Between An Angel and a Madwoman

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In the novel, *To the Lighthouse,* Virginia Woolf represents the intense feelings of restriction characteristic of patriarchal Victorian society in her female protagonists Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Both women are condescendingly marginalized by their male counterparts with respect to their achievements, capabilities, and talents. Within these juxtaposed central characters, Woolf offers dichotomous responses to the entrenched system of gender-based hegemonic tyranny. Given the outrageous demands that characterize her marriage to her philosopher husband, Mrs. Ramsay, the consummate wife and homemaker, is veritably suffocated by her diligent ministrations to her family. Yet, Mrs. Ramsay is a willing accomplice to her own subjugation. Alternatively, Lily Briscoe's non-conformist identity, both as an artist and an independent "spinster," is under constant assault by both her male peers and Mrs. Ramsay. Inside the patriarchic Victorian universe, Woolf demonstrates the extreme struggles of both characters to reconcile the tension of individuality and social integration. Within the "moment of being" experienced by Lily in the novel's denouement, Woolf ultimately privileges a compromise response to gender inequity as opposed to the inflexible reactions of radical societal estrangement or explicit collaboration.

In her essay *Three Guineas,* Virginia Woolf asserts that patriarchal society, which is tolerantly forgiving of the masculine, "is an ill-fitting form that distorts the truth; deforms the mind, and fetters the will" for the feminine (qtd. In Dick 63). This extreme societal repression of the feminine is reflected in Woolf's struggling protagonists Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Yet these central characters offer starkly contrasting responses to male hegemony. Virginia Woolf consciously crafts Mr. Ramsay as the primary oppressor of Mrs. Ramsay. Significantly, Mr. Ramsay's profession as philosopher introduces within the text the Western origins of phallocentric hegemony. Like philosophy, gender based discrimination was born in ancient Greece, where the masculine was institutionally privileged over the feminine. Ancient Greeks perceived women as an impediment to the pursuit of knowledge (Bressler 169). According to Aristotle, the woman is "matter, waiting to be formed by the active male principle…Man consequently plays a major part in reproduction; the woman is merely the passive incubator of his seed" (qtd. In Bressler 169). Thus, even the narrow "feminine" role of motherhood is strictly impugned by misogynist philosophical tradition. Phallocentrism, according to Bressler, is: "any form of criticism, philosophy, or theory dominated by men and thus governed by a male way of thinking" (354). Operating under this definition, the phallocentric corruption of philosophic tradition is self-evident. In Greek tradition, women are both passive and valueless. Given the prejudice of Aristotle, who would have been crucial in the formative development of the philosopher, it comes as no surprise that Mrs. Ramsay's parental role is narcissistically undercut by Mr. Ramsay at the outset of the novel. His introduction to the novel constitutes the heartless destruction of hopeful trust shared between Mrs. Ramsay and her emotionally vulnerable child James. With a simple declaration: "But, it won't be fine," Mr. Ramsay undermines the credibility of the devoted mother (Woolf 4). The significance of this breach of filial trust by the intrusive male is established when the weight with which Mrs. Ramsay associates the role of motherhood to self-identity and fulfillment is considered. Mrs. Ramsay "would always have liked to have had a baby; she was happiest carrying one in her arms" (58). Though she dutifully does not shy from this strictly narrow Victorian gender expectation, to birth and foster progeny, this identity is unjustly disparaged by Aristotle's hegemonic tradition.

The role of philosopher for Mr. Ramsay has additional implications noteworthy in his individual development as an oppressor. Though he is considered to be exceptional in his academic field, and has solved the philosophical riddle of "Q," he struggles to comprehend the relevance and identity of "R." In his struggle, "he heard people saying – he was a failure – that R was beyond him; he would never reach R" (34). Allegorically, this philosophical stumbling block represents total lack of self-awareness or comprehension. Because Mr. Ramsay is unable to apprehend even himself, with whom he is conceivably more familiar than anyone, he is ill prepared to understand the enigmatic complexities of another, especially an individual as richly constructed as Mrs. Ramsay. Without this basic understanding, Mr. Ramsay is ill prepared to perceive his own complicity in gender injustice, or to empathize with the larger societal plight of women. In fact, it is Mrs. Ramsay who comprehends her husband, not vice versa. Brooding upon his academic mediocrity and textual "regurgitation," Mrs. Ramsay intuitively perceives his lamentation that he "would have written better books if he had not married" (69). This narcissistic sentiment, though unspoken, patriarchically assumes that Mr. Ramsay's intrinsic character was compromised, and that his professional potential was undermined in marriage. Yet this concept of "dilution" in matrimony is deplorably inappropriate when applied to the Victorian male, especially in the privileged case of Mr. Ramsay. Indeed, the discriminatory repression imposed upon Victorian women in England, such as that borne and suffered by selfless Mrs. Ramsay, is so iniquitous that Virginia Woolf declaratively characterizes its repression in *Three Guineas:* "You shall not learn; you shall not earn; you shall not own" (qtd. In Bazin 171). In strict opposition to Mr. Ramsay's university matriculation, Mrs. Ramsay, like Virginia Woolf, is not privileged to empowering opportunities such as formal education. Even before the iniquities and expectations of Victorian matrimony, Mrs. Ramsay's societal human worth had been diluted. Indeed, it is Mrs. Ramsay, saddled with the inordinate responsibility of maintaining a house comprised of eight children, whose potential has truly been undermined: she is no longer the "happier Helen" reflected in the personal inscriptions of admiring authors; ironically, these authored praises are shelved, neglected and forgotten, because her tragic existence prevents her enjoyment of them (27).

Mr. Ramsay, in seeking to comprehend "R," usurps for himself the independence, needs, and energies of his wife. Lily Briscoe asserts that Mr. Ramsay is neither hypocritical nor untruthful; he is "the most sincere of men, the truest, the best; but…he is absorbed in himself, he is tyrannical, he is unjust (46). If Lily is to be believed, then Mr. Ramsay is endowed with all the admirable "male" qualities and, simultaneously, the least possible amount of mitigating corruptions. Yet even an intrinsically noble man such as Mr. Ramsay could not withstand the immense societal misogynist pressures which molded within him an unconscious oppressor. Therefore, Mr. Ramsay's ill-tempered foil Tansley, who tyrannically carries innate resentment of women, is a more representative example of deep rooted feminine oppression. Mr. Ramsay, according to Lily, is a "good" despot. His intrinsic "goodness," however, does not mitigate his gender destructiveness. Mrs. Ramsay's struggles to maintain her family's cohesive health, both emotionally and financially, prove all consuming to her character such that "there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by" (38). This feminine loss of identity through marriage is directly attributable to the "wifely" responsibility: the consuming toll of perpetually stroking the fragile and child-like vanity of the male. Woolf describes this feminine duty, at the expense of the self, as relieving the "thigh bones, the ribs," and enabling the male desire to "assert" himself (91). Woolf's metaphorical correlation of "rib" to male vanity is a conscious allusion to the genesis of "fallen" Eve from the rib of "altruistic" Adam as represented in the Old Testament. With this metaphor, Woolf captures the Victorian devaluation of females framed through iniquitous gender and marital expectations, and described through imagery of the progenitor of the femme fatale, Eve. In this metaphor, Woolf strikingly communicates Victorian society's depraved perception of women. With these facts in mind, modern feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have identified two constructs to which women traditionally conform within literature: "the angel of the house" and "the madwoman in the attic" (Bressler 178). Virginia Woolf reveals her starkly feminist

perception of the "angel of the house" in her essay "Professions for Women" delivered before the Women's Service League:

> She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily…Above all – I need not say it – she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty – her blushes, her great grace. In those days – the last of Queen Victoria – every house had its Angel. (Norton, Vol. F 2153)

The qualifiers denoted in Woolf's essay are undeniably satisfied in the archetypal "angel" Mrs. Ramsay. Mrs. Ramsay, the veritable "angel of the house," is subject to gross domestic exploitation by domineering males (Bressler 178). Indeed, as is the case of Mrs. Ramsay, the "angel" has difficulty in perceiving her intrinsic identity, let alone appreciating her individual self-worth, because, like Eve, she is defined in terms of her husband and children (178). Indeed, Mrs. Ramsay is only able to define her true self in terms of an enigmatic "wedge of darkness" (Woolf 63). To exacerbate this alienation of self, the lone approbation given to Mrs. Ramsay, which links her male oppressors Mr. Ramsay, Mr. Bankes, and Tansley, is their appreciation of her physical radiance. Thus, Mrs. Ramsay is veritably reduced to a physical object aesthetically decorating their phallocentric world. Though this misogynist pattern is demonstrated throughout the novel, it is especially apparent when narcissistic Tansley, while walking beside Mrs. Ramsay, felt for the first time "an extraordinary pride" when a male laborer admired her notable beauty (14). Herein, Mrs. Ramsay is reduced to a mere adornment of Tansley, and, as in similar circumstances represented, his swelling pride is won only at her injurious expense.

However, this dehumanizing objectification is not, for Mrs. Ramsay, the most injurious assault. Mr. Ramsay's most potent weapon, the "scimitar of the male," constitutes the perpetual and childish demand for sympathy, and proves far more destructive (38). Mr. Ramsay is in "sterile" constant requirement, regardless to Mrs. Ramsay's own state of internal disquiet, to be reminded of his genius and warmed in the feminine "circle of life" (37). Herein, the impotent Mr. Ramsay wields his "scimitar," a euphemism for a phallic sword, which he seeks to warm in the very essence of Mrs. Ramsay's womanhood (38). Though Mr. Ramsay's efforts to buttress his masculinity while exploiting Mrs. Ramsay's selflessness may be interpreted at face value, as a simple need for external assurance, it must also serve, at the least, to introduce the reality of the very physical threat omnipresent to women. Forced sexual submission was not uncommon in Victorian marriage. According to Wilson and Wilson, the act of rape offers masculine power through destruction; in this act "the male ego was able to blossom like a hot-house plant – for male sexual fulfillment is an assertion of the ego" (439). Given Mr. Ramsay's bruised vanity, his frustrated male ego, and his masculine "need to assert himself," the consideration that Mrs. Ramsay has had to surrender to forcible sexual advances to the "active male principle" is not irreconcilable. Whether her children were conceived consensually or otherwise, unarguably it is the tremendous individual toll of raising eight children which proves so personally suffocating. Mrs. Ramsay acknowledges that, though she finds fulfillment in her children, it is this very obligation which prevents her creation of "a model dairy" or "hospital" on the deficient Isle of Skye (58). Herein, Woolf again reverses the notion of dilution through marriage. It is Mrs. Ramsay who has had to sacrifice both her potential and her ambitious dreams for family. Though Mr. Ramsay most probably does not constitute this cad, and an interpretation which assumed his identity as a spousal rapist would necessarily be a character injustice, a larger injustice of omission perpetrated against the very real Victorian wife-victims would be committed should this possibility dismissed outright. Woolf, too, would have ascribed to this argument, given her strenuous declaratory emphasis on the injurious masculine "scimitar" which relentlessly "smote mercilessly, again and again" (38).

Even within marriage, this sense of opportunity lost in favor of patriarchic familial obligation is witnessed. Faced with the opportunity to promenade the beach at night with her children, Mrs. Ramsay declares her strong desire to join them: "How I wish I could come with you!" (117). Yet something very strong inhibits her. Despite this desire, the angel Mrs. Ramsay selflessly "never thought of asking herself what it was" which shackled her (117). This confusion is carried into next the scene, as she seeks to identify the source of her misgiving. Immediately, confronted by her husband brooding over texts, her memory is stimulated to recall his bruised ego at the dinner table. He had been reminded that his texts were not timeless as Shakespeare's: he had not solved 'R'. According to Mrs. Ramsay: "He was always uneasy about himself; that troubled her" (118). Seeking to confront her husband's nagging self-doubt, and to "relieve the pressure of his thighs," Mrs. Ramsay significantly begins to read aloud Shakespeare's Sonnet 98. Yet, even in her selfless sacrifice to him she is tyrannically attacked by his misogynistic bias: he "exaggerated her ignorance, her simplicity, for he liked to think that she was not clever, not book learned at all; he wondered if she understood what she was reading; probably not" (121). Given the distinct advantage of an institutional education over his wife, this disparagement is especially severe. Despite this harsh indictment, Mr. Ramsay, just as Shakespeare's speaker in the poem, pays tribute to the beauty of his subject: "She was astonishingly beautiful" (121). Yet this assertion objectifies Mrs. Ramsay still further; rather than reconciling the tension of beauty and intelligence within Mrs. Ramsay, her husband's juxtaposition only serves to intensify further her "ignorance".

Ultimately, it is the suffocating weight of Mrs. Ramsay's "wifely" quotidian responsibilities, domestically consisting of both the trivial and the vital, which cause her to seek shelter like a wounded bird. Her "angel in the house" efforts physically "exhausted" her, and there "tinged her physical fatigue some faintly disagreeable sensation with another origin" (39). The nature and sum-total of Mrs. Ramsay's "obligations" were so physically consuming that she was being choked. The consequence of this spiritually asphyxiating world was that Mrs. Ramsay could only "be herself, by herself" (62). Like a storm battered ship, threatening to capsize, she reaches for the sheltering protection of the phallic lighthouse. In the piercing light thrown by the phallic beacon, Mrs. Ramsay paradoxically seeks to introspectively apprehend her own true nature so long repressed in the enigma of her dark form. This rare promise of self offers her a glimmer of counterbalancing power and strength, however ephemeral. Her stroke, the "long steady" third beam, offered rare privilege: she was unshackled by condescending needy males. The liberation that the lighthouse offered was such that, she "could go anywhere, for no one saw it; they could not stop it…there was freedom, there was peace" (62). It is this derived strength which leads to Mrs. Ramsay's epiphany: she declares "It is enough, it is enough!" (65).

Yet, in this stark world of societal feminine repression, it is Mrs. Ramsay who is her own warden. Rather than represent an alternative to her own "angelic" subjugation, she is fully invested in its propagation. To the obvious approval of her husband, Mrs. Ramsay is actively transmitting the Brothers Grimm tale "The Fisherman and his Wife" to her youngest son James. Echoing both the classical perception of the female as a "parasite" or "obstruction," and the Judeo-Christian mythical representation of Eve, the wife of the fisherman is a femme fatale who parasitically causes her selfless husband's downfall. Though this represents a stark inversion to her own individual marital experience, she does not hesitate to teach her son arcane folklore specifically designed to socialize and apologize for patriarchic societal repression of the feminine. Of even greater significance are Mrs. Ramsay's proactive matchmaking efforts. In her own marital circumstance, Mrs. Ramsay is privileged to apprehend the simple truth that her husband "made things worse for her" (64). Yet, the privilege of this knowledge is fully undermined by Mrs. Ramsay's assertion that, in her iniquitous marriage: "she had had experiences which need not happen to everyone" (60). This declaration stands as an apology to marital suffering by the tortured "angel of the house." This serves to self-justify her perception that Minta must marry Paul Rayley, Lily Briscoe must wed William Bankes, and Prue should soon be a bride. These desires stand diametrically divorced from her self-sacrificing marital reality. By Mrs. Ramsay's own estimation, she was "making Minta marry Paul Rayley" (60). When the newly engaged couple is led into the dining hall by Mrs. Ramsay, Lily perceives them as "victims" being transported to the

sacrificial “altar” (101). Given the nature of her experience, this evaluation by the unmarried “spinster” would seem more natural if derived from spiritually choked Mrs. Ramsay. Yet, she is the primary catalyst for this union. Ignoring her own compromise to misogyny, Mrs. Ramsay avers that “people must marry; people must have children.” These aphorisms reveal the depth of Mrs. Ramsay’s notion of feminine self-sacrifice. Rather than an agent of feminine liberation, she is in fact a willing accomplice to misogynist hegemony.

Within the character of Lily Briscoe, Virginia Woolf proffers a dichotomous response to patriarchic domination. Lily, though a generation younger than Mrs. Ramsay, was subject to the very same institutional resistance and discrimination that faced Mrs. Ramsay. Like Mrs. Ramsay, as a middle class woman, avenues of advancement within society were virtually non-existent. Woolf’s declarations haunt as strongly for Lily: “You shall not learn; you shall not earn; you shall not own.” Just like Mrs. Ramsay, Lily recognized that “she liked to be alone, she liked to be herself” (50). Yet, unlike Mrs. Ramsay, Lily Briscoe refused to compromise or “dilute” her spiritual independence within the “degradation” of marriage (102). The product of Lily’s love, which she describes as “beautiful and necessary,” is not consummated in marriage or constituted in children, but is expressed in the purity of her art. However, this artistic independence exists in diametric opposition to Victorian gender expectations. While Mrs. Ramsay represents the archetypal “angel in the house,” Lily Briscoe, the violator of Victorian gender mores is the inscrutable “madwoman in the attic.” According to Gilbert and Gubar, the “mad woman” representation is used to demonize and disparage the independent woman, while usurping any niche in literature and society where she may burgeon (qtd. In Bressler 178). This literary demonization of Lily is apparent even in physical description: unlike Mrs. Ramsay’s resplendent beauty, Lily is marginalized as prohibitively unattractive. Mrs. Ramsay, again the agent of the establishment, physically disparages Lily: “With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered up face, she would never marry (Woolf 17). This condemnation serves to perverse the state of Lily’s marital independence; it assumes that this freedom is not derived from Lily’s own free will, to maintain her spiritual integrity, but rather, as a condition resulting from Lily’s rejection by society as being unworthy of marriage. The damage wrought by this superficial demonization is indeed severe, and is only superseded by the identity of its orator. Mrs. Ramsay constitutes not an ally in Lily’s opposition to misogyny but an antagonist.

Yet impugning or maligning Lily’s physical appearance does not fully undermine her character. Are not many wives perceived as unattractive, especially by their spouses? Indeed, even Minta managed to lose the physical interest of her husband. Only the denigration of Lily’s art, her lone pathway to independence, constitutes a truly effective means of marginalizing Lily as a social deviant. Mrs. Ramsay, as though dismissing an annoying fly, asserts: “One could not take her painting very seriously” (17). Despite this artistic rejection, Mrs. Ramsay claims affection for Lily as “an independent little creature” (17). The disingenuousness of this claim is self-evident when juxtaposed to her former assertion. If Lily is too ugly to marry, then she does not constitute an “independent creature.” Independence is an assertion of individual right, not collective alienation. Lily’s art veritably is her independence; if not the financial means by which she maintains her physical independence within patriarchic society, it is the emotional means through which she derives her strength. Lily’s art provided her a tool with which to existentially grapple In a dark world; Lily’s liberating art provided her “daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark” (161). More powerful than the phallic lighthouse, it is the only tool from which Lily is assured of her emotional, and perhaps physical, independence from patriarchic tyranny. In dismissing Lily’s art, Mrs. Ramsay thrusts a dagger into the heart of the independent woman.

This objection by Mrs. Ramsay to Lily’s independence is mirrored at the dinner table. Not only did Mrs. Ramsay constructively place the chauvinist Tansley directly opposite Lily, where his sanctimonious attacks would be most perceptible, but she additionally cruelly disarmed Lily to his narcissistic assaults. Tansley denigrates women as simultaneously boring and ignorant, yet, like Mr. Ramsay, he actively seeks a female to stroke his vain ego. He impotently maneuvers to hypocritically “assert himself” within the realm of dinner conversation, to prove his intellectual superiority at the expense of the “silly” female (90). Yet, Lily’s smiling experiment, her determination to not provide “relief to his thigh bones,” a form of passive resistance which Thoreau would have deemed admirable, is fully undermined by Mrs. Ramsay. Seeking to exploit the very real affection Lily fosters, which contrasts to her own concern, Mrs. Ramsay silently appeals for Lily to unjustly compromise her independent values in favor of the chauvinist Victorian set. This appeal may seem small for Mrs. Ramsay, as she has already willingly surrendered her own independence, but for Lily, it constitutes no small favor. Yet, for her friend, she performs this service willingly; Lily, mirroring the angel’s own selfless service, is “nice” to her oppressor (92). Additionally, given Lily’s declaration that she has had to “renounce her experiment for the hundred and fiftieth time,” it is clear that this violation of her individuality, though not insignificant, has become routinely performed (92). Yet, even in this situation, Lily’s compromise of her individuality affords her no measure of justice or satisfaction. According to Lily, despite her diplomacy toward Tansley, “She would never know him; he would never know her; human relations were all like that, and the worst were between men and women” (92). Sabotaging progress, the tyrannized Mrs. Ramsay, the “angel of the house,” yet again acts in perfect concert with her male exploiters, whom she herself characterizes as “merciless.”

Because the role of artist for Lily proves so empowering, liberating, and central to her identity, societal resistance to its expression portrayed in the text warrant further scrutiny. Mrs. Ramsay’s objections to Lily’s art are joined in constant refrain of the truly tyrannical Tansley: “Women can’t write, women can’t paint” (86). Even Bankes, whose perception of Lily appears genuinely favorable, joins in this choral condescension; in evaluating Lily’s portrait of Mrs. Ramsay, he criticizes her work as “simple, obvious, commonplace” (52). This devaluation of her art is analogous to the disparagement of the female in general. Lily was not immune to the effects of these aspersions. According to Lily, justifying her creations, in which she attempts to reflect her very individual perception of the world, was as thoroughly disheartening as attempting to “clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her” (19). Despite immense collective pressure to abandon her unconventional artistic expression, exponentially enhanced by her own significant misgivings, the veracity of Lily as a true artist cannot be doubted. To do so would be to question the literary craft of Woolf herself. According to Fernald, Lily Briscoe offered Woolf an “anonymous artist” to textually impersonate, granting her the artistic freedom to develop her work (159). Like Virginia, Lily is afflicted by artistic misgivings and struggles to “express her vision” (Briggs 178). Therefore, Lily serves as a literary proxy for Virginia, performing the crucial role of articulating her own individual privileging of the independence of the feminine through art over societal male subjugation, especially characteristic in the iniquitous institution of marriage. As already implied, the charges impugning the character of Lily’s “silly” art do not result from benign artistic criticism. Indeed, the text does not privilege an evaluation by the only other artist in the house whom such criticism would seem natural: Augustus. This denunciation by creatively feckless amateurs constitutes, in fact, a deep seeded ideological knee jerk reaction to Lily’s nonconformist identity. In “Professions for Women,” Woolf asserts that the “angel of the house” veritably strangled independent thought, stifling individual creativity, and that had she not “killed” her, then certainly “she would have killed me” (2153). This is certainly the case for Lily. By delegitimizing her art, agents of the patriarchic establishment seek to undermine that which they perceive as radically unpalatable. Like Virginia, Lily has had “to pay for the independence she has gained” (Bazin 129).

Though unstated, it is the very weight of the compromise of self which results in Mrs. Ramsay’s death. Even before her demise, her exploitation had been such that “there was scarcely a shell of herself left to know herself by” (38). The unjust cause and trajectory of her downfall was assured. Yet, even in death Mrs. Ramsay is cheated. Her bright light is extinguished within “Time Passes” almost as an afterthought or footnote to the chapter. Furthermore, it is only through the “inconvenience” of Mr. Ramsay that her loss is even expressed; without her significant support, helpless Mr. Ramsay nearly falls over within his own home (Woolf 128). As with the worn beach house, Mrs. Ramsay died of exploitation and neglect. This tragic loss serves to clearly reveal

Woolf's perceptions of the consuming nature of unjust marriage. Yet, even independent Lily was not immune to this loss. Lily was veritably connected to her complicit oppressor, regardless of her long absence or physical estrangement. Indeed, it is this fact of human connection which brings her back within the Victorian family fold. Rather than join Mr. Ramsay and his children on their trip to the island and its phallic lighthouse, Lily remains behind to commune closer with the feminine essence of Mrs. Ramsay. Like Woolf, Lily attempts to represent Mrs. Ramsay and her own sense of loss within her art, to reconcile "these emotions of the body" (178). This struggle by Lily reflects her strong attachment, despite its characteristic tyranny, to the Victorian family and the tragic "woman hero" which maintains it. These dual themes of mortality and alienation, so central to the text, which Lily seeks to reconcile and balance, significantly echo the motifs of John Donne's "Meditation XVII: No Man is an Island." Donne's poem acts as a skewed mirror to Woolf's text. It is the woman, the disparaged "woe of man," who is institutionally alienated from wider society which Woolf attempts to represent. As Lily struggles on the canvass to come to terms with her loss and her own identity, to mimic this tension on canvas, she literally cries aloud for the return of her martyred friend, "Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!" (180). This impassioned plea reflects Lily's stark realization that Donne's metaphorical funeral bells toll as much for herself as for Mrs. Ramsay. This epiphany in the dénouement resolves the text's central tension, and for Lily:

> the pain of the want, and the bitter anger lessened; and of their anguish left, as antidote, a relief that was balm in itself, and also, but more mysteriously, a sense of someone there, of Mrs. Ramsay, relieved for a moment of the weight that the world had put on her. (181)

Because Lily can be so strongly identified with Woolf herself, or vice versa, it is the nuanced lesson of Donne which Woolf wishes us to apprehend. Sexual independence is very important, necessary even for the true expression of the individual, and it should not be compromised. Despite tremendous gender resistance, one cannot be physically divorced or isolated from fellow humans, regardless of society's iniquitous chauvinism. Given her sudden desire for human connection, Lily yearns for Mr. Ramsay, whom she had before categorically dismissed. "Where was that boat now? And Mr. Ramsay? She wanted him" (202). It is this newly discovered bond to humanity, which must not be severed, that allows Lily to sense the Ramsay family's landing upon the island: "He has landed; it is done" (208). This connection empowers Lily to cross the divide which separates her from Mrs. Ramsay. She is able to culminate her artistic vision, painting not at the lonely extremities of either pole, but through a compromise stroke flashed in the middle of her canvas (209). Donne asserts that, "all mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must so be translated" (Norton 1305). Thus, in Woolf's revisionist Donne, the author offers the promise of gender equality within societal integration as opposed to without. Iniquitous man, through the improvement of "translation" of chapters and editions, will evolve to be a just text worthy of Woolf's literary canon. Thus, every generation, collectively and consciously connected, will offer progress beyond the misogynist hegemony of the past. Living in the presence of tyranny, one cannot perish each alone.

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