not having hung a cloth betwixt the trees "to shut out cows, swallows, present time!" Both she and her audience are unable to bear the discordancy of present day reality. So used to being duped by conventions, this exposure of their true selves is excruciating—excruciating to the point of death. And yet "Miss La Trobe seems to realize, to accept and believe, that her art can exist only on the edge of failure. She has failed, and it has failed, again and again…it may be that authentic art can exist only in this region, where the artist struggles to create out of his own anguish, and from his unique perspective as an 'outcast,' some totally new thing" (Harper 296).

Indeed earlier too Miss La Trobe had felt this paralyzing sense of death intrinsic to her work,

> Then the wind rose, and in the rustle of the leaves even the great words became inaudible; and the audience sat staring at the villagers, whose mouths opened, but no sound came.
> And the stage was empty. Miss La Trobe leant against the tree, paralyzed. Her power had left her. Beads of perspiration broke on her forehead. Illusion had failed. "This is death," she murmured, "death." (BTA 125-6)

As the words pass through the trees' leaves, they become silenced—"inaudible" to the waiting audience. Nature's silence, feminine silence, washes over the crowd while Miss La Trobe worries that in this moment the play has died. The deathly and feminine silence has brought to fruition the cyclical legacy of womankind. This intervention of nature's femininity is only possible due to Miss La Trobe's decision to conduct the play outdoors. And thus, it is the androgynous visionary that allows for the potent awareness of the unheard, for the tribute to womankind's generations of silent suggestive power. Like the stage center in *Between the Acts*, Harper acknowledges that indeed in many of Woolf's works "the dining room and the bedrooms, sacramental spaces, are almost always empty—and silent" (Harper 307). He believes, "art leads us into, or at least invites us to enter, that emptiness and silence at the heart of every house" (Harper 307). Again, the connection between artistry and the heart of the artist is reinforced, as the creative power issues forth from this internalized empty silence. In this pivotal scene the play's growing and increasingly uncomfortable tension of silence is at last broken by the unplanned and unexpected act of nature—art of nature. The play climaxes with an effusion of rain:

> And then the shower fell, sudden, profuse.
>
> No one had seen the cloud coming. There it was, black, swollen, on top of them. Down it poured like all the people in the world weeping. Tears, Tears. Tears.
>
> "O that our human pain could here have ending!" Isa murmured. Looking up she received two great blots of rain full in her face. They trickled down her cheeks as if they were her own tears. But they were all people's tears, weeping for all people…The rain was sudden and universal...
>
> "That's done it," sighed Miss La Trobe, wiping away the drops on her cheeks. Nature once more had taken her part. The risk she had run acting in the open air was justified… The tune was as simple as could be. But now that the shower had fallen, it was the other voice speaking, the voice that was no one's voice. And the voice that wept for human pain unending…(BTA 162-3)

This finale by the role of nature immediately mediates the tension. Throughout her play Miss La Trobe has challenged gender conventions, gradually relieving the audience of their

preconceived notions of artistic legacy. Yet, at the same time the novel has unveiled a growing sense of discordancy in the lives of the family. This growing tension between the binaries is mediated and brought into communion in this finale moment. The natural outpouring of rain serves as the pivotal moment in that it bestows a universalizing quality, the audience is imbued with an overall harmony with themselves and with nature. The jarring introduction of nature's rain is the tipping point of discordancy that allows the blanket of harmony to fall upon the audience. The female androgynous creator mediates the liminal space between harmony and discordancy. The silent voice weeps; the voice that is no one's, the voice that is everyone's. Miss La Trobe, the embodiment of this liminal silent voice of reinvented significance has succeeded in creating a new form of artistic legacy.

The androgynous figure mediates the words of male authors of antiquity with the silenced voices of womankind by way of introducing a natural element to her work. The constant integration of natural elements within Miss La Trobe's play serves to both silence elements of the spoken play from the audience's hearing, but also to simultaneously complete the scenes, the natural silence adding "its unmistakable contribution to talk" (BTA 36). For instance, the words of the Reverend in praising the play and its natural elements are fittingly silenced by nature incorporating itself:

> There he stood their representative spokesman; their symbol; themselves; a butt, a clod, laughed at by looking-glasses; ignored by the cows, condemned by the clouds which continued their majestic rearrangement of the celestial landscape; an irrelevant forked stake in the flow and majesty of the summer silent world.
> His first words (the breeze had risen; the leaves were rustling) were lost. Then he was heard saying "What." To that word he added another "Message"; and at last a whole sentence emerged; not comprehensible; say rather audible. "What message," it seemed he was asking, "was our pageant meant to convey?" (BTA 171-2)

Nature creates silences, infiltrates his speech. Nature and a peaceable silence are inextricably linked. Ironically enough, in the asking of his question the Reverend has

received his answer. Nature and its accompanying silence continuously weave themselves between his words, suggesting that theirs is the subtle presence altering the traditional message of speech. The pageant has been conducted outdoors for a purpose, and Miss La Trobe's endeavor is to orchestrate this meeting of the natural feminine sphere with that of traditional English theatrics to produce an enriched understanding of both gender limitations and strengths.

On a grander scale, the novel, itself a work of art, incorporates this newfound sense of cyclical legacy as "the 'summer's night' of [the] opening passage prepares the way for the eternal night into which the book itself disappears at the end…perhaps the book itself has no beginning and no ending. Only the pageant seems to give it historical order—but 'history' is the product of the creative imagination" (Harper 287). The now nuanced understanding of history as a weave of both linear and cyclical traditions comes as a "product of the creative imagination" of Miss La Trobe, of Lily, of Orlando, of Woolf. In regards to *Between the Acts*, Harper intones that "at last the book itself, like the pageant within it, must merge into its horizons. And its final words, 'they spoke,' open into that realm of the unspoken: the book and [Woolf's] lifework close on that threshold between language and silence" (Harper 320). Thus Virginia Woolf, the ultimate visionary of her *oeuvre*, ends her lifework in the tense balance between speech and silence—forever cradling the androgynous creator's thread that links the masculine with the feminine.

THE THIRD VOICE: PEACE

Peace is characterized within *Between the Acts* as a liminal emotion between the emotions Love and Hate. As a liminal state, its presence and appreciation are introduced through the

figure of the female androgynous creator—a figure mediating the tension between the gender binaries, the emotional binaries.

Prior to the introduction of the androgynous perspective of Miss La Trobe in the text, the emotions of Love and Hate very clearly create a gap between feminine and masculine understandings. In a moment at the dinner table in *Between the Acts*: " 'He is my husband,' Isabella thought, as they nodded across the bunch of many-coloured flowers. 'The father of my children.' It worked, that old cliché…It was a shock to find…how much she felt when he came in…of love; and of hate" (BTA 44). This scene represents a meeting of the minds that takes place at the dinner table, a silent communication between the gender spheres carried along by the centerpiece flowers.

The love-hate tension is heightened by Isa's distracted interest in both Giles and Mr. Haines. As Harper denotes, the name Giles "means *aegis*, shield or protection" and "Haines (*haine*=hatred). This has its counterpart in the dialectic of love and hate which preoccupies Isa during the pageant" (Harper 305). The Love-Hate emotional binary is also reflective of the marital state between Isabella and Giles. Isabella characterizes her state of emotional strife, Giles sat "Staring, glaring, he sat silent. Isabella felt prisoned. Through the bars of the prison, through the sleep haze that deflected them, blunt arrows bruised her; of love, then of hate. Through other people's bodies she felt neither love nor hate distinctly" (BTA 60-1). It is only when trying to intimately communicate with her spouse that Isabella is aware of the brutally jarring emotional conflict. It is as if only her life partner, her chosen gender binary, can affect her with such a severe emotional binary of love and hate. There is a gap in their understandings that must be bridged. Isa looks toward Giles and thinks, " 'The father of my children, whom I love and hate.' Love and hate—how they tore her asunder! Surely it

was time someone invented a new plot, or that the author came out from the bushes…" (BTA 194). Miss La Trobe, the author playwright, must emerge from her place behind the tree to introduce her new androgynous plot, to mediate Isa's love and hate with the power of Peace.

While sitting in the audience of Miss La Trobe's play, Isabella, still blinded by gender binaries, begins to question, "Did the plot matter?... The plot was only there to beget emotion. There were only two emotions: love; and hate. There was no need to puzzle out the plot. Perhaps Miss La Trobe meant that when she cut this knot in the centre? Don't bother about the plot: the plot's nothing" (BTA 82). Yet, as she continues to watch the scene unfold, Isa soon realizes that there is in fact a third emotion. As the central character in the play's scene dies, Isa recognizes the presence of Peace: "She fell back lifeless. The crowd drew away. Peace, let her pass. She to whom all's one now, summer or winter.
Peace was the third emotion. Love. Hate. Peace. Three emotions made the ply of human life" (BTA 83). The natural cycle of death and the feminine power of silence it invokes invest new meaning into the legacy of the play. The play while taking inspiration from its natural surroundings is also able to inhabit the lives of its audience, transforming the relationships of its audience members. Like Lily's final line through the centre of her painting, when Miss La Trobe cuts the "knot in the centre" she ties together the binaries of love and hate with her mediating Peaceful power.

In the age-old binary of masculine and feminine power, a new voice resounds within Miss La Trobe's play. The following is a song from one of the play's scenes ensued by the emotional reaction of the audience:

The king is in his counting house,
Counting out his money,

> *The Queen is in her parlour*
> *Eating bread and honey*
> They listened. Another voice, a third voice, was saying something simple…listening to Miss La Trobe or whoever it was, practicing her scales. (BTA 103-4)

The third voice mediates this binary opposition between the royal kingly and queenly powers. An invisible voice of simplicity echoes within the lyrical spaces. "Miss La Trobe watched them sink down peacefully into the nursery rhyme. She watched them fold their hands and compose their faces" (BTA 110). Through her music, through her artistic vision, Miss La Trobe brings peace to her audience. Her androgynous perspective has allowed her to alter the feminine "objet d'art" and imbue her with new power; in the moment when Lady Reason takes center stage, the villagers all sing:

> …
> *And cast your cares adown*
> *For peace has come to England,*
> *And reason now holds sway*
> *…*
> (BTA 112)

The newly defined feminine figure of Miss La Trobe's Lady Reason, of appreciated female intellect, is able to bring peace to England, to society.

The Reverend attempts to give thanks to this harbinger of the third voice, to the playwright Miss La Trobe. Yet significantly, Miss La Trobe conceals herself:

> "To propose a vote of thanks to the gifted lady…" He looked round for an object corresponding to this description. None such was visible. "…who wishes it seems to remain anonymous." He paused. "And so…" He paused again.
> It was an awkward moment. How to make an end? Whom to thank? Every sound in nature was painfully audible; the swish of the trees; the gulp of a cow; even the skim of the swallows over the grass could be responsible? Whom could they thank for their entertainment? Was there no one? (ellipses original) (BTA 175)

Miss La Trobe is unconcerned with this traditional male sense of legacy. She does not desire recognition but is content with the natural incorporation of legacy within her work.

She attempts to find the Peaceful middle-ground between the gendered discordancy and harmony of her play, of her audience.

Like Miss La Trobe, the androgynous female artist Lily Briscoe also orchestrates peace. Harper believes that in the moments leading up to Lily's final vision she has realized the assets of both feminine and masculine intellect and has been able to incorporate them into her final portrait. For "at the end of the first section she commits herself to giving, as the mother, Mrs. Ramsay, had done. In the second she realizes the father's humanity. In the third she finds herself divided (between the voyage and the shore) and begins to perceive the distance and the silence" (Harper 141-2). It is on the shore, in the depths of silence, that Lily experiences peace. Lily stands "on the edge of the lawn" looking out at the traveling sailboat, as Cam from the sailboat "looked doggedly and sadly at the shore, wrapped in its mantle of peace; as if the people there…were free to come and go like ghosts" (TTL 170). Lily's androgynous perspective from the shoreline is imbued with an omniscient otherworldliness as she prepares for the moment of her final vision.

Orlando, too, has an inherent sense of peace born from her androgynous perspective. " 'I have my mate,' she murmured. 'It is the moor. I am nature's bride…I have known many men and many women…none have I understood. It is better that I should lie at peace here…' (*Orlando* 248). In her matrimony with nature, Orlando finds peace in its cyclical legacy. This scene comes moments before Orlando's androgynous lover Shelmerdine is introduced and the two assume a relationship that transcends language and silence, transcends gender binaries, and ultimately results in an exquisitely peaceful harmony.

Additionally, one excerpt in particular from Vita Sackville-West's "The Land" seems to have influenced Woolf's emphasis on the love-hate binary: "Strange lovers, man and earth! Their love and hate / Braided in mutual need; and of their strife / A tired contentment born" (Sackville West, "The Land"). Femininity is aligned with mother earth, while the generationally re-born "contentment" is in need of the androgynous perspective to mediate this "strife," to enlighten this "mutual need."

Indeed is this hate within the love-hate binary the same as the "anti-love" which Cixous describes in "The Laugh of the Medusa"? Cixous argues, "men have committed the greatest crime against women…they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves…They have made for women an antinarcissism! …They have constructed the infamous logic of antilove" (Cixous 878). The feeling Isa registers as hate could be her own generationally devalued femininity, her corrupted sense of self. In Miss La Trobe's revelation to the audience of their true selves through the multitude of mirrors in her finale act, she mediates this tension between love and hate, love and antilove, by making each audience member uncomfortably aware of the truth underlying societally constructed facades.

In the closing moment of the novel *Between the Acts*, Isa and Giles were "left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. …
Then the curtain rose. They spoke" (BTA 197). This bared enmity and love reflect the emotional binary of hate and love explored throughout the novel. Yet, in light of the androgynous reading of mediating Peace, the ending of *Between the Acts* is imbued with new meaning. After both Isa and Giles took part as audience members in the play that

afternoon, there is hope that they will approach this masculine-feminine binary with a new perspective. Will they be able to reach a different understanding than in arguments of the past? Before they speak, the silence is laced with an altered meaning. Their speech takes on the characteristics of a play as the "curtain rose"; the hope exists that this play that opens at novel's end, at the end of Woolf's *oeuvre*, will reflect elements of Miss La Trobe's play and thus carefully balance the masculine perspective with that of the feminine.

THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH IN OBSCURITY

This difference in the gendered understanding of legacy is echoed within *Orlando* when the once male Orlando finally achieves the completion of "The Oak Tree" poem as a female artist. In Orlando's early years as a man, when he had first begun writing "The Oak Tree" poem, he had been obsessed with its inception into the "blessed, indeed sacred, fraternity" of male-dominated society (*Orlando* 82). "For, to Orlando in the state he was now in, there was a glory about a man who had written a book and had it printed, which outshone all the glories of blood and state" (*Orlando* 82). The male Orlando is distressingly agitated over his legacy within the literary world. As Orlando awaits the arrival of the literary critic Nick Greene to analyze his poem, a testament of the materialistic nature of male legacy is seen in the description of "the vast fireplaces of wrought Italian marble, where nightly a whole oak tree, with its million leaves and its nests of rook and wren, was burnt to ashes" (*Orlando* 84). The feminized and maternal oak tree is killed by male materialism; it must succumb to the male's wish to kill her as a testament to the regality of his legacy.

Whereas Woolf's male characters are overly concerned with society's perception of their art, Woolf's female androgynous artists are concerned with portraying the truth of

their personal reality. The female androgynous artists within Woolf's novels create their artistic pieces not for the eyes of the public but as tribute to their rich inner life—the personal intimacy of their artwork invests its value as an extension of themselves and for themselves. The process of creation for the female artist is a means of self-discovery and far more important to her than the public's reception. After Nick Greene's ridicule of Orlando's poem, the androgynous Orlando comes to the impassioned conclusion where he intones, " 'I'll be blasted,' he said, 'if I ever write another word, or try to write another word to please Nick Greene or the Muse. Bad, good, or indifferent, I'll write, from this day forward, to please myself'" (*Orlando* 10). Upon this declaration an interesting phenomenon takes place in the mind of Orlando, "[m]emory ducked her effigy of Nick Greene out of sight; and substituted for it—nothing whatever" (*Orlando* 103). Orlando has begun his internal transformation into a woman as his ideals change from that of fulfilling masculine ideals of legacy to an appreciation of silent emptiness, nothingness.

Orlando, though still a man, begins to understand the vanity inherent in the legacy of his male contemporaries, and begins to assume a more androgynous viewpoint. He decides to change his approach towards writing in denouncing fame, and realizes "the delight of having no name, but being like a wave which returns to the deep body of the sea; thinking how obscurity rids the mind of the irk of envy and spite" (*Orlando* 104-5). Before physically assuming the body of a female, he has begun to identify with the female artist. Orlando will eventually embody generations of feminine obscurity and emerge onto the artistic scene with a different perspective on how to attain legacy.

He realizes that "obscurity lets the mind take its way unimpeded…He may seek the truth and speak it; he alone is free; he alone is truthful; he alone is at peace. And so he sank

into a quiet mood, under the oak tree" (*Orlando* 104). Like the reinvented silence of oppressed femininity, the androgynous Orlando will find new meaning and Peace within feminine obscurity. This Peace, characteristic of the female androgynous creator, is now set in parallel to a search for truth in obscurity. The obscure legacy, the legacy that stands in opposition to the traditional male obsession with public acceptance, allows the author to engage his single self, his real self, his silent self (*Orlando* 314). In his androgyny, Orlando embodies the liminal tension between the masculine and feminine spheres; he briefly glimpses the Peaceful mediation between the Love and Hate that characterize the relationship of Isa and Giles in *Between the Acts*. This realization sinks Orlando, the future androgynous, into a communion of silence with nature as he lays at the feet of the oak tree.

However, despite having this revelation of the faults inherent to male society, Orlando still falls victim to the glory of materialistic legacy, as he has not yet been entrenched in the female perspective and thus has not yet reached his full potential as an androgynous creator. In fact, shortly after the previous revelation, he feels the need to furnish his entire mansion with millions of dollars of "richly gilt and carved" tables and chairs until "there was not room in the galleries for another table; no room on the tables for another cabinet; no room in the cabinet for another rose-bowl; no room in the bowl for another handful of potpourri; there was no room for anything anywhere" (*Orlando* 110-11). He outfits his mansion with all the traditionally masculine emblems of knowledge and legacy. Rather than beginning the quest for obscurity that he had so foretellingly imagined, he stamps his masculine legacy upon every room of his mansion ensuring that his name will be spoken of and honored for generations around the tables he has furnished. In short,

his house was stuffed to repletion with male materialistic thought, yet still our male Orlando felt unfulfilled.

The fulfillment of the androgynous perspective approaches as Orlando soon falls into a deathlike sleep, a sleep from which he will emerge as a woman. Orlando, despite the flushing of his cheeks, "gave no signs of life" and was "to all appearance dead" during his transformation of sexual orientation (*Orlando* 133). In waking from death into a state of womanhood there is the implication that Orlando's newfound femininity and feminine obscurity is closely tied with his recent descent into the obscurity of death.

Three women attempt, and fail, to awaken Orlando from her deathlike trance. These women represent the projected ideals for femininity by a male-centric society: Ladies Chastity, Purity, and Modesty. Orlando does not awaken to the calls of these ideals of femininity, but rather wakes up only to the trumpets of Truth—the attribute that the Ladies of traditional femininity had tried to obscure. Truth is born from feminine obscurity. In awakening only to the Truth that defies the feminine voices of Chastity, Purity, and Modesty (defined by the desires of masculine antiquity), the reader perceives Orlando's imminent role as visionary who will orchestrate the reconfiguring of both the constricting silence of femininity and the obsessive mindset of masculine legacy.

In waking from death to the calls of Truth, Orlando will be able to truthfully incorporate the obscurity of death into her literary opus "The Oak Tree." Thus, though obscurity is intrinsic to her awakened femininity, she will redefine it by Truth and thus embody the figure of the female androgynous creator. As creative visionary she represents a liminal state between age-old femininity and a renewed sense of female artistry and appreciation. Thus, the third emotion of Peace that is discussed in *Between the Acts*, in

parallel with Truth, can now be found in artwork through an appreciation for obscurity, through surrendering a traditional sense of legacy. The androgynous female creator, an embodiment of generational female obscurity, is able to mediate the realms of Love and Hate by bringing Peace of self to one's artwork, of bringing to the poet's table a Truth that has not been heard before in the annals of a male-dominated educational tradition.

In her novel *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf proposes that the most wholesome works of art come as result of the artist paying tribute to both the masculine and feminine intellects within his or her brain, rather than allowing one gendered perspective to dominate the other. As Bazin states, Woolf's writing suggests that:

> every mind is potentially bisexual. But she finds that among writers, and particularly among her contemporaries, most men tend to develop only the analytic, "masculine" approach, what [D.H] Lawrence calls "knowing in terms of apartness," and most women only the synthetic, "feminine," that is, "knowing in terms of togetherness." In her opinion, however, to be truly creative one must use the "whole" mind. In keeping with this, the greatest writers are "androgynous": they use and harmonize the masculine and feminine approaches to truth. (Bazin 3)

Thus the Truth that androgynous Orlando attains is the harmonized truth of both the masculine and feminine approaches. In the unification of these truths, the artist achieves the keystone of creation, the Truth that attends the liminal space between "apartness" and "togetherness."

Likewise Harper notes that in *Between the Acts*, Miss La Trobe as playwright attempts to reveal that same Truth to her audience: "*Between the Acts* becomes the mythic drama of the twilight of a culture, and of the dramatist whose destiny it is to try, in the deepening shadows, to reveal that culture to itself" (Harper 282). Like the Truth in *Orlando* that ascends from silent obscurity through the peaceful communion of selves, Miss La Trobe's drama "moves her and her audience in mysterious ways, as they all merge together

in the gathering darkness. At last the form of the narrative comes to reflect the form of its discovered truth, and that final aesthetic achievement enables the voice of the creative consciousness to enter into a final silence" (Harper 282). Through Miss La Trobe's unifying vision, the multiple selves of reality are merging into one real self. At this peaceful center of "discovered truth," silence prevails.

Orlando obtains a womanly knowledge of death traditionally feared yet obsessed over by the male-dominant literary tradition (Gilbert and Gubar). And thus, in waking from this death-like trance it is evident that Orlando can no longer hold the traditional ideals of a male-dominant society, but rather has woken into a life of androgyny, a mental state that is both "man-womanly" and "woman-manly" (AROO 97). In her refusal to awaken to the traditional calls of femininity, Orlando embodies a new wave of womanhood, one in which woman can be both androgynous and artistically distinct.

But what form does this literary obscurity assume? How has Orlando's initial concern for the fame of masculine traditional legacy changed by the end of the novel through his transformation into a woman and her new androgynous viewpoint, into a legacy of nature and communion with self?

In the final moments of the novel, Woolf reveals:

> All was still now. It was near midnight. The moon rose slowly over the weald. Its light raised a phantom castle upon earth. There stood the great house with all its windows robed in silver. Of wall or substance there was none. All was phantom. All was still. All was lit as for the coming of a dead Queen. Gazing below her, Orlando saw the dark plumes tossing in the courtyard, and torches flickering and shadows kneeling. A Queen once more stepped from her chariot.
>
> "The house is at your service, Ma'am," she cried, curtseying deeply. "Nothing has been changed. The dead Lord, my father, shall lead you in." (*Orlando* 328)

In this final focus of *Orlando* on the "phantom castle," we hear the echoes of the "phantom table" of *To the Lighthouse.* And like in Lily's ruminations, "this scene is enacted far above

the limitations of 'the house' and 'the present,' in the eternal realm of pure imagination—which does not, of course, make it any less 'real' " (Harper 199). Thus, Harper acknowledges the confining limitations of the domestic sphere and that through imagination the suppressed female intellect is able to achieve eternal legacy. As Lily in *To the Lighthouse* in viewing the phantom table in the pear tree attempts to mend the gap between feminine and masculine perspectives, Orlando in view of her phantom castle awaits the imminent return of her equally androgynous lover Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine. This phantom reality, this essence of the world of imagination, comes to fruition in our figure of the androgynous female artist. Additionally, Harper points out that "the dead queen is not named…she is the ghost of all the queens who haunt this very English house and book," recognizing that there is an irony of namelessness to the generational legacy of the female's unimposing presence (Harper 199).

In this scene "the masculine obsession with death and the martial arts, also prominent in the opening, has now given way to a more mature perception of death as inevitable in, and inseparable from, life" (Harper 200). The new knowledge imparted to Orlando after transition from male to female affords her a more complete conception of death—no longer an aspect of femininity to be simultaneously feared and glorified, but rather perceived as an element of the cyclical nature of life. The passage reads, "Nothing has been changed." Not a thing has been changed, or has nothing, an entity itself, a silent emptiness, been changed in our understanding? And how does our nuanced understanding of Woolf's semantics alter our own acceptance of this passage as the culmination of her novelistic love letter to her androgynous muse Vita? Do we accept changing nothingness or maintain stasis throughout the centuries?

Harper illustrates that "from the oak tree on the knoll Orlando and the narrative look down on the castle, on history, on all the themes, in fact, which seemed so troubling in the opening passages. The perspective now is large enough for the perception—or is it an illusion?—of unity" (Harper 200). From a space beyond the walls of both house and garden, from her omniscient perspective at the elevated oak tree, our androgynous female creator Orlando is able to look upon and recognize the phantom reality of the prestigious castle-obsessed mentality. In understanding of both masculine and feminine mentalities, she has surpassed the limiting borders of their respective societal expectations and approached Woolf's ideal of the "man-womanly" or "woman-manly" mentality set upon in *A Room of One's Own* (AROO 97). Yet the constant tension between unity and disunity remains, for it is an embracing of this divide, this liminal state of illusive "unity," of love or of hate, which peacefully frees the mind.

Despite, Orlando's continual revisions of "The Oak Tree" through the many centuries of his and her life, the reader has very few glimpses of the actual text of the poem. One glimpse we do get of the poem is the following:

> Will the young maiden, when her tears,
> Alone in moonlight shine,
> Tears for the absent and the loved,
> ….
> She was so changed, the soft carnation cloud
> Once mantling o'er her cheek like that which eve
> Hangs o'er the sky, glowing with roseate hue,
> Had faded into paleness, broken by
> Bright burning blushes, torches of the tomb,
> but here, by an abrupt movement she spilt the ink over the page and blotted it from human sight she hoped forever. (*Orlando* 238-9)

The poem reflects an intimacy with death seen in the "paleness" of the maiden and the "torches of the tomb." As in Lily Briscoe's painting of Mrs. Ramsay and Miss La Trobe's deathlike depiction of Lady Reason, death is intrinsic to Orlando's poetry. The

incorporation of the natural cycle of death within their artwork reflects Woolf's demand for the redefinition of artistic legacy. In writing "The Oak Tree," Orlando is trying to balance the male legacy of literary writing with her feminine perception of nature, creating a poem that at times is almost empty as she erases more than she writes.

Fittingly, even the understanding of death within her poem is killed by Orlando herself through the blotting of these lines from existence by the spilling of ink. The artwork itself is part of the natural life-death cycle. Orlando praises the poetic art form "for how handy a rhyme is to pass us safe over the awkward transition from death to life"—a transition she has experienced firsthand in her deathlike transformation from man to woman (*Orlando* 295). The art of poetry is intrinsically linked with the cycle of death and life, and Orlando's "The Oak Tree" is deemed a masterpiece because it is able to so skillfully capture life's constant dance with death, an understanding afforded to Orlando as she has waked from death into a new life as a woman.

In *Orlando*, the literary critic Nick Greene reads Orlando's revision of "The Oak Tree" after she has been a woman for several centuries, and he comments,

> There was no trace in it, he was thankful to say, of the modern spirit. It was composed with a regard to truth, to nature, to the dictates of the human heart, which was rare indeed, in these days of unscrupulous eccentricity. It must, of course, be published instantly. (*Orlando* 280)

Thus as a woman, Orlando's poem embodies different elements than those of her contemporary male authors who comprise the so-called "modern spirit." It seems as if, from her experience as both male and female, she has struck upon what Woolf advocates for in *A Room of One's Own,* that "poetry ought to have a mother as well as a father" (AROO 102). Her poem embodies the Truth she first woke up to as a woman, the natural link to a mother earth. Her poem has shed light on a new perspective of love and life not usually

seen within the annals of male-dominated publications. Her artwork has brought something new to the literary table. Yet of course, typical of the idealized male tradition of legacy, Orlando's confidante wants only to turn her artwork into a schema of academic legacy, to ensure a far-reaching global dominion for the text.

At the moment that Orlando achieves a traditional male legacy, she no longer desires it. In being published globally, her poem has lost its intimacy to her personally. The poem which she held next to her breast all her life is now open to the interpretations of many. Legacy in the world of academia has come at a cost to her personhood, leaving her vulnerable. Orlando's androgynous mind is split between the binary desires of the male and female spheres.

Orlando recognizes that fame and public acceptance are not intrinsic to legacy, but that rather a different form of legacy can transpire,

> What has praise and fame to do with poetry? What has seven editions (the book had already gone into no less) got to do with the value of it? Was not writing poetry a secret transaction, a voice answering a voice? …What could have been more secret, she thought, more slow, and like the intercourse of lovers than the stammering she had made all these years to the old crooning song of the woods. (*Orlando* 325)

Orlando understands that art is an intimate act of communion with nature, a tribute to nature's simultaneous call for and destruction of a need for legacy—a cycle of life and death intrinsic to human nature. She must put her book to rest, her mind to rest; she welcomes peace.

We remember Isabella from "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection." Reminiscent of the discussion of feminine beauty killed into art, the progressive narrator intones that even after the comparison of Isabella's beauty to that of the flowers she picks, "the comparison showed how very little, after all these years, one knew about her; for it is

impossible that any woman of flesh and blood of fifty-five or sixty should be really a wreath or a tendril" (CSFVW 216). For such comparisons traditionally performed by the masculine dominancy "are worse than idle and superficial—they are cruel even, for they come like the convolvulus itself trembling between one's eyes and the truth. There must be truth" (CSFVW 216). The passage suggests that truth will not be found in the relegation of women to mere objects of superficial beauty. In an ironic nod to the masculine ideology of woman as angel or monster, the narrator satirizes "it was absurd, it was monstrous" for Isabella to keep her secrets of a bygone life private (CSFVW 217). For "it was strange to say that after knowing her all these years one could not say what the truth about Isabella was" (CSFVW 216). Isabella's truth lies within her secret internalized life, her private table of knowledge, of memories. Her truth lies in her obscurity.

At the moment of Isabella's final arrival at the marble-topped table, "the looking-glass began to pour over her a light that seemed to fix her; that seemed like some acid to bite off the unessential and superficial and to leave only the truth" (CSFVW 219). In the final moment of androgynous perspective in which the independent woman, the tree, and the table, are all superimposed upon one another, truth is achieved.

CONVERGENCE OF THE MOMENT

In *Between the Acts*, Isa in the midst of her conflict of Love and Hate reminisces to meeting Giles for the first time while salmon fishing. Harper notices that "her feeling of excitement, admiration, even awe, toward this man who, whatever he might have done and become since that magic moment, will always exist at the heart of that moment. Even now, seven years later, the thought of it fills her with vivid sensations" (Harper 295). Isa remembers,

"like a thick ingot of silver bent in the middle, the salmon had leapt, had been caught, and she had loved him" (BTA 44). Harper remarks that this "suddenness and inevitability of 'she had loved him' are consistent with the ways in which women are stricken by sexual love in [Woolf's] *oeuvre*, and the silver tint [of the fish] may imply that this love could be lethal" (Harper 295). Harper is positing that for women sexual love is an experience that transcends time, and though of the moment is indeed composed of previous moments. Indeed we can even hear echoes of Gilbert and Gubar from *The Madwoman in the Attic* in which the sexuality of females is laced with the mystique of death. Thus, the feminine experience of sexuality reflects that of a cyclical legacy in part due to their understanding of nature's deathly recycling, and in part due to their sexuality's close association with childbirth. This experience of sexuality in the *oeuvre* is intensified in the figure of the female androgynous creator as she is not only sensitive to unifying moments of sexuality, but attempts to portray them in her art.

In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous argues that there is "no general woman, no one typical woman," but rather that what women do have in common is "the infinite richness of their individual constitutions" (Cixous 876). Almost in response to Harper's previous position on female sexuality she states that one cannot talk about "*a* female sexuality, uniform, homogenous, classifiable into codes—any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another" (Cixous 876). Cixous beautifully states that: "Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible" (Cixous 876). This reference to the rich inner life of the female intellect especially in regards to music, painting, and writing, could not be more relevant to this discussion on Woolf's female artists: the playwright, the painter, and the poet. Her

characterization of the female mind as one of an incredible "stream of phantasms" is especially potent for not only its acknowledgement of the female's constant relationship with death but also this notion of woman's continual streaming of moments to convergence at the present instant. The ghostly moments, the phantasms of time gone by, are continually reborn in the present moment. The female's stream of consciousness is indicative of her cyclical legacy, of the continual rebirth of the moment.

And thus, in Woolf's trademark stream of consciousness writing she transcends even Cixous' admiration for woman by merging her "stream of phantasms" in an effort that is not "like music, painting, writing" but in fact *is* "music, painting, writing" and furthermore discusses the art of "music, painting, writing" through her artistic mastery of it. For as Harper tells us, Woolf

> visualized all of her novels in terms of space much as if the novel were a painting. In speaking of her first novel, she said that "the whole was to have a sort of pattern." As she discovered techniques which enabled her to rely less and less upon story and, hence, upon a chronological time sequence, she developed what Joseph Frank calls "spatial form." Spatial form transforms the novel itself into an image. That is, in Frank's words, it unites "disparate ideas and emotions into a complex presented spatially in an instant of time." (Harper 32)

Interestingly, Virginia Woolf has subverted the age-old patriarchal view of woman as a household image, woman killed into art, and has, in its place, introduced her own understanding of feminine image—the novelistic portrait. Cixous argues that "women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must…get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word 'silence' " (Cixous 886). In her artistry, Woolf has given voice to the silence.

Virginia Woolf's novelistic portrait and stream of consciousness writing transcends Harper's "chronological time sequence" through the unification of her moments of being into a single image. As the final words uttered in *Between the Acts* reflect what "Miss La Trobe had envisioned when 'She heard the first words' at the end of the penultimate section," Woolf's stream of consciousness becomes a form of cyclical legacy (Harper 317). In Harper's words the ending of *Between the Acts* "is about a larger creative process: a creative consciousness envisioning a consciousness envisioning a dramatic action—the infinitely regressive 'subject' of modern art" (Harper 317).

In this "subject of modern art," feminine power manifests in the silence honed through years of male dominant suppression. It is not a power of brute overt force, but rather gentle suggestive persuasion inculcated by the experiences of generations of foremothers. This suggestive power often manifests in moments of silence—silence that serves as a reflection of female's deathlike status. As the historical female "voice" within the domestic sphere has been one of suppressed silence, the androgynous mind too is one where silence prevails:

> So she was now darkened, stilled, and become, with the addition of this Orlando, what is called, rightly or wrongly, a single self, a real self. And she fell silent. For it is probable that when people talk aloud, the selves (of which there may be more than two thousand are conscious of disseverment, and are trying to communicate but when communication is established there is nothing more to be said. (*Orlando* 314)

Orlando experiences a convergence of her multiple selves. Thus, silence is transformed from a signifier of suppression to a signifier of an ultimate communion with self. A sense of power revives the deathly silence.

The epitome of feminine intellect, Mrs. Ramsay, inherently appreciates the voice of silence:

> Mrs. Ramsay sat silent. She was glad, Lily thought, to rest in silence, uncommunicative; to rest in the extreme obscurity of human relationships. Who

> knows what we are, what we feel? Who knows even at the moment of intimacy, This is knowledge? Aren't things spoilt then, Mrs. Ramsay may have asked (it seemed to have happened so often, this silence by her side) by saying them? Aren't we more expressive thus? The moment at least seemed extraordinarily fertile. She rammed a little hole in the sand and covered it up, by way of burying in it the perfection of the moment. It was like a drop of silver in which one dipped and illumined the darkness of the past. (TTL 171-2)

The final moment in which all of the interactions of *To the Lighthouse* converge into the stroke through the center of Lily's painting, fulfills the search for Truth in "the extreme obscurity of human relationships." The silent moment becomes "extraordinarily fertile."

In the final moment of *Between the Acts,* the audience questions: "What's the notion? Anything that's bright enough to reflect, presumably, ourselves? Ourselves, Ourselves!" (BTA 165) The audience continues to speculate, "But that's cruel. To snap us as we are, before we've had time to assume… And only, too, in parts…That's what's so distorting and upsetting and utterly unfair" (ellipses original) (BTA 165). The audience is overwhelmed by the splintering mirage of themselves. Yet in this splintering, in this silent reflection of a million of themselves, amidst the discordancy and cacophony of shapes and lights and mirrored faces—there is a harmony. There is a peace in being divided from one's gender-perceived body. There is a peace in this overlap of feminine and masculine qualities staring back amidst the myriad of reflections.

It is at this convergence of the moment, when the multiple selves are aligned, that silence ensues. Harper posits that towards the end of *Orlando*, as her "final moment of vision is approaching," she has seen "how the meaning of everything that has ever been is inherent in the present moment" (Harper 198). At the center of emptiness, at the darkened silent heart of the moment, is a convergence of selves that lends ultimate understanding of Truth, of Peace. The emptiness becomes profound; it becomes productive. The works of the

three androgynous artists within Woolf's *Orlando*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Between the Acts*, are all completed by moments of silence and internal reflection.

The narrator of *A Room of One's Own* wonders,

> Why do I feel that there are severances and oppositions in the mind, as there are strains from obvious causes on the body? What does one mean by "the unity of the mind," I pondered, for clearly the mind has so great a power of concentration at any point at any moment that it seems to have no single state of being. It can separate itself from the people in the street, for example, and think of itself as apart from them…Or it can think with other people spontaneously…It can think back through its fathers or through its mothers, as I have said that a woman writer thinks back through her mothers. Again if one is a woman one is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness…Clearly the mind is always altering its focus, and bringing the world into different perspectives. But some of these states of mind seem…to be less comfortable than others…But there may be some state of mind in which one could continue without effort because nothing is required to be held back. (AROO 96)

In conclusion, women have to forge a new type of literary understanding rather than conform to an education that appeals to the male mind and has been inculcated by generations of exclusively male learning. Women approach learning from a different standpoint and practice an art of persuasive suggestive power as a reaction against the instilled gender confines of society and the centuries of female suppression. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gubar and Gilbert note, "we decided, therefore, that the striking coherence we noticed in literature by women could be explained by a common, female impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of self, art, and society" (Gilbert and Gubar xi-xii). Historically, the female of the house has always needed to employ strategy in order for her suppressed voice to be heard within her own domestic sphere. As women emerge onto the literary and artistic scene traditionally dominated by males, they transform this century-old strategy of a silent and suggestive power into their works—effectively producing artwork more reflective of

the human condition as they project the supposed intimacy with death that has for centuries been imposed upon them, onto their artwork.

The feminine consciousness is a search for completion, for achievement of the unified whole, of a cyclical return and advancement. As Cixous notes this cyclic consciousness is born as result of woman who always the "outcast, has never ceased to hear the resonance of fore-language… the language of 1,000 tongues which knows neither enclosure nor death… she doesn't defend herself against these unknown women who she's surprised at becoming but derives pleasure from this gift of alterability…alive because of transformation" (Cixous 889). Woman herself is a convergence of the moment. Likewise, Woolf's own novelistic history reflects this "organic whole." As Harper reveals,

> Because the *oeuvre* is an organic whole, this final novel emerges against the background of all of the earlier work, and achieves its fullest meaning against that background. Its poetic language subsumes and fulfills the languages of the earlier works…it distills the essence of a lifework. And so, as Jean Guiguet has said, "Perhaps *Between the Acts* is fully intelligible only to a reader prepared by long familiarity with Virginia Woolf's writings. He alone can recognize her characteristic themes under the faint outlines, and amplify a mere allusion with a full context from elsewhere." (Harper 282-3)

Fittingly, the final moment of Woolf's lifework is received most profoundly when considered as a confluence of all the moments of her literature. And thus, the "transcendent meaning" of Woolf's lifework comes through the vision of the female androgynous artist and from Woolf's own "mysterious power of consciousness to conceive such a drama" (Harper 5). Perhaps this new androgynous perspective can create a liminal space between the male and female genders, in effect creating a "man-womanly" or "woman-manly" mind (AROO 97). The reinvention of silence through the figure of the female androgynous creator has issued in an era of the meeting of the minds, of a communion in silence. As the unnamed audience members voice in *Between the Acts*:

> but whose play? Ah, that's the question! And if we're left asking questions, isn't it a failure, as a play? I must say I like to feel sure if I go to the theatre, that I've grasped the meaning…Or was that, perhaps, what she meant?...that if we don't jump to conclusions, if you think, and I think, perhaps one day, thinking differently, we shall think the same? (BTA 180)

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf posits that "before the act of creation can be accomplished," "some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated" (AROO 103). The androgynous female artists Miss La Trobe, Orlando, and Lily Briscoe, are able to create for the very reason that they have facilitated this meting of the minds, this intersection of the tea-table and the conference table, of the table and the tree. These women provide hope that "perhaps one day, thinking differently, we shall think the same." In a return to the essay "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," and a consideration for the historical moment in which Woolf was writing, does androgynous artistry become the key to creating "the only efficient air raid shelter?" She suggests that perhaps war can be avoided through an integration of the androgynous perspective of peace.

We remember Isabella. In a cyclical fashion, we return to the start of this thesis and our knowledge of Isabella and her relationship to her world. It is my hope that her world is now endowed with richer meaning. Throughout the course of this thesis, I have gradually unveiled in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection" what I believe to be hallmarks of Virginia Woolf's lifework: her response to the conception of masculine and feminine

knowledge within literary traditions, her assertion for the reception of both women and men to the table of knowledge, her nuanced perspective on legacy and the feminine power of silent suggestion, and her ability to reinvent tradition in light of the superimposition of the table and tree by the orchestrating female androgynous artist. As Isabella walks towards the eye of the looking-glass, her real self converges upon the immortal self fixed within the glass, within the page. The final moment, the present moment, becomes a convergence of all experience. In the final moment of the short story, as in the final moment of this thesis, the analysis of symbols within the lifework of Virginia Woolf converges as "the letters and the table and the grass walk and the sunflowers which had been waiting in the looking-glass separated and opened out so that she might be received among them" (CSFVW 219). In this final moment: "Here was the woman herself. She stood naked in that pitiless light. And there was nothing. She was perfectly empty" (CSFVW 219). With the arrival of the androgynous perspective through the overlaid imagery, Isabella is stripped to stark truth and Woolf reveals what can now be viewed as a productive, perfect emptiness. Isabella, a reflection of an independent woman with a room of her own, with a rich inner life of sympathies and symbolism, becomes the artistic visionary Virginia Woolf herself.

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Works Cited Key

AROO= *A Room of One’s Own*
BTA= *Between the Acts*
CSFVW=*Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*
TTL = *To the Lighthouse*