

4-2008

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“I Hate, I Love:” How Mothers Fail in Virginia Woolf’s Fiction

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelors of Arts in English from
The College of William and Mary

by

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Accepted for _____
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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April 25th, 2008

She has always haunted me, partly, I suppose, her beauty; and then dying at that moment, I suppose she cut a great figure on one's mind when it was just awake, and had not any experience of life – Only then one would have suspected that one had made up a sham – an ideal. (Letters III 383, 5/25/27)

Woolf's mother, Julia Duckworth Stephen, died in 1895 when Virginia Woolf was thirteen years old. For the Stephen household and its patriarch, Sir Leslie Stephen, Julia was the epitome of maternal perfection and wifely duty. Leslie recorded these ideals in the Mausoleum Book, laying the groundwork for Woolf's reminiscences of her mother. Both Woolf and her father fell prey to the temptation to idealize the beauty, grace, and superlative femininity of Julia Stephen. The quotation above, however, suggests Woolf's misgivings about the idealization – almost canonization – of her mother. Having lost Julia at such a young age, Woolf often examines her own memories of Julia and the difficulty of representing her. She writes to Vita Sackville West, "As my mother died when I was 13 probably [the depiction of Julia in To the Lighthouse] is a child's view of her" (Letters III 374, 5/13/27). Woolf addresses the subject again in a letter to Vanessa, writing, "But what do you think I did know about mother? It can't have been much – What would Quentin have known of you if you had died when he was 13?" (Letters III 379, 5/22/27). Woolf's struggle between the inherited myth of her mother and the actual experience of her creates ambiguity in the mothers Woolf creates in her fiction. In an effort to demythologize maternity, Woolf allows all of the mothers in her works to have flaws. Woolf's anxiety about the mythologization of motherhood reveals itself through her insistent depictions of failed, imperfect maternal characters in her fiction.

Each mother in Woolf's fiction is either hyperbolically maternal in a threatening way or too removed as a maternal presence. The delicate balance of maternity is never

achieved by any of Woolf's mothers. In The Voyage Out, Woolf creates a novel full of absent, incompetent, and aggressive mothers. Rachel Vinrace, the novel's heroine, is both an orphan and a surrogate under the wing of her aunt, Helen Ambrose. Helen, who has temporarily abandoned her own two sons, is a physical threat to Rachel and instrumental in the sexual indoctrination of Rachel into adult society. Night and Day is a novel about the home, and what women give up in marriage. Katherine, the mathematician and daughter of the central family, struggles to define her own desires against the will of her flighty and intrusive mother. Jacob's Room, the only novel that features a boy as the object of a mother's imperfect love, explores a failed relationship between mother and son. The dynamics of Jacob's Room are fundamentally different because of this sex difference. In Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf explores the sacrifices of motherhood and the lost possibilities that come with aging. The novel examines the relationship between mother-daughter pair Clarissa and Elizabeth and explores the claim Clarissa aspires to exert over the body and mind of her daughter. To the Lighthouse is Woolf's most autobiographical novel, or elegy, about her parents. The novel contemplates its maternal center, Mrs. Ramsay, from various characters' point of view, dramatizing especially her relationship with her husband and surrogate daughter, Lily Briscoe. Lily, who has lost her own mother, attempts to claim Mrs. Ramsay in a painting as well as in life but meets the obstacles of censorship, death, and grief. In Orlando, Woolf explores essential womanhood through her bi-sexed eponymous main character. Orlando achieves ultimate femininity in her experience of sex and childbirth, yet she quickly abandons her child in favor of other experiences. In her most experimental novel, The Waves, Woolf uses six voices to create a narrative about growth and loss. Susan, the maternal force in The

Waves, is as tender as she is fierce, but even she cannot protect her surrogate children from the inevitability of death. Woolf constantly rewrites the maternal drama, and each time it ends in disappointment and failure.

Each of Woolf's maternal characters is written in relation to the depiction of the ultimate mother in The Mausoleum Book, an homage Leslie Stephen wrote about Julia to preserve her memory for his children. Leslie bequeaths to Woolf an archetypal figure of motherhood. He writes, "I saw and remembered [Julia], as I might have seen and remembered the Sistine Madonna or any other presentation of her superlative beauty" (Stephen 31). He continues, "She lived in me, in her mother, in her children, in the many relations and friends whom she cheered and helped. The very substance of her life was woven out of her affections" (Stephen 58). Leslie Stephen makes sure to emphasize Julia's maternal perfection as well, "She was a perfect mother, a very ideal type of mother; and in her the maternal instincts were, as it seemed, but the refined essence of love which showed its strength in every other relation of life" (Stephen 83). Even the children subscribed to the ideology of maternal perfection. In Reminiscences, Woolf writes:

We insisted that to be like mother, or like Stella, was to achieve the height of human perfection. Vanessa then at the age of eighteen, was exalted, in the most tragic way, to a strange position, full of power and responsibility. Everyone turned to her and she moved, like some young Queen, all weighed down with the pomp of her ceremonial robes, perplexed and mournful and uncertain of her way. (Reminiscences 53)

The sardonic analogy with the young Queen Victoria shows not only the burden Vanessa Stephen shouldered but the wry humor Woolf now finds in her childish worship of Julia.

However, according to Woolf, her mother's multiple commitments weakened her individual relationships. Woolf writes, "I see now that she was living on such an

extended surface that she had not time, nor strength, to concentrate, except for a moment if one were ill or in some child's crisis, upon me or upon anyone" ("Sketch" 83). Julia lived in endless crisis mode, responding to emergencies rather than forging everyday relationships. Woolf continues, "Can I remember ever being alone with her for more than a few minutes? Someone was always interrupting" ("Sketch" 83). Even when Julia was alive, she was not fully present. Ellen Bayuk Rosenman notes, "Julia must have mothered her infants well enough to leave Woolf with a taste for maternal love but thereafter spread herself too thin to fulfill the need she aroused. She weaned her daughter Virginia at ten weeks, an unusually early separation" (Rosenman, *Invisible* 10). Woolf separated from her mother's breast early, followed by a period of stiff competition with siblings, Leslie, her disabled sister Laura's special needs, and her mother's charity work. The relationship between Woolf and her mother could not help but be strained.

Leslie's constant need for validation, attention, and affection grew into a burden for Julia and the subsequent maternal figures of the Stephen household. Leslie encouraged the children's worship of Julia Stephen at the same time that his demands weakened Julia's ability to be a completely committed mother. Woolf openly resents the legacy of dependence that Julia left for Stella and Vanessa. She writes:

It would have [been] better for our relationship if [Julia] had left him to fend for himself. But for many years she made a fetish of his health; and so – leaving the effect upon us out of the reckoning – she wore herself out and died at forty-nine; while he lived on, and found it very difficult, so healthy was he, to die of cancer at the age of seventy-two. ("Sketch" 132)

Not only did Julia's coddling of Leslie affect her relationship with her children during her life, but after her death Leslie is bequeathed to both Julia's replacements. The coddling

that Leslie enjoyed during Julia's life made him an odious figure after she was gone. Julia's legacy to her daughters was an inconsolable, fragile father.

After Julia's devastating death, Woolf's carefully crafted and edited grief allows her to more acutely articulate and rebuild her feelings of loss in her writing. Recounting the death of her mother, Woolf writes, "I got a feeling of calm, sadness, and finality" ("Sketch" 84). Woolf describes her mother's lifeless face as "immeasurably distant, hollow and stern. When I kissed her, it was like kissing cold iron. Whenever I touch cold iron the feeling comes back to me – the feeling of my mother's face, iron cold, and granulated" ("Sketch" 92). Woolf's memory is controlled, rational, and subdued, perhaps in defiance of the theatrical bereavement required of her. In the period of mourning that followed, Woolf found herself performing a fictional grief. She writes, "We were made to act parts that we did not feel; to fumble for words we did not know" ("Sketch" 94). Woolf's ability to articulate a sentiment is fundamentally linked to her understanding of it. She writes:

I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. ("Sketch" 72)

The desire to re-create wholeness recurs in the mother-child relationships Woolf creates in her fiction. Woolf has strong feelings of abandonment and a desire to fill the void left by her absent mother. Rosenman suggests that, "particularly if they experience inadequate early mothering, women may also continually seek to recreate the mother-daughter dyad in other forms such as female friendships, lesbian relationships, and motherhood itself, which restores the symbiotic bond" (Rosenman, *Invisible* 13). Unable

to replace Julia by becoming a mother herself, Woolf attempts to restore the bond and feelings of unity through art.

Woolf discovered the link between art and loss in the days following her mother's death. The sense of relief Woolf feels after her mother's death gives rise to her new ability to relate to poetry. She writes, "[M]y mother's death unveiled and intensified; made me suddenly develop perceptions, as if a burning glass had been laid over what was shaded and dormant" ("Sketch" 93). Woolf's ability to feel may have been stunted at the moment of Julia's death, but her ability to perceive blossomed. The separation of mother from daughter becomes the cruel instrument – the burning glass – through which art can be deciphered. Just as a lens concentrates light, Woolf's grief intensifies her experience of poetry. She continues, "I opened [The Golden Treasury] and began to read some poem. And instantly and for the first time I understood the poem...no one could have understood from what I said the queer feeling I had in the hot grass, that poetry was coming true" ("Sketch" 93). Having had the first great loss of her life, Woolf has joined the ranks of poets and artists working from their own experiences of genuine emotion. In her unarticulated experience, Woolf finds the line between art and reality is transgressed; the separation between art and emotion is breached. In this moment, Julia's abandonment allows for literary growth.

After Julia's death, Virginia Woolf had two surrogate mothers, each as failed in her eyes as her own. Following Julia's death Virginia's half-sister, Stella, became the maternal figure in Virginia's life. As the guide during her pubescent years, Stella was in charge of Virginia when Woolf was beginning to blossom into physical womanhood. Woolf was "forced to wear certain underclothing for the first time in [her] life"

(Apprentice 64, 4/1/97) in preparation for Stella's wedding. Mothers, as gatekeepers into womanhood, are especially crucial during puberty. Mothers help to guide their daughters through the physical changes toward womanhood. Losing Stella becomes even more tragic because of the role she played during Woolf's social, emotional, and bodily transitions.

Woolf shows no overt aggression toward Stella until Stella's death seems imminent. Woolf writes, "I had a succession of respectable dull visitors, & answered the invariable 'How is Stella?' till I hated poor Stella & her diseases" (Apprentice 105, 6/23/97). Just as Woolf hated the performance of grief during her mother's death, she began to chafe against the same social dance of caring for a second dying mother. In Woolf's diary, one can see the parallel in the grieving process. She writes, "At 3 this morning, Georgie & Nessa came to me, & told me that Stella was dead – That is all we have thought of since; & it is impossible to write of" (Apprentice 115, 7/19/97). Additionally, Stella was fostering the Stephen girls' independence. Woolf writes in her diary, "Stella made a proposal that father should give Nessa an allowance of 40£ a year – 25 of which I should have" (Apprentice 62, 3/30/97). This lost potential for healing and autonomy makes the tragedy of Stella's death all the more profound.

Woolf's knowledge of Freud may have illuminated some of her vision of mother figures. Lee writes:

What she read of Freud in this first part of the war affected her profoundly. In his writings on war and civilization, Freud insisted on the persistence of "primal" or "primitive" mental instincts... Civilization has to struggle to repress or sublimate these instincts, and the question for the survival of the group, as for the individual, is whether these restraints and repressions can master the instincts of aggression and self-destruction. (Lee 710)

Woolf's own description of Freud allows her to articulate her internal struggle in her attitude toward her mother. She writes, "It was only the other day when I read Freud for the first time, that I discovered that this violently disturbing conflict of love and hate is a common feeling; and is called ambivalence" ("Sketch" 108). The notion of the hate and love dichotomy reemerges in The Waves, specifically in the mother character, Susan. Just as Susan's maternity is contingent on her ferocity, Woolf's mother figures live in constant oppositional tension. Mrs. Flanders is pulled between interference and censorship, Mrs. Ramsay between absence and intrusion. Mrs. Dalloway is both virgin and mother, and Orlando both male and female. Woolf never allows for a one-dimensional depiction of maternal figures and creates multifaceted characters as complex as her love and aggression toward Julia herself.

Motherhood seemed to breed feelings of inadequacy and hostility in Woolf's most prized relationships with women. Woolf's friendships with mothers Vanessa and Vita, are tainted by feelings of envy and exclusion. In a letter to Vita, Woolf writes, "[My] body [...] is misshapen as a woodpecker – Whereas Vita – beech trees, waterfalls and cascades of blue black paper – all so cool and fruitful and delicious" (Letters III 227, 1/9/26). Vita is the symbol of fecundity and maternal charm, which contrast with the barren severity of Woolf, who is laid up in bed with a fever. In her diary, Woolf describes Vita as "matronly & voluptuous" (Diary IV 120, 12/15/37). Vita allows Woolf to articulate what she believes real womanhood to be. In her diary Woolf writes:

There is her maturity & full breastedness: her being so much in full sail on the high tides, where I am coasting down backwaters; ... her motherhood (but she is a little cold & offhand with her boys) her being in short (what I have never been) a real woman...but then she is aware of this, & so lavishes on me the maternal protection which, for some reason, is what I have always most wished from everyone. (Diary III 52, 12/21/25)

Woolf associates maternity with becoming fully woman. In her tongue-in-cheek biographical parody of Vita, Orlando, Woolf uses the idea that motherhood validates and completes femininity whether or not the mother plays an active role in her children's lives.

Woolf openly and periodically quarreled with Vanessa over Vanessa's children. Woolf is ambiguous about her attitudes toward motherhood, simultaneously criticizing Vanessa as well as envying her. Woolf's sometimes critical attitude towards Vanessa's son, Julian, creates tension between the sisters. On one occasion, Woolf attempts to talk about Julian with Vanessa but Vanessa "ruffles like a formidable hen" (Diary IV 264, 11/27/34). Woolf goes on to deplore what she calls the "religion and superstition of motherhood" (Diary IV 264, 11/27/34). She continues on in the same entry, saying, "Why does it irritate me so, this maternal partiality?...I disliked many of my feelings. Most of all I hate the hush and mystery of motherhood. How unreal it all is!" (Diary IV 264, 11/27/34). Woolf casts herself as an outsider to the religiosity of motherhood.

Woolf expresses feelings of competition with Vanessa, framing these sororal comparisons in relationship to Vanessa's children. Woolf seems to revert back to her own childhood, when she competed with her siblings and father for Julia Stephen's attention. Woolf writes simply, "Nessa has Quentin & don't want me" (Diary V 63, 3/1/37). Woolf goes so far as to attribute Vanessa's slow art sales to the fact that Vanessa has children. Woolf writes in a diary entry, "465 [pounds] for a handful of old [literary] sketches. This a little shames me in comparison with Nessa's sales: but then I reflect, I put my life blood into writing, & she had children" (Diary V 63, 3/1/37). Woolf feels shame that her "sketches" are far more lucrative than Vanessa's painting sales. Woolf also suggests that

money serves to compensate Woolf for her lack of children. Moreover she suggests that her own writing would have suffered had she had children. Elsewhere, Woolf expresses feelings of inadequacy because of her childlessness. She writes:

I wonder why. Why life suddenly seems empty & endless:& I seem for ever climbing the endless stair, forced; unhelped; unthanked; a mere slave to some harsh – shall I say destiny – or is the word too big for what is probably some superficial reaction; part the old jealousy of Nessa's children isn't it? (Diary V 189, 11/24/38)

Despite the comfort Woolf finds in her literary success, she maintains feelings of jealousy. Unsure of her relationships to maternal figures, Woolf imbues her texts with her unresolved anxiety, bitterness, and grief about her own interactions and disappointments with mothers.

The Voyage Out

Woolf's first depiction of maternity is also the most violent and abusive. In The Voyage Out, Helen Ambrose, a mother of two boys and surrogate parent to Rachel Vinrace, is both an absent and intrusive mother. In the first few pages, Helen appears as a mysterious crying woman detached from her husband. Woolf writes, "He came up to her, laid his hand on her shoulder, and said 'Dearest.' His voice was supplicating. But she shut her face away from him, as much as to say, 'You can't possibly understand'" (Voyage 7). Woolf has already isolated Helen from her partner and husband, beginning to show the strained relationships Helen forms with her family. Woolf continues, "somewhere up there above the pinnacles where the smoke rose in a pointed hill, her children were now asking for her, and getting a soothing reply" (Voyage 7). Helen's introduction sets her up as a disconnected mother, literally creating space between herself and her children, and

mentally distant from her own husband. One assumes that Helen's grief is related to her children; however it is never actually articulated.

Instead of being too absent, as she is with her biological sons, Helen becomes hyper-involved in Rachel's life. Helen views Rachel as a way to revisit and reclaim her own lost youth and sexual potential. Despite telling the Dalloways, "I'd much rather be a cook than a nurse...nothing would induce me to take charge of children" (Voyage 38), Helen chooses to take Rachel under her wing. Helen is an enigma; she simultaneously denounces childcare although she is a mother herself, and at the same time desires to control the life of her surrogate daughter. The result of Helen's manipulative maternity is an abusive and violent relationship with Rachel. Helen presents herself as a kind alternative to letting Rachel grow up ignorant of the world. Helen writes in a letter:

It's an odd fate that has put me in charge of a girl...considering that I have never got on well with women, or had much to do with them...this girl, though twenty-four, had never heard that men desire women, and, until I explained it, did not know how children were born...It seems to me not merely foolish but criminal to bring people up like that. Let alone the suffering to them, it explains why women are what they are – the wonder is they're not worse. I have taken it upon myself to enlighten her. (Voyage 91)

As a biological mother to boys, Helen approaches Rachel differently because she is a woman. Helen's resolve to "enlighten" Rachel is an unsolicited undertaking that stems from something other than maternal altruism.

When Helen speaks to Rachel's father about her plan to take Rachel with her, she becomes a real surrogate mother under the watchful eyes of Rachel's biological mother, Theresa. Theresa's photograph dominates Willoughby Vinrace's study and directs the conversation between Willoughby and Helen. Woolf describes Theresa's portrait as follows:

The need of sitting absolutely still before a Cockney photographer had given her lips a queer little pucker, and her eyes for the same reason looked as though she thought the whole situation ridiculous. Nevertheless it was the head of an individual and interesting woman, who would no doubt have turned and laughed at Willoughby if she could have caught his eye. (Voyage 80)

The odd deification of Theresa chafes against this human depiction of her annoyance and imperfection. Willoughby believes “she watched him from Heaven and inspired what was good in him” (Voyage 80). Unfortunately, Theresa’s memory and photograph do not protect Rachel from Helen’s manipulative violence. The ever-present image of Theresa follows Rachel through the text. Froula suggests, “If Rachel needs her mother’s image in order both to recognize and to differentiate her own, she also risks resembling her too much, of losing her own identity in her mother’s, reproducing her in motherhood and in death” (Froula 70). Rachel does not have her own mother from whom to differentiate herself and she has a surrogate mother who desires to take over rather than release Rachel.

Helen takes power from Theresa, both by claiming accountability for Rachel as well as undermining Theresa’s saintly image. Woolf sets up a literal transfer of maternal responsibility from Theresa to Helen. Willoughby explicitly says to Helen, “I want to bring her up as her mother would have wished...making a woman out of her, the kind of woman her mother would have liked her to be’ he ended, jerking his head at the photograph” (Voyage 81). Although Helen fulfils her essential duties of bringing Rachel into society and even finding her a husband, the most important job of a mother both socially and biologically is to keep her offspring alive, which Helen fails to do. Helen overturns the deification of Theresa as well as Rachel’s other surrogate mothers, her aunts. Helen says to Rachel, “It was Maurice Fielding, of course, that your mother was

engaged to...more people were in love with her than with any one I've ever known...She had that power – she enjoyed things. She wasn't beautiful...She got on with every kind of person" (Voyage 177). Rachel responds, "That's so like Aunt Lucy and Aunt Katie... They always make out that she was very sad and very good" (Voyage 177). Helen not only rewrites Rachel's inherited image of Theresa, but manages to create liars out of her other aunts, winning more of Rachel's trust.

Clarissa Dalloway is also a surrogate mother to Rachel, if only for a brief time. Clarissa shows potential for being an effective and sympathetic mother figure, yet she leaves before any real relationship can be formed. Rachel "was overcome by an intense desire to tell Mrs. Dalloway things she had never told anyone – things she had not realized herself until this moment" (Voyage 56). Clarissa allows for Rachel's own self discovery without trying to create or claim it as her own. Rachel engages with Clarissa in a way very different from her relationship with Helen. Clarissa remains detached from Rachel and grants her an independent voice in conversation. Even Rachel, in a moment of autonomy, can say, "I find you easy to talk to" (Voyage 56). However, with all of this potential for maternal affection and understanding there is still an unspoken chasm between Rachel and Clarissa. Rachel reveals:

"I am lonely...I want—" She did not know what she wanted, so that she could not finish the sentence, but her lip quivered.
But it seemed that Mrs. Dalloway was unable to understand without words.
(Voyage 56)

Clarissa does not have the kind of intuitive connection with Rachel to close the disjunction between them. Unable to forge an unspoken bond, Clarissa leaves after the initial voyage, once again underscoring the transient nature of mother figures in the text. Clarissa says, "'Rachel's coming to see me anyhow – the instant you get back,' she said,

pressing Rachel's arm. 'Now – you have no excuse'" (Voyage 73). Of course, Rachel never sees Clarissa again because of Rachel's death, the one excuse Clarissa does not count on. Although Clarissa has good intentions for Rachel, she exposes her, via her husband Richard, to sexuality and death.

Clarissa's fleeting relationship with Rachel stimulates Helen's maternal jealousy. Spying Clarissa and Rachel together on the boat, Helen feels the need to possess and control Rachel, as she does for the rest of the novel. Woolf writes that Helen "seeing Rachel arm-in-arm with a comparative stranger, looking excited, was amused, but at the same time slightly irritated" (Voyage 57). Helen is torn between her desire for Rachel's socialization and her desire to be the sole guide into Rachel's adulthood. Helen speaks badly of the Dalloways to Rachel in order to win Rachel's full affection. She calls Clarissa "a thimble pated creature... chock-full of idiotic theories about the way to bring up children... He was pompous, but he did at least understand what was said to him" (Voyage 77). Just as Helen succeeded in tainting Rachel's perceptions of Theresa and her aunts, Rachel thinks, "The glamour insensibly faded a little both from Richard and Clarissa. They had not been so wonderful after all, then, in the eyes of a mature person" (Voyage 77). The competition of the two mother figures over the single child, Rachel, shows neither woman as magnanimous Madonna figure. Clarissa has no children through whom to gain experience, and Helen has left her biological children at home. Woolf not only mocks the two women for their faulty mothering, but also finds humor in Helen's assertion of maturity, which is clouded by jealousy.

After Richard Dalloway's kiss, Rachel confides in Helen. Rachel's initial desire to share her experience with Helen gives Helen the power to become an abusive mother

figure. Armed with information about Rachel and the appearance of social knowledge, Helen is able to assert her maternal authority over Rachel for the first time. Helen views Rachel “like a victim dropped from the claws of a bird of prey” (Voyage 31) which in deSalvo’s, view suggests that “Helen is capable of softness and tenderness only if she can construe Rachel as a victim” (deSalvo 82-3). Helen uses this power dynamic, both real and constructed, to mold Rachel. Although Helen is quite aware that Rachel “was... terrified” (Voyage 75), she decides to “belittle...the whole affair” (Voyage 75). Diana Swanson suggests that the kiss “functions in Rachel’s psyche and in the novel as a whole as a synecdoche for rape and sexual abuse of women” (Swanson 290). Undermining the sexual assault of Richard’s kiss, Helen says, “It’s the most natural thing in the world. Men will want to kiss you, just as they’ll want to marry you.” (Voyage 76). Helen is complicit in the violence of Richard and men at large. Additionally, she links marriage with the violence of the unsolicited kiss, imbuing matrimony with the same kind of rape motif.

Helen is thus Rachel’s entrée into the realm of married life, encouraging both her social and sexual development; yet despite her involvement in Rachel’s journey toward marriage, Helen also acts on jealous impulses against Rachel and her suitor, Terence. Helen’s views of marriage are a little skewed. She says to Rachel, “I don’t mind being kissed; I’m rather jealous, I believe, that Mr. Dalloway kissed you and didn’t kiss me” (Voyage 76). Once Helen attaches herself to Rachel, she begins to identify herself as a maiden, sharing in Rachel’s self-discovery and youth. Helen’s conflation of Rachel’s life with her own, leads to competition and jealousy, despite the maternal role Helen adopts initially.

Helen's violence toward Rachel attempts to preserve the power given to Helen by Willoughby and Theresa. One way in which Helen maintains power is through her sexual and social knowledge. With Rachel on the brink of a new female experience, Helen's position of power becomes more tenuous. In the company of a group including Terence, Helen actively belittles and embarrasses Rachel. She says, "Oh, Rachel...It's like having a puppy in the house having you with one – a puppy that brings one's underclothes down into the hall" (Voyage 139). Helen both envies as well as exploits Rachel's naivety and youth. Helen's role becomes even more muddled as she continues to compete with Rachel for attention and sexual validation. While on an exploratory ride up the river, the traveling group, which includes Helen, Terence, and Rachel, stops to rest. Terence and Rachel take a walk into the jungle where Terence proposes to Rachel. Concerned that Rachel and Terence have been gone too long, Helen goes to find them. Oblivious in the afterglow of the engagement, neither Terence nor Rachel hear Helen's approach:

The grasses and breezes sounding and murmuring all around them, they never noticed that the swishing of the grasses grew louder and louder, and did not cease with the lapse of the breeze. A hand dropped abrupt as iron on Rachel's shoulder; it might have been a bolt from heaven. She fell beneath it and the grass whipped across her eyes and filled her mouth and ears. Through the waving stems she saw a figure, large and shapeless against the sky. Helen was upon her. Rolled this way and that, now seeing only forest green, and now the high blue heaven, she was speechless and almost without sense. At last she lay still, all the grasses shaken round her and before her by her panting. Over her loomed two great heads, the head of a man and woman, of Terence and Helen.

Both were flushed, both laughing, and the lips were moving; they came together and kissed in the air above her. (Voyage 276)

The encounter is extremely violent and disorienting. Helen's hand becomes like celestial Zeus' thunderbolt "from heaven". She wields the hand of authority and power. In fact, all of the body parts are dismembered in the scene. "The lips" instead of *their* lips creates a sense of disjunction. Perspective and body parts change and shift so that everything is

amorphous, even the possession of lips and limbs. In Lesbian Panic, Smith suggests that Terence is “co-predator in a mimetic realization of Rachel’s ongoing rape phobias” (Smith 25). The kiss in the jungle is problematic because one assumes that Helen is upset at her loss of power over Rachel, putting Helen at odds with Terence. The kiss, however, makes Helen Rachel’s rival as they both compete over Terence (Smith 25). The heterosexual kiss is violent and disturbing, breaking the bond of womanly trust between Rachel and her aunt. The kiss reveals the destructive nature of Rachel’s marriage and foreshadows Rachel’s death.

The scene becomes even more complicated if one looks at what Woolf edited out. In the same passage from the holograph version printed in Patricia Juliana Smith’s book, Lesbian Panic, one can see the much more intense version Woolf rejected:

Helen was upon her. Too breathless to scold, she spent her rage in rolling the helpless body hither and thither, holding both wrists in one first grasp, and stuffing eyes, ears, nose, and mouth with the feathery seeds of the grass. Finally she laid her flat on the ground, her arms out on either side of her, her hat off, her hair down. “Own yourself beaten!” she gasped. “Beg my pardon!” Laying thus flat, Rachel saw Helen’s head pendent over her, very large against the sky. A second head loomed above it, “Help! Terence!” she cried. “No!” he exclaimed, when Helen was for driving him away. “I’ve a right to protect her. We’re going to be married.”

For the next two seconds they rolled indiscriminately in a bundle, imparting handfuls of grass together with attempted kisses. (Smith 27)

In a novel about “the things people don’t say” (Voyage 210) the importance of the mouth as an image of communication is especially strong throughout the text. By stuffing Rachel’s mouth with the fecund seeds, Helen acts to silence Rachel through a coded sexual initiation process. Helen, as Rachel’s guide into womanhood, uses the seeds as a violent silencing, occurring at the moment of her engagement. The ambiguity about the “attempted kisses” leads to even more confusion about Helen’s role in Rachel’s initiation.

Assuming that all three, Helen, Rachel, and Terence, are rolling together, the person attempting kisses and the intended recipient of the kisses are unclear. While one might assume that Terence and Helen are rivals over Rachel, the kiss between Terence and Helen figures Helen as in competition with Rachel over Terence. What Woolf is ultimately quite clear about is her own discomfort with Helen's overt violence in the early drafts. The editing process completely changes Helen's role in the scene.

Helen emerges as an ambiguous mother figure. DeSalvo writes, "Helen represents a malicious, life-threatening maternity to Rachel, a maternity which embraces, caresses, and smothers simultaneously. Rachel accepts this destructive mothering unquestioningly" (deSalvo 57). On her deathbed, Rachel has a hallucination, which recalls the scene in the forest. Woolf writes, "Helen's form stooping to raise her in bed appeared of gigantic size, and came down upon her like the ceiling falling" (*Voyage* 337). Helen's role in Rachel's life has been abnormally large and violent, linking this phantom with Rachel's lived experience. Rachel also inserts Helen into her recurring nightmare:

Rachel again shut her eyes, and found herself walking through a tunnel under the Thames, where there were little deformed women sitting in archways playing cards, while the bricks of which the wall was made oozed with damp, which collected into drops and slid down the wall. But the little old women became Helen and Nurse McInnis after a time, standing in the window together, whispering, whispering incessantly. (*Voyage* 322)

The dream, which occurs for the first time after Richard Dalloway's kiss, symbolizes Rachel's fear of female sexual initiation processes. Rachel's sexual introduction has been through the mimetic rape of Richard Dalloway, and her engagement is similarly violent. The damp brick tunnel becomes the womb, the center of Rachel's anxiety. Placing Helen and McInnis within this scene gives both of these women authority over Rachel's life and sexuality. Their whispering suggests a secretive sexuality to which Rachel is not privy;

once again Helen is the keeper of sexual knowledge. Helen's control over information and power kills Rachel, the utmost failure for a mother.

Another ambiguously sexed pseudo-mother figure in the text is Miss Allan. She is one of the women in the hotel that Rachel hopes "might remove the mystery which burdens her" (Voyage 246). Instead, Miss Allen attempts to further instruct Rachel in the ways of female sexuality. Through the use of food Miss Allan speaks about unpleasant sexual experience. Miss Allen's role as instructor is not initially sexual but rather she shows genuine concern for Rachel, "She looked at Rachel with great kindness and simplicity, as though she would do her utmost to provide anything she wished to have" (Voyage 247). Searching to find a way to bridge the two minds – her interest in literature, and Rachel's in music – Miss Allan attempts to create a shared sensual experience in the form of ginger, "but the ginger was deep and could not be reached" (Voyage 247). The ginger – a metaphor for sexual knowledge – is too far removed from the surface; Rachel has suppressed Richard's kiss and kept it out of reach from daily thought. Rachel's gut reaction – "I daresay I shouldn't like preserved ginger" (Voyage 247) - is rejected, just as her unease at Richard's kiss had been mollified by Helen. Even after Rachel has spit out the unpleasant food, Miss Allan asks, "Are you sure you have really tasted it?" (Voyage 247) and then, resigned, says "an experience anyhow" (Voyage 247). The ginger is analogous to a distasteful sexual experience – a rejected kiss as embodied by the spitting out of the food. More importantly, Miss Allan as a teacher and elder woman forces the experience on Rachel and then attempts to manipulate her reaction just as Helen had done at the beginning of the novel.

Just as Helen's use of information made her a failed mother in The Voyage Out, in Night and Day, Mrs. Hilbery's chaotic ignorance makes her a flawed parent to the novel's heroine, Katherine. Mrs. Hilbery and her daughter are working to write the biography of Mrs. Hilbery's father, Richard Alardyce, who was a poet. Katherine, who would much prefer to secretly study mathematics, works on the research and her mother, a flighty and disorganized woman, writes the flowery prose. This working relationship parallels their mother-daughter relationship. Ronchetti notes:

Katherine's pursuit of mathematics is clearly a reaction to her grandfather's fame as a poet and her parents' absorption in literature, which she disdains as being 'all about feelings'...even more importantly, mathematics, like music for Rachel Vinrace in The Voyage Out, provides Katherine with an arena in which to craft an independent identity and gain a sense of mastery over something other than the family tea table. (Ronchetti 35)

Mrs. Hilbery does not understand the cerebral complexities of her daughter, and Katherine has no desire to constantly assist her mother with the superficial pleasantries of "ancestor-worship" (Night 271) and the entertainment of admiring guests. The split loyalty of Katherine toward her mother places a distance between the two women and a strain on their relationship. Denham, a guest and admirer of Katherine, can perceive that "although silent [Katherine] kept sufficient control of the situation to answer immediately her mother appealed to her for help, and yet it was obvious to him that she attended only with the surface skin of her mind" (Night 6). Perhaps it is the lack of any depth between the two women that makes the relationship so tenuous. Katherine's intellect is deep but secretive, and Mrs. Hilbery shows very little depth of any sort, let alone to share with her child.

Mrs. Hilbery's comfort in the drawing room translates into an appreciation and reverence for all of the ideals the drawing-room holds. Watching Katherine talk with Mr.

Denham brings joy to Mrs. Hilbery, who expects the traditional marriage plot from her daughter. Mrs. Hilbery “stood looking at them with a smile of expectancy on her face, as if a scene from the drama of the younger generation were being played for her benefit” (Night 15). The image of a play not only emphasizes the chasm between mother and daughter, but also highlights the one-sided exchange occurring in the room. Mrs. Hilbery alone seems to get enjoyment from the scene, and it does not occur to her that Katherine may suffer in its confines. The play also suggests a script, something followed by procedure and not by emotion. At the end of the novel, Mrs. Hilbery’s prescribed script will fail and Katherine will be a fully autonomous player on her own.

Although mothers are supposed to guide their daughters into the future of wifedom and childbearing, Mrs. Hilbery’s obsession with the past prevents Katherine from living in the moment or focusing on the future. Katherine feels:

The glorious past, in which men and women grew to unexampled size, intruded too much upon the present, and dwarfed it too consistently, to be altogether encouraging to one forced to make her experiment in living when the great age was dead.

She was drawn to dwell upon these matters more than was natural, in the first place owing to her mother’s absorption in them, and in the second because a great part of her time was spent in the imagination with the dead, since she was helping her mother to produce a life of the great poet. (Night 29)

In both cases, Katherine’s relationship with her mother is responsible for the encroachment of the past. Katherine’s immersion in her family’s history is unnatural and stunts her vision of reality. The “dead” become her companions, men and women are larger than life, and mother and daughter come together in the quasi-incestuous birth of a biography – the production of a life. The passage suggests not only Katherine’s frustration with her filial tasks but that there is harm in her constant involvement with the

biography. Katherine's life in the present will never be what her mother praises in the biography; Katherine's current life is "dwarfed" by the deified life of her grandfather.

In order to restore herself to the present, Katherine turns to her mathematics. Mrs. Hilbery finds Katherine's private intellectual pursuits in direct opposition to the family history and tries to undermine Katherine's attempts at autonomy and personal development. Like her mother, Katherine sees that "mathematics were directly opposed to literature...opposing the tradition of her family" (Night 34). Therefore, Katherine was forced to study in secret "like...some nocturnal animal. Steps had only to sound on the staircase, and she slipped her paper between the leaves of a great Greek dictionary which she had purloined from her father's room for this purpose" (Night 34). Katherine's love of privacy makes her even more different than her mother, whose reverence for the family poet, Richard Alardyce, is shown in public. Katherine is very clear about her mother's legacy; she thinks, "Her mother was the last person she wished to resemble, much though she admired her" (Night 34-5). This statement confirms Mrs. Hilbery's failings as a mother; her role, both professionally and socially, is utterly rejected by her only child. Katherine marks a great shift away from her family history and in women's thinking within the family. As a mathematician, she enters a masculine arena, and cuts ties with the bloodlines she finds so confining.

Though Mrs. Hilbery may know the needs of her guests, she is unable to sense the emotions of her own daughter. The relationship between the two women is silent. In addition to Katherine's secret studies, other emotional acts go unspoken and suppressed. Woolf writes:

Katherine looked at her mother, but did not stir or answer. She had suddenly become very angry, with a rage which their relationship made silent, and therefore

doubly powerful and critical. She felt all the unfairness of the claim which her mother tacitly made to her time and sympathy, and what Mrs. Hilbery took, Katherine thought bitterly, she wasted. (Night 94)

Upon Katherine's engagement to Rodney, Mrs. Hilbery recounts the story in a letter. She writes, "She was so silent, for such a long time, that in my foolish, nervous state I dreaded something" (Night 117). Indeed, Katherine is not happy to marry Rodney, and ultimately does not. Katherine does not need to try very hard in order to convince her mother that the traditional marriage plot will follow. Mrs. Hilbery continues in her letter:

But Katherine said to me, 'I am happy. I am very happy.' And then I thought, though it all seemed so desperately dismal at the time, Katherine had said she was happy, and I should have a son, and it would all turn out so much more wonderfully than I could possibly imagine, for though the sermons don't say so, I do believe the world is meant for us to be happy in. She told me that they would live quite near us, and see us every day; and she would go on with the Life, and we should finish it as we had meant to. (Night 118)

Mrs. Hilbery's attitude is self-serving and fantastical. When she wishes to finish the biography "as we had meant to" one can also hear that she means for Katherine to finish out her life plan in the same way, according to a predestined plot line. Katherine's ability to produce an heir – both for property as well as for the literary tradition – is not about Katherine as a mother but about the future of the family at large. Mrs. Hilbery as the matriarch wishes to further the family rather than create legitimate happiness in her distressed daughter.

As invested as Mrs. Hilbery is in her daughter's courtship and marriage, Mrs. Hilbery is absent during the great twist of Katherine's engagement. Off to visit Shakespeare's tomb, Mrs. Hilbery is not at home when Katherine and Rodney announce the dissolution of their engagement and his love for Cassandra. When Mrs. Hilbery does return and is briefed on the events, she reverts once again to belittling mathematics as a

symbol of Katherine's autonomy and radical views. When Katherine insists on living with Denham without marriage, Mrs. Hilbery replies, "A plus B minus C equals x y z. It's so dreadfully ugly, Katherine. That's what I feel – so dreadfully ugly" (Night 411). Mrs. Hilbery equates math with rebellion and both are unfit for her ideals.

Katherine's reaction to her mother is as ambiguous and roundabout as her mother's writing style. While discussing marriage with her mother and Lady Otway, "Katherine felt, as she was apt to do suddenly, for no definite reason, that they [she and Mrs. Hilbery] understood each other, in spite of differing in every possible way" (Night 179) and yet in the same moment "Katherine knew that only some one of her own age could follow her meaning" (Night 179). In another scene, Katherine and her mother speak about the relationship between Katherine and her fiancé. Woolf writes, "Katherine was on the point of interrupting her mother, and then she was on the point of confiding in her. They came strangely close together sometimes" (Night 260). This potential connection is somewhat realized when Katherine confesses her romantic plans to her mother. When Katherine tells her mother about her relationship with Ralph Denham, the act of confession gives Katherine "the most exquisite pleasure and the most profound alarm" (Night 410). The constant ambiguity in the relationship reflects Mrs. Hilbery's anachronistic mindset and desire for the past. Mrs. Hilbery's historical obsession intrudes on Katherine's present reality yet Mrs. Hilbery is not fully present enough to profoundly understand her child.

Jacob's Room

While Mrs. Hilbery's relationship with language hindered her connection with her daughter in Night and Day, Mrs. Flanders' crippling self-censorship prevents any

kind of bond with her son in Jacob's Room. From the outset of the novel, Mrs. Flanders' language is impotent and passive. At the beginning of the text, Betty Flanders writes the first of many letters in the novel. Woolf begins in medias res with Mrs. Flanders writing, "So of course [...] there was nothing for it but to leave" (Jacob 1). Rosenman asserts that Woolf uses Mrs. Flanders' letters to belittle her. Rosenman writes:

Crying while she composes a letter [to Captain Barfoot], she makes a 'horrid blot' which blurs and then erases what she has written...like Mrs. Hilbery, these women write artlessly. No discipline shapes or structures their feeling, and their attempts at this formal, symbolic mode of communication devolve ultimately into bodily processes (Rosenman, Invisible 64)

Mrs. Flanders' letter writing process is exemplary of her communication with her child. As a woman who corresponds with Jacob exclusively through letters, Mrs. Flanders' failure to write well implies her failure as a mother.

Try as she might, Mrs. Flanders does not fulfill the maternal ideals Woolf sets up in her other texts. From the beginning, Mrs. Flanders is not self-sacrificing and sympathetic but rather upset and annoyed with her son. She says, "Where is that tiresome little boy?" (Jacob 1). Not only has she lost track of her child but she loses her patience. The façade of ideal motherhood has already cracked. Unlike her organized maternal counterparts, Mrs. Flanders' disorder is disruptive to the scene around her. Having completed her letter, Mrs. Flanders is incapable of finding a stamp in her bag. Her search is so frenetic that it distracts Charles Steele from his painting (Jacob 2). Just as she neglects Jacob, Mrs. Flanders "had left her sewing on the table" (Jacob 5). She loses her needles as she loses her child, careless and passive. At the Roman campsite, Mrs. Flanders thinks, "How many needles Betty Flanders had lost there! And her garnet brooch!" (Jacob 102). Losing pervades the text and both emblems – the needles and the

brooch – relate directly to her role as a mother. Needles are the tools to bind things together, to repair rips, and to create new life. Mrs. Flanders has lost countless opportunities and more importantly is resigned to her own failing. The brooch was a gift from Jacob, and in the dark that Mrs. Flanders can never keep at bay; the brooch passively falls to be lost forever.

Apart from the symbolic failings of Mrs. Flanders, she also lacks the primary maternal ability to keep death and chaos from taking over. When young Jacob is lost and fumbling to find home, he encounters death in the form of a skull. Not only is the skull found while Jacob is alone and away from his mother, but it lures him even further from her. Woolf writes, “Sobbing, but absent-mindedly, he ran farther and farther away until he held the skull in his arms” (Jacob 3). Jacob has already formed an attachment to the skull by the time his mother finds him. Jacob’s curiosity has a stronger physical and mental hold on him than his loyalty to his mother. Despite her demands to “drop it this moment...naughty little boy” (Jacob 3), Jacob keeps the jawbone with him, even taking it to bed (Jacob 6). Both the skull and bed images foretell the future maternal failings in the text. Mrs. Flanders will not be bold enough to warn Jacob about sexual misconduct, and Jacob will carry out flirtations and affairs with promiscuous and married women. Likewise Mrs. Flanders’ inability to successfully remove the skull symbolizes her inability to protect her son from an early death. From the very beginning, Mrs. Flanders struggles to regain possession over the physical body of her son. Ellen Rosenman suggests, “Woolf’s emphasis on maternal possessiveness shifts the balance of power away from the mother by making her a less appealing figure to the reader and less desired by her fictional children” (Rosenman, Invisible 35). The repetitions of “come back”

suggest the futility of her words and the irreparable breach that occurs at the beach on the first page of the novel.

Mrs. Flanders is equally unsuccessful in keeping the outside world from intruding upon her home. In sharp contrast to Susan's nighttime rituals and soporific touch in The Waves, Mrs. Flanders can't manage to get her children to sleep against the "gurgling and rushing; the cistern overflowing; water bubbling and squeaking and running along the pipes and streaming down the windows" (Jacob 5). All that Mrs. Flanders can muster is a "conspiracy of hush" (Jacob 6). Mrs. Flanders cannot control the external world in the same way other mothers can. Instead, with the help of a nursemaid – not seen in any of Woolf's other texts – Mrs. Flanders can only provide a false safety. Certainly Jacob's death proves how tenuous the charade was.

From the beginning of the novel, death and sex seem fundamentally linked. Mrs. Flanders, as a theoretical force of protection, ought to be able to guard her children against both. But because of her inability to communicate honestly, Mrs. Flanders is powerless to protect Jacob against his own sexuality. Woolf suggests that Mrs. Flanders is not the only mother who is inept at nurturing and protecting her son. She writes:

Mothers down at Scarborough scribble over the fire with their feet on the fender, when tea's cleared away, and can never say, whatever it may be – probably this – Don't go with bad women, do be a good boy; wear your thick shirts; and come back, come back, come back to me.

But she said nothing of the kind. (Jacob 69)

Mrs. Flanders is too concerned with self-censorship and propriety to speak honestly to her son.

The entire novel, in fact, is a play on censorship. Ruth Gruber writes that Jacob's room is full of "stippled sketches of love between mother and son, between artist and

model, between husband and wife, between the wife and lover...Sex permeates the book but always with feminine delicacy, verging upon Victorian innuendos" (Gruber 144). Each relationship Gruber describes is as veiled and oblique as the sexual aspect of Jacob's life. Censorship in the novel is all encompassing, snuffing out any human interactions between the hero-like Jacob and mere mortal characters around him. Mrs. Flanders' failure and therefore Jacob's death are linked to the paralyzing practice of avoiding the taboo. Instead, Jacob has a sexual relationship with Florinda, the inarticulate whore, while Mrs. Flanders' letter waits on the table outside the bedroom. Mrs. Flanders is as passive as her unread letter on the table. Woolf writes:

But if the pale blue envelope lying by the biscuit-box had the feelings of a mother, the heart was torn by the little creak, the sudden stir. Behind the door was the obscene thing, the alarming presence, and terror would come over her as at death, or the birth of a child. Better, perhaps, burst in and face it than sit in the antechamber listening to the little creak...Indeed when the door opened and the couple came out, Mrs. Flanders would have flounced upon her – only it was Jacob who came out first,...like a baby after an airing. (Jacob 71)

The potential for Mrs. Flanders to act is prevented by Jacob's very enjoyment of his transgression. As much as Mrs. Flanders wants to blame Florinda for Jacob's fall into sin, Mrs. Flanders' inaction lies at the root of Jacob's distance from his mother and promiscuous sexuality. Woolf's projection of the mother onto the passive letter is the closest Mrs. Flanders will get to the true activities of her son. The creaks in this passage are reflected twice more in the text. Woolf writes early on, "Listless is the air in an empty room, just swelling the curtain; the flowers in the jar shift. One fiber in the wicker arm-chair creaks, though no one sits there" (Jacob 27). The passage is repeated after Jacob's death at the very end of the novel (Jacob 138). Jacob's death is never explicitly announced; rather it is his conspicuous absence that alerts the reader to his death. Jacob's

death, like his sexual encounter with Florinda, cannot be expressly stated. The synecdoche – the creak to imply the devastating action – works for both sex as well as death. Creaking becomes the symbol for the unnamed. Jacob’s absence is deeply connected with his sexual fall, for both occur outside of the text.

The isolation of mother from son is felt on both sides of the relationship. From the beginning of the novel, Jacob is lost and wishes for the safety of home while Mrs. Flanders tries to search out Jacob. In their letter exchange, Mrs. Flanders wishes to say things to Jacob, which tact cannot allow, and Jacob’s letters are equally censored. Woolf writes, “No – Mrs. Flanders was told none of this, though Jacob felt, it is safe to say, that nothing in the world was of greater importance” (Jacob 101). Woolf goes on to clarify the differences between Mrs. Flanders’ letters and Jacob’s, “Jacob had nothing to hide from his mother. It was only that he could make no sense himself of his extraordinary excitement, and as for writing it down—“ (Jacob 102). Mrs. Flanders’ letters, then, are worse than her son’s; they actively withhold what she cannot convey, as opposed to Jacob who cannot find the words to articulate what he wishes to share.

Mrs. Dalloway

The sexual fears that imbue the text of Jacob’s Room inform Clarissa’s maternal jealousy in Mrs. Dalloway. Clarissa’s past is highly sexualized yet her present life as a mother and wife is consciously lacking sexual passion. Instead, the sexual and social potential is transferred to Clarissa’s daughter, Elizabeth. The disparity between Clarissa’s past and present contribute to her ambiguous maternal relationship to Elizabeth. Having chosen a safe and predictable path, Clarissa conforms to the roles she occupies – wife and mother. Clarissa’s mothering, however, is as superficial and staged as if she really were

assigned the role in a public play. Clarissa's daughter, Elizabeth, receives more emotional and spiritual interaction from her tutor, Mrs. Kilman. The two women combine to raise Elizabeth in a household full of tension and maternal competition: Clarissa as the epitome of wealth, grace, and reserve, and Miss Kilman as the visceral, lower class, zealot. It is only after rejecting both maternal symbols that Elizabeth learns to create a place for herself.

Clarissa clings to Elizabeth as a way to confirm her maternal identity and in doing so, Clarissa uses her position of wealth as a weapon. While shopping in Bond Street, Clarissa feels, "the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having children now...this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway" (Dalloway 11). Unsure of her own self-definition, Clarissa becomes rooted in the material elements of life, counting her daughter among them. Clarissa often uses criticism of Miss Kilman's clothing to articulate a deep-rooted animosity toward her daughter's tutor. Annoyed by the intellectual intimacy of Elizabeth and Miss Kilman, Clarissa thinks:

Better distemper and tar and all the rest of it than sitting mewed in a stuffy bedroom with a prayer book!...But it might be only a phase, as Richard said, such as all girls go through. It might be falling in love. But why with Miss Kilman?... Anyhow they were inseparable, and Elizabeth, her own daughter, went to Communion; and how she dressed, how she treated people who came to lunch she did not care a bit. (Dalloway 11)

Clarissa takes a jab at the masculinized and impoverished tutor because she feels jealous that her daughter's attentions lie elsewhere. Clarissa thinks to herself, "And there was Elizabeth, closeted all this time with Doris Kilman. Anything more nauseating she could not conceive" (Dalloway 117).

Clarissa often seems to think of Elizabeth as one of her possessions. For example, early in the novel she muses, “Gloves and shoes; she had a passion for gloves; but her own daughter, her Elizabeth, cared not a straw for either of them” (*Dalloway* 11). This is the first time of many that Clarissa will call Elizabeth “hers”. Peter picks up on this odd possessive tone that Clarissa adopts with her daughter. He thinks, “The way she said ‘here is my Elizabeth!’ – that annoyed him. Why not ‘Here’s Elizabeth’ simply? It was insincere. And Elizabeth didn’t like it either” (*Dalloway* 49). Peter returns to his thoughts about Clarissa and Elizabeth throughout the text. He thinks, “Probably she doesn’t get on with Clarissa. ‘There’s my Elizabeth’ – that sort of thing – why not ‘Here’s Elizabeth’ simply? – trying to make out, like most mothers, that things are what they’re not” (*Dalloway* 56). Woolf draws attention to the façade of the maternal relationship between Clarissa and Elizabeth, peeling away the affectation of closeness to reveal Clarissa’s need for possession. However, Peter is not a particularly reliable character. His own attempted possession of Clarissa fails when she chooses Richard as her husband. Instead of insincere selfishness, as Peter projects onto Clarissa, her insistent language of possession toward Elizabeth is a potential signifier of Clarissa’s tenuous and insecure hold on her daughter.

Ironically the relationship between Miss Kilman and Elizabeth is not unlike that between Clarissa and Sally Seton. Clarissa’s ideological relationship with Sally included socialist visions of an idealized world. Zwerdling writes, “the girlhood attachment [between Clarissa and Sally] was as intense as Miss Kilman’s feeling for Elizabeth” (*Zwerdling* 134). Indeed Elizabeth’s ultimate abandonment of Miss Kilman in the café parallels Clarissa’s breaking away from Sally and her subsequent engagement and

marriage to Dalloway. Both Clarissa and her daughter leave the liberal company of their non-traditional female companions for the hegemonic safety of the known. Indeed, both women flee to the very same man, Richard Dalloway and the British ruling-class wealth and comfort he embodies. Clarissa thinks about Miss Kilman, “Ah how she hated her – hot, hypocritical, corrupt; with all that power; Elizabeth’s seducer; the woman who had crept in to steal and defile. [...]. She hated her: she loved her. It was enemies one wanted, not friends” (Dalloway 175). Miss Kilman allows Clarissa to direct her rage at an external figure, and Miss Kilman becomes the signifier for the lost youth of Clarissa’s past at Bourton. The rage and anxiety of growing older, then, is focused on Miss Kilman.

Elizabeth is fully aware of the tension between the two mentors in her life. She knows that “Miss Kilman and her mother hated each other” (Dalloway 125). Elizabeth concedes that she “had never thought about the poor. They lived with everything they wanted, -- her mother had breakfast in bed every day; Lucy carried it up; and she liked old women because they were Duchesses, and being descended from some lord” (Dalloway 131). In this respect, Miss Kilman offers Elizabeth a view into an entirely different class, an education that Clarissa cannot provide. The privileged life that Elizabeth has inherited is presented as a hindrance and a burden; her social ignorance discredits Clarissa as a mother.

While Woolf seems to favor Clarissa over Miss Kilman, both women are flawed by their socioeconomic status. Clarissa’s weapon against Miss Kilman is her fashionable and feminine aura. She uses her party like a grenade, thrown out into the London streets. Woolf writes, “With a sudden impulse, with a violent anguish, for this woman was taking her daughter from her, Clarissa leant over the banisters and cried out, ‘Remember the

party! Remember our party to-night!” (Dalloway 126). In this moment of panic, Clarissa loses her feminine composure. Indeed, Clarissa’s maternal moments are in opposition to her façade of feminine delicacy. Rosenman argues, “Actual motherhood tempts Clarissa into unfeminine possessiveness as she competes with Miss Kilman for Elizabeth’s affection” (Rosenman, Invisible 81). Clarissa’s aggressive hatred of Miss Kilman goes against the gentle, refined tenets of womanhood. Clarissa cannot be fiercely possessive and simultaneously a gracious and gentle hostess.

Ultimately Elizabeth manages to escape from both Miss Kilman and Clarissa. While they are sitting at tea together, Elizabeth begins to separate from Miss Kilman’s hold. When Elizabeth begins to leave, Miss Kilman thinks:

The agony was so terrific. If she could grasp her, if she could clasp her, if she could make her hers absolutely and forever and then die; that was all she wanted. But to sit here, unable to think of anything to say; to see Elizabeth turning against her; to be felt repulsive even by her – it was too much; she could not stand it. (Dalloway 132)

Miss Kilman’s physical desire to possess becomes violent and deadly. Elizabeth, appropriately uncomfortable, leaves to return to Clarissa. Directly Miss Kilman thinks, “She had gone. Mrs. Dalloway had triumphed. Elizabeth had gone. Beauty had gone, youth had gone” (Dalloway 133). However, Elizabeth does not run swiftly into her mother’s arms. In the liminal space between Miss Kilman and Mrs. Dalloway, Elizabeth feels the freedom of her own autonomy. She thinks, “It was so nice to be out of doors. She thought perhaps she need not go home just yet. [...] So she would get on to an omnibus. [...] She was delighted to be free” (Dalloway 134-5). Atop the omnibus, Elizabeth has the potential for unencumbered movement and possibility. She is on the verge of womanhood and enjoying the transition. Yet, her responsibilities toward Clarissa

remain. She remembers, “Her mother would not like her to be wandering off alone like this. She turned back down the Strand” (Dalloway 138). Returning home, however does not mean returning to Clarissa.

Elizabeth appears at the party and performs her filial role, but instead of reinforcing her allegiance to her mother, Elizabeth is last shown with her father. Woolf writes:

Elizabeth had felt [Richard] looking at her as she talked to Willie Titcomb. So she went to him and they stood together [...] Richard and Elizabeth were rather glad it was over, but Richard was proud of his daughter. And he had not meant to tell her, but he could not help telling her. He had looked at her, he said, and he had wondered, who is that lovely girl? and it was his daughter! That did make her happy. (Dalloway 194)

Compared with Richard’s inability to express his love to Clarissa, the father-daughter relationship is a success. Woolf revisits the difference between paternal and maternal relationships with daughters in A Room of One’s Own. She writes, “For we think back through our mothers if we are women. It is useless to go to the great men writers for help, however much one may go to them for pleasure” (Room 76). Elizabeth has been tutored, molded, and fought over by rival mother figures; when she is finally able to make an independent decision, she chooses her father for the pleasure of his company.

Mrs. Dalloway is essentially about a woman who chooses wifehood over motherhood. While Clarissa Dalloway is a mother to Elizabeth and wife to Richard, critic Mark Spilka suggests that the novel has “no parental figures” (Spilka 20). Her role as Richard’s wife creates her identity, obliterating her previous self as Clarissa Parry. Although Woolf makes clear that marriage has deeply changed Clarissa’s identity, Clarissa does not undergo the same kind of transformation when she becomes a mother. Clarissa’s relationship with Elizabeth stems from competition with Miss Kilman, not an

innate maternal instinct. Clarissa's main maternal failure in the novel is her inability to be a fully maternal figure at all. Her competition with Miss Kilman, Elizabeth's impoverished tutor, over Elizabeth is not about Elizabeth. Rather, the relationship of all three women is about the competition between Miss Kilman as Elizabeth's mother in emotion and Clarissa as Elizabeth's mother in name.

To the Lighthouse

Unlike the end of Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse celebrates maternal influence instead of paternal support. Mrs. Ramsay, the maternal figure to Lily Briscoe, is a successful mother in her life but in her abrupt death, she fails her family, including her surrogate daughter. In opposition to her tyrannical hold on the household during her life, Woolf explores the emotional chasm when Mrs. Ramsay is gone. The themes of oppressive maternal perfection and devastating absence combine in the novel to explore the troubling idea that a mother can both be too involved in, and too removed from, the raising of a family. This dichotomy of perfection and resistance is one of the links between Mrs. Ramsay and Julia Stephen. The writing of To the Lighthouse relieves Woolf of her mother's haunting memory. Woolf says, "I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her" ("Sketch" 81). Lily's gradual discovery of Mrs. Ramsay's failings parallels Woolf's own realization that her own idealized mother could not possibly have been as splendid and as pure as the Madonna to whom her husband compared her.

During Mrs. Ramsay's life, she reigns over the ideological space of the summer home. As a woman who values marriage and maternity, Mrs. Ramsay unilaterally imposes her role on all of the daughters – biological or surrogate – around her. Although

Mrs. Ramsay does not properly manage the budget for her decaying house, she believes her unwavering allegiance to Mr. Ramsay to be better than her daughters' roguish plans:

When she looked in the glass and saw her hair grey, her cheek sunk, at fifty, she thought, possibly she might have managed things better – her husband; money; his books. But for her own part she would never for a single second regret her decision, evade difficulties, or slur over duties. She was now formidable to behold, and it was only in silence [...] that her daughters, Prue, Nancy, Rose – could sport with infidel ideas which they had brewed for themselves of a life different from hers; in Paris, perhaps; a wilder life; not always taking care of some man or other; for there was in all their minds a mute questioning of deference and chivalry, of the Bank of England and the Indian Empire, or ringed fingers and lace [...] which called out the manliness in their girlish hearts. (Lighthouse 6-7)

In addition to the bills that are mismanaged, Mrs. Ramsay also faces her own deterioration that matches the deterioration of the family house and greenhouse (Rosenman, Invisible 94). Mrs. Ramsay recognizes that she chooses hardship in her complete commitment to her husband yet simultaneously passes on a legacy of marital difficulty to her daughters. They can only fantasize about an alternative future in silence, but in their actions, the Ramsay daughters fulfill their mother's marriage plot.

Mrs. Ramsay's greatest success in the novel is her dinner party. Within the party Mrs. Ramsay celebrates and initiates the wifely and maternal roles she has strived so hard to perfect in her own life. The compulsion to match-make is part of Mrs. Ramsay's gift for creating harmony and unity. The fruit bowl centerpiece serves no purpose to the party except that both Augustus Carmichael and Mrs. Ramsay look at it, "that was his way of looking, different from hers. But looking together united them" (Lighthouse 97). The merging together of two perspectives creates a fuller unity. But as the fruit bowl is spoiled by the removal of a single pear (Lighthouse 109), the dinner party dissolves, showing how tenuous Mrs. Ramsay's powers really are. Mrs. Ramsay serves Boeuf en

Daube, a recipe passed down from her grandmother. The maternal inheritance of wifely and maternal ideals shapes the dinner party, which takes on a sinister air.

As the dinner party progresses, Mrs. Ramsay's compulsions become more subversive and intrusive. Viola's criticism likens the meal to a cannibalistic feast, presided over by Mrs. Ramsay. He writes:

Later in the dinner, the newly engaged couple appears as no more than 'victims' led 'to the altar', so that the meal becomes a cannibalistic feast during which people are reduced to pulp, to 'the soft mass' of Boeuf en Daube, including Lily, implicitly offered as 'a specially tender piece for William Bankes'. But Lily mentally refuses marriage, escaping, as she reflects afterwards, 'by the skin of her teeth' – another cannibalistic metaphor. (Viola 278)

Mrs. Ramsay's passing youth, as she had examined in the mirror early in the novel, places her in a similar position to Helen Ambrose in The Voyage Out. Woolf writes, "It must have happened then, thought Mrs. Ramsay; [Paul and Minta] are engaged. And for a moment she felt what she had never expected to feel again – jealousy. [...] There was some quality which she herself had not" (Lighthouse 99). Her compulsion to matchmake, paired with her own hyper-awareness of her own aging, leads to the possibility that Mrs. Ramsay uses the dinner party "to justify her own life and achieve a tangential form of immortality" (Smith 68) through the younger generations. The dinner party may have been a successful moment of cohesion against the darkness outside, but her work is not lasting: "It had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past" (Lighthouse 111).

Lily's suffering during the dinner party reveals the bartering system set up by Mrs. Ramsay for women to purchase freedom by pandering to men. In the face of Mr. Tansley's mantra, "Women can't write, women can't paint" (Lighthouse 86), Lily struggles to keep her mind on thoughts of her painting. Lily must "hold fast to that [idea]

[...] and not lose her temper, and not argue, and if she wanted revenge take it by laughing at him” (Lighthouse 86). Lily wishes to question the symbiotic relationship of men to women by neglecting to follow the “code of behaviour” (Lighthouse 91) of flattery in exchange for “help [...] suppose the Tube were to burst into flames” (Lighthouse 91); however, noticing Mrs. Ramsay glancing at her, “Lily Briscoe has to renounce the experiment [...] and be nice” (Lighthouse 92). This cycle of cajoling fuels the exhausting relationships on the island. Lily’s appeasement of Mrs. Ramsay is kept up in order to preserve a space in which to paint as well as to keep the cooperation of her painting’s subject.

Although Lily becomes dangerously close to surrendering to Mrs. Ramsay’s compulsive ordering, it is Lily’s art that saves her from Mrs. Ramsay’s primordial maternal power. Over the dinner party, Mrs. Ramsay becomes a pagan priestess of marriage. Lily thinks:

There was something frightening about her. She was irresistible. [...] She put a spell on them all by wishing so simply, so directly [...] in this strange, this terrifying thing, which made Paul Rayley, sitting at her side, all of a tremor, yet abstract, absorbed, silent. [...] Mrs. Ramsay [...] led her victims, Lily felt, to the altar. (Lighthouse 101)

Lily senses the finality of Mrs. Ramsay’s match making, the suffocating perfection of wifhood and maternity. But she remembers that her art can save her. She thinks, “catching sight of the salt cellar on the pattern, she need not marry, thank Heaven: she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution. She would move the tree rather more to the middle” (Lighthouse 102). Since Lily can create her own ordered world in a painting, she does not need to be defined and ordered through marriage roles.

Lily escapes the fate of Mrs. Ramsay, showing not only other options than Mrs. Ramsay's obsessive pairings but a decidedly better path.

Lily's success stems from her rejection of Mrs. Ramsay's marriage plot. The other daughters who were true to Mrs. Ramsay's wishes do not fare as well. Prue fails under Mrs. Ramsay's match. Andre Viola's criticism suggests, "Prue, occasionally mentioned, dies from too complete an obedience to her mother's wishes" (Viola 271) because of her carefully choreographed marriage and death during childbirth. Ironically, at the dinner party Mrs. Ramsay speaks "to Prue in her own mind, You will be as happy as [Minta] is one of these days. You will be much happier, she added, because you are my daughter, she meant; her own daughter must be happier than other people's daughters" (Lighthouse 109). Lily, who has a more distanced perspective as a non-biological daughter, not only criticizes the marriage economy but also its avatar, Mrs. Ramsay. All of Mrs. Ramsay's couplings have failed. Although Mrs. Ramsay wishes to link Lily to William Bankes, they remain only friends. In Mrs. Ramsay's pairing of Paul and Minta, Paul is unfaithful. Lily, smug in her avoidance of these unhappy marriages, thinks:

Mrs. Ramsay had faded and gone [...]. We can over-ride her wishes, improve away her limited, old-fashioned ideas. She recedes further and further from us. [...] And one would have to say to her, It has all gone against your wishes. [...] For a moment Lily [...] triumphed over Mrs. Ramsay, who would never know how Paul went to coffee-houses and had a mistress. (Lighthouse 174-5)

Lily can only disregard and disrespect Mrs. Ramsay's wishes after Mrs. Ramsay's death.

She feels vindicated for her surrogate mother's tyranny by the utter failures of Mrs.

Ramsay's life work, her constant refrain of "Marry! Marry! Marry!" (Lighthouse 174).

Art, as a profession and a feminine outlet outside of marriage, goes against Mrs. Ramsay's monolithic prescription for femininity. In the very post-impressionist style in

which Lily paints, she works against the aesthetic and social values of Mrs. Ramsay and her generation. Lily “made no attempt at likeness [...] she felt the need of darkness. [...] Mother and child then – objects of universal veneration, and in this case the mother was famous for her beauty – might be reduced...to a purple shadow without irreverence” (Lighthouse 52). By attempting to capture Mrs. Ramsay’s essence apart from her exterior appearance, Lily tries to break the hold of the idealized Madonna that Mrs. Ramsay represents. Rosenman suggests that Lily’s femininity greatly influences the way she depicts Mrs. Ramsay. She writes:

Mrs. Ramsay’s identity as a Madonna-icon is a product of masculine culture; as a female artist, Lily must find a different Mrs. Ramsay and establish a different relationship to her. [...] Lily must come to terms with the way in which the icon and the mother herself exclude and devalue her. The iconography of the Madonna and Jesus leaves no room for a daughter, and, in enshrining motherhood, it repudiates the spinster. (Rosenman, Invisible 99)

Woolf also reveals, “Mrs. Ramsay cared not a fig for her painting” (Lighthouse 49). Mrs. Ramsay keeps the façade of support for Lily; she poses for her picture and gives her space to work but in reality Mrs. Ramsay is not invested in her surrogate daughter’s success or failure as an artist. Because of Lily’s art, Mrs. Ramsay thinks of her as removed from the marriage market and therefore removed from the feminine sphere. She thinks:

She was supposed to be keeping her head as much in the same position as possible for Lily’s picture. Lily’s picture! Mrs. Ramsay smiled. 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 Mrs. Ramsay liked her for it; so remembering her promise, she bent her head. (Lighthouse 17)

Mrs. Ramsay, knowing the legacy of Lily’s life is in art instead of motherhood, humors Lily as an orientalized other. Lily functions so differently from the uber-matriarch figure

of Mrs. Ramsay that there is a patronizing element in this exchange that contrasts with the compulsive nature of Mrs. Ramsay's interaction with marketable young women. In her artistry, Lily de-commodifies herself, thus freeing herself from the market run by Mrs. Ramsay.

Mrs. Ramsay is not only a failed mother to Lily but also to her youngest daughter, Cam. Through her maternal desire for unity, Mrs. Ramsay teaches Cam the lesson of male superiority and pandering. The temporary peace this lesson brings, however, decays after Mrs. Ramsay's death, though the lessons she teaches Cam do not. In Mrs. Ramsay's death, her shawl becomes her avatar; it cannot hold together either. In a former moment of maternal genius, Mrs. Ramsay solves a quarrel between James and Cam about the presence of a skull in the nursery. In order to appease Cam who "couldn't fall asleep with it in the room, and James [who] screamed if she touched it" (Lighthouse 114), Mrs. Ramsay "took her own shawl off and wound it round the skull, round and round and round" (Lighthouse 115). Solving the problem between the siblings, Mrs. Ramsay appeases each differently. James fundamentally wins because the skull remains in the room, and Cam is taught to ease her own fears and discomforts with feminine masking. Shannon Forbes' scholarship focuses on Cam's role in the Ramsay family. She writes:

Mrs. Ramsay teaches her daughter that appeasing the men in the family must always take precedence over maintaining one's independence through arguing for the fulfillment of her own cause. The lesson has been successful. Cam literally repeats her mother's words and falls asleep having, along with her mother, done just what James wanted. (Forbes 469)

In Mrs. Ramsay's absence the shawl can no longer keep its form. Woolf writes, "As rock rends itself from the mountain and hurtles crashing into the valley, one fold of the shawl loosened and swung to and fro" (Lighthouse 130). The shawl had masked the skull – the

unpleasant intrusion of mortality – and in the shawl’s loosening, the illusion of safety against chaos is dismantled as well. The geological language adds to the universal hardship of a world without Mrs. Ramsay. Her death means that the center of the universe is gone, and nothing can stay in alignment. Under the phallic beam of the lighthouse, once so pleasurable to Mrs. Ramsay, “another fold of the shawl loosened; there it hung, and swayed” (Lighthouse 133). In her absence, Andrew and Prue die, the house decays, and the mystical unity that Mrs. Ramsay created falls apart.

Mrs. Ramsay’s legacy is Mr. Ramsay. The wifeness Mr. Ramsay demanded from Mrs. Ramsay detracted from her ability to be a fully present mother. In her absence, Mr. Ramsay continues to demand deference and affirmation. Lily, newly matured and autonomous, can finally articulate the relationships in the household. She concludes, “Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died – and had left all this. Really she was angry with Mrs. Ramsay” (Lighthouse 149). Mrs. Ramsay’s constant placating and cajoling of Mr. Ramsay make him more difficult to live with after Mrs. Ramsay’s death. In Mrs. Ramsay’s absence, Lily becomes the matriarch, and therefore beholden to Mr. Ramsay. Woolf writes, “One can’t waste one’s time at forty-four, she thought. [...] But he made her. [...] Here he was, close upon her again, greedy, distraught. Well, thought Lily in despair, letting her right hand fall at her side, it would be simpler then to have it over” (Lighthouse 150). In satisfying Mr. Ramsay’s need for attention, Lily not only removes him as the physical block to her work, but re-embodies Mrs. Ramsay, honoring her and laying her memory to rest. Lily “could not achieve the razor edge of balance between two opposite forces: Mr. Ramsay and the picture” (Lighthouse 193). Just as Mrs. Ramsay had to manage the men around her in order to

keep peace in the microcosm of her home, Lily must appease Mr. Ramsay to carve out the physical space in which to create the order of her painting. Indeed Mrs. Ramsay's death seems to be the result of sheer exhaustion, of letting the balance go for a moment.

Lily's artistic success at the end of the novel is a direct inheritance from Mrs. Ramsay's failure to be a perfect mother. Lily blossoms under the freedom from maternal criticism and expectation. Spilka suggests:

Lily, an emotionally undeveloped woman, must not only come to terms with Mrs. Ramsay before she finishes her painting, she must also emulate her creativity in life, in marriage, at every step of her artistic work. Her artistry is in fact a maternal inheritance, a distilled result of maternal guidance long-delayed by death and emotional arrest. (Spilka 102)

Just as Mrs. Ramsay staved off the outer chaos, Lily's art does the same, "in the midst of chaos there was shape" (Lighthouse 161). As the ocean moves around the lighthouse, the characters moved around Mrs. Ramsay, Lily's art anchors "this eternal passing and flowing [...] into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said. 'Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!' she repeated. She owed it all to her" (Lighthouse 161). Lily's ability to call motion into stillness will remain in her painting after her death. Mrs. Ramsay's powers were transferred to Lily and in that transfer, the tyranny of hyperbolic femininity was dissipated.

Lily's painting becomes a spiritual act that revives Mrs. Ramsay, placing her back in the window frame. Lily's painting has delved back into memory, restoring Mrs. Ramsay to the spot she was in when the novel began. Mrs. Ramsay "sat there quite simply, in the chair, flicked her needle to and fro, knitted her reddish-brown stocking, cast her shadow on the step. There she sat" (Lighthouse 202). It is as if each color applied to the canvas places Mrs. Ramsay more firmly in reality. The reds come back into the

window frame, the shadow, as it is painted on, appears in Lily's memory of Mrs. Ramsay.

Through Lily's painting she lets out her grief:

'[Y]ou' and 'I' and 'she' pass and vanish; nothing stays; all changes; but not words, not paint. [...] Her eyes were full of a hot liquid (she did not think of tears first). [...] Was she crying then for Mrs. Ramsay, without being aware of any unhappiness? [...] if they shouted loud enough Mrs. Ramsay would return. 'Mrs. Ramsay!' she said aloud, 'Mrs. Ramsay!' The tears ran down her face. (Lighthouse 179-80)

In the inclusion of "words" and "paint", Woolf and Lily become doubles in grief – painter and writer unite. In Lily's final strokes at her canvas, "she looked at the steps; they were empty" (Lighthouse 208). Mrs. Ramsay is gone from the house and is now embodied in the painting. Simultaneously, Lily has internalized the fertility and femininity (Weil 247) of Mrs. Ramsay, using her maternal qualities in the creation of her art.

Orlando

Orlando is a mythicized figure who embodies all of English literature in a single lifetime. After living from the Renaissance through the seventeenth century as a man, Orlando undergoes a profound and celestial sex change. Orlando as both male and female, mother and rogue, is the avatar of the ideal creative woman, yet Woolf can only create her by throwing plausibility out the window. In fact, the only way to create a writer prior to the eighteenth century is to make him male (deGay 133). Orlando's transition into womanhood happens under the watch of feminine virtues and the censoring narrator. These figures act as mothers, guiding Orlando from boyhood into womanhood. In order to be fully female, Orlando herself has a child, becoming a mother only in name. Through these necessary but parodied female experiences, Orlando confronts and rejects the historic constructions of femininity. Orlando has lived as a ruling-class man as well as a

liberal-minded and sexual woman. Straddling the boundary of male and female, hegemonic and outlier, privileged and disenfranchised, Orlando creates gender norms as well as breaks them. Orlando's historical context allows her to retain all memory from before her sex change, remembering her expectations and desires as a man, and living out the consequences of these ideals as a female. Orlando is a woman shaped by history, and the constructs of social female identity become the mother that raises her.

From the beginning, the narrator likens motherhood to literary creation. Woolf writes, "Happy the mother who bears, happier still the biographer who records the life of such a one!" (Orlando 14). Indeed, Orlando coddles and mothers her poem, "The Oak Tree", throughout the text, revising and reshaping the words as if it were a separate autonomous being. The little that is written about Orlando's mother figures her as part of Orlando's writing. The book in which Orlando keeps "The Oak Tree" was "stitched together with silk stolen from his mother's workbox" (Orlando 112). While Orlando had to covertly take his female literary inheritance from his mother, she still becomes the literal structure behind his poetry. Orlando's poem contains material from her mother, as if the maternal lineage is passed on from Orlando's mother to the pseudo child, the poem.

Primordial mother-figures preside over Orlando's sex-change. The actual sex change itself is veiled under the guise of a morality play. The saintly figures, Our Lady of Purity, Our Lady of Chastity, and Our Lady of Modesty enter the room and surround Orlando. These are the attributes of women and are often passed on by mothers to their daughters. The three ideals are, ironically, murderous and cruel. Purity expounds, "Speak not, reveal not" (Orlando 135). Chastity says, "Where my eyes fall, they kill. Rather than let Orlando wake, I will freeze him to the bone" (Orlando 135). Lastly Modesty is barren

and lifeless, saying, “Not for me the fruitful fields and the fertile vineyard. Increase is odious to me” (Orlando 135). The three virtues, supposedly feminine, lack all of the warmth of maternal qualities, setting up Orlando’s failure as a mother figure. Truth, figured as a man, is the only virtue that can vanquish the three sisters and wake Orlando. Woolf writes, “[Orlando] stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! We have no choice left but confess – he was a woman” (Orlando 137). Orlando, had he not been saved by truth, would have remained a tabooed mystery. The virtues, as mothers, attempt to preserve propriety at the expense of honesty. However, the three virtues have not been completely excised. The narrator writes, “but let other pens treat of sex and sexuality; we quit such odious subjects as soon as we can” (Orlando 139), a reference to Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park. Austen wrote “let other pens dwell on guilt and misery” in her novel all about morality and punishment. Austen, a mother of female writing, becomes a censoring figure for the narrator who emulates her.

After her sex change, Orlando becomes a pseudo-mother to herself. Recognizing her previous demands on women when she was a man, she teaches herself the social constructs of femininity. Keeping the memory of her expectations:

[Orlando] remembered how, as a young man, she had insisted that women must be obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely appareled. [...] for women are not (judging by [her] own short experience of the sex) obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely appareled by nature. They can only attain these graces without which they may enjoy none of the delights of life, by the most tedious discipline (Orlando 156-7).

Since Orlando lacks a maternal figure to teach her the social and sexual codes of women, Orlando uses her past life as a man to recreate the maternal guidance she lacks. Orlando as a mythic figure lives two lives. Orlando is both mother and daughter – or rather, father,

daughter, mother, son. She must teach herself what “she would have been taught as a child, that is to say, the sacred responsibilities of womanhood” (Orlando 157).

When Shelmerdine finds Orlando, the Romantic age is ending and during the course of their relationship, the Victorian begins. The Victorian age greatly influences marital and courtship relationships. Victorian marriage traditionally solidified gender roles yet Orlando falls into an indefinable relationship:

She was married, true; but if one’s husband was always sailing round Cape Horn, was it marriage? If one liked him, was it marriage? If one liked other people, was it marriage? And finally, if one still wished, more than anything in the whole world, to write poetry, was it marriage? She had her doubts. (Orlando 264)

For Orlando, these are not only theoretical questions; she feels the physical presence of her doubt reading over her shoulder, hindering her writing like an editor. She thinks, “At this point she felt that power [...] which had been reading over her shoulder, tell her to stop. [...] Are girls necessary? You have a husband at the Cape, you say? Ah well, that’ll do” (Orlando 265). Here Orlando’s husband is viewed only as a cover for her insinuated lesbianism. Once the spirit of the age is appeased by even the semblance of Orlando’s marriage “the spirit passed on” (Orlando 265). A married woman – even if only married in name – is much less dangerous as a writer than a single one. This marriage of convenience allows for the best relationship for Orlando. Woolf writes, “She need neither fight her age, nor submit to it; she was of it, yet remained herself. Now, therefore, she could write, and write she did. She wrote. She wrote. She wrote” (Orlando 266). Like Lily Briscoe learning to cajole Mr. Ramsay, Orlando has found a way to straddle both spheres of writer and woman. She has created a historical place and context within the confines of the spirit of the age. She has her money and her marital protection, while maintaining her freedom and a room of her own.

Within this freeing marriage, Orlando becomes a mother to a physical child, rather than just to her poetry. Prior to her own pregnancy the narrator addresses childbirth in a (quite literally) veiled way. Woolf begins:

Were they not all of them weak women? wearing crinolines the better to conceal the fact; the great fact; the only fact; but nevertheless, the deplorable fact; which every modest woman did her best to deny until denial was impossible; the fact that she was about to bear a child? to bear fifteen or twenty children indeed, so the most of a modest woman's life was spent, after all, in denying what, on one day at least every year, was made obvious (Orlando 234-5)

Directly after this allusion to pregnancy, Orlando feels compulsively in her breast, eventually recovering "The Oak Tree", her competing child. When Orlando has her own child, its paternity and even its conception is a mystery. All Woolf writes of the birth is as follows:

(here the barrel-organ stops playing abruptly)

"It's a very fine boy, M'Lady," said Mrs. Banting, the midwife. In other words Orlando was safely delivered of a son on Thursday, March the 20th, at three o'clock in the morning" (Orlando 295)

Orlando is delivered *of* a son, emphasizing his burden to her. The child is an interruption, and an inconvenient one at that, arriving in the very early morning. Nothing more is said of the child, rather Orlando resumes her life as it had proceeded before. Her motherhood completes her transition into womanhood, but the relationship does not matter.

When Nick Greene reappears three hundred years later to read "The Oak Tree", one can see Woolf's analogy that writing is a form of motherhood. Greene thinks:

There was no trace in [her manuscript], 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. [...] Really Orlando didn't know what he meant. She had always carried her manuscripts about her in the bosom of her dress (Orlando 280)

Having lived through and been influenced by all of literary history, Orlando has absorbed not one voice, but all voices; she is neither masculine nor feminine in style. Orlando as a writer without gender or time can only write truth; fluctuating styles have been edited away. What's more, this talent for writing has remained a part of her from the beginning as exaggerated by the idea of the manuscript at her breast. Orlando's child has always been at her heart, and it was not the one that she gave birth to at three o'clock in the morning; its conception and birth were a lifetime in the making.

The Waves

Just as Orlando's poetry is in process during her whole life, in The Waves, Susan's maternity begins before she is even physically able to be a mother. Susan's maternity infuses her character, casting her as a mother to the four other friends the narrative follows in the text. Each character plays a hyperbolic role, representing a single element of a whole person. In this arrangement, Susan is pure motherhood. Despite her maternal essence, Susan remains complicated and, eventually, fails. Susan is an idealized figure who oscillates between extremes exemplified by her refrain of "hate...love". Susan is not sexualized yet she is fecund. She is held in opposition to Jinny and yet the two trade faces. These contradictions can be attributed to Woolf's attitude that The Waves ought be considered "autobiography [...] only autobiography is literature – novels are what we peel off, and come at last to the core which is only you or me" (Lee 627). The core of the novel is the culmination of all six characters, which Leonard believed to be six voices of Virginia herself (Cramer 443). Moreover Woolf considered herself "as an amanuensis for her own voice and voices of other speakers" (deGay 161) abolishing the single perspective of not only a narrator but a single author as well. Susan, as the

maternal voice in the novel, fails to keep death away despite her fiercely protective nature. The narrative then asks, if Susan's maternity is fiercely off-putting and ultimately fails, who succeeds?

Within the novel, each individual is seemingly confined to a prescribed role carefully outlined and articulated. At the end of the book, Bernard summarizes each persona:

Better burn one's life out like Louis, desiring perfection; or like Rhoda leave us, flying past us, to the desert; or choose one out of millions and one only like Neville; better be like Susan and love and hate the heat of the sun or the frost bitten grass; or be like Jinny, honest, an animal. (Waves 266)

Susan's potency as a mother is formed from her wild shifts between hate and love and the ferocity with which she embraces her motherhood. In this novel about loss – loss of narrative voice, loss of plot line, loss even of language itself – she is the character who desperately struggles for creation, preservation, and life. Despite Susan's attempts to keep her friends and children safe, she ultimately loses Percival. Additionally, one never sees her children or witnesses the way she interacts with them. Susan's role as a mother does not have anything to do with her bearing of children. Her maternal instincts and capabilities are independent of the anonymous children she has.

The first time Susan appears in the text, she is the guardian of budding sexuality. Susan's eyes see everything including the kiss between Jinny and Louis (Waves 15), Florrie and Ernest (Waves 25), and the boot boy and the scullery-maid (Waves 124). From the first witnessed kiss between Jinny and Louis, Susan becomes the chaperone and Jinny the sexual deviant. Their very physical features set them against each other. Susan says, "[Jinny] danced in flecked with diamonds light and dust. And I am squat, Bernard, I am short" (Waves 15). Jinny's sexuality is countered by Susan's wide-set fecundity. By

separating sexuality from motherhood, Woolf is preserving the virgin-mother ideal. The separation of Susan from Jinny is fundamentally impossible. The isolation of Susan away from sexuality stunts her growth into full womanhood.

Others view Susan as Jinny's opposite as well. Rhoda says, "I like Susan's way better, for she is more resolute, and less ambitious of distinction than Jinny" (Waves 43). Woolf once again emphasizes the polarity between motherhood and sexuality; ambition is not an attribute of the ideal mother and therefore unbecoming of archetypal Susan. The distinctions drawn between Jinny and Susan are not always finite. Rhoda says, "Susan and Jinny change bodies and faces" (Waves 122). Woolf complicates her separation of paradigms by creating hyperbolic characters and simultaneously subverting them. Just as Susan manages to hate and love, she can also share moments of confused identity with Jinny, her opposite. Rhoda perceives Susan as guarding herself against Jinny's sexual performance. In response to Jinny's application of make-up, "Susan, who feels scorn and fear at the sight of these preparations, fastens the top button of her coat, and unfastens it. What is she making ready for? For something, but something different" (Waves 226). Susan feels assailed by Jinny's sexuality; her fastening is a kind of preparation for battle, and her unfastening an attempt to appear unaffected.

Despite the dichotomy presented between Jinny and Susan, Bernard presents Susan as the "one who first became wholly woman, purely feminine" (Waves 248). Susan's womanhood is described in maternal terms through the image of purity. Bernard says of Susan:

She was born to be the adored of poets, since poets require safety; some one who sits sewing, who says, 'I hate, I love,' who is neither comfortable nor prosperous, but has some quality in accordance with the high but unemphatic beauty of pure style which those who create poetry so particularly admire. (Waves 248)

This passage conveys all of Woolf's conceptions of motherhood, which she explores in her fiction: the protective mother, the mother-patron, the mother-seamstress, and lastly, the mother-atmosphere. Susan's protection allows art to blossom at the same time people feel judged under her gaze. Her sewing attempts to construct and preserve the ties of friendship but ultimately cannot save Percival. She is feminine but not sexual. Susan cannot be defined by her identification as mother. Motherhood implies sex and virginity, ephemeral atmosphere and physical burden. All of these contradictions are brought to bear on her ever-present ambivalence towards those she loves.

Susan was first defined by her protective gaze watching over the sexual transactions of the group. Now, years later, Neville finds Susan's eyes to be a synthesizing factor. He says:

What remains is what Susan brings to light under the acid of her green eyes, her crystal, pear shaped eyes. There is always somebody [...] who refuses to be submerged; whose identity therefore one wishes to make crouch beneath one's own. For me now, it is Susan. I talk to impress Susan. Listen to me Susan. (Waves 212)

In his adulthood, Neville expresses an adolescent need for simultaneous separation and affirmation from Susan, his surrogate mother. Earlier in the novel he expressed his need for her protection and now in the next stage of his development, he wishes to reverse their relationship. The very ferocity that gave Neville comfort earlier becomes a symbol of judgment against him. He says, "I want to diminish your hostility, your green eyes fixed on mine, and your shabby dress, your rough hands, and all the other emblems of your maternal splendour" (Waves 213). All that was attractive has now become repulsive; Just as Susan is an ambivalent character as a mother herself, characters who come in contact with her maternity are equally torn between feelings of love and hate.

Susan's possessiveness parallels similar needs in Mrs. Dalloway, The Voyage Out, and Jacob's Room. Susan says:

I shall possess more than Jinny, more than Rhoda, by the time I die. But on the other hand, where you are various and dimple a million times to the ideas and laughter of others, I shall be sullen, storm tinted and all one purple. I shall be debased and hide-bound by the bestial and beautiful passion of maternity. (Waves 132)

Susan sees her children as assets but also burdens. She views maternity as both ugly and beautiful; Susan always returns to the hate-love balance. Even though Susan's entire identity is linked to her children – or perhaps because of it – she chafes against her own fierce instincts. She says, “I am sick of the body, I am sick of my own craft, industry and cunning, of the unscrupulous ways of the mother who protects, who collects under her jealous eyes at one long table her own children, always her own” (Waves 191). At the same time, Susan sees her children as a way to expand her own experience vicariously. Watching her child sleep, Susan says, “His eyes will see when mine are shut...I shall go mixed with them beyond my body and shall see India. He will come home, bringing me trophies to be laid at my feet. He will increase my possessions” (Waves 172). Here her son becomes a symbol of British imperialism through his travels to India. Susan, then, is a national symbol of motherhood and is showered with presents as a queen would be. Susan's attitude toward her son underlines the maternal will to possess. Similarly it emphasizes the recurring role of investment and inheritance in mother-child relationships.

Susan's ability to protect and mend is celebrated in the text. In her maternity, Susan has the power to protect her own children. Louis says of her:

Susan, I respect; because she sits stitching. She sews under a quiet lamp in a house where the corn sighs close to the window and gives me safety. For I am the weakest, the youngest of them all. I am a child looking at his feet and the little runnels that the stream has made in the gravel. (Waves 96)

Additionally, Susan's very home is as fertile as her character; mother Susan and mother Nature are one. Susan thinks:

I am the field, I am the barn, I am the trees; mine are the flocks of birds, and this young hare who leaps, at the last moment, when I almost step on him. Mine is the heron that stretches its vast wings lazily; and the cow that creaks as it pushes one foot before another, munching; and the wild swooping swallow; and the faint red in the sky, and the green when the red fades; and the silence and the bell; the call of the man fetching cart-horses from the fields – all are mine. (Waves 97)

Susan, as the field, gives of herself in order to feed all that she owns; maternal possession is coupled with self-sacrifice. Later, Susan reasserts her physical communion with her farm. She says: "I shall lie like a field bearing crops in rotation; in the summer heat will dance over me; in winter I shall be cracked with cold" (Waves 131-2).

Susan's communion with the earth transforms her into pure essence, "the light that falls on this gate, on this ground" (Waves 98). She is recast as a kind of Gaia figure, conforming to the idea of mothers as pure style, pure atmosphere. Like Mrs. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse, Susan is reduced to "all one purple" (Waves 132). Everything in her presence is transfigured into maternal symbols. Her entire life validates her motherhood. She thinks:

The bread rises in a soft dome under the clean towel. [...] All the world is breeding. The flies are going from grass to grass. The flowers are thick with pollen. [...] I feel through the grass for the white domed mushroom; and break its stalk and pick the purple orchid that grows beside it and lay the orchid by the mushroom with the earth at its root, and so home to make the kettle boil for my father among the just reddened roses on the tea table. (Waves 100)

Dome shapes are reminiscent of pregnancies, breasts, and the softness of the female form. In To the Lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay is likened to a dome on several occasions. Here, the dome is repeated twice, both in the bread and the white mushroom. The sexual imagery is replete with literal copulation as well as with the image of the mushroom and the orchid –

pregnancy and female genitalia. The passage is anchored in the end to the tea table and familial obligations to the father – in this case Susan’s father but foretelling also the future father of her children.

Another iconic act of motherhood is performed around the tea table. Woolf’s satirized model of the Angel in the House in Coventry Patmore’s poem is glimpsed at tea; so too are the domesticated and eligible women in The Voyage Out, Night and Day, and The Waves. Susan imagines her future cultivating land and children, an ideal mother. She says, “I pour out cup after cup while the unopened flowers hold themselves erect on the table among the pots of jam, the loaves and the butter” (Waves 99). The attitude of the flowers suggests utmost propriety and ceremony. At the same time, the erect flower image is Woolf’s code for female sexuality. As part of her future fantasy, Susan not only desires idyllic femininity and fecundity but achieves it.

Viewed by others, however, Susan’s hate-love dichotomy manifests in violent imagery. Louis says, “To be loved by Susan would be to be impaled by a bird’s sharp beak, to be nailed to a barnyard door. Yet there are moments when I would wish to be speared by a beak, to be nailed to a barnyard door, positively, once and for all” (Waves 120). Susan’s love is paralyzing and final. As a mother, she has the power to keep her immediate world stable against external chaos. This stability translates into a kind of death, violent yet comforting in its stasis. Even Susan acknowledges her violent love. She says, “I love with such ferocity that it kills me when the object of my love shows by a phrase that he can escape. He escapes, and I am left clutching at a string that slips in and out among the leaves on the tree-tops” (Waves 132). The ferocity of protection can only exist in combination with the desire to withhold and possess. Many other children in

Woolf's novels struggle with finding a balance between their need for mothers' protection with the desire to gain freedom from maternal oppression.

Susan is often figured as a guardian against death. Prior to having her own children, Susan kept watch over sexuality around her. Having become a mother, she keeps the outside world at bay. She says:

Sleep, sleep, I say, warning off with my voice all who rattle milk-cans, fire at rooks, shoot rabbits, or in any way bring the shock of destruction near this wicker cradle, laden with soft limbs, curled under a pink coverlet. [...] I would fell down with one blow any intruder, any snatcher, who should break into this room and wake the sleeper. [...] I push my thread through the needle and murmur, 'sleep' (Waves 171-3).

Death itself heeds Susan's warning. As a farmer and mother, Susan is always tending to fragile and dependent things. She says, "I have seen my sons and daughters, once netted over like fruit in their cots, break the meshes and walk with me, taller than I am, casting shadows on the grass" (Waves 190). The mixed metaphor suggest not only the protection of the farmer's nets over young plants but also suggests a butterfly's metamorphosis in the image of a breaking chrysalis – a symbol that Woolf uses again in The Voyage Out. The fragility of both the fruit images as well as the butterfly image underscores the delicacy needed for a mother to sustain her children. In this sense, the fierce and violent Susan fails, confirmed in Percival's death.

Conclusion

As Woolf progresses through her novels, her focus shifts from children to mothers. Although the ambivalence that permeates the maternal relationship remains, Woolf first examines how children reconcile ambiguities in their own mothers; in her later works, Woolf looks at the ambivalence of mothers themselves – reconciling public and private space, motherhood versus wifehood, ferocity and warmth. The shift in focus

reflects Woolf's slow movement towards sympathy with mothers away from the anger or disenchantment of her youth.

As Woolf examines mothers, she attempts to explain their failings. Ultimately women are held to unrealistic and contrasting ideals that necessitate failings as a form of compromise. Helen's desires to be a sexual being counters her prescribed maternal role toward Rachel. The idealized youthful potential of Rachel creates jealousy between her and Helen, beginning the complicated movement toward death. Mrs. Hilbery's family worship is part of her own daughterly duty toward her father, yet it suffocates Katherine and strains their relationship. Mrs. Hilbery is caught between obligations and cannot choose which one to honor. Mrs. Flanders cannot address the taboo sexuality of her son's young adulthood because she is censored by the constraints of female propriety. At the same time she bears responsibility for her son's safety, which suffers from Mrs. Flanders' reticence. Mrs. Dalloway is asked to be the perfect political wife – a glamorous and opulent hostess. The qualities that make Clarissa ideal for cocktail conversation – superficial pleasantries and hegemonic identity – make her emotionally and physically removed from her own daughter. Likewise Mrs. Ramsay suffers under the constraints of wifehood and motherhood. Her exhaustion and death are the result of her demanding husband in combination with her equally demanding charitable and familial obligations. Her desire to please Mr. Ramsay for the welfare of her family leaves only more chaos after her death. Mrs. Ramsay had to choose peace during her life or peace after her death and she chose the former, leaving a legacy of unease for her biological and surrogate children. Orlando attempts to examine a more universal and historical version of femininity and motherhood. Orlando's depiction of motherhood conveys the idea that

childbirth makes a woman fully womanly. At the same time, Orlando's life trajectory does not change after childbirth and Woolf never gives time or ink to the offspring. Orlando as a historical amalgam of everyone cannot also embody the historical-nobody of unseen and undocumented mothers. Lastly, Susan comes the closest to maternal successes. Her maternal style, however, hyperbolic as it is, does not suggest the warmth or comfort of other less successful mothers in Woolf's fiction. Her ferocity that maintains and sustains the lives of her children, is alienating and distancing at the same time. Susan does not fail to be a mother, she fails to be an amenable human being.

The contradictions of motherhood cannot feasibly be reconciled. Woolf's collection of mothers in her fiction shows the social and cultural impossibility of maternal success. By exploring these seven maternal figures, all archetypal yet all different, Woolf comes to show how ideal maternity is a fallacy. The unique successes and flaws of each woman undermine the cultural concept of a single maternal ideal. As Woolf progresses, she allows each mother she depicts to be more fully realized and competent, yet none embodies the Angel in the House figure, the maternal standard Woolf has inherited from Leslie. Even Coventry Patmore, the man who articulated female perfection in his poem, "The Angel in the House", realizes "She's not and never can be mine" ("Angel" 168). Even as a figment of the imagination, wifely and maternal perfection is unattainable.

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