

The Female *Künstlerroman* in the Writing of Virginia Woolf

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ABSTRACT

The defining features of the female *Künstlerroman* in Virginia Woolf's writing suggest a revision of the narrative form to accommodate, navigate, and interrogate the artist's gender and origins of her creativity. This thesis plots the birth of the female artist and the conditions of her artistic development within Woolf's writing by first examining the construction of Rachel Vinrace, the rudimentary artist of the equally embryonic text, *Melymbrosia* (1912-1982). Rachel's failure to privately self-identify as an artist is contrasted with her reluctance to accept her future potential as a wife and mother, suggesting that "woman" and "artist" are two mutually exclusive identities. For this reason, Woolf's use of the female *Künstlerroman* examines the complexities of the female artist's ability and, indeed, inability to acknowledge and inhabit her creative identity.

But how, exactly, the narrative form develops in Woolf's writing relies upon a reading of the relationship between the figure of the artist and the novel she occupies: Rachel Vinrace in *Melymbrosia*; Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* (1927); Orlando in *Orlando: A Biography* (1928); Miss La Trobe and Isa Oliver in *Between the Acts* (1941). Each of these works present a modification of the female *Künstlerroman*, and, in doing so, a markedly different artist-as-heroine. Moreover, in Woolf's later writing, the narrative development of the female artist incorporates aspects of historical non-fiction, the biographical and autobiographical, and epistolary and essayistic fictions. An analysis of the intertextual relationship between *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Orlando: A Biography*, and *Three Guineas* (1938) and *Between the Acts*, is therefore critical to the argument of this thesis.

The following is an exploration of how a variety of female artist-figures are constructed within Woolf's writing: a musician, a painter, a social artist, a poet, and a pageant-writer-director. Through Woolf's diverse expositions on the creative process, her heroines embody the personal difficulties women encounter as they attempt to realise their artistic potential. In this way, the female *Künstlerroman* is used by Woolf to examine, often simultaneously, the aesthetics of failure, as well as the conditions of success. But that a multitude of creative mediums appear in Woolf's writing suggests there are universal obstacles when the artist in question is a woman, an implication in the narrative of the female *Künstlerroman* that the gender of a protagonist is the primary source of complication. Therefore, the degree to which each heroine achieves

a sense of creative fulfilment is dependent on her ability to recalibrate her identity as a woman with her self-authorisation as an artist.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	v
INTRODUCTION	vi
CHAPTER ONE: <i>MELYMBROSIA</i>	1
SECTION 1.1 “Rake Her Out”: The Birth of an Artist	1
SECTION 1.2 Initiation to Creation: The Travelling Artist	6
SECTION 1.3 Tragic Ends: The Unravelling Artist.....	10
CHAPTER TWO: <i>TO THE LIGHTHOUSE</i>	15
SECTION 2.1 Between Two Worlds: The Artist-as-Heroine and the Artist-as-Wife.....	15
SECTION 2.2 The Table is the Canvas: Domesticity as an Art Form	19
SECTION 2.3 “Every House had its Angel”: Feminine Influence and Masculine Oppression	29
CHAPTER THREE: <i>ORLANDO</i>	37
SECTION 3.1 The Heat and Violence: “Caught and Tangled in a Woman’s Body”	37
SECTION 3.2 Women and Fiction: An Alternative History?	37
SECTION 3.3 Satire and Wildness: Biography and the Artist	43
SECTION 3.4 “Of Man’s Treachery”: Gender Fluidity in the Female <i>Künstlerroman</i>	45
SECTION 3.5 The Sexless Sappho: Sexuality and the Female Artist.....	52
CHAPTER FOUR: <i>BETWEEN THE ACTS</i>	56
SECTION 4.1 Essayism and Erasure: Politicising the Female Experience in <i>Three Guineas</i>	57
SECTION 4.2 Anon’s Song: The Private World of Miss La Trobe	61
SECTION 4.3 Unified and Dispersed: The Aesthetics of Failure in <i>Between the Acts</i>	68
SECTION 4.4 “It was an awkward moment. How to make an end?”	76
CONCLUSION	79
WORKS CITED	83

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1 – Seating Plan for the Dinner Party, as dictated by Mrs. Ramsay.....	21
FIGURE 2 – Judy Chicago’s <i>The Dinner Party</i> (1974-1979)	25

Introduction

The first example of the *Bildungsroman* in the English tradition appeared in the early 19th century, with Thomas Carlyle's translation of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1788) in 1824. A novel of self-development, the *Bildungsroman* follows the protagonist from early childhood through to adolescence and adulthood, where a sense of denouement in the plot is observed with the character's physical and psychological maturity. Typically in the English *Bildungsroman* there is a distinct augmentation of the protagonist's social and economic circumstances; as Brigid Lowe suggests in *The Cambridge History of the Novel*, where the prosperous fortunes of Goethe's Wilhelm facilitate his social mobility and eventual success, the English novel of growth insists upon a sense of social and economic destitution, a precursory hindrance to the protagonist's ability to develop a moral conscience (405). The characteristics of the *Bildungsroman* in its English form suggest the internal psychological development of the protagonist as an escape from the strict sexual and social politics of Victorian England.

Cited by Mandy Treagus in *Empire Girls*, Jerome Buckley provides a comprehensive outline of a conventional *Bildungsroman*: Emerging from a state of emotional trauma, the male-child in the *Bildungsroman* is raised in a provincial setting, where his impoverished beginnings reflect the social and intellectual constraints on the freedom of his imagination (13). His parentage presents as indifferent to the ambitions of the young hero, insofar as it symbolises the external conditions that seemingly plague his desire for autonomy and personal growth. His early experiences of education are tried and judged inadequate; his self-acquired knowledge suggests the boy is destined to leave the mediocre offerings of the regions for a bustling metropolis should he have any chance at reaching his full, unspoken potential. Once established in the city, the protagonist, now an adolescent male, embarks upon his true vocation, according to Buckley, for whom the *Bildungsroman* reads as a "convenient synonym for the novel of youth or apprenticeship" (13). From here the male *Bildung* narrative undertakes an examination of his "direct experiences with urban life", culminating in at least "two love affairs or sexual encounters" before the adolescent male remonstrates with his afforded place in society, abandons the innocence of youth, and subsequently ventures into a state of maturity. For Buckley, this resolution of self-hood is capped by the hero's return to the provincial home and is thus marked in the text by a profound reflection on his state of affairs; the man

soliloquises on the getting of wisdom and subsequent resolution of his character's psyche (13). It is therefore the question of individual freedom against the spirit of the age that compels the protagonist of the English *Bildungsroman*, with notable examples including Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1849) and William Makepeace Thackeray's *The History of Pendennis: His Fortunes and Misfortunes, His Friends and His Greatest Enemy* (1849).

Although the English *Bildungsroman* seemingly begins with poverty – making possible the rags-to-riches narrative with didactic ends – the central figure never truly begins on the bottom rung of the social ladder; the subterfuge of the British *Bildungsroman* is that, undeterred by humble origins, the protagonist is almost exclusively of a middle-class background. The familial history of Arthur “Pen” Pendennis in Thackeray's novel, for example, is marked by its generational rise to gentility. Comically, Pen is taken to be wealthier than he appears and, during his studies, squanders most of his allowance, returning debt-ridden to his family home and forcing his foster-sister, Laura, and his mother into penury. Understandably the *Bildungsroman* narrative requires a level of social mobility for its protagonist, an unattainable status for both the working-classes and women in Victorian society. Addressing the reader in the preface to the new edition of his seminal work, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (1987), Franco Moretti alludes to the exclusion of the ‘Other’ in the European and English *Bildungsroman* of the nineteenth century, namely women and the working-class male, those so defined by their sex and social positioning beneath the bourgeois and aristocracy. The silencing of the Other thus “lies in the very elements that characterise the *Bildungsroman*,” particularly the narrative's reliance upon “wide cultural formation, professional mobility, [and] full social freedom” (ix). Arguably these “social privileges” necessitate the form's production, for without the middle-class man – and the cultural freedoms he commands – “the *Bildungsroman* was difficult to write, because it was difficult to imagine” (x). Moretti openly admits that his 1987 edition “never fully explains why [the *Bildungsroman*] was so deeply entwined with one social class, one region of the world, one sex” (x).

That a manual labourer or woman should exude the same rights and privileges of the middle-class male is to “defy narrative imagination” and so Moretti concludes that “what makes the working-class *Bildungsroman* incomparable to *Wilhelm Meister*” is therefore the central figure “of a youth without the right to dream” (x).

Floating between two worlds, never truly a member of the “bourgeois milieu”, nor comfortable in working-class origins, the implausible protagonist abruptly ends his journey of self-repression; enlightenment strikes him with the sudden realisation of the “impossibility of his position” (x). The coming-of-age novel featuring a working-class hero is, by definition, an oxymoron when the narrative endings of the protagonists in *David Copperfield* and *Pendennis* are compared to the final moments of Jude Fawley in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Fawley begins as the quintessential autodidact of the *Bildungsroman*, teaching himself Greek and Latin as a youth, all the while nurturing the dream of becoming a scholar. But his complex social arrangements with his cousin Sue, a once-divorced woman who protests against the institution of marriage, and Arabella, who tricks him, twice, into marriage, leave Fawley discontented and despairing; he dies, and is mourned by none.

It is a hauntingly familiar denouement of plot observed in the New Woman fiction of the late nineteenth century¹. As Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland posit in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (1983), the central figure of the *Bildungsroman*, the “fully realised and individuated self ... may not represent the developmental goals of women” (11). In their reading of early *Bildungsroman* heroines, such as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), or Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), they instead recognise that “female fictions of development reflect the tensions between the assumptions of a genre that embodies male norms and the values of its female protagonists” (11). Like the impossibility of the male working-class protagonist, they posit that “the deaths in which these [female] fictions [of growth] so often culminate represent less developmental failures than refusals to accept an adulthood that denies profound convictions and desires” (11).

The idea of a feminist imagination therefore intersects with the presence of the ‘Other’ in Moretti’s argument. It is seemingly impossible to imagine an alternative narrative ending for a female protagonist in a *Bildungsroman* and a revision of the form is thus required; it is not that these characters are unrealistic representations so much as that their development in the *Bildungsroman* is wholly unimaginable, both fantastic and obscure. As such, it is as paradoxical to write the successful or optimistic

¹ Numerous studies suggest the New Woman was a popular figure towards the late nineteenth-century in fiction, reflecting women’s increasing social freedoms. Margaret Beetham provides the following definition: “The figure of ‘The New Woman’, who emerged in the 1890s, was only the last in a series of representations of the rebellious woman thrown up in the nineteenth-century press” (Beetham 65).

narrative conclusion of the male labourer in the nineteenth century as it is to write the novel of the female heroine, the impossible and inconceivable protagonist whose quest for self-determination and autonomy is often thwarted by repressive social and economic demands. In this sense, paralleling the literature of subjection and denigration that so defines the oxymoronic working-class *Bildungsroman*, the same pattern emerges in the female *Künstlerroman* – the novel of artistic growth – where the heroine presents exclusively with a creative disposition and artistic aspirations.

The *Künstlerroman* is an extension of the *Bildungsroman* narrative, where the male child is not so much preoccupied with his internalised development against the currents of modernity but more with his identity – and function – as an artist, whose mind comes to embody the spirit of the age. Rather than following the progression of a wayward son through to adulthood, the *Künstlerroman* claims to interrogate the very origins of artistic integrity, mapping the psychological neuroses of the creative mind. The narrative uses particular modes of expression to present the artist as marked out from their contemporaries, with a number of motifs denoting the genre's application to a creative protagonist. Listing these features in "From Work to Text: The Modernist and Postmodernist *Künstlerroman*", Carl D. Malgrem claims that the artist-as-hero can be identified in the Modernist novel by several attributes: a name of unusual or unique origin; a particularly notable demeanor and physical carriage; a parentage contradictory or ambivalent, reflecting the artist's idiosyncrasies; a distinct sensibility and emotional separation from his peers, which weighs on the protagonist's mind; the presence of a biographer and subsequent authorial treatment of the subject and the protagonist's artistic endeavours (6-7). The internal sensitivities of the artist-as-hero make him ambivalent about society's charms and pleasures, and propel his external vocational endeavour; whether painter, sculptor, writer, poet, or artisan, he is motivated by a paradoxical sense of moral obligation towards a culture that he perceives as receiving him with prejudice and minimal affection.

Perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of the masculine form's history is Maurice Beebe's *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce* (1964), a study of artistic temperament, the creative process, and the relationship of the artist-as-hero to society. Within the *Künstlerroman*, there are aesthetic differences in the positioning of the artist. As Beebe suggests, the artist's calling says much about their social and psychological disposition, for "the painter ... is more likely to be gregarious than the poet, and the ability to obscure life clearly is

obviously less important for the musician than the painter or writer” (v). But a fundamental truth of the artist-as-hero narrative remains: “it is apparent that ‘the artist’ established in fiction is always a literary *man*” (v; my emphasis). Continuing along this line of argument, Beebe deduces that there are three main themes that define the artist-novel: “The concept of the artist as a divided self, the equation of art with experience, and the conflicting ideal of detachment” (vi). Similarly, the “quest for self is the dominant theme of the artist-novel, and because the self is almost always in conflict with society, a closely related theme is the opposition of art to life: the artist as hero is usually therefore the artist-as-exile” (6). Furthermore, in Beebe’s reading, the *Künstlerroman* undoubtedly has its origins in the writings of the German Romantic Goethe and his French counterpart Rousseau, whose respective works *Wilhelm Meister* (1795) and *Confessions* (1782) champion the “Romantic notion of the artist as the unacknowledged legislator, the proper leader, of mankind” (37). Beebe’s deconstructionist interpretation of the form’s origins and characterisation of the central artist-as-hero thus deduces two separate traditions in the narrative, which have been carried throughout subsequent criticism and creative work: The Ivory Tower and the Sacred Fount. The crucial difference between these two traditions identified by Beebe is that the former posits art and creativity as experience lived, while the latter presents art as a quasi-religion, with the vernacular and associated images of the creative process presented in holy and divine terms.

But in Beebe’s work, the artist-as-hero is a term exclusively reserved for men. In his analysis he selects four male authors whose male heroes embody these selected traits: Honoré de Balzac, Henry James, Marcel Proust, and James Joyce. It is frustrating that while Beebe considers Germaine de Staël’s *Corinne ou l’Italie* (1807) as a major contribution to the development of the *Künstlerroman*, there is no allowance in his double tradition for a female version. How, then, do the features of the *Künstlerroman* translate into a narrative where the hero is a heroine? Gender complicates the narrative, and the straightforward transition of the male artist’s life, from adolescence to adulthood, is not possible when the protagonist is a woman, one whose self-realised artistic identity is impaired by her inability to recognise herself as such.

Indeed, one could be forgiven for deducing that no female artists existed in verse or prose, an issue reduced to the “Woman Problem” in Linda Nochlin’s essay “Why Are There No Great Woman Artists?” Interrogating the social implications of a

falsified conditioning on the feminist consciousness and the impact of such institutional questions on female creativity, Nochlin argues the initial response to the lack of female artists is not the problem of individual creative genius, or lack thereof, but rather “the nature of given social institutions and what they forbid or encourage in various classes or groups of individuals” (492). In her consideration of the various académies across Europe, spanning from the late Baroque through to Impressionism, Fauvism, and later Cubism, Nochlin illuminates the curious absence of a female equivalent to Caravaggio, Rubens, Delacroix, Renoir, or Gauguin. The erroneous truth here is that woman exists solely as muse, never creator; a woman does not express herself in art, but lives to inspire generations of male artists. The male *Künstlerroman* consistently depicts the woman as the subservient muse, the spark of inspiration: the origin of art and never the artist. The classic example here is Henry James’s *The Tragic Muse* (1890), in which Miriam Rooth, an aspiring actress, sits for painter Nick Dormer’s portrait, which he entitles “The Tragic Muse”. Though Rooth as an actress arguably eclipses Dormer’s talent as a painter, she is consistently pigeonholed by the male artist as the source of his creative impulse.

Linda M. Lewis perceptively points out in *Germaine de Staël, George Sand and the Victorian Woman Artist* (2003) that “in the long ages of Western art man as creator has found, modified, and created metaphor and myth to endorse his creativity,” citing the myths of Faust, Icarus, and Prometheus as the archetypes of the creative male imagination (2). Lewis too argues that where the male artist can write his own experience through the representation of the Faustian and Promethean tale, it is presumed the female artist has no such myth beyond Eve and Pandora who “only let loose evil in the world” (2). Instead, Lewis, who cites the origins of the female *Künstlerroman* in *Corinne Ou l’Italie* and George Sand’s *Consuelo* (1842), suggests that Staël and Sand, through their artist-as-heroines, Corinne and Consuelo respectively, deliberately created a myth later “invoked in creating fictional portraits of women” by early English writers of the female *Künstlerroman* in the mid-nineteenth century (2). But again, if the epicentre of the male protagonist is the Faustian and Promethean myths, the features that Malgrem uses to define the application of the *Künstlerroman* become fragmented when the protagonist is a woman. What of women who cannot seek the education that necessitates the coming-of-age narrative? And what of the creative woman’s inability to travel alone? The distinction here between the male and female *Künstlerroman* is that the artist-as-

heroine and the artist-as-exile are both physical and psychological states of being. Indeed, if female *Künstlerroman* as a narrative form is one that needs revision, then a mythical forbear is fundamental.

If Corinne and Consuelo are therefore to female artists what Icarus is to Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1915), then the origins of the female *Künstlerroman* rest with Staël and Sand. Consider the influence of the French novelists on 19th-century English writers such as George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, and Humphrey Ward. Where the male *Künstlerroman* becomes the psychological development of the prodigious youth to fully fledged artist, examining in the process his relationship to society through the production of his works, be he poet, painter, sculptor, musician or writer, the prevailing theme of the female *Künstlerroman* is the location of the creative female genius. The question is not whether she can create, but whether she should. There is, as demonstrated by Lewis, a fascination of sorts by English women with French society, particularly at the turn of the century after the Terror and coronation of Napoleon. While Staël was exiled by Bonaparte due to her outspoken and controversial politicking during his reign, it is undeniable that women in France had a greater social and political freedom than their English contemporaries across the Channel.

And though much scholarship denies the existence of the female *Künstlerroman*, Lewis insists that an extensive collection of nineteenth-century female artists exists, presenting the reader with a litany of "painters, poets, actresses, singers, and musicians" from the Victorian novel (7). However, a peculiar anomaly exists in the form's development, with Lewis conceding that while many scholars incorrectly presume the female artist-as-heroine fails in her endeavour to reach a sense of creative fulfilment, the artistic protagonist of New Woman fiction does "tend to fail" in her pursuit of female genius (7). The underlying theme of the female *Künstlerroman* at the turn of the century is then not so much the journey of the artist-as-heroine, but rather an interrogation of whether she can feasibly inhabit both her identity as woman and artist. Despite being an off-shoot of the *Bildungsroman*, the underlying theme of the female *Künstlerroman* is not so much a didactic journey of the artist-as-heroine, nor the quarrelsome relationship between life and art, as one sees in Stephen Dadelus, but rather an interrogation of the contradiction between woman as creator of art and creator of life.

This positioning is not in the least an extreme reimagining of woman-as-artist, with Lewis quoting the theoretical disinclination of Roland Barthes towards women's presumptions of art:

Be business-women, or women of letters, but always remember that man exists, and that you are not made like him. Your own order is free on the condition that it depends on his; your freedom is a luxury, it is possible only if you first acknowledge the obligations of your nature. Write, if you want to ... But don't forget on the other hand to produce children, for that is your destiny. (3)

The female *Künstlerroman* depicts the artist as “usually subordinate characters in their works, while artistry in major characters is represented almost offhandedly as an acquired skill or gift enhanced by practice”, such as Jane Eyre's water-colour paintings (Graham 149). Moreover, the self-identification of the artist is never articulated or fully acknowledged by these women, with Graham deducing this characteristic “seldom appears as an overarching quality of temperament” (150). That “artist” and “woman” exist as two mutually exclusive categories was a point insisted upon a young Virginia Woolf; previous examples of the female *Künstlerroman*, such as Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's verse-novel *Aurora Leigh*, presents artistic ambition, self-hood, and free agency as an incompatible state of being for a woman.

This incompatibility is experienced by Helen Graham in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), who has her autonomy as an artist eclipsed by her subsequent roles of wife and widow; her remarriage to Gilbert Markham overshadows her desire to create. When Markham first visits Wildfell Hall he is surprised when, “ushered into a room”, the “first object that met the eye was a painter's easel, with a table beside it covered with rolls of canvass, bottles of oil and varnish, palette, brushes, paints, &c. Leaning against the wall were several sketches in various stages of progression, and a few finished paintings – mostly of landscapes and figures” (40). Describing her artwork, “Mrs. Graham” admits she conceals her identity, pointing to “false initials” in the corner of her canvas: “I cannot afford to paint for my own amusement” (41). After the death of Helen's abusive husband Arthur, Markham distinguishes between the two selves she presents: the public “Mrs. Huntingdon, the lady of Grassdale Manor” and the private “Mrs. Graham the artist, the tenant of Wildfell Hall” (383).

Related, too, is the experience of Ethelberta Chickerel in Thomas Hardy's novel, *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876). Widowed just mere weeks after her marriage at 18, Ethelberta enjoys relative success as a poet in London society, publishing her works and engaging in public story-telling, much like Dickens, but conceals her creative endeavours from her mother-in-law, Lady Petherin. When confronted with her growing reputation as a "fair poetess" she is promptly disinherited (67). Ethelberta not only hides the origins of her creative self to her growing social circle of aristocrats, poets, and aesthetes, but similarly omits any mention of her rising literary reputation to her family, whom she supports with her earnings as a governess. When Lady Petherin confronts Ethelberta about a paragraph in a newspaper, which "contained in a few words the announcement of Ethelberta's authorship that had more circumstantially appeared in the *Wessex Reflector*", Ethelberta confesses that her secrecy was adopted "in the spirit" of "avoid[ing] disturbing [Lady Petherin's] mind" (97). Lady Petherin describes Ethelberta's verse as "ribald", berating Ethelberta for engaging in publishing, insinuating that women, no matter how "virtuous", become "improper" in print (97). Lady Petherin demands that she must "suppress the poems instantly" and purchase all copies in order to return to favour, but Ethelberta does not "wish them to be suppressed" as "there is nothing to be ashamed of" in her published works (99). Lady Petherin thus relinquishes her role as Ethelberta's benefactress, forcing the fair poetess into living a double-life.

For a century that began with the fully-fledged Continental artists of *Corinne* and *Consuelo*, the seemingly regressive conditions of the artist-as-heroine in the English *Künstlerroman* present an alarming trajectory when it is paralleled with its male equivalent. Mary Amanda Mecke identifies this disjuncture between male and female artists-as-heroes in Modernist novels, asking why is it that women as painters, writers, or artists are represented as unconscionable beings, with "their future almost always less bright, their talent less appreciated than that of their male equivalents?" (1) When one begins to read these narratives of self-denigration and destitution it becomes apparent that the English *Künstlerroman* demands a female protagonist be prepared to acquiesce to society's expectations and compromise her sense of agency. Even the *fin de siècle* novels of the New Woman, a fictional character rather than a tangible identity, wholly dissatisfied with marriage and sexual double standards, fails to grant autonomy to its artistic female protagonist; one marries or one dies. The early stories of the female artist become, according to Marianne Hirsch, "the story of the

potential artist who fails to make it” and, instead, “for the strongly impassioned heroine, death is the simplest way of accommodating her desire in narrative terms” (Treagus 22). The dominance of the romance plot over personal development – as can be seen in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* – more or less sabotaged the beginnings of the female *Künstlerroman* in the English tradition².

Overshadowed by a male tradition, it is likely then that these “women, excluded by custom and education from achieving distinction in poetry, history, or drama, had, in defining their literary culture in the novel, simply appropriated another masculine genre” (Showalter 4). This assertion that the *Künstlerroman* is a reworking of a patriarchal narrative therefore implies only a certain level of modification by female novelists. In *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), a feminist manifesto and pillar for women’s literary theorists, much in the same vein as Wollstonecraft’s *The Rights of Women* (1792) was for early suffragettes, Woolf pursues the salience of women’s writing, the fruit of that “wild, generous, untutored intelligence [that] poured itself out, higgledy-piggledy, in torrents of rhyme and prose, poetry and philosophy which stand congealed in quartos and folios that nobody ever reads” (62). It is therefore by plotting the development of the *Künstlerroman* through the fiction and non-fiction produced by Woolf that I seek a greater understanding of how women came to impose their artistic self-hood on prose. The male *Künstlerroman* contemporary to Woolf’s writing insists upon a level of professionalism, dedication, and creative self-authorisation that is neither feasible nor practical for the artist-as-heroine.

This thesis plots the genesis of the creative female in the writing of Woolf by delving first into the construction of Rachel Vinrace, the embryonic artist of *Melymbrosia* (1912-1982), later published as *The Voyage Out* (1915). Though Vinrace does not explicitly identify herself as an artist, in much the same way as Helen Graham, she is a curious anomaly in Woolf’s execution of the *Künstlerroman* as she is unable to ameliorate her relative positioning in relation to society without sacrificing her sense of agency. The novel is littered with artistic curiosities and attempts to incorporate the difficulties of being both a woman and an artist. Though the first chapter will show that *Melymbrosia/The Voyage Out* fails to offer Vinrace an

² Woolf notes with disquiet in her essay, “Aurora Leigh”, how Barrett-Browning slipped into relative obscurity: Fate has not been kind to Mrs. Browning as a writer. Nobody reads her, nobody discusses her, no-body troubles to put her in her place. One has only to compare her reputation with Christina Rossetti’s to trace her decline ... In short, the only place in the mansion of literature that is assigned her is downstairs in the servants’ quarters, where ... she bangs the crockery about and eats vast handfuls of peas on the point of her knife. (98)

alternative to marriage, the second chapter unpacks the representation of female artists in *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Both Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay overcome the presence of imposing masculinity to achieve their individual female creative visions, in the painting and the dinner party, respectively. Moreover, Lily is the first female protagonist of Woolf's to achieve autonomy as an artist outside marriage and beyond the realm of the domestic. However, Lily's autonomy is strictly private. Her painting is not hung in a public gallery and does not receive the critical acclaim that previous fictional male artists so aspire to sustain. Therefore, my third chapter interrogates the character of Orlando in *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), who marries, has a child, and successfully publishes her poem, "The Oak Tree". The increasing pressure of the artist to exist in the public domain complicates Woolf's later female *Künstlerroman*, emerging in *Orlando*, but taking its fullest exposition in the posthumously published *Between the Acts* (1941), where the dictatorial Miss La Trobe struggles to perform a village pageant of English history for the locals, and Isa Oliver, a poet manqué, hides her scribbled verses from a domineering husband.

Each of Woolf's novels, from *Melymbrosia* to *Between the Acts*, present a differing account of female art via their respective artists-as-heroines. Therefore, the question of how the female *Künstlerroman* develops in Woolf's writing hinges on the relationship between the form of the novel and the figure of the artist. For this reason, the intertextual relationship in her later narrative forms is paramount for these incorporate the biographical and autobiographical, as well as historical non-fiction – *A Room of One's Own* (1929) – and essayistic fictions – *Three Guineas* (1938). The use of this material in examining the female *Künstlerroman* is a critical element of my thesis for their variations all create markedly different examples of the artist-as-heroine in *Orlando: A Biography* and *Between the Acts*.

Chapter One: *Melymbrosia*

1.1 “Rake Her Out”: The Birth of the Artist

In this chapter I will explore the initial development of the female *Künstlerroman* in *Melymbrosia*, reading the novel as Woolf’s first attempt to rewrite the narrative development of a feminine creative imagination³. The examination of such a fledgling artistic identity warrants the use of an equally inceptive text. The justification for using *Melymbrosia* as my primary text is the ability to coherently trace the construction of Rachel as Woolf’s earliest artistic heroine, and it is within this embryonic text that the undeveloped potential in the female artist is best illustrated. The narrative of a distinctly artistic identity differs from female identity at large in the novel, and the initial shaping of Rachel in *Melymbrosia* dramatises Woolf’s anxiety about creating as a woman outside the strictures and demands of the gendered self in matrimony, motherhood, and society.

The consideration of *Melymbrosia* as an earlier version of *The Voyage Out* invites a comparative reading of Rachel Vinrace’s development as an artist-proxy for Virginia Woolf. And though pivotal moments in *Melymbrosia* – such as Rachel’s fever and her engagement to Terence Hewet – are also present in *The Voyage Out*, there are slight but significant changes between the two versions, encouraging a comparison between how Woolf originally conceived of Rachel in 1912 in *Melymbrosia*, and how Rachel finally appeared in 1915, when *The Voyage Out* was published. But there are strong thematic commonalities between the two texts, namely the complicated relationship between Rachel’s desire for autonomy and her resignation to marry. In both versions the reader still extrapolates the complexities and contradictions between Rachel’s identity as an artist and her identity as a woman. Therefore, both *Melymbrosia* and *The Voyage Out* are differing accounts of the same linear narrative, charting the growth of the female artist’s mind and her dynamic relationship to society. For this reason, though much criticism focuses on the narrative structure of *The Voyage Out*, the arguments posed and observations made remain

³ *Melymbrosia* – completed by 1912 after Virginia Stephen’s marriage to Leonard Woolf – was not released during Virginia Woolf’s lifetime, although a final revision by Woolf was published as *The Voyage Out* by her step-brother, George Duckworth, in 1915. The circumstances surrounding the eventual publication of *Melymbrosia* are complex. Handwritten drafts and various holographs were unearthed in the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature in the New York City Public Library by Woolf scholar Louise A. deSalvo in the late 1970s. After publishing a seminal study of the contents, *Virginia Woolf’s First Voyage: A Novel in the Making*, deSalvo published what she believed to be the novel’s original form in 1981.

applicable to *Melymbrosia*. In this way, the quotes used in this chapter, unless specified as being from *The Voyage Out*, are taken from *Melymbrosia*. Moreover, where necessary in this chapter, instances of divergence in Rachel's narrative are comparatively read with reference to the secondary text, *The Voyage Out*. By privileging *Melymbrosia* as my primary text, and relying on *The Voyage Out* as a supplementary source, this chapter outlines the gradation of Rachel's textual creativity; an aggregate approach to Woolf's earliest dialogue of what it means to be a female artist.

In August of 1908, plagued by interruptions at Fitzroy Square, Virginia Stephen quit the city and, travelling alone across Somerset to Pembrokeshire in southern Wales, wrote to Violet Dickinson of the arduous task before her, the completion of *Melymbrosia*. Woolf had earlier mentioned to Dickinson on May 13, 1908 of her "work of the Fancy and the Affections", admitting the struggle of penning her first novel, confessing to perpetually existing "in a state of acute misery" (I: 331). In the same week she wrote to Clive Bell (who would become her chief advisor and confidant during the infancy of *Melymbrosia*, providing much needed encouragement, revisions, and editorial advice): "I have been slashing at *Melymbrosia*!" (I: 334). Such anxiety about her writing permeates these letters dated from late 1907 through 1908, when Woolf divided her time teaching classical studies at Morley College and composing reviews for the *Times Literary Supplement*. Months later even, "[thinking] of Nessa and Julian", Woolf draws a macabre comparison to infanticide when she considers her latest work: "A page of *Melymbrosia* was strangled in the birth this morning" (I: 345). Desperate for the solitude she felt necessary for her writing, Woolf began a brief and solo sojourn through the south-western English countryside in August, though her letters home suggest a rural setting had not changed her perspective: "I can't get on with my writing," she tells Vanessa, "and I sit in an upper room and look into a glass case of black theology; and Cynthia [*Rachel Vinrace*] will not speak, and my ship is like to sink" (I: 341). The immediacy of the paranoia and despondency conveyed in these letters is especially pertinent to the development, or, rather, regression of Rachel Vinrace, a character whose desire to exist beyond the social and cultural demands of her sex remains unrequited. The novel chronicles the beginnings of a female *Künstlerroman* through the protagonist Rachel, whose inability to imagine herself beyond marriage and motherhood is similarly captured in the

metaphorical imagery of anxiety, suffering, and death. In keeping with the narrative ending of the New Woman fiction, Woolf's first attempt to probe the sensitivities of a feminine consciousness sees Rachel try to escape from the socially enraging, physically, and psychologically confined space society compels her to accept through a proposal from a would-be novelist Terence Hewet; instead, she experiences a metamorphosis that culminates in a feverish death.

Melymbrosia opens with Helen and Ridley Ambrose walking arm-in-arm along London streets to Willoughby Vinrace's schooner, *Euphrosyne*, which is to set sail to a small port in South America, Santa Marina. Rachel, a naïve 24-year-old, waits in the saloon of her father's ship, "already unnaturally braced to receive" her aunt and uncle, the Ambroses (7). Accompanying Rachel on the sea voyage are the former parliamentarian-come-diplomat, Richard Dalloway, and his wife, Clarissa, and the boorish Mr. Pepper, a former Cambridge acquaintance of Ridley's. While *Melymbrosia* is relatively straightforward in terms of its plot, the novel "can be considered a female *Bildungsroman* in that it traces the social and psychological development of a naïve and ill-educated – but intelligent and musically talented – young woman who is exposed to social life and relations between men and women for the first time at the age of twenty-four" (Ronchetti 17). Rachel's education and tutelage are superficial and counter-productive; the young woman, though surrounded by guardians, is paradoxically isolated and socially ignorant. As in Continental examples of the female *Künstlerroman* heroine, including de Staël's *Corinne*, Rachel presents with a predilection and flair for music – particularly the sonatas of Beethoven and Bach. Rachel, though she does not explicitly identify as a creative or artistic woman, is established as a protagonist who occupies a space between the demands of domesticity and the female creative mind.

That Rachel is not explicitly an artist does not diminish *Melymbrosia* as an attempt to rewrite the female *Künstlerroman*. Here one must summon the artist-as-woman in those earlier novels of the nineteenth century, their inability to identify exclusively as painters and poets, musicians and novelists, outside their ascribed gender roles. The characters that Rachel encounters during her passage on the *Euphrosyne* and her exploits at the English resort are a creative collective of "amateurs and dilettantes from relatively privileged backgrounds", including, in Ronchetti's summary: "Mrs. Flushing the painter; Helen Ambrose, who has an eye for beauty and

is working on an elaborate piece of embroidery; Hewet, the aspiring young novelist; St. John Hirst, his scholarly Cambridge friend who occasionally turns out a poem or a play” (18). That these artistic types are novice at best is a point to consider, for in distinguishing *Melymbrosia* as female *Künstlerroman* it is plausible that a female artist does not need to be professional nor openly identified in order for the narrative to concern itself with her creative progression.

It therefore does not follow that a lack of definitive artists in *Melymbrosia* means the narrative of the female *Künstlerroman* here fails to interrogate the birth of a creative mind. In “Out of the Chrysalis: Female Initiation and Female Authority in Virginia Woolf’s *The Voyage Out*” (1986), Christina Froula labels Rachel a “female artist-figure”, highlighting the distinction between professional artists and the aspirant self in the female *Künstlerroman*. It is through Woolf’s “later female artist-novels” that we are able to “interpret her representation of female initiation and female authority” in her earlier novel “not as an ultimate failure but as a challenging and transforming critique” (Froula 63). In *Melymbrosia* Woolf attempts to assert the question of female creativity and self-determination through Rachel by using her to position the relationship of the artist to society: the juxtaposition of the desired business-like mind against the flighty, creative self. Moreover, Rachel’s quest for autonomy is overshadowed by the presence of the budding novelist Terence Hewet, and so Rachel, as a prototype of the artist-as-heroine, becomes the virginal muse who unwittingly draws the attention of the male creator.

But in considering her relationship to society-at-large, Rachel encounters what Woolf will spend her career teasing apart: the distinction between the public and private self, the Mrs. Huntington and the Mrs. Graham, as well as the role of the artist in society. It is a position both explained and critiqued during a disagreement between the Dalloways and the Ambroses aboard the *Euphrosyne*. Richard, who represents the politicised public self doing its “best to get a grasp of things”, relinquishes the artist as a purveyor of truth:

Now your artists find things in a mess. Shrug their shoulders, turn aside to their visions – which I grant may be very beautiful and leave things in a mess. Now that seems to me evading one’s responsibilities. Besides we aren’t all born with the artistic faculty. (51)

Richard – biting his thumb at the nineteenth-century ideal of *l'art pour l'art* – has his sentiments echoed by Clarissa:

When I'm with artists I feel so intensely the delights of shutting oneself up in a little world of one's own, with pictures and music and everything beautiful, and then I go out into the streets and the first child I meet with its poor hungry dirty little face makes me turn round and say, "No I can't shut myself up – I won't live in a world of my own. I should like to stop all the painting and writing and music until this sort of thing exists no longer." (51)

Rachel, as an observer of public life rather than an active participant, is exemplary of the female artistic mind, prone to retreat to her own private quarters to escape the overwhelming exposure to social conventions, both on the *Euphrosyne* and at the English resort. In one instance she finds "tears suddenly [rushing] to [her] eyes" as Mrs. Ambrose and Mrs. Dalloway discuss motherhood and their respective children; her own mother dead, Rachel "[leaves] them abruptly for her music", returning to her room. (65). Thinking of the girls from her time in Kensington, Rachel weighs up their sense of destiny, and determines they were "born for a thousand other reasons; to marry, to nurse, to ride, to fill the world" (66). And yet Rachel dismisses this purpose in life as being incompatible with her own desires, noting that "music, with painting and a knowledge of English history, was like a tiny tin sword ... to fight the world with, if other weapons failed" (66). Indeed, Rachel believes girls are born to serve society primarily within their basic biological function, thereby removing women from the public and cultural world. Here, Rachel intimates that her passion for music, like painting and a knowledge of history, is a secondary weapon, existing beyond her societal obligations to become a wife and a mother, which she could deploy to fight for an alternative destiny.

But, as Rachel spreads Bach before her, wearing "the expression on her face, sensual and absorbed, that proved she was born to play" (66), we observe that she aligns own destiny beyond the primeval order of "marry ... nurse ... fill the world", suggesting that she believes she, too, was born to create, and she intends to fill the world by means other than motherhood. Here Rachel understands that Mrs.

Dalloway was alluding on deck to “something common to arts, religions and maternity” – the physical act of creation itself and the transmutation of female creativity in art. And so Rachel, secure in her belief that “one wants to do something without an audience”, begins to inhabit a feminine artistic consciousness, and, “far away from all looking glasses” (66), starts the journey of creative self-determination that so refines the ebb and flow of the later female *Künstlerroman* by Woolf.

1.2 Initiation to Creation: The Travelling Artist

Woolf claimed years later in her essay, “Life and the Novelist”, that the novelist is “terribly exposed to life”, for “life is forever pleading that she is the proper end of fiction” (46). For her, the novelist “becomes terrified ... of falling behind the times”, of failing to capture the essence of life in fiction. The artist has, according to Woolf, a symbiotic relationship with art, and so the act of “[retiring] to one’s study in fear of life is equally fatal” to the novelist (47). Consequently, though the novelist must surely “at a certain moment ... leave the company and withdraw, alone, to that mysterious room where his [sic] body is hardened and fashioned into permanence” to recount in fiction the fibres of being, it is clear, from Woolf’s perspective, that artists – if they are to create – cannot exist perpetually in a state of isolation (47). Rachel’s relationship to society is therefore crucial to her creative development. In *Melymbrosia*, read as a female *Künstlerroman*, the story of the liberated artist in the male *Künstlerroman* is paralleled by the enclosure of the travelling Rachel’s creativity. The question of what exactly constitutes a ‘voyage out’ for Rachel as an artist is complex, for the *Euphrosyne* is not the inviolate private sphere that she initially perceives it to be. Though the vessel traverses oceans, moving from England to South America, Rachel is arguably trapped onboard; she cannot leave but can only retreat momentarily to her quarters. Even when she moves to her room, she cannot assume any level of privacy. As she plays for herself at the piano, the “shape of the Bach fugue [crashes] to the ground”, as Mrs. Dalloway interrupts Rachel, who becomes silent as she “flushed and fumbled her fingers in her lap” (67). Despite the Dalloways’ criticism of the detached artist, the novel nonetheless, as Ronchetti puts it, “tends to privilege the sequestered life over the social life, especially for the creative individual” (26). This is true of Rachel; her regular retreats to her own private quarters are undermined both on board the *Euphrosyne* and during her stay in Santa Marina.

But much like her position in society, her solitude is conditioned by those around her. Arguably, being on board the *Euphrosyne* does not so much suggest Rachel's voyage out as much as it replicates her designated place in society. Therefore, the conditions necessary for the production of art here converge with the specific difficulties faced by female artists.

The opening of *Melymbrosia* presents London as a city of conformity and assent, "where beauty goes unregarded, eccentricity must pay the penalty, and it is better not to be very tall, to wear a long blue cloak, or to beat the air with your left hand" (1). As already established, the social, economic, and physical mobility of women during the late Victorian period was still significantly limited; Rachel expresses dismay at Santa Marina at women walking the terrain unaccompanied, she herself confessing her father would never allow her to walk Bond Street alone (222). The positioning of England as "the commonplace" against the alien, exotic settings of Santa Marina and the jungle "function as resources for a new type of female adventure", further suggesting that "transplantation is necessary for a new writing, especially in the representation of female identity" (Lawrence 156). The question of an alternate identity seems inconceivable in England, which presents an impasse for a protagonist in an English female *Künstlerroman* at the time: one must voyage out, both physically and metaphysically, to truly know one's self.

In the development of a feminine artistic identity there is an overlapping of narrative as *Melymbrosia* not only incorporates elements of self-determination in the *Künstlerroman* but also the female initiation plot. The question of female initiation must be extrapolated from the text, for female initiation is a "three-stage process of enclosure, metamorphosis (or magnification), and emergence", and therefore the plot itself, which "institutes women's absence from the culture of the public sphere", regards "the woman artist or culture-maker [as] a contradiction in terms" (Froula 65). In this way *Melymbrosia* as a *Künstlerroman* presents a conflict between personal desire and self-determination in the unimagined future, for in "depicting the initiation of the female artist-figure", Woolf "captures the paradoxical relation of female initiation to female authority in the late-Victorian culture" (Froula 63). Moreover, in terms of the conflict the novel presents, Rachel's death represents "not only the power of the female initiation structure to overwhelm female desire when it ventures to imagine a different future" but the "difficulties [Woolf] confronted in her first attempt

to imagine an alternative to the female initiation plot” (Froula 63). Similarly Woolf “endows Rachel with a powerful desire to evade or transcend this culturally determined destiny” but such an escape from social providence for Rachel “ends not in triumph but in death” (Froula 63). Therefore, the death of Rachel is a “symbolic initiatory death that precedes the rebirth of Woolf’s authority in more powerful representations of female creativity in her later female *Künstlerromane*” (Froula 63), such as Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* or Miss La Trobe in *Between the Acts*. Rachel’s death provides a narrative point of reference from which we can trace the construction, progression, and successes of subsequent female artists in Woolf’s writing.

Therefore, what separates Rachel’s journey from other artistic voyages is the unrealised return of the traveller in this early female *Künstlerroman*. The closure of her narrative is a premature death; where male artists return home from abroad, their creation made all the richer by experiences of the exotic and foreign, by contrast Rachel’s return is never imagined in the text. In her acquiescence to domesticity, her death becomes ironic: “the wedding veil becomes a shroud” and travel – seen in Rachel – though “typically a topos of liberation, instead becomes a dead end” (Lawrence 155). But Rachel’s “dead end” is of course figurative as well as literal; an enigmatic reimagining of the limitations of gender and creativity, suggesting the trappings of female interiority. And therefore it is worth noting an intriguing feature of Rachel’s voyage out is that her physical, final destination is entirely imaginary; a mythical landscape at the ends of the earth. Though the landscape is arguably described in terms of being “an undefiled female body that invited the European male’s imagination” (Lawrence 158), the same can too be said for Rachel: the virginal muse tempting the male creator, her fiancé Terence Hewet. While Rachel as a travelling artist-type anticipates later excursions in Woolf’s female *Künstlerroman*, the imagined destination becomes a metaphorical extension for the gendered divisions forced on Rachel, whose voyage is marked by an inability to realise a future for herself without sacrificing her autonomy.

In reading *Melymbrosia* within the context of previous female *Künstlerromane*, it is useful to distinguish how Woolf’s first use of the genre both bolsters Rachel as an artist-type and ultimately renders her a character without agency. That Rachel is seeking an alternative to a life defined by domesticity is evident by her travels to

South America; she has no qualms about living the life of an aesthete, but harbours a paradoxical air of innocence and horror towards the expectation that she will marry and become a mother. While still on board the *Euphrosyne* Clarissa Dalloway claims she envisages Rachel “walking alone ... and thinking – in a little world of [her] own” only for Rachel to assume she means “walking with a man”, with which she follows: “I shall never marry” (69). The setting of the tropics provides a landscape in which the budding female artist could expand her mind, to “find its dimensions” (*A Writer’s Diary*, 206). Froula positions Woolf’s “imaginary gardens” as rewritings of Eden that simultaneously suggest a “continuing and increasingly victorious struggle to resist the ... myth [of Genesis]” and an attempt to “resurrect the buried mother as a ground for the daughter-artist’s authority” (Froula 199). The persistent imagery of the mother – specifically Rachel’s deceased mother Theresa, and drowned statues of the past in “the great white monsters of the lower waters” (16) – can be read here as an attempt by Rachel to imagine a future through her own deceased mother, who remains an invisible yet paradoxically active agent in the narrative. Though Rachel travels outside of the patriarchal English setting to a more fertile, feminine landscape – one in which an artistic mind could feasibly flourish – she is overpowered by the persistence of gender roles.

But what changes reading Eden and its pertinence to female authority in *Melymbrosia*, in comparison to *The Voyage Out*, are the subtle changes – and omissions – from the latter that lessen the influence of a paradisaal setting on Rachel. In chapter XVI of *Melymbrosia* – significantly recast into the closing paragraph of chapter XIII of *The Voyage Out* – Rachel travels alone to the wilderness, asking “out loud of the sky and mountains, ‘Am I in love?’”, here repeating the Romantic notion: “Only the truth was ever spoken by things of such beauty” (193). Until now “there has been two people in her, one who asked, and one who answered. But now there was one only”, and sitting “on the top of a little hill”, among the “tall grasses”, with a “long-necked bird,” passing overhead, she cries aloud her admission “I love you I love you!” not to Hewet, but to nature itself (193-94). As with the imaginary garden in Genesis, the landscape in *Melymbrosia* “provides not only an account of a fall from innocence and grace into experience (or knowledge) and mortality but, equally important, a complex paradigm for the relationship between sexual difference and cultural creativity” (Froula 199). That this scene in its entirety – Rachel’s solitary

excursion to the mountains and declaration of love for nature – only appears in *Melymbrosia* intimates that the earlier form of the novel adheres to Woolf's initial imagined destiny for Rachel as an artistic protagonist, one who would "[transcend] the plot of marriage and motherhood that traditionally confronts heroines of the realist novel", but was overpowered by "the woman artist's struggle against facticity" (Froula 212). At the end of *Melymbrosia* Rachel's declaration of love to nature is overpowered by her inability to integrate her cultural identity as a woman with her private associations of female artistry.

1.3 Tragic Ends: The Unravelling Artist

Woolf's chief difficulty in imagining a destiny for Rachel is the inefficiency of language to translate the convergence of reality and fantasy in *Melymbrosia*, and so her conception of herself in the future – married to Terence Hewet – begins to alter her present sense of self, thus curtailing her voyage of self-determination. Nancy Weiner defines Rachel as a character of "absolute passivity" who "controls neither her art nor her destiny", suggesting that in "her textual and linguistic hesitancy" Rachel is "cast in the passive role of a victim waiting for the social order to determine her destiny" (Weiner 39). Similarly, Rachel is unable in the narrative to "reconcile decisively her need to be accepted into the social order, in terms of the patriarchally prescribed roles for women, and her need for self-actualization through her role as musician" (Weiner 33). There is an inability in Rachel to communicate her desires: she has no language to encapsulate her condition, no legitimate medium to resolve the questions of truth and reality she poses. "To tell you the truth," Rachel says in a conversation with Miss Allen, "I don't know how to speak" (266). As they continue there is a terse assertion by the masculine Miss Allen of what one "should" do as a woman – which is of course to marry – and a declaration by Rachel that "if [she] seriously thought [she] was not going to have what [she wants]" that she "should kill [herself]" (267), using "should" here to indicate suicide – like marriage – as a necessity rather than a desire.

The language of female initiation is inextricably tied to sex and death, with the lush terrain and sensual images of nature in Santa Marina contrarily described in terms of destruction, suffering, and obliteration. During a picnic with the guests,

Rachel and Terence walk together against the backdrop of the mountains, vast bodies of “intense blue mist” which give the appearance of being “shaved by razors”:

They walked on a pace or two looking right away to the horizon, and then both dropped their eyes to the earth simultaneously. They beheld a man and woman beneath them, pressed in each other’s arms. They rolled slightly this way and that, as the embrace tightened and slackened. Then Susan pushed Arthur away, and they saw her head laid back upon the turf, the eyes shut, and a queer look of pallor upon it, as though she had suffered and must soon suffer again. She did not seem altogether conscious, which affected both Hewet and Rachel unpleasantly. When Arthur began butting her as a lamb butts a ewe, they turned away. Hewet looked, half shyly at Rachel, and saw that her cheeks were white.

“Oh how I hate it – how I hate it!” she cried to him. (161)

Though Terence advises Rachel that she “must get used to it” or risk “[exaggerating] its importance” (161), James Naremore notes in *The World Without a Self* (1972) that “it is no accident that sex and death are linked” (22) on a number of occasions. Moreover, in the novel, “sexuality ... is associated with the fear of death and destruction, even if sex and death do not seem to be causally related” (22). As with much of Woolf’s later writing, *Melymbrosia* shows a compulsion to “use images of nature to indicate a beautiful, primitive, and often dangerous unity beneath ordinary life” (23). Naremore recognises this feature of her writing: “the intrusion of these fantastic, eerie, potentially violent forces upon a tranquil and beautiful mood,” he observes, is indicative of the “elemental forces which underlie the orderly everyday patterns of British domesticity”, which are “emphatically sexual” (22). Rachel’s blunt admission – a hatred of sex – and her subsequent terror strongly imply the virginal naivety with which she pursues a marriage to Hewet and, in doing so, her “desire for love leads eventually to a total loss of self in death” (29). Rachel’s decision to marry Hewet derives from a sense of cultural obligation and necessity, rather than from a claim for her creative autonomy, and her inability to reconcile her

identity as an artist with her identification as a marriage article propels her towards a death that is both physical and metaphysical.

And so Rachel's identity as both an artist and a woman complicates our reading of the novel as a female *Künstlerroman*, for where she is distinguished as a creative mind by Terence, she is confined to being his muse. In *The Voyage Out*, Rachel presses Terence on the subject of his writing, to which Terence boasts that while he is not first-rate, he is "about as good as Thackeray" (205). That Terence self-identifies as a novelist and aligns himself with the canonical Thackeray, without having published any fiction, contradicts Rachel's understanding of her own self-determined artistic identity. The statement amazes her, for she "could not widen her point of view to believe that there could be great writers in existence at the present day" (205). Moreover, as Terence rambles about his novelistic aspirations, "his self-confidence astounded her, and he became more and more remote" (205). We could therefore suggest Rachel herself is not an artist, but moments later Terence likens his motivations for writing to her musical talents: "What I want to do in writing novels is very much what you want to do when you play the piano, I expect ... We want to find out what's behind things, don't we?" (207). But, of course, they disagree, for Rachel does not self-identify as a musician nor an artist: "They tried to invent theories and to make their theories agree" (208). The inability of Rachel to expressly characterise herself as an artist is countered by Terence's zealous assertion of self-determination. The moment marks a turn in the narrative, where it is not the increasingly remote nature of Terence that Rachel experiences, but rather the beginnings of her metaphysical removal from public life.

But it is not until after their engagement that Terence completely strips Rachel of her creative agency, suggesting that Rachel has fragments of a potential artistic identity, but by agreeing to marry him she will only be able to inhabit her identity as a woman. While Rachel plays the piano one evening, Terence sits close to her, engaged with his writing – a novel ironically named *Silence*, all the while interrupting her. He imparts his latest ideas to her: "'Women – under the heading Women I've written: 'Not really vainer than men. Lack of self-confidence at the base of most serious faults. Dislike of own sex traditional, or founded on fact? Every woman not so much a rake at heart, as an optimist, because they don't think'" (276). The title of Terence's novel embodies the difficulty Woolf faced in writing the

narrative of a woman's identity and, fittingly, Rachel stays silent and says nothing in response, continuing to play her music. When she finally relents and responds to his niggling, Terence confesses that he has been desiring her to quit practising her music for the last half-hour: "I've no objection to nice simple tunes – indeed, I find them very helpful to my literary composition, but that kind of thing is merely like an unfortunate dog going round on its hind legs in the rain" (277). Rachel as an artist and Rachel as a prospective wife are mapped out in the narrative as possessing two wholly incompatible identities. And so, like the tragic muse of previous female *Künstlerromane*, Rachel falls victim to becoming the inspiration of art and not its creator.

The narrative therefore seeks to incorporate the female initiation plot, which arguably ends in marriage, and the plotting of a new female *Künstlerroman*, in which artistic labours are rendered complete. But the fusion of Rachel's two identities – the private musician and the public wife – in *Melymbrosia* is simply not possible. Returning from a sojourn up river, Rachel contracts a fever, slips into a deep state of unconsciousness, and never recovers. Hallucinating, she exists in a chaotic void, a terrifying state of haunting, trailed by animalistic creatures, and "drowning" beneath a "thick sticky substance" (326). Unaware of her temporality, completely cut off verbally and physically, Rachel is isolated in her own body and mind, a symbolic reimagining of the confinement of the female artist. And so the narrative of the female *Künstlerroman*, which typically maps the psychological progression of a creativity identity, is instead overshadowed by a substantial physical journey. Rachel's narrative end is therefore marked by a physical and psychological regression. Where the typical female initiation plot would see the woman emerge from enclosure and metamorphosis, Rachel's death becomes emblematic of the silencing of women artists of the past, who, as was later argued by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), were unable to imagine themselves as artistic individuals with free agency. This "anxiety of authorship" is a "profoundly debilitating" sense of inferiority "built from complex and often barely conscious fears of that authority which seems to the female artist to be by definition inappropriate to her sex" (Gilbert and Gubar 51). In choosing to adhere to cultural methods of female initiation – marriage and motherhood – Rachel's fever and subsequent fantasies thus become the voyage in of self-discovery. Peering inward

and seeing no future but one of dread, marked by trepidation and a fearful pursuit of her body, her quest ends in a physical and metaphysical death.

The denouement of *Melymbrosia* categorically confirms that Rachel could neither be an artist nor a mother or a wife. Her death further suggests the fatalist nature of compromise in the desire for free agency against the cultural specificities of the gendered artist. Moreover, the identification of Rachel as an artist-type consequently alters our impressions of domestic women in Woolf's writing for Rachel's dire perception of her gendered self as mother and wife contradicts her presentation of a creative gendered mind, a feminine imagination. Though not a conventional female *Künstlerroman*, but rather another example of "the *failed* female artist-novel" (Froula 63) of the late Victorian era, – modelled on the European *Künstlerroman* exemplified Sand and Staël, – the narrative is a necessary foundation on which Woolf's later artists-as-heroines build their relentless desire to transcend the political, social, and cultural boundaries of their sex.

Chapter Two: *To the Lighthouse*

2.1 Between Two Worlds: The Artist-as-Heroine and the Artist-as-Wife

This chapter will examine the construction of the female *Künstlerroman* within the context of the relationship between Lily Briscoe, the artist-as-heroine, and Mrs. Ramsay, the artist-as-wife, who create, successfully and independently of each other, in conflicting roles. The relationship between Mrs. Ramsay and her own creativity suggests her dinner-table is a metaphorical extension of her body's ability to create. Rather than the demands of domesticity, Lily desires an alternative means of creativity, namely her painting. Ronchetti argues that the character of Lily presents as "Woolf's fullest exposition of the creative process as experienced by a single artist in her fiction" (63). At the same time, the nature of "the specific conditions that affect women and their creativity" is exemplified by Mrs. Ramsay, who – though not a painter, a sculptor, musician, or poet – symbolises the other "[form] of creativity available to women ... in their tradition domestic roles as wives, mothers, and social managers" (Ronchetti 63). Though Mrs. Ramsay is certainly not an artist in the same way as Lily, she is certainly of a creative mind: her engagements and interactions with other characters are orchestrated and coordinated; her chief source of energy is in providing unconditional comfort and reassurances to her family, particularly Mr. Ramsay. So it is worth distinguishing here that while Mrs. Ramsay does not see herself as an artist in the same way as Lily, Lily similarly does not imagine herself a domestic agent and source of enduring and sheltering love, as Mrs. Ramsay thinks of her role. In order for Woolf to achieve her vision in the female *Künstlerroman*, Lily must find a way of uniting these two methods of creation.

Set on the Isle of Skye during September 1913, then September 1923, *To the Lighthouse* focuses on the familial dynamics of several characters: Mr. Ramsay, a scholar, his wife Mrs. Ramsay, and their eight children; Williams Bankes, a widower; Augustus Carmichael, a poet; Charles Tansley, an atheist; and Lily Briscoe, an unmarried painter. Within the first section of the novel, "The Window", which takes place over the course of a summer afternoon, the relationship between Lily and Mrs. Ramsay is immediately established as one marked by their ideological positioning: Mrs. Ramsay is the "feather-brained self-satisfied manipulator" whose marriage is a "mature, sharp critical examination ... of the destruction wrecked by the Victorian

social arrangement on human capacities for freedom and growth” (Lilienfield 149). Lily is the advocate of the progressive desire to exist outside of such an institution. The physical distance between the two characters is therefore deliberate, creating a space in which each can feasibly observe the other from afar. Watching Lily from the window, Mrs. Ramsay sits with her son James on her knee, keeping “her head as much in the same position as possible for Lily’s picture” (17). As she observes Lily behind her easel, “with her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face”, Mrs. Ramsay muses that “[Lily] would never marry; one could not take her painting very seriously” (17). In “The Window”, Lily’s painting “provides another means of maintaining her emotional autonomy” within the Ramsay household, and the “physical distancing” she demands between herself and the subject, Mrs. Ramsay, is fundamental if one “wishes to appraise her objectively” (Ronchetti 70). The underlying question of “subject, object, and the nature of reality” (22) with respect to creativity permeates each section of the novel, complicating the relationship between the two creative minds, and must be resolved before Lily can consider herself an artist. Thus the convergence of subjectivity and objectivity between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe is principally seen in the novel in two instances: Mrs. Ramsay’s dinner party and the completion of Lily’s painting. But a closer analysis of their creative progression is required first to understand how these moments of artistry are achieved.

The beginnings of Lily’s artistic vision are best understood by reflecting on Mr. Ramsay’s philosophy – which concerns itself with subject, object, and reality – and its presence within the composition of creativity. Lily’s creative process begins in “The Window”, where division between art and creativity, life and experience, is exemplified in Mrs. Ramsay, whose superior nature as a mother and wife stems from her innate ability to compose, design, and nurture moments of social success. By presenting Mrs. Ramsay in the context of her friends and family Woolf, as Herbert Marder posits, “[makes] us aware of Mrs. Ramsay’s artistry, for the medium in which [she] exercises her creative powers is social life” (Marder 40). Mrs. Ramsay’s creativity therefore lies within her relationship to her family, and she demonstrates an ability to create within the rigid conformity of the Victorian home. In using Mrs. Ramsay to examine the artist-as-wife, a greater understanding of the social oppositions towards Lily, the artist-as-heroine, is therefore possible, for Lily is fundamentally

crafted as an alternative to women's power being both paradoxically derived from and confined to their domestic duties and physical beauty.

A question applicable to the female *Künstlerroman* more broadly is that of how each woman reaches her potential as an artist. In *To the Lighthouse* this is entirely dependent on the composition of the family home and the subsequent cultural demands placed on each woman within complex social processes. The focal point of the Ramsay home on Skye exposes the demands placed on Mrs. Ramsay as woman, wife, and mother. Where the "concrete image" of the home conjures up images of rigidity, permanence, and desired stability in domestic life (Marder 36), Mrs. Ramsay – like the house – endures. Indeed, "the stability of the house, and of the family ... is determined by the nature of the spirit that gives it life, the mother" (Marder, 38). When Mr. Ramsay interrupts the "perfect simplicity and good sense of [James's] relationship with his mother" (33), he does so seeking sympathy from his wife, igniting an Oedipal hatred in James. Here, on Mr. Ramsay's command, Mrs. Ramsay's ability to console her husband extends beyond his psychological well-being to the house:

It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life – the drawing-room; behind the drawing-room the kitchen; above the kitchen the bedrooms; and beyond them the nurseries; they must be furnished, they must be filled with life ... Flashing her needles, confident, upright, she created drawing room and kitchen, set them all aglow. (33-34)

The language of her nurturing and creativity is inexplicably tied to the condition of the home. In creating the family and revitalising the household Mrs. Ramsay comes to embody the "spiritual principle" that "she not only creates life by giving birth to sons and daughters, she creates meaning by giving harmonious form to their lives", and therefore in her "deliberate shaping of domestic life shows that [she] is also an artist" (Marder 38). Mrs. Ramsay's ability to breathe life with a few consoling utterances to Mr. Ramsay is suggestive of her power as creator. Reflecting on his own self-

dissatisfaction, Mr. Ramsay laments his role as husband and father, suggesting to himself that his career, his creative development, has been curtailed by familial demands: “the father of eight children has no choice” (39). He views his domestic role with indifference, depreciates his achievements, and believes “he had not done the thing he might have done” (39). While Mrs. Ramsay flourishes as an artist in her domestic duties, Mr. Ramsay resents his role in the home, and finds pleasure in “snubbing the predominance of the arts ... [as nothing more than] merely a decoration on top of human life” (38). From Mr. Ramsay’s perspective, the arts are impractical applications of limited potential, unable to encompass the virility of his philosophies. In snubbing the form, Mr. Ramsay shows a complete lack of understanding for the significance of Mrs. Ramsay’s creative, social arrangements, while entirely depending on it. In this way, “the masculine opposition to Mrs. Ramsay’s domestic sovereignty cannot be taken seriously”, for the presentation of Mr. Ramsay is, according to Emery, at once “child-like, violently patriarchal, absurdly ridiculous, or comically pathetic” (Emery 219). Woolf uses the image of wife and mother – whose creative self is tied with the image of the family home – to surpass the artistry of the male creator – exemplified as the tyrannical Mr. Ramsay, who crudely faults his own domestic role as restrictive and patronising to his creative pursuits.

Lily’s ambition for her painting is to translate the image of “Mother and child ... objects of universal veneration” (45), as a formalist composition, a geometric shape, on her canvas. But it is undermined by Lily’s lack of creative unification. As she perceives William Bankes observing the subject of Mrs. Ramsay and her son with complete reverence, with “such a rapture” that she forgets her admonishing of Mrs. Ramsay, her interior monologue becomes derailed by the patriarchal antagonism of Charles Tansley’s comment: “women can’t paint, women can’t write” (42). Stylised with Woolf’s idiosyncratic use of parenthesis to separate thoughts from action, namely Lily’s belief that “Mrs. Ramsay cared not a fig for her painting”, Lily recants her first attempt to converge the subjectivity of Mrs. Ramsay with the objectivity of her art, thus ushering in a greater knowledge of her own abilities:

It was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men,

but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee. (44)

Of course, nothing happens: "Nothing! Nothing!" (44). In Lily's first attempt to represent the female subject of Mrs. Ramsay, the aesthetic vision is "taken from her" (46) in what she earlier describes as "that moment's flight between the picture and her canvas [where] the demons set on her ... and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child" (19). For the remainder of "The Window" Lily's perception of her own artwork remains "hopelessly discontented", but, in speaking with Mr. Bankes, she declares that "she would always go on painting, because it interested her" (60). Here, against the disconnect between the art she wishes to produce and the reality of what she creates, Lily battles with the gendered expectations of society, namely the fabric of marriage, embodied in Mrs. Ramsay. As Lily perceives "the symbols of marriage, husband and wife" in Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, a "symbolic outline" appears to her, "which [transcends] the real figures" of the pair (60). Though Lily as an observer is perfectly capable of perceiving the subject of Mrs. Ramsay – of visualising a symbolic means by which to transcend the reality of her vision – as an artist she is as yet unable to transmute this vision into an objective representation.

2.2 The Table is the Canvas: Domesticity as an Art Form

Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party in the first section of the novel offers one resolution to the paradox of female creativity, as her autonomy as a social artist is expressed through the deliberate interactions of her guests and the resulting harmony created at the table. For Mrs. Ramsay, whose social compositions extend beyond the realm of her family to include a family of rooks outside her bedroom window, the prospect of "fifteen people sitting down to dinner" is met with anxiety: "Everything depended upon things being served up the precise moment they were ready ... all must be done to a turn" (66)⁴. However, despite her concerns about the tardiness of Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle, Mrs. Ramsay presents herself with apparent casualness, allowing her children the "little ceremony of choosing jewels" to match

⁴ Though David Bradshaw correctly identifies in his edition of *To the Lighthouse* that fifteen people do not, in fact, sit down to dinner, it is widely accepted that Nancy Ramsay is present at the dinner table, and thus fourteen people are present. It is my assumption that she is in fact absent from the table, for her presence is curiously not remarked upon by any of the guests. Indeed, Mrs. Ramsay directly names the other twelve people at the table and instructs them where to sit (see pp. 22 – 23).

her dress, to select which shawl to don, to allow Jasper to “give her his arm” and Rose to “carry her handkerchief” (67). The attention she devotes to the minute details suggests the impending dinner party is just “one of Mrs. Ramsay’s creations”, a “symbol of her artistic powers” and adheres to the notion put forth by Woolf that “domestic skill of a high order might rank as one of the arts” (Marder 41).

Using the example of Isak Dinesen’s short story “The Blank Page”, Susan Gubar suggests that “woman’s image of herself as text and artefact has ... [shaped] the metaphors through which she imagines her creativity” (Gubar 295). In Dinesen’s narrative, the eponymous blank page refers to a set of blood-stained sheets, hung and framed in a gallery for all to see and confirm the virginal status of a number of royal princesses. Therefore, according to Gubar, the stained sheets “illustrate at least two points about female anatomy and creativity: first, many woman experience their bodies as the only available medium for their art, with the result that the distance between the woman and her art is often radically diminished; second, one of the primary and most resonant metaphors provided by the female body is blood and cultural forms of creativity are often experienced as a painful wounding” (Gubar 296). Understanding the relationship between Mrs. Ramsay as wife and mother – the female body as a media for creativity – and the presentation of the dinner-table is crucial to our recognition of Mrs. Ramsay as an artist. Moreover, the implication that “woman’s use of her own body in the creation of art in forms of expressions devalued or totally invisible to trained eyes by traditional aesthetic standards” (Gubar 296) suggests that while domesticity as an art form for Mrs. Ramsay is the closest and only medium available to her, her creative achievements are virtually unrecognisable to the likes of Mr. Ramsay, Augustus Carmichael, William Banks, Paul Rayley, and Charles Tansley, who instead “[prostrate]” themselves silently before her: “a tribute to her beauty”, not artistry (68). Again, Mrs. Ramsay, though an artist and a creator in her own right, is relegated to the historic role of muse, playing a diligent, subservient role to her male dinner guests.

But as her guests assemble themselves in the dining-room, Mrs. Ramsay, “taking her place as the head of the table”, surpasses the “sterility of men” and directs them, one after another, to their assigned seats (68-69). Here, she asserts her agency over the scene, stepping out of the role of muse. But the division of art and creativity, life and experience, interrupts the scene, and Mrs. Ramsay waits

“passively ... for something to happen” (69). Her authority as an artist is expressed in her realisation that though the guests are present, the plates and cutlery arranged without fault, the room itself is “robbed of colour ... There was no beauty anywhere. Nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her” (69). The personal complexity of the dinner scene is juxtaposed against Mrs. Ramsay’s social fluidity and ease of movement, thus elevating her actions to that of an art form. The feminine artistic vision is dependent on the ability to create synthesis in the seemingly disparate; the ability to converge the separate selves present at the dinner requires a level of balance, such as that yearned for by Lily on her canvas. For this reason, much like the creative medium of her body, the dinner-table is an extension of Mrs. Ramsay’s identity as an artist and should be represented in the same manner as the painter’s canvas:

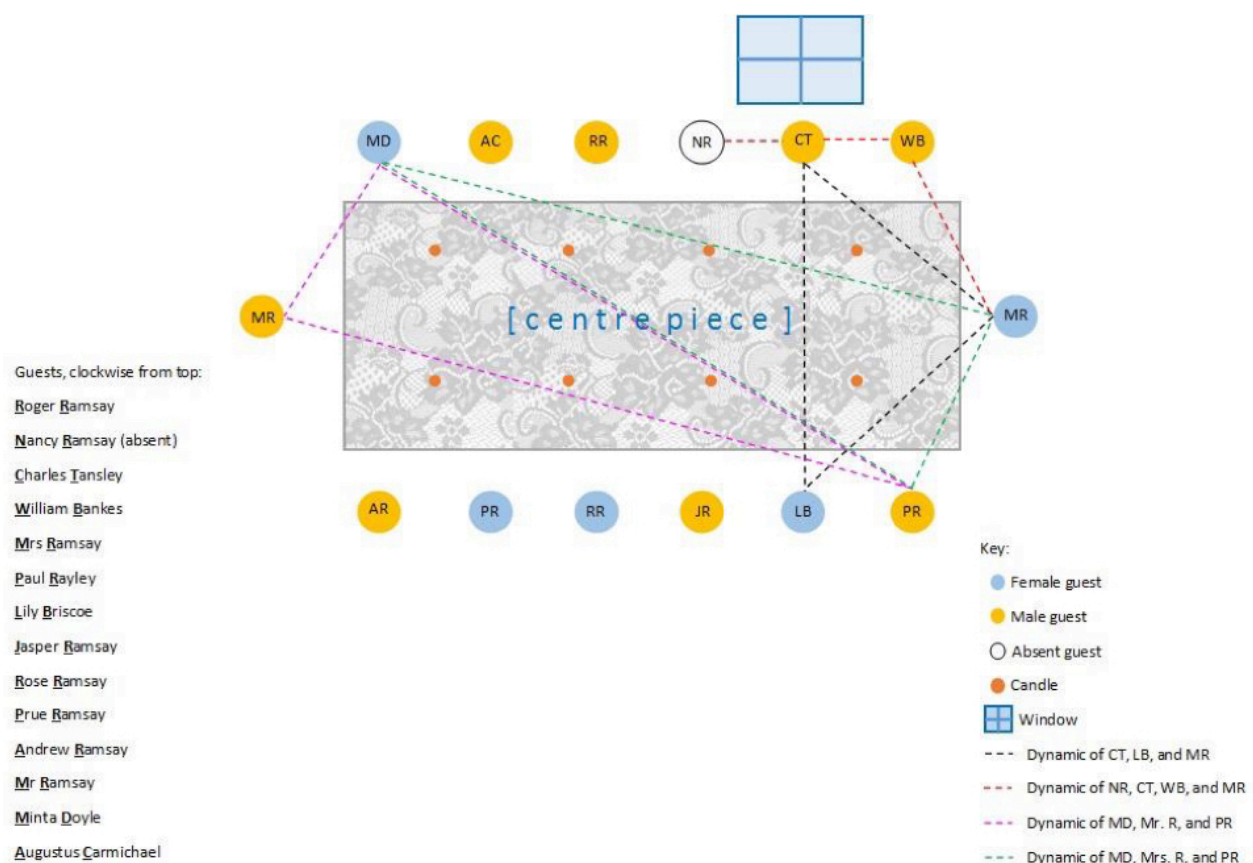


Fig.1: Seating plan for the Dinner Party, as dictated by Mrs. Ramsay

Immediately we perceive the underlying social discourse at play during Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party: the triangular positioning of Mrs. Ramsay, Charles Tansley, and Lily Briscoe; the opposing factions of Tansley and Lily; the blocking of Lily's view of the window by Tansley; the connection between Mr. Ramsay, Minta Doyle, and Paul Rayley, mirrored in the positioning of Mrs. Ramsay to Minta and Paul; Minta hemmed in by male guests; Lily flanked by the Ramsay children. But Nancy Ramsay's curious absence is a point to consider when evaluating the social artistry of her mother. It would appear Nancy's assumed presence has become a critical commonplace; the two youngest Ramsay children, James and Cam, are confirmed as having been taken up to the nursery; the remaining six – Andrew, Prue, Nancy, Jasper, Roger, and Rose – are deductively assumed to be at the table. In fact, there is more evidence in the text to suggest Nancy – whose whereabouts are met with complete uncertainty – is instead entirely absent from the dinner proceedings. It is more likely that Nancy silently retreats upstairs “to her attic” (61) after returning with Andrew, Minta, and Paul, to escape what she earlier describes as “the horror of family life” (61). Nancy's absence is keenly felt by Tansley, who, isolated from the conversation shared in French between Mrs. Ramsay and William Bankes, is left “sitting stuck there with an empty seat beside him”, feeling as if “nothing had shaped itself at all” (74). It is this empty seat that I posit Nancy was intended to occupy and the initial disharmony inherent in the gathering is the result of Nancy's disappearance; her discomforting absence threatens to distract the guests from a collective sense of oneness. For anyone to comment on her absence from the dinner party, to acknowledge the empty chair beside Tansley, would be an admission that Mrs. Ramsay had effectively failed in her role as hostess to unite the household in one moment of being. Though traditionally a technique of the visual arts, this absence is an example of negative spacing: by removing the object of Nancy Ramsay Woolf draws our attention closer to the subjectivity of Mrs. Ramsay's dinner table as a medium of creativity and an extension of her role as mother and wife. The dinner table puts on display the creative fruits of Mrs. Ramsay's artistic labours but also implies a degree of failure.

Evaluating the formal etiquette of Victorian dinner parties, Natalie Kapetanios Meir confirms there is a preordained structure to “[ornamenting] the table, [ordering] the courses, [and arranging] guests according to precedence” which thus enables the host, or hostess, to “possess the capacity to shape individuals' social behaviour” (Meir

133-135). In keeping with the dinner narrative, Mrs. Ramsay, as both the host and the lady of the scene, seats her guests according to her sense of their prominence to her (Fig. 1). Those closest in proximity to Mrs. Ramsay are therefore the most pertinent to her creative achievements: William Bankes has “at last consented to dine with them” (66) and sits at Mrs. Ramsay’s right-hand; Paul Rayley, under duress, has proposed to Minta Doyle, and returns “straight to Mrs. Ramsay, because he felt somehow that she was the person who made him do it. She had made him think he could do anything” (65). Next to be seated are Lily Briscoe and Charles Tansley, who are curiously in an equal position with respect to Mrs. Ramsay, but in opposition to each other; Lily confirms Tansley “sat opposite her with his back to the window precisely in the middle of view” (70). Placed here by Mrs. Ramsay, Lily is seated alongside four of the Ramsay children present, furthering the allegorical nature of Mrs. Ramsay as a pseudo-mother to the painter, reaffirming the metaphor of the table as a continuation of Mrs. Ramsay’s creativity as a mother and wife. Here, Lily encounters the parameters in which she can instinctively reimagine the composition of her work and “in a flash she saw her picture, and thought, Yes, I shall put the tree further in the middle; then I shall avoid that awkward space. That’s what I shall do. That’s what has been puzzling me” (70). Picking up the salt cellar, Lily places it “down upon a flower in a pattern in the table-cloth” to “remind herself to move the tree” (70). In this way, Mrs. Ramsay’s creative act of the dinner party guides Lily towards solving an artistic problem.

Seated at the dinner Lily is forced to confront the agitator Tansley, to ask herself “why did she mind what he said? Women can’t write, women can’t paint – what did that matter coming from him, since clearly it was not true to him but for some reason helpful to him...?” (71). As Lily allows her painting, her creativity, to take shape in her mind, Tansley views his position at the table as “extremely, even physically, uncomfortable” (74). Tansley, specifically, desires “somebody to give him the chance of asserting himself”, and Lily wrestles with her role as the young woman “to go to the help of the young man opposite so that he may expose and relieve [himself] of his vanity, of his urgent desire to assert himself” (75). But this demand on women to acquiesce to men is a social role for which Lily has already criticised Mrs. Ramsay for in her yielding to Mr. Ramsay: “she gave ... what he asked too easily” (39). Therefore, when she relents and pacifies Tansley, she does so not for Tansley’s

benefit, but for Mrs. Ramsay's "gratitude", admitting to herself that in being nice to Tansley "she had not been sincere" (76). The placement of Lily opposite Tansley enables the artist to perceive the insincerity of relationships between men and women, to dismiss Tansley's critique of her artwork, and to begin to anticipate a future outside a potential marriage, in contrast to the prospective union of Minta Doyle and Paul Rayley. If we consider the form of the *Künstlerroman* and ergo the artistry of Mrs. Ramsay, the dinner table is to the social artist the equivalent of an empty canvas to a painter, a metaphor for Mrs. Ramsay's creative capabilities both as wife and mother. Moreover, Mrs. Ramsay herself instigates the social interactions at the table, and thus she prepares Lily's realisation of moving the tree to utilise the space between the subject – Mrs. Ramsay – and Lily's objective position beyond the home.

The re-evaluation of domesticity as an art form is paramount to understanding the creativity of Mrs. Ramsay, for it is not until we visually represent her dinner table (Fig. 1) that we can wholly comprehend her achievement. An analogy to the complexities of Mrs. Ramsay's dinner-table is Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1979, Brooklyn Museum), a mixed-media art installation that seats 39 female figures – both real and fictional – around a large triangle, with a ceramic sculpture marking each woman's seating place (Fig. 2). Chicago's imaginative process began in 1974 as she reflected upon "women's history and women's exclusion from the grand sweep of art history", before she eventually "settled on the idea of a dinner party seating thirty-nine women under three table wings representing time periods, each seating thirteen guests" (Gerhard 76). Indeed, the fundamental "contribution in *The Dinner Party* [is] a visual representation of women's history ... that [symbolises and contextualises] the female body, stressing both its essentialism and its changing social meaning" (Gerhard 76). This contextualisation of the female body is of course represented in Mrs. Ramsay's dinner-table, as well as the subject of women's exclusion if we accept Nancy Ramsay as absent. Appropriately, among those seated at Chicago's dinner table is Woolf herself, whose excoriation of the angel in the house in "Professions for Women" (1942), and, more broadly, woman's domestic confinement, had been explored by Chicago and Miriam Shapiro in an earlier installation piece, *Womanhouse* (1972). Within *The Dinner Party*, Woolf's ceramic sculpture, along with Susan B. Anthony and Georgia O'Keefe, is one of the "three most difficult [plates] because they were the most ornate and sculpted of the table" (Gerhard 141). In fact, Woolf and

O'Keeffe are the “last two guests” at the table and thus represent “the culmination of the feminist narrative of *The Dinner Party*” for, as Chicago observes, they each “represent that point in time when women began to regain their power through the creative act”, when “women began to have their own language for the first time” (Gerhard 176). Here, again, there is an established seating arrangement, as one understands from Chicago’s instruction and Mrs. Ramsay’s stream of imperatives to her guests. The parallels between the two dinner parties suggest a conceptualisation of the dinner party as a female form. The demands of domesticity re-evaluated on a table by Chicago in 1979 knowingly echo Mrs. Ramsay’s creative synthesis:



Fig 2.
Judy Chicago
The Dinner Party
1974 -1979
Multimedia, 48 x 48 x 3 ft.
Installed in the Elizabeth A. Sackler
Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn
Museum, Brooklyn, NY, collection of
the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY
© Judy Chicago
Photo © Donald Woodman

If Chicago’s piece “celebrates creative women who, refusing conventional definition of the female, are in a privileged position to question the definitions of art that our culture accepts”, then more specific and more pertinent to Mrs. Ramsay’s creativity is the suggestion

that “the dinner party plates ... imply that women, who have served, have been served up and consumed ... [reminding] us of the sacrificial nature of the body ‘dressed’ as art” (Gubar 300). The initial presentation of Mrs. Ramsay’s body is certainly a point to consider, for in dressing ahead of dinner, she allows her children, Rose and Jasper, the pleasure of choosing “which jewels she was to wear” (66). The children open “all the trays of the jewel-case”, and Mrs. Ramsay allows them to “take their time to choose”, to “hold her jewels against the black dress”, to select the handkerchief and shawl, a “little ceremony ... which was gone through every night” (67). The image of Mrs. Ramsay being dressed by her children for her presentation before twelve guests is inevitably symbolic of a Last Supper, with both Mrs. Ramsay and Minta Doyle as the female body to be sacrificed. That Mrs. Ramsay will serve – has been served – is both literally and figuratively demonstrated at her dinner party, for the table can be seen as a continuation of her body.

The question of the sacrificial female body and its inevitable consumption is the final triumph of Mrs. Ramsay at the dinner party. For if the blank page implies “the sacrificial sufferings of the inarticulate female body” (Gubar 300), the impending marriage of Minta Doyle and Paul Rayley becomes the narrative that parallels Mrs. Ramsay’s eventual demise. Minta is on the threshold of marriage and thus the loss of her grandmother’s brooch – a “weeping willow ... set in pearls” – evokes extreme emotions; she cries for the loss of something as yet unreal to her, in much the same way that Rachel Vinrace in *Melymbrosia* dies in a fit of feverish hallucinations, unable to imagine herself as a wife and mother. As Nancy Ramsay remarks on the beach, though Minta sobbed for the loss of the ornament, she felt “she wasn’t crying only for that. She was crying for something else. We might all sit down and cry, she felt. But she did not know what for” (64). Minta, who “had a presentiment when she put it on that afternoon” that she would in fact lose the brooch, weeps for the emphasis placed on her body’s secret ornamentation. Though Paul Rayley, “positive he would find it” (64), quietly resolves to return to the beach under the cover of darkness the following morning, Minta is certain: what she has lost can never be regained.

In conceptualising the sacrifice of the female form and its creative nature at Mrs. Ramsay’s dinner party, Minta Doyle – as much as the hostess – is the focus of an allegorical Last Supper. And it is the main course, the serving of the Boeuf en Daube, which affirms the tenuous nature of female sexuality, the allure of domesticity, and the

figurative consumption of the artist-as-woman. However, in order to achieve this, Mrs. Ramsay must first unify all those present at the table, to converge her guests into the same moment. The climactic scene of the main dish begins with the lighting of eight candles, throwing the long table of guests into visibility, converging light and dark in a prose equivalent of chiaroscuro. At first the guests eat with their eyes on a cornucopia of “grapes and pears, of the horny pink-lined shell, of the bananas”, implying some great Bacchanalian feast “among the leopard skins and the torches of lolloping red and gold” (79). With the presentation of the centrepiece “the faces on both sides of the table were brought nearer by the candle light, and composed, as they had not been in the twilight, into a party round the table” (79). Here, the synthesis of Mrs. Ramsay’s creativity peaks, for suddenly “some change at once went through them all, as if this had really happened, and they were all conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island; had their common cause against the fluidity out there” (80). This moment of harmony and expectation is doubly marked by the arrival of newly engaged Minta Doyle and Paul Rayley, and the maid carrying the *Boeuf en Daube*.

The main course becomes in turn a presentation of Minta Doyle as much as it is about the masterpiece of Mrs. Ramsay’s dinner, for Minta: “she knew, directly she came into the room, that some miracle had happened, she wore her golden haze” (80). Curiously, Minta Doyle is directed by Mrs. Ramsay to sit next to Mr. Ramsay, while her fiancé takes his place next to the hostess (Fig. 1). Moreover, Minta, who “knew instantly by the way some man looked at her” that “she had it” (80), is seated the furthest from Mrs. Ramsay, entirely surrounded by men, a sacrificial lamb to the slaughter. The glow of Minta, now the future angel of her own home, entices Mr. Ramsay and incites a curious jealousy in his wife: “There was some quality which [Mrs. Ramsay] herself had not, some lustre, some richness, which attracted [Mr. Ramsay], amused him, led him to make favourites of girls like Minta” (81). The glowing effect of Mrs. Ramsay is appropriated by Minta Doyle during the dinner-party. Mrs. Ramsay is therefore sacrificing herself, for in positioning Minta next to Mr. Ramsay, in exposing her to Paul Rayley and the male guests, Mrs. Ramsay thus prepares Minta for the burden of female creativity and the demands on a woman’s body as her primary medium.

The visual language of bodily sacrifice at the table is inextricably linked to sexuality and death, and it is Mrs. Ramsay who does the serving: “Diving into the soft

mass, to choose a specially tender piece for William Bankes”, Mrs. Ramsay “peered into the dish, with its shiny walls and its confusion of savoury brown and yellow meats, and its bay leaves and its wine, and thought, ‘This will celebrate the occasion ... for what could be more serious than the love of a man for woman, what more commanding, more impressive, bearing in its bosom the deaths of death.’” (82). The act renews William Bankes’s “love” and “reverence” for Mrs. Ramsay, whose recipe, like Minta’s brooch, hails from her grandmother (82). And yet Lily, overcome with “the emotion, the vibration of love”, perceives the creative genius of Mrs. Ramsay as one that leads “her victims”, in the manner of a Judas steer, “to the altar” (83). Lily, seated next to Paul Rayley, “bound for adventure” while “she [was] moored to shore”, envisages the serving of the meat as being intricately bound up with the loss of Minta’s brooch: “the heat of love, its horror, its cruelty, its unscrupulosity ... the most barbaric of human passions” (83). The serving of the meal is followed by Lily’s resolute understanding of her own future marital circumstances: “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” (83). Therefore the consumption of the *Boeuf en Daube* – the third masterpiece of Mrs. Ramsay’s creations – ushers in a convergence of sorts: Bankes renews his waning devotion; the impending marriage is sealed; Lily resolves never to marry; communion is made; the body sacrificed.

In conceptualising the medium for female creativity as both the body and the dinner table, the ceremony at Mrs. Ramsay’s dinner party marks a decisive advance in the female *Künstlerroman*. Hers is a creative genius that exists in the home, and one that the artist-as-heroine, Lily Briscoe, thus rejects. Mrs. Ramsay’s dinner table is the metaphorical presentation of the female body as the closest medium in which one can create, a process traced by bloodied sacrifice and loss, as expressed by Minta Doyle, whom Mrs. Ramsay initiates into this creative realm. But in evaluating Woolf’s contrasting development of Mrs. Ramsay as an artist against Lily Briscoe, it cannot be denied that the artist-as-wife-and-mother provides the parameters within which Lily can feasibly attain her vision. Though Lily wishes to create beyond the traditional mode of creativity exemplified by Mrs. Ramsay, the latter provides the context and the prompt for this to take place.

2.3 “Every House had its Angel”: Feminine Influence and Masculine Oppression

If death is the ultimate form of silencing for the female artist in the *Künstlerroman*, suggested by *Melymbrosia*, what are we make of a *Künstlerroman* in which the creative-domestic heroine dies *after* achieving her artistic vision? And yet, Mrs. Ramsay reappears to Lily Briscoe; Mrs. Ramsay remains an active agent in the narrative. How does this, if at all, affect the creative development of Lily Briscoe, and in what way does Mrs. Ramsay retain a sense of permanence?

In 1931, Woolf delivered a paper to The Women’s Service League that would later be posthumously published in *Death of the Moth and Other Essays* as “Professions for Women” (1942). The essay articulates the battle of the woman writer to overcome a phantom, a spectral being that seemingly comes “between me and my paper” (202). This phantom Woolf describes as one of menace: “It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her” (202). And her description of the angel recalls the guiles of Mrs. Ramsay as one such menace:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of her 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. (202)

Similarly, too, Woolf’s opposition to the angel is reminiscent of Lily’s antagonism to Mrs. Ramsay’s charms and her temptation to be nice to Tansley at the dinner table:

I took my pen in my hand to review that novel by a famous man, she slipped behind me and whispered: ‘My dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all be pure. (203)

That the angel demands of Woolf a tempered response, a degree of insincerity to soothe and pacify the male novelist, is exactly what Mrs. Ramsay desires of Lily towards Charles Tansley. Jane Lilienfield reaffirms the conflict Mrs. Ramsay presents for the “woman who wishes not to be the archetypal mother and wife” and thus the process she “must go through in order to separate herself from an almost overwhelming urge to fuse herself with such a mother” (347). Therefore, much like Woolf repeatedly grappling with the presence of the angel while writing, Lily’s “initiation into womanhood is the process by which she turns from the stranglehold of the archetype to ... allow her spirit to achieve ... independence and maturity” (Lilienfield 347). But, as Woolf notes, though she turns and “[catches the angel] by the throat”, or flings the inkpot in her direction, it is the angel’s “fictitious nature” that sees her return: “It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality. She was always creeping back when I thought I had despatched her” (203). Despite death, then, Mrs. Ramsay, like the angel, undeniably remains an active agent in the narrative, ever present in Lily’s desire for distance, and her spiritual presence allows the material in Lily’s subconscious full expression in her art.

Of course, within “The Lighthouse” section, it is plausible that the woman painter is analogous to the woman writer, for the acting of killing the angel is explicitly described by Woolf as the chief “occupation of a woman writer” (204). But Lily does not expressly kill off Mrs. Ramsay, and so in her absence Lily comes to supplant her creativity. If we extrapolate the death of Mrs. Ramsay then from the narrative, and its profound psychological effect on Lily, we can begin to understand the shift in the female *Künstlerroman*, and how its narrative form affects the figure of the artist. To reach Mrs. Ramsay, to enable her return, Lily must return to the past, somewhere she physically cannot journey. Therefore, in slaying the angel in the house, the *Künstlerroman* in *To the Lighthouse* turns to the interiority of Lily Briscoe, the creative feminine mind, which “consciously acknowledges the influence of Mrs. Ramsay as a fellow artist who has created enduring moments that remain in one’s memory” (Ronchetti 76).

It is precisely this sense of Mrs. Ramsay’s endurance that “Time Passes” presents, for it is a section marked by inaction, the domestic realm seemingly left in a state of suspended animation, interspersed with parenthetical moments of death, destruction, and allusions to war. As the lights dim and darkness begins, the section opens with a

divination from William Bankes that one “must wait for the future to show” (103). Indeed, the opening passage ushers in the night, where “nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness”, which seemingly strips the characters of their ability to perceive one another clearly: “There was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say ‘This is he’ or ‘This is she’” (103). There is a deliberate attempt here to present “Time Passes”, an entire decade, in one night to better conceptualise the permanence of Mrs. Ramsay. As the final light – Mr. Carmichael’s candle – ceases, “whatever else may perish and disappear what lies here is steadfast ... here you can neither touch nor destroy” (104). The narrative here presents the Ramsay home when void of its inhabitants, and so “Time Passes” puts into practice Mr. Ramsay’s philosophy of attempting to imagine an object when you are not there to see it. The question here, “But what after all is one night?” implies that this “short space” of time, which can “lengthen” and “darken”, is a malleable construct, and we are thus invited to think upon the degradation of Mrs. Ramsay’s homestead when, of course, she is no longer there. Though the entire section recounts a decade, “Time Passes”, which commenced with night falling on the Ramsay home, concludes with the arrival of dawn, where the gloom of darkness is broken by the sun “[lifting] the curtains, [breaking] the veil on their eyes” (117). By presenting an entire decade as one night, the pliable connection of time to reality furthers these questions of endurance and permanence, and thus the proximity of Mrs. Ramsay to Lily Briscoe is closer than it seems.

Therefore, if the angel in the house dominates the first section of the novel, the final section is the territory of the female creative mind outside the home, exemplified in Lily who once again erects her easel by the hedge, in the garden beyond the confines of the Ramsay household. Moreover, the form of the novel reflects this divide, for the dominion of each artist is separated by “Time Passes”, a structure similarly observed on Lily Briscoe’s canvas. Being able to connect these two creative selves is Lily’s chief artistic concern. She begins to philosophise in “The Lighthouse” on her returned position in the Ramsay house, now bereft of the mother: “What does it all mean then, what can it all mean?” (121). She furthers this desire – to make sense of the absence of Mrs. Ramsay – with what she earlier questioned as the complicated task of “how to connect this mass on the right hand to that on the left” (46), to bridge, metaphorically speaking, the creativity of Mrs. Ramsay with her own: “The question

was of some relation between those masses. She had borne it in her mind all these years. It seemed as if the solution had come to her: she knew now what she wanted to do” (123). As the joint protagonist of a female *Künstlerroman*, Lily must therefore rectify her position to each opposing mass to achieve her painterly epiphany; the feminine influence of Mrs. Ramsay and the masculine oppression towards the female self, exemplified for Lily by Charles Tansley. But, as seen at Mrs. Ramsay’s dinner party, synthesis begets a creative genesis; the abstract relationship of form on her canvas is emblematic of a unification of these two opposing forces. It is this representation, this understanding, which demonstrates an undivided mind in Lily Briscoe, and ushers in her vision.

The proximity of Mrs. Ramsay to Lily’s creativity is an integral question of the female artist’s agency outside the home, but it does not explain how Lily upholds a sense of creative and emotional autonomy in the female *Künstlerroman* while still resisting the gendered role of domesticity. Lily’s canvas traces her growth as a female artist but her relative position to the Ramsay household maintains the “sense that ... there is little distance between her life and her art” (Gubar 299). For this reason, Lily explicitly desires a physical separation from the home, the domain of Mrs. Ramsay, and again erects her easel and canvas “on the edge of the lawn” to achieve the same perspective she had a decade ago: “Yes, it must have been here that she had stood ten years ago. There was the wall; the hedge; the tree” (123). And yet the looming presence of Mr. Ramsay disturbs her vision. Lily uses her “clean canvas” as a “barrier” to “ward off” the stalking offensive of Mr. Ramsay, “but it was out of the question. Let him be fifty feet away, let him not even speak to you, let him not even see you, he permeated, he prevailed, he imposed himself. He changed everything” (124). Here, Lily puts down her paintbrush and is again tempted to succumb to the delight and rapture Mrs. Ramsay gave with her sympathetic nature, to yield to Mr. Ramsay, to “give him what she could” (125).

Of course, Lily does not soothe Mr. Ramsay in the same manner as his wife. They instead “stood there, isolated from the rest of the world” while “his immense self-pity, his demand for sympathy poured and spread itself in pools at her feet” (126). Dumbstruck, she remarks on his “beautiful boots”, and though expecting “one of his sudden roars of ill-temper”, she is instead party to a treatise of sorts on the delicate nature of shoelaces and knots: “they had reached, she felt, a sunny island where peace

dwelt, sanity reigned and the sun forever shone” (127). The significance of Lily partially yielding her sympathies briefly raises the possibility of creative harmony, arguably ameliorating her position to Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, the gendered symbols of marriage in the text. And though Lily wishes to say something more substantial to Mr. Ramsay, she perceives that “her feeling had come too late” and inevitably realises that “there was no helping [him] on the journey he was going” (128). It is the eponymous journey that precisely marks Lily’s attempts to conjure the image of Mrs. Ramsay, a feat possible in the absence of Mr. Ramsay, the overbearing patriarchal figure with whom she momentarily shares a mutual sense of affinity.

What, then, can we say of the motif of travel in the female *Künstlerroman* when the artist in question, Lily Briscoe, does not take part in what is supposedly the central action of the text: the journey to the lighthouse? Lily is unlike Rachel Vinrace in *Melymbrosia* in that she does not travel anywhere, except to the Isle of Skye, a journey not detailed in the narrative. So where Rachel Vinrace, as a burgeoning creative mind, completes a physical journey only to be killed off, Lily’s progression is paradoxically marked by physical inertia: a voyage *inward*, rather than *outward*. Lily captures the internal creative journey of self-discovery, successfully recovering the spectral image of Mrs. Ramsay and transforming it into her painting. In terms of her ability to travel through the past, she moves beyond the boundaries of time in “The Lighthouse”. As Lily tunnels through the past to reach the “thing itself”, the solution to the problem which “evaded her” (158), she demands the desire to perceive the nature of reality from the perspective of Mrs. Ramsay’s “scientific mind”: “One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought” (161). Indeed, though physically absent in “Time Passes” and “The Lighthouse”, Charles Tansley here returns to “upset the proportions of one’s world” (161) as Lily interrogates the problem of space on her canvas. Likening the scholar to the “red, energetic ants” which crawl nearby, Lily reaffirms the idea that “for some odd reason” Tansley did “not so much [believe]” his own mantra – “women can’t write, women can’t paint” – but instead “wished it” (161). This is of course reminiscent of the pleasure Mr. Ramsay seeks in being disparaging of the arts. Spurred on by her soothing of Mr. Ramsay, Lily concedes “her own idea of [Tansley] was grotesque ... They served private purposes of one’s own”, and inevitably recognises that “if she wanted to be serious about him she had to help

herself to Mrs. Ramsay's saying, to look at him through her eyes" (161). For Lily as a heroine in the female *Künstlerroman*, it is Tansley who embodies the conundrum of masculine oppression and female self-censorship; he is the only character in the text who explicitly dismisses the concept of woman-as-artist. Tansley here is the equivalent for Lily that Mr. Ramsay is for Mrs. Ramsay, in the sense that both Tansley and Mr. Ramsay dismiss women as artists and the arts as decoration respectively. The difference between the artist-as-mother-and-wife and artist-as-heroine is that while Mrs. Ramsay yields to her husband, Lily refuses to acquiesce to Tansley.

Therefore, in terms of creative influence on the female artist in the narrative, Tansley represents the disquiet felt by women artists, the "anxiety of authorship", in which the "female writer's battle for self-creation involves her in a revisionary process" (Gilbert and Gubar 49). Though Lily is a painter and not a writer, she puts into practice Woolf's advice to women writers: she confronts her own angel. Lily's personal growth is tied closely to her abstract representation of this reality on her canvas, and thus the analogy of revision remains a pertinent feature of the text. Indeed, the "revisionary struggle" of the artist "often becomes a struggle for what Adrienne Rich has called, "Revision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (Gilbert and Gubar 49). Similarly too, the artist "can begin such a struggle only by actively seeking a *female* precursor", which inevitably sees her "search for a female model not because she wants dutifully to comply with male definitions of her 'femininity' but because she must legitimise her own rebellious endeavours" (Gilbert and Gubar 50). This revisionary process marks the beginning of self-creation in the female artist and supplants the need for travel in a female *Künstlerroman*. Lily explicitly seeks out a female precursor (Mrs. Ramsay), and looks back, revisits the past, in an attempt to see with fresh eyes – fifty pairs of them, in all – to bring to the surface the artistic authority that has evaded her, to overcome the anxiety of production, presented in the text by Tansley's mantra against female creativity.

All the while, tunnelling into the past, Lily remains consciously aware of the presence of a little boat on the blue sea, for "so much" of her quest for artistic self-determination "depends ... upon distance" (156), both in time and space. As Mr. Ramsay journeys with Cam and James, "her feeling for [him] changed as he sailed further and further across the bay. It seemed to be elongated, stretched out; he seemed

to become more and more remote” (156). Indeed, Lily perceives that her relationship to Mr. Carmichael “was different altogether, because he was so near”, suggesting that Mrs. Ramsay’s metaphysical proximity – intimated only by Lily’s revisionary tunnelling – surpasses Mr. Ramsay’s dwindling physical presence, thus reduced to the “brown speck of [his] sailing boat” (157). For Lily on the lawn, “distance had an extraordinary power”, and Mr. Ramsay, Cam, and James are “swallowed up” in the process: “she felt, they were gone forever, they had become part of the nature of things” (154). Lily’s artistic vision is therefore marked by the shift in reality to the uncanny, the “old horror ... to want and want and not to have”, for at once Mrs. Ramsay reappears as solid as she had been when alive, the more unreal Mr. Ramsay’s presence becomes. In fact, Mr. Ramsay has arrived at the lighthouse, though he says nothing to mark the occasion; it is Lily who, perceiving the lighthouse “had become almost invisible”, deductively reasons “he must have reached it ... he has landed ... it is finished” (169). Reflecting, too, on her creative practice, Lily recognises the impermanence of her picture, which “would be hung in the attics ... it would be destroyed”, but “with a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought ... I have had my vision” (170). As Bellamy suggests, “this moment of completion might be considered the closest Woolf comes to a self-portrait, noting the wondrous synchronicity of the finishing of the novel and the painting” for “the span of the novel is the span also of the painting as a process, leaving the reader with the open ending that never ends” (Bellamy 140). While the journey to the lighthouse underpins the plot in the *Künstlerroman* it is the action of female creativity that narrates its completion; it is Mrs. Ramsay who initially suggests the excursion and Lily Briscoe who marks its conclusion with a stroke. Lily’s imaginative perception of Mr. Ramsay reaching his goal while she simultaneously achieves her own by finishing the painting suggests that Lily and Mrs. Ramsay’s creativity are interfused to the end. The final action of Lily’s painting “brings all of the composition into balance, the triangle or pyramid that forms the structure” and thus “these transmodernist resonances across colonial spaces, time zones, and geography between women artists in the real and the textual worlds give extended meaning to the dynamic portrait of Lily Briscoe” (Bellamy 143). Here, Woolf successfully augments a fractured genre to present a completed artistic protagonist, ushering in a new kind of portrait in her novels. The completion of Lily’s

creative journey – the convergence of the artist-as-wife-and-mother and artist-as-heroine – thus concludes the female *Künstlerroman* in *To the Lighthouse*.

Of course, there are many unanswered questions despite Lily Briscoe's painterly vision. How, for example, does Lily maintain her life as an artist? The question of supporting herself financially as a painter is not explored in the text. Where Moretti conceded that the *Bildungsroman* narrative of the 'Other', namely the working-class and women, is curiously absent from literature of the nineteenth century, Woolf presents Lily as being both working-class and a woman. She is revealed as living above a shop-front, with an older father to support, but Woolf glosses over the logistics of class and simply focuses on the psychological wanderings of the female creative process. What kind of female *Künstlerroman* does this present if one does not fully interrogate the social conditions necessary for female creativity outside the rigid strictures of domesticity? What does it mean to focus instead on the interiority of the female artist over the external, cultural positioning of her quest for self-determination? Is Lily therefore limited in her mode of production? Does Woolf develop Lily as an artist by converging the subjectivity of her own production as a writer with her sister Vanessa's painterly life? The questions are endless. What seems clear here is that, for Woolf, a straightforward *Künstlerroman*, from youth, through adolescence, to creative realisation, is not possible when the protagonist is a woman.

Chapter Three: *Orlando*

3.1 The Heat and Violence: “Caught and Tangled in a Woman’s Body”

The explicit treatment of transsexuality in *Orlando: A Biography* further expands the particular version of the female *Künstlerroman* developed by Virginia Woolf, negotiating the question of gender and the artist through the transmutation of Orlando. The novel’s fantasy element, combined with the specific presence of a biographer-as-narrator, produces a female *Künstlerroman* arguably more malleable than *Melymbrosia/The Voyage Out* – where the impossibility of a creative future for Rachel Vinrace triggers her death – or *To the Lighthouse*, where the narrative is defined by its strict adherence to rigidity and form. By contrast, the protagonist in *Orlando: A Biography* reflects this fluidity of form, transforming from man to woman, unruffled by the physical change.

But what is it about this metamorphosis that suggests Orlando is – was – always a woman? Does the concept of the “female artist”, the feminist consciousness, and the female imagination transcend the symbolic modes of reference in the narrative? Indeed, what are we to make of a female *Künstlerroman* where the creative female in question has her origins in masculinity? Using the character of Orlando and the enduring persona of ‘the critic’ (personified in both *Orlando: A Biography* and *A Room of One’s Own* as Nick Greene), Woolf addresses the discomfort of creating as a woman in a masculine culture. The intertextual relationship between *Orlando* and *A Room of One’s Own* – written within twelve months of each other – encapsulates Woolf’s ambition for *Orlando* as the epistemological framework for the origins of the female artist. Through mapping the intertextual relationship between an alternate history for women and fiction in *A Room of One’s Own* and the figure of the poet in *Orlando: A Biography*, this chapter will examine the primacy of biography to the formation of the female *Künstlerroman*, suggesting that the malleability of the biographical form in fiction permits an equally fluid artist-as-heroine.

3.2 Women and Fiction: An Alternative History?

Woolf’s lectures on the subject of women and fiction, delivered to the Arts Society at Newnham and Girton Colleges during late October, 1928, lay the foundation for the feminist polemic *A Room of One’s Own*. Speaking of the lectures

in *A Writer's Diary*, Woolf – who was travelling at the time with Vita Sackville-West – observes that while intellect and fervor paint the faces of the attending girls, there is a patent disconnect with their present and future opportunities as women graduates: “Thank God, my long toil at the women’s lecture is this moment ended. I am back from speaking at Girton, in floods of rain. Starved but valiant young women – that’s my impression. Intelligent, eager, poor; destined to become schoolmistresses in shoals. I blandly told them all to drink wine and have a room of their own. Why should all the splendour, all the luxury of life be lavished on the Julians and Francises, and none on the Phares and the Thomases?” (134) Later, in the same entry, her attention turns to the college itself: “The corridors of Girton are like vaults in some horrid high church cathedral – on and on they go, cold and shiny, with a light burning. High Gothic rooms: acres of bright brown wood; here and there a photograph” (135). The resulting impression is one of spirited but arguably trapped women, confined to the vault-like halls of Girton, like prisoners within a lesser institution.

Publishing *Orlando: A Biography* mere weeks before these lectures, Woolf entered a period of writing that sought to interrogate the experience of the contemporary female creator, as well as her relationship to the past; she dwelt on the question of a feminine aesthetic, the creative androgyne, and the space women occupy in a masculine literary hierarchy. “I want to write a history,” she decides the week after speaking at Girton, “say of Newnham or the women’s movement, in the same vein. The vein is deep in me – at least sparkling, urgent” (136). The “vein” of which she speaks is the fanciful, spirited prose she employed as a satirical biographer in *Orlando: A Biography*. But while the narrator’s pseudo-profession in the novel is explicitly identified, the speaker, or, rather, speakers presented in *A Room of One’s Own* are less defined; the speaker invites the reader to call her “Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any other name you please” for “it is not a matter of any importance” (6). The anticipation of a single, unified voice in *A Room of One’s Own* is contradicted, and the resulting cluster of selves consequently reveals the multiplicity of the subject itself: women and fiction.

As the speaker acknowledges in the opening paragraph, the subject of her essay is not as simple as it first appears: “The title women and fiction might mean ... women and what they are like; or it might mean women and the fiction that they write; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them; or it might

mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together” and we should “consider them in that light” (5). From the moment the subject is identified, the speaker points out that if the premise of her essay – women and fiction – cannot itself be understood, or clearly explained in a simple sentence, then any decisive truth is a moot point: “When I began to consider the subject in this last way, which seemed the most interesting, I soon saw it had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to come to a conclusion” (5). Eschewing any hope of locating an incontrovertible “nugget of pure truth”, and the “duty of coming to a conclusion”, the speaker instead offers the mantra that has become much quoted: “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (6). Much like the “starved but valiant young women” of Girton, the speaker scorns the “reprehensible poverty” of the female sex: “What had our mothers been doing then that they had no wealth to leave us?” (22). The fictional women’s college she visits for supper – a meagre meal of soup, beef, greens, potatoes, prunes, and custard – is revealed to be propped up by charitable grants, and the speaker laments their impoverished circumstances when compared to the immensity, splendour, and wealth of the male colleges, established by the “purses of men” (11):

If only Mrs. Seton and her mother and her mother before her had learnt the great art of making money and had left their money, like their fathers and their grandfathers before them, to found fellowships and lectureships and prizes and scholarships to the use of their own sex, we might have dined very tolerably up here alone off a bird and a bottle of wine ... We might have been exploring or writing; mooning about the venerable places of earth; sitting contemplative on the steps of the Parthenon, or going at ten to an office and coming home comfortably at half past four to write a little poetry. (23)

The lack of a female scholarly institution, and the historical failure to equip women with the provisions with which to support their daughters and, indeed, their daughters’ daughters, leaves the speaker frustrated. The “snag in the argument” is that if “Mrs. Seton and her like had gone into business at the age of fifteen, there would have been ... no Mary” (23). Again, the paradox of women’s absence plagues the

speaker. It is a subject more recently analysed in Rebecca Solnit's essay "Grandmother Spider" (2014). But it is not so much women's erasure from history that she identifies as her major bone of contention, but rather the fact that this kind of obliteration is systemic, appearing generation after generation: "I have a friend whose family tree has been traced back a thousand years, but no women exist on it ... Thus coherence – of patriarchy, of ancestry, of narrative – is made by erasure and exclusion" (63). The expunging of women is a generational problem, and, much like the speaker of *A Room of One's Own*, Solnit identifies the "business of naming" as one such method of "female nonexistence": "names erased a woman's genealogy and even her existence", for though "their children take the father's name" and she may keep her own, "until very recently, married women were addressed by their husbands' names, prefaced by *Mrs.* ... She had no separate existence" (65).

Returning then to the business of Mary Seton's mother, and her mother before her, who "had no money to leave us", was ever subservient to family life and unable both to amass "a fortune and [bear] thirteen children", the speaker draws parallels between women's education and her unfortunate encounter with the Oxbridge beadle while trying to view the manuscript of Milton's "Lycidas": "How unpleasant it is to be locked out" (25). The statement of course has wider ramifications than simply being disallowed access to a manuscript. But, ruminating here on generations of women confined to family duties, she gravely realises "how it is worse perhaps to be locked in" (25-26). The contradicting image of being concurrently locked in-and-out is reminiscent of Woolf's initial impression of the faces at Girton, echoing the complexities of women's relationship to fiction. To search then for an unprejudiced account of women's literary history, the speaker begins with an institution, for "if truth is not to be found on the shelves of the British Museum, where, I asked myself, picking up a notebook and a pencil, is truth?" (27). Of course, no such account exists for her and the visit is fruitless; women are once more locked out. In fact, the treatises she encounters on women are superficial, "frivolous and facetious" and "written by men" (32). Deprived of autonomy, locked-and-written-out, women's literary history is determined by male scholars, but the premise – that nothing is known about any woman writer prior to the eighteenth century – is unsettling since it is categorically untrue. How, then, should one approach the disparity between women and fiction if

the speaker does not so much watch “truth run through [her] fingers” as seemingly opens her own fingers?

The problem lies with the speaker’s position, for she is not aligning herself as an historian but as a biographer, writing in the same manner as the narrator of *Orlando: A Biography*. That Woolf ventured into the thematic implications of biography in fiction is not entirely unexpected; her father, Leslie Stephen, was the first editor for the seminal *Dictionary of National Biography* (1885). Writing of the form in her essay “The New Biography” for the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1927, Woolf presents the “whole problem” of constructing biographical narratives as a two-part issue. On the one hand, though the “truthful transmission of personality” is stipulated by Sir Sidney Lee⁵ as biography’s primary function, it is countered by what Woolf calls the truth of the subject: “on the one hand there is truth; on the other there is personality” (149). A manipulated version of truth, then, is the biographer’s chief function, and its location is squarely in the public sphere: “The truth which biography demands, is truth in its hardest, most obdurate form; it is truth as truth is to be found in the British Museum; it is truth out of which all vapour of falsehood has been pressed by the weight of research” (149). Why does the speaker in *A Room of One’s Own* then ignore fact and dismiss research in the institutions? Because in pressing out the “vapour of falsehood”, fact must yield to allow the conveyance of personality:

For in order that the light of personality may shine through, facts must be manipulated; some must be brightened; others shaded; yet, in the process, they must never lose their integrity. And it is obvious that it is easier to obey these precepts by considering that the true life of your subject shows itself in action which is evident rather than in that inner life of thought and emotion which means darkly and obscurely through the hidden channels of the soul. (150)

Like the cultural expunging presented in “Grandmother Spider”, the speaker imagines herself faced with an obliterated history, a vacuum of truth, but by establishing herself as an authoritative biographer, and not an encyclopaedic historian,

⁵ Sidney Lee succeeded Leslie Stephen as editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography* in 1891.

she is free to incorporate an element of personality in the text, suggesting a playful, highly fictionalised rewrite of the subject of women and fiction. “Let it be fact one feels,” Woolf writes of the New Biography, “or let it be fiction; the imagination will not serve under two masters simultaneously” (154). This suggests that in reading *A Room of One’s Own* one cannot entertain the notion of a factual history and still relish the personality of its speaker⁶.

Indeed, the speaker brazenly negates the task of an accurate historical account as being beyond her expertise:

All these facts lie somewhere, presumably, in parish registers and account books; the life of the average Elizabethan woman must be scattered about somewhere, could one collect it and make a book of it. It would be ambitious beyond my daring, I thought, looking about the shelves for books that were not there, to suggest the students of those famous colleges that they should rewrite history, though I own that it often seems a little queer as it is, unreal, lopsided; but why should they not add a supplement to history? (47)

Aspersions are cast, questions are asked, and the speaker challenges the validity of her own truth. After presenting the metaphor of ‘Judith’ Shakespeare and concluding that “it is unthinkable that any woman in Shakespeare’s day”, let alone his fictional sister, “should have [his] genius”, the speaker flippantly ventures that throughout history those who signed their poems ‘Anon’ were predominantly women. But directly she undermines her authority on the subject: “This may be true or it may be false – who can say?” (51). Similarly, too, as she toys with the idea of recasting the truth of history, her personality becomes increasingly hyperbolic: “Towards the end of the eighteenth century a change came about which, if I were rewriting history, I should describe more fully and think of greater important than the Crusades or the War of the Roses. The middle-class woman began to write” (66). By establishing herself as a biographer of sorts – half fact, half personality – she concludes that

⁶ In the introduction to her work, *Producing Women’s Poetry, 1600 -1730: Text and Paratext, Manuscript and Print*, Gillian Wright acknowledges that “*A Room of One’s Own*, so compelling as a polemic, is shaky as history. Over eighty years after it was first published, scholarly understanding of early modern English literature – by men as well as women – has changed considerably, and many of the assumptions, spoken and unspoken, on which Woolf’s argument depends now seem at best tendentious, at worst misinformed and misplaced” (5).

though much time has passed, the figure of the female artist – whether poet, writer, playwright – remains elusive.

It is not therefore that no conclusion can logically be drawn on the subject of women and fiction but, rather, that if one wishes to grasp the truth before it slips so unceremoniously through one's fingers, it cannot be done by isolating one period, one artist, one reality from the next. The challenge presented by the speaker in *A Room of One's Own* parallels the desire of the female artist to achieve self-determination by reshaping her narrative history. In this way, the presence of biography in Woolf's *Künstlerroman*, a genre traditionally unsuited for a female protagonist, also exhibits the desire to rewrite form, to narrate female experiences, and to assert the autonomy of the female artist by politicising the personal.

3.3 Satire and Wildness: Biography and the Artist

Writing of the state of biography in the twentieth century, Woolf describes an altered perception of the subject by the writer:

He is no longer the serious and sympathetic companion ... Whether friend or enemy, admiring or critical, he is an equal. In any case, he preserves his freedom and his right to independent judgment. Moreover, he does not think himself constrained to follow every step of the way. Raised upon a little eminence which his independence has made for him, he sees his subject spread about him. He chooses; he synthesises; in short, he has ceased to be the chronicler; he has become the artist. ("The New Biography", 152).⁷

In considering the proximity of biography and autobiography to the formation of a female *Künstlerroman*, the biographer must function as a character in the narrative: is then the real artist of *Orlando* the omniscient biographer, or the titular character? The figures intermingle as the centuries pass and we are therefore directed to read their

⁷ It seems likely here that Woolf has in mind Lytton Strachey, whose seminal work, *Eminent Victorians* (1918), recast the genre of biography. Writing of Strachey's conception of biography, Charles Richard Sanders remarks that for Strachey, "The basis of all good biography must be ... the humanistic respect for men – men in their separateness as distinct from lower creatures and in their separateness apart from economical, political, ethical, and religious theories; men in their separateness as distinct from one another, men as individuals, various, living, free" (295).

development alongside each other. The poets and the critics in *Orlando* – Pope, Swift, Addison, and Nick Greene, to name a few – are trusted with presenting the form of history deemed closer to the truth, but it is the biographer, not Orlando, who chronicles the latter’s truth: the historical, physiological, socio-political, sexual, and creative development of the female artist.

Woolf explicitly conceived of *Orlando: A Biography* as free-flowing, highly satirical, a complete movement away from the concreteness of her former works: “sapphism is to be suggested”, she writes in March 1927, with “satire ... to be the main note, satire and wildness” (*A Writer’s Diary* 98). But while *Orlando: A Biography* as a *Künstlerroman* certainly has its own artistic merits, it is important to acknowledge its novelistic origins lie in Vita Sackville-West’s biography of her family and estate, *Knole and the Sackvilles* (1922). As Karyn Z. Sproles notes in “Orlando: A Biography of Desire”, the novel is “as much about Knole as it is about Sackville-West” for *Orlando: A Biography* “parodies” Sackville-West’s biography, “a copy of which [she] sent to Woolf, at Woolf’s request, soon after they met” (71). Like the female artist recasting her own narrative, Sackville-West “writes her history of the house [and] rewrites the line of succession to conclude with herself as Knole’s rightful heir” (Sproles 71)⁸. In doing so, Sackville-West aligns herself with the future intentions of the speaker-come-biographer in *A Room of One’s Own*, for, as Sproles points out, “(re)writing history is another way to fulfil desire” (71).

Sackville-West’s deliberate augmentation of her lineage to suit her purposes undeniably influenced the fluctuation between fact and fiction Woolf felt was necessary in biographical writing. Sproles points out that it was “while reading *Knole and the Sackvilles* [that] Woolf found herself wishing to revolutionise biography” (72). Conscious then of the hybridity of biography and autobiography, coupled with the fluidity of fact and fiction, Woolf dashed off *Orlando: A Biography* more quickly than her previous novels, but was amused and dismayed when it was placed on the shelves with other biographies – not fictions – in a London bookstore. In her diary, she writes in September 1928: “No one wants biography. But it is a novel, says Miss Ritchie. But it is called a biography on the title page, they say. It will have to go to the

⁸ The ending of *Knole and the Sackvilles* parallels the final scenes of Sally Potter’s adaptation of *Orlando* (1992), in which the character of Orlando is clearly identified as her own biographer and regularly breaks the fourth wall, interacting with the audience in much the same way as the biographer in the text addresses the reader. The film deviates from the narrative of Woolf’s novel, however, with Orlando remaining unmarried and having a daughter, not a son, meaning her estate passes from her ownership.

Biography shelf ... a high price to pay for the fun of calling it a biography. And I was so sure it was going to be the one popular book!” (III: 198). The previous March, while writing the novel she felt it was “all a joke; & yet gay & quick reading I think; a writer’s holiday. I feel more & more sure that I will never write a novel again”, concluding a few days later that it was “too long for a joke, & too frivolous for a serious book” (III: 177). But what is intriguing is the self-conscious awareness of *Orlando: A Biography*’s form, which vacillates between fiction and biography, and the creeping doubt over whether any future works could be considered novels: “I doubt that I shall ever write another novel after O”, Woolf definitively asserts in February 1928, “I shall invent a new name for them” (III: 176). Indeed, after *Orlando: A Biography*, Woolf published the long-form essay, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), followed by the highly experimental stream-of-consciousness novel, *The Waves* (1931), which preceded yet another fictionalised biography, *Flush* (1933), a cross-genre impressionist view of London, seen through the eyes of Elizabeth Barrett-Browning’s cocker-spaniel, Flush.

Woolf’s desires for self-determination and female reclamation through a new biography “are departures from the idea of truth triumphant in *To the Lighthouse*, and also rejections of the style and social propriety implicit in it”, for her promises of a spirited style and “wildness informs the entirety of the new conception, and is to be found in the action of the omniscient narrator as well as in the action of the protagonist” (Alexander 127-128). Therefore, the previous idiosyncrasies of the female *Künstlerroman* noted in *Melymbrosia/The Voyage Out* and *To the Lighthouse* undoubtedly influence the narrative performance of their respective creative protagonists. And so, in the same vein, Woolf’s first venture into the biographical form, which insists upon fantasy and satire, presents a protagonist of equal malleability. The relationship between the narrative form in *Orlando: A Biography* and the figure of the artist is therefore symbiotic; where the former is marked by its ability to parody the unyielding spirit of the age, the latter reflects the ceaseless wanderings of the artistic mind.

3.4 “Of Man’s Treachery”: Gender Fluidity in the Female *Künstlerroman*

If the role of the biographer is to present the most accurate version of the subject, then we must ask how this form intersects with the female *Künstlerroman*,

which is concerned neither with truthfulness of the subject nor a subtle revision of history, but instead with the journey of the artistic self. Orlando begins the novel as an adolescent male in sixteenth-century England, and the “good biographer” is quick to note that though the young boy’s physical carriage compels a desire to “rhapsodise”, his temperament oscillates from the passionate to the melancholic to the dramatic: “Sights disturbed him, like that of his mother, a very beautiful lady in green walking out to feed the peacocks with Twitchett, her maid, behind her; sights exalted him – the birds and the trees; and made him in love with death” (5). Moreover, his fluency in verse is marked by his abstraction of form, so while the young poet “was describing, as all young poets are for ever describing, nature” he is unable to adequately reach an objective representation of the subject – here, nature – much like Lily Briscoe attempting in “The Window” to objectively recast the subject of Mrs. Ramsay and James as a formalist shape. Orlando’s writing comes to a stop: “In order to match the shade of green precisely he looked ... at the thing itself ... After that, of course, he could write no more. Green in nature is one thing, green in literature is another ... The shade of green Orlando now saw spoilt his rhyme and split his metre” (5). The biographer establishes Orlando clearly as an artistic soul who desires kinship with nature, for the poet “loved solitary places, vast views, and to feel himself for ever and ever and ever alone” (6). The scene of maternal discomfort – for his mother wears green – and his subsequent artistic frustration is reminiscent of Mrs. Ramsay’s green shawl, used to cover the boar’s skull in Cam’s and James’s room, and Lily’s smearing of green paint on her palette as she painstakingly tries to recreate her painting.

Surely if the novel is read as a female *Künstlerroman* then the transitioning of the artist’s gender is the text’s preeminent concern. As I have already established, the male *Künstlerroman* as a form is totally incapable of answering the cultural absurdity of female creativity. Orlando as a protagonist therefore presents a unique paradox; in the act of writing a male character into a female *Künstlerroman* defined by its narrative ability to delve into the character’s psyche over the course of nearly four centuries, and so marked by its distinctive narrator, the biographer, Woolf successfully subverts the traditional masculine form, enabling the protagonist’s fantastic gender transition. At a cursory glance the characterisation of Orlando in the narrative can be seen similar to that of the protagonist of a male *Künstlerroman*, and we can interpret Orlando’s initial flight from the maternal and the desire for perfect

solitude as comparable with the male *Bildungsroman*. But *Orlando: A Biography* certainly deviates from the male form, as the narrative expressly concerns itself with the puzzle of a self-determined creativity within the identity of a female artist. This is achieved by incorporating elements of the female initiation plot – used by Woolf in *Melymbrosia/The Voyage Out* to explore the burgeoning artist-figure of Rachel Vinrace – to examine the private and public relationship of the female artist to society. Rachel, as an artist-type, voyages out to seek an alternative future beyond the cultural expectations demanded of her – namely her marriage to Terrence Hewet – only to find no such possibility exists: her creative development is stymied and she is enclosed within her own mind; she is not magnified, but reduced. Emergence is never reached and she dies, her artistic potential unfulfilled. By contrast, Orlando, as a male, circumvents the historical context of women’s inability to travel unaccompanied, a fact lamented by Vinrace. Relentlessly pursued by the Archduchess Harriet Griselda, Orlando sees it is “not Love, the Bird of Paradise, that flopped, foully and disgustingly upon his shoulders” but rather “Lust the vulture”, and so, “realising that his home was uninhabitable, and that steps must be taken to end the matter instantly, he did what any other young man would have done in his place, and asked King Charles to send him as Ambassador Extraordinary to Constantinople” (73).

But we must first consider Orlando’s relationship to the persistence of time in the narrative, for what marks his departure to Constantinople as a turning point in the novel is that his flight from marriage comes after a lengthy period in which he exists in self-imposed exile, shut up in his home with his dogs, his poetry, and the bones of his ancestors. He is not confined, as it were, but his caustic treatment at the hands of critic Nick Greene – who writes a jovial mockery of the lovesick Lord Orlando – is similar to the manager’s treatment of Judith Shakespeare in *A Room of One’s Own*, and the wider parodying of Lady Winchilsea, also described at length in the polemic. The latter is said to have “shut herself up in the country to write” and “suffered terribly from melancholy ... and, accordingly, Pope or Gay is said to have satirized her “as a blue-stockings with an itch for scribbling”” (61). But the biographer characterises Orlando’s solitude as seemingly voluntary: though the women in *A Room of One’s Own* are unable to “go about alone” or “[drive] through London in an omnibus or [have] luncheon in a shop by herself” (69), Orlando’s seclusion is written as the passage of time, which magnifies his philosophical and creative temperament:

Here he came then, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year ... But Time ... has no such simple effect upon the mind of man. The mind of man ... works with equal strangeness upon the body of time. (59)

We learn, then, that just as Orlando is a character of fluid definition, so too is his physiological relationship to time: “It would be no exaggeration to say that he would go out after breakfast a man of thirty and come home to dinner a man of fifty-five at least. Some weeks added a century to his age, others not more than three seconds at most” (60). The element of fantasy in *Orlando* presents time as a similarly constructed to “Time Passes” in *To the Lighthouse*, condensed but undeniably flexible. This therefore allows a reading of Orlando’s presence in his home during the Restoration period not as confinement, but as a personal account of creative solitude: the productive enclosure of the female mind.

This period of enclosure reaches its pinnacle with Orlando’s second instance of sleep in Constantinople, where his metamorphosis is wholly realised when he awakens as a woman. The transportation of Orlando out East doubly implies the mobility of the artist-as-hero as an element of the male *Künstlerroman* and the creative potential of the artist-as-heroine necessitates its growth in a foreign landscape. And like the biographer-narrator of *A Room of One’s Own*, the biographer in *Orlando* is not concerned with the facts of Orlando’s gender transition, but rather the truth, again insisting upon a confluence of fact and fiction, truth and personality⁹. Addressing the transsexualism inherent in the novel, Karen R. Lawrence agrees that “Woolf’s revisionary gesture of lifting the veil of the ‘truth’ of Orlando’s womanhood is deliberately orientalist” for “Orlando’s sex change is situated in Turkey”, and it is therefore “worth asking why, in the fantasy of a transsexual life lived over more than three hundred years, it seemed necessary to plot the text’s most radical event outside of England” (182). She concludes the decision echoes the concerns planted within *Melymbrosia/The Voyage Out*, for “the general representation of the mobility of

⁹ During Orlando’s second instance of sleep in Constantinople, he is visited by the Three Graces – Purity, Chastity, and Modesty – who each demand the veil to be lifted on the truth of his identity: “Putting their silver trumpets to their lips they demand in one blast, Truth! And again they cry Truth! And sounding yet a third time in concert they peal forth, The Truth and nothing but the Truth!” (85)

desire suggests that English soil is inimical to the emergence of female subjectivity and sexuality”, noting again that Orlando’s journey and this “centrifugal impulse in the narrative is reminiscent of Rachel Vinrace’s voyage out for new models of desire” (182). The biographer comically renders the shock of the transformation by suggesting people would prefer the facts, whereas Orlando shows no surprise at waking a woman:

Many people, taking this into account, have been at great pains to prove (1) that Orlando had always been a woman, (2) that Orlando is at this moment a man. Let biologists and psychologists determine. It is enough for us to state the simple fact; Orlando was a man to the age of thirty; when he became a woman and has remained so ever since. But let other pens treat of sex and sexuality; we quit such odious subjects as soon as we can. (88)

After spending time in the mountains with gipsies, Orlando returns to England, compelled to see the English landscapes, carrying her poem “The Oak Tree” at her bosom. The voyage out of the male artist thus becomes the voyage in of the female mind, for the Lady Orlando successfully transcends the physical and psychological boundaries of creation that Rachel tried to cross and failed.

Returning to England as a woman, Lady Orlando continues her work on “The Oak Tree”, a poem that remains virtually inaccessible to the reader, but is a symbol of the progression of the female artist across the centuries. But her return passage on the *Enamoured Lady* marks a moment in the novel where the artistic self interrogates the concept of her gendered self. The biographer notes that “it took her the entire length of the voyage to moralise out the meaning of her start [as a man], and so, at her own pace, we will follow her” (98). The fluidity of her gender throws Orlando’s “spirit into such a rapture as nothing else can”, as she takes turns resisting and yielding, yielding and resisting, the advances of the men onboard:

And here it would seem from some ambiguity in her terms that she was censuring both sexes equally, as if she belonged to neither; and indeed,

for the time being, she seemed to vacillate; she was man; she was woman; she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each. (101)

Though her musings on gender identity and sexuality descend into obscurity “which divided the sexes”, the “thousand hints and mysteries became plain to her that were then dark” (103). The veil of truth, once again, is lifted, and the “affection” she feels towards women “gained in beauty what it lost in falsity ... [and] she thought now only of the glory of poetry, and the great lines of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Milton began booming and reverberating, as if a golden clapper beat against a golden bell in the cathedral tower which was her mind” (103-105). Lady Orlando’s subsequent achievement of the creative mind and harmony between the male and female components of one artistic self encapsulates what Woolf later establishes as the androgynous mind necessary for creative genius.

The narrator in *A Room of One’s Own* sympathises with Coleridge’s identification of an androgynous mind as a fundamental necessity for achieving creative incandescence, agreeing that to be wholly male, or exclusively female, is to deny the artistic mind as one capable of “spiritually cooperating” (97). As the narrator in *A Room of One’s Own* concludes, “some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated ... The writer ... once his experience is over, must lie back and let his mind celebrate its nuptials in darkness” (103). Indeed, the description of Coleridge’s androgynous mind is one that “is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotions without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent, and undivided ... And ... does not think specially or separately of sex” (97). Orlando, though predominantly physically identified as a woman in the novel, operates as a social androgyne, and her ability to finish “The Oak Tree” can be tied directly to her sense of physical and sexual fluidity.

One cannot complete a reading of Orlando’s development as a female artist without assessing her relationship to questions of motherhood and marriage. In perhaps the most satirical of the chapters, the Victorian era is presented with images of damp fecundity: “The great cloud which hung ... over the whole of the British Isles on the first day of the nineteenth century stayed ... long enough to have extraordinary consequences for those who lived beneath its shadow” (146). The “constitution of

England was altered and nobody knew it”, and the rigidity and conformity Woolf associated with the Victorian “home – which had become extremely important – was completely altered” (147). The societal and domestic demands placed on women are transmuted onto the house itself, for outside “it was another effect of the damp – ivy grew in unparalleled profusion” and homes “that had been bare of stone were smothered in greenery” (147). And yet despite the fertile imagery of the Victorian era smothering the virility of the drawing-room, the biographer notes a curious change in the mentality of its people: “The change did not stop at outward things. The damp struck within. Men felt the chill in their hearts; the damp in their minds. In a desperate effort to snuggle their feelings into some sort of warmth one subterfuge was tried after another. Love, birth, and death were all swaddled in a variety of fine phrases. The sexes drew further and further apart. No open conversation was tolerated. Evasions and concealments were sedulously practised on both sides” (147). The life of the average woman became a “succession of childbirths” and the biographer parodically equates the immense pressure on woman’s bodies with the emergence of the British Empire, noting “there is no stopping the damp” (148).

Orlando is not exempt, but, as her “sex was still in dispute”, her marriage to the preposterously named Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, Esquire – Shel – should not be read in the same way as the disparaging images of Victorian families across the Empire. Shel’s gender as much as Orlando’s is treated with a degree of ambiguity, for Orlando determines Shel a “woman” and Shel suspects Orlando a “man” (164). The debate persists, with Shel “anxiously” asking “are you positive you aren’t a man?” and Orlando retorting, “can it be possible you’re not a woman?” (168). Similarly too his second name – Bonthrop – comes to signify for the reader that when Orlando addressed him as such, “she was in a solitary mood”, and its utterance impressed upon both Orlando and Shel – “mystically” – the sense of “separation and isolation” and, to Shel, “the disembodied pacing the deck of his brig in unfathomable seas” (169). Their marriage operates as “movement and confusion”, and their vacillations of gender enable Orlando to retain her autonomy: “She was married, true; but if one’s husband was always sailing around Cape Horn, was it marriage? If one liked him, was it marriage? If one liked other people, was it marriage? And finally, if one wished, more than anything in the whole world, to write poetry, was it marriage?” (173). She puts her theory to the test, and so comes to perform “in spirit ... a deep

obeisance to the spirit of her age ... she need neither fight her age, nor submit to it; she was of it, yet remained herself" (174). The ability to pursue art within marriage depends upon Orlando's state of androgyny and marks a separation from Woolf's earlier female *Künstlerroman*, which, with Rachel Vinrace, and Lily Briscoe in particular, insisted upon the production of art outside marriage. To be a female artist was to renounce the Mrs. Ramsay model of artist-as-wife-and-mother, and yet Orlando, who eventually has a son, maintains selfhood: "Now, therefore, she could write", solving the paradox of creativity and female creation, "and write she did. She wrote. She wrote. She wrote" (174).

Though the text's relationship with *A Room of One's Own* suggests *Orlando* is a musing on the generational conditions necessary for women's production of art, the use of satire and parody, particularly with respect to Orlando's marriage and motherhood, means her artistic achievements, though impressive, are comically rendered. Woolf subverts the masculine origins of the artist in question but her fantasy of self-determination is undermined by the biographer's inability to examine in full the production of "The Oak Tree". The poem, which is published to much critical acclaim by Nick Greene, is only superficially understood in the novel; we know nothing of its content, its form, or its merit. However, it appears common in the female *Künstlerroman* for the reader not to have access to the finished product. That Lily Briscoe's painting is not visually represented in *To the Lighthouse* does not mean her artistic achievement is undermined, and it therefore follows that a version of "The Oak Tree" is not required to crystallise Orlando's creative integrity. Rather, it is the use of fantasy and biography in this female *Künstlerroman* that examines the effect of the artist's physiological, psychological, and sexual development on their work. Though the narrative evokes techniques of satire and myth to construct the artist-as-heroine and, when read against *A Room of One's Own*, portrays the development of various modes of production within women's literary history, the primacy of the biographical form to the construction of the artist instead serves as a point from which to trace the waves of an alternate female sexual and gendered identity.

3.5 The Sexless Sappho: Sexuality and the Female Artist

Where characters as artist-types in *Melymbrosia* and *To the Lighthouse* are neither sexually active nor initiate sexual desire, *Orlando: A Biography* deliberately evokes

the subtleties of female sensuality, towards both men and women. We must then consider the representations of sapphism in *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own*, for the two texts were written before, during, and after the trial of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*¹⁰. Woolf herself did not care for Hall's novel but nevertheless protested calls to ban the semi-autobiographical work, arguing for freedom of speech and signing her name to a petition actioned by Leonard Woolf and E.M. Forster¹¹. Woolf was invited to appear in court during the trial along with a number of expert literary witnesses, but their evidence was deemed inadmissible; the book was banned in November 1928 in the United Kingdom¹². Scholars have suggested that the rejection of Hall and contemporary lauding of *Orlando* is more to do with Woolf's ability to covertly express female homosexuality within modernist fiction and Hall's literary traditionalism; it was the style, the perceived lack of a coherent form that Woolf felt detracted from Hall's narrative¹³. But the trial was about the subject of obscenity, not literary merit. Vera Brittain's account of the trial perceptively identifies that Sir Chartres Biron's final summation focused on "whether the book was an obscene libel according to the common law of the country" (98). Similarly, too, Biron agreed there had been a "considerable misunderstanding about the meaning of the word "obscene"" and therefore a large "volume of evidence tendered ... was quite inadmissible in law" (Brittain 99). However, though Biron contends that the work "has some literary qualities", Brittain notes he had "no hesitation in saying that the book was an obscene libel, and that it would tend to corrupt those into whose hands it

¹⁰ Nigel Nicolson's edited collection of Virginia Woolf's letters reveals that Woolf closely followed the obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. Woolf, called on as a writer, prepared evidence on the subject of sapphism for the trial but the "evidence was [deemed] inadmissible" on 9 November and the novel declared obscene on November 16, 1928 (III: 555). However, the novel was cleared of the charges of obscenity in the United States and subsequently published.

¹¹ To Vita Sackville-West, Sunday 2 September, 1928: "As for Radclyffe Hall, I agree: but what is one to do? She drew up a letter of her own, protesting her innocence and decency, which she asked us to sign, and would have no other sent out. So nothing could be done, except indeed one rather comic little letter written by Morgan Forster, which he asked me to sign: and now it appears that I, the mouthpiece of sapphism, write letters from the Reform Club." A footnote explains that "A letter to the editor, protesting the banning of *The Well of Loneliness* and signed by E. M. Forster and Virginia appeared in *The Nation* of 8 September 1928" (III: 530).

¹² According to Vera Brittain's account of the trial in *Radclyffe Hall: A Case of Obscenity?* those present in court included: E. M. Forster, Desmond MacCarthy, Storm Jameson, Amabel Williams-Ellis, Bernard Shaw, and Vita Sackville-West, as well as "booksellers, ministers of religion, social workers, magistrates, biologists, including Professor Julian Huxley, educationists, including the registrar of Durham University, medical men, and representatives of the London libraries" (90-92).

¹³ To Vita Sackville-West, 30 August 1928: "In the midst of this Morgan [Forster] goes to see Radclyffe in her townhouse in Kensington, with her love [Lady Troubridge]: and Radclyffe scolds him like a fishwife, and says that she won't have any letter written about her book unless it mentions the fact that it is a work of artistic merit – even genius... So our ardour in the cause of freedom and speech gradually cools, and instead of offering to reprint the masterpiece, we are already beginning to wish it unwritten" (III: 520). To Vanessa Bell, Sunday 2 September, 1928, Woolf confesses: "I think much of Miss Radclyffe Hall's book is very beautiful ... But the rest of the book I do not care for" (III: 526).

might fall” (101). The difference between Stephen Gordon and Orlando as Sapphic characters therefore lies in their relationship to their respective narratives. Gordon is a proxy for Radclyffe Hall in *The Well of Loneliness*, a semi-autobiographical novel, where *Orlando: A Biography* is a fanciful exploration of gender and the creative androgyne. But the idea of corruptibility extends beyond the literary qualities of each narrative, for where Hall’s text represents a realistic portrayal of the “sexual invert”, and is therefore charged with the ability to corrupt, the implausibility of a character such as Orlando meant the novel was exempt from such claims.

Hall’s novel is not so much a tale of burgeoning lesbianism in the early twentieth century as it is an exposition on gender non-conformity. Where Orlando literally transforms sex under the guise of fantasy, parody, and irony, Stephen Gordon does no such thing and identifies instead as a “sexual invert”, a term no longer in use within contemporary queer theory. Moreover, the polarising image of lesbianism presented by Stephen Gordon determines female homosexuality as inherently based on an engagement with a clear masculine identity, and the consequent rejection of the feminine. Of course, this narrative is written with a conflation of sex and gender and should be understood as such. Though Orlando explores the same spectrum of gender as Stephen Gordon, the satirical and parodic form and tone of *Orlando: A Biography* conceals any explicit reading of lesbianism in the novel, or what Woolf in a letter to Sackville-West described as the latter’s “proclivities” (Sproles 67). Consider here the casual nature with which Woolf raises the subject of sapphism within *A Room of One’s Own*, subtly injecting Sackville-West’s sexual disposition. The question of whether Chloe liked Olivia in Mary Carmichael’s unnamed novel, which explores a fictionalised though implicitly sexual relationship between two women, and the subsequent desire to omit such bonds in literature, reveals much of Woolf’s opinions on female sexuality and the suppression of such an identity. In much the same way, Orlando’s ostensible bisexuality and explicit androgyny is Woolf’s acknowledgement that women’s writing should have the freedom to discuss the personal without fear of censorship.

Writing of a female sexual identity in Woolf’s feminist discourse, Ellen Bayuk Rosenman identifies an early holograph of *A Room of One’s Own*, in which an “erotic encounter between two women” is excluded from the final publication (635). This leads Rosenman to question the significance of its omission and why it is “not part of

Woolf's public theory of female literary history, which stresses bonds between women as the source and guarantee of female creativity" (635). However, the nature of lesbianism in either *A Room of One's Own* or *Orlando: A Biography* is a moot point, for the "lesbian experience, culturally formulated, was actually inappropriate within Woolf's theory of influence", and, in fact, "no understanding of lesbianism existed that explained her personal relationship with Sackville-West, as private experience and public understandings shared no common ground" (Rosenman 639). Too often the discourse about a female sexual identity in Woolf's fiction and non-fiction is reduced to questions of her own sexuality, specifically whether she was – or was not – a lesbian. And Rosenman correctly identifies these assumptions of Woolf's sexual identity as belonging to modern feminism, where the nomenclature of lesbianism and, indeed, the cultural identity of such, is markedly different than the inter-war period: "Rather than appraise her in the context of contemporary ideology, we need to attend to the historical specificity of her own thought and consider what it meant to have a lesbian identity in England in the 1920s" (635). This is undeniably true: the location of sapphism in Woolf is not comparable to contemporary lesbianism, and one must tread carefully when dissecting the social, sexual, and literary implications of presuming a coherent lesbian identity in Woolf's writing.

And yet the language of female sexuality does become a characteristic of the female *Künstlerroman* in Woolf's later writing. Through her initial suggestion of an alternative female sexuality in *Orlando* and its reappearance between Chloe and Olivia in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf begins to develop a narratological figuring of a female sexual identity beyond the presumed heterosexuality of the creative protagonists in her pre-existing *Künstlerromane*. It is a feature more overtly treated within the development of the female artist's sexual psyche in Woolf's posthumously published novel, *Between the Acts* (1941). Here it is clear that the pageant-writer Miss La Trobe is a lesbian, that the aesthete William Dodge is homosexual as a corollary, and that, for the reluctant poetess Isa Oliver, male heterosexuality is equated with violence and tyranny.

Chapter Four: *Between the Acts*

Woolf's final polemic on the status of women as artists – *Three Guineas* (1938) – turns to women's position in an increasingly unstable society. Where she earlier instructed her female literary contemporaries to kill the ubiquitous angel in the house to ensure creative self-determination and recoup the losses of patriarchal self-censorship, Woolf now turns her attention to the difficulty of "killing the woman ... the human being whose sex made it her sacred duty to sacrifice herself to the father" to escape the "disease, this infantile fixation" with women existing solely within the realms of domesticity (153). Written against the encroaching threat of Fascism in Europe during the late 1930s, *Three Guineas* repositions the patriarchal dominance of women within the tyranny of autocracy; Woolf's introspective, fictive letter signals a desire for women to exist as outsiders. Her final exploration of the *Künstlerroman* in *Between the Acts* (1941) builds upon that image of women as outsiders in *Three Guineas*, anticipating an uncertain future for modern women's writing, since the female artist is still only an attainable identity in the absence of imposed masculinity.

This chapter examines Woolf's call for a Society of Outsiders in *Three Guineas* and her posthumously published "Anon" as companion pieces to the development of Miss La Trobe, the artistic heroine of Woolf's last female *Künstlerroman*. *Between the Acts* contrasts the public, dictatorial Miss La Trobe with the private, submissive Isa Oliver to illustrate the private-public dialectic of the artist in society. The social partnering of the aesthete William Dodge and the wild Mrs. Manresa is set in opposition to the marriage of Isa, a secret poet, and her husband, a formidable stockbroker, Giles; the juxtaposition of these two antipodal relationships in the novel is rendered by poetic allusions and marked by silences. Finally, the creative identities of La Trobe, Isa, and Dodge converge at one physical location – the aptly named Pointz Hall – for the performance of La Trobe's pageant of English history. Woolf uses the narrative form of a play-within-a-novel to encrypt the feminist pacifism of *Three Guineas* into the creative agenda of the artist-figure in the female *Künstlerroman*. La Trobe, grappling with the difficulties of uniting the audience in a single moment, forces us to consider whether creative methods should adhere to a wider social agenda, echoing Woolf's concern with the ethics of artistic production in an increasingly tense political climate. Here, the function of a visible audience, a unique aspect of this novel, not incorporated in Woolf's earlier

Künstlerromane, allows an examination of the fundamental question: What is the role of the female artist in society?

4. 1 Essayism and Erasure: Politicising the Female Experience in *Three Guineas*

Three Guineas begins with the speaker apologising for failing to return a fictitious letter sent by a barrister, querying how one is to prevent war. Woolf engages directly with her reader, whom she visualises as “a little grey on the temples; the hair is no longer thick on the top of your head” (5). Her recipient is educated and prosperous, having avoided the “contented apathy of middle life”, and spends his time “writing letters, attending meetings, presiding over this and that, asking questions, with the sound of the guns in [his] ears” (6). But, like the speaker’s opening address in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), Woolf invites the reader of *Three Guineas* to consider the fundamental inadequacy of the initial question posed by her male antagonist – here, a barrister – and of her own eventual response. In *A Room of One’s Own*, the speaker explicitly begins by proclaiming no conclusions can be succinctly reached on the subject of women and literature. In *Three Guineas*, the question of how, from a woman’s perspective, “are we to prevent war?” is similarly “doomed to failure” (5). What follows is a curt but undeniably sharp explanation of women’s absence in such political debates: the Arthur’s Education Fund (AEF). By reducing the entire problem of women’s absence from political process to a mere familial fund for sons, Woolf is able to relay the relationship between the ongoing education of sons, and the comparatively inadequate tutelage of daughters. A “voracious receptacle, a solid fact ... a fact so solid indeed that it cast a shadow over the entire landscape”, the AEF is the sole reason, according to the speaker, that “though [men and women] look at the same things, we see them differently” (7). In fact, the AEF provides men with more than an academic education, echoing the discrepancies between educating the sexes pointed out in *A Room of One’s Own*:

Games educated your body; friends taught you more than books or games. Talk with them broadened your outlook and enriched your mind. In the holidays you travelled; acquired a taste for art; a knowledge of foreign politics; and then, before you could earn your own living, your

father made you an allowance upon which it was possible for you to live while you learnt [your] profession. (7)

Here, male education is identified as more complex and refined than academic learning, extending far beyond the classroom and libraries to include travel, art, and politics. Furthermore, though families for centuries obediently paid into the AEF, the damage ultimately lay with reducing funding for women – sisters, mothers, daughters. For “[n]ot only did their own education ... go into it; but many of those luxuries and trimmings which are, after all, an essential part of education – travel, society, solitude, a lodging apart from the family house – they were paid into it too” (7). Conscious then of women’s place in society being consigned to the private and domestic, Woolf in *Three Guineas* identifies the same chains of events regarding women’s absence as those underpinning *A Room of One’s Own*. But, where the latter records the potential lives of fictitious female writers such as Mary Beton or Mary Carmichael, *Three Guineas* ruminates on the capacity of women to play a more active role in the public sphere.

Woolf acknowledges that women such as the Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Palmerston, Lady Melbourne, Madame de Lieven, Lady Holland, and Lady Ashburton all “influenced politics”, but points out that they did so predominantly in their capacity as wives, daughters, or sisters, a fact which reduces their leverage as social artists to the domestic space of the drawing-room (17). As Woolf observes, the great political memoirs of the age erase their presence: “the names of the great political leaders ... are sprinkled on every page; but you will not find either at the head of the stairs receiving the guests ... any daughter of an educated man” (17). Women as social artists create the stage on which men perform public and political duty, yet they remain silent actors in the wings. Woolf had already dramatised this background role in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), where the eponymous heroine, as the wife of a public servant, Richard Dalloway, organises a number of successful dinner parties and seemingly holds her command over her guests¹⁴. Through anecdotes of female difference in *Three Guineas*, the paradox of women being simultaneously

¹⁴ Mrs. Dalloway is perhaps Woolf’s most accomplished hostess. Her dinner party is the penultimate action in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), and similar parties of hers appear in several short stories: “Together and Apart”, “A Summing Up”, “The New Dress”, and “The Man Who Loved His Kind”, all of which appear in the posthumously published *A Haunted House and Other Stories* (1944).

influential in the public sphere and rigidly fixed in domesticity is powerfully adumbrated.

But the politicising of the private female experience framed as a belated letter to an unsympathetic barrister is less a literary work than a fictionalised cultural critique. As Saloman puts it, to imagine *Three Guineas* as “an obedient answer, rather than an unprovoked attack, permits Woolf a sense of freedom as she writes”, allowing her to “speak freely and at length, because she is not throwing the first punch, but only reluctantly entering the fray” (95). *Three Guineas*, initially titled “Answers to Correspondents” and “Letter to an Englishman”, fragments the hybrid mode of essayistic fiction Woolf initially envisioned to chronicle the Pargiter family in *The Years* (1937)¹⁵. While editing proofs for *The Years* in March of 1936, Woolf remarks in her diary on her desire to keep the final form of *Three Guineas* as a single letter, “because ... separate letters break continuity” (V:18). This “break” suggests that the narrative a letter allows in non-fiction performs a similar function to stream of consciousness in her novels. Woolf’s fragmented letter in *Three Guineas* reads like an erratic triptych, simultaneously examining the past, present, and future conditions necessary to maintain the worlds of the “private and the public, the material and the spiritual” (162). Therefore, by framing her response as a letter, a form “that is both intimate and entirely public” (Saloman 96), Woolf is able to pore over the power and influence of women in the public, political realm.

Though *Three Guineas* is “centrally concerned with the material conditions of space and economy that govern women’s contributions to the public sphere”, its construction as a letter shows what Anna Snaith regards as Woolf’s belief that “the politics of genre included the letter” (Staveley 295-296). The letter facilitates an emotional exploration of women’s desired future in a more public role – whether political or creative – without providing a concrete answer or reaching a final, inevitable conclusion, unlike the generic demands of the essayist, or narrator of fiction. Though the letter is fictitious in the sense that there is no barrister, no initial point of reference, it is by definition a personal piece of writing. Moreover, where Woolf’s novels arguably have an invisible audience, *Three Guineas* as a letter pinpoints a specific interlocutor – the barrister – whose function is paramount to the

¹⁵ Woolf initially developed the narrative of *Three Guineas* as part of *The Years* but decided to separate them into two publications.

foundations of the text. Woolf, who wrote letters to both public figures and personal acquaintances prolifically throughout her life, uses the epistolary form in *Three Guineas* to rationalise the “nature of fear” in the “private house” and the public “emotion of hate” across a continent threatened by fascism (162). To feel both “horror and disgust” simultaneously, she records, “suggests a connection ... a very important connection ... that the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected” (162). “Such will be our ruin”, she warns the barrister, “if you, in the immensity of your public abstractions forget the private figure, or if we in the intensity of our private emotions forget the public world” (163). As a genre, the letter embodies the interdependence of the public-private relationship and the inability to disassociate from the complexities of these connections.

The public-private distinction is effectively expressed in the division of the eponymous three guineas as Woolf is asked to support the public debate on the prevention of war while still endorsing the private world of women. Dividing her charity between the recipient of her letter, and donations towards promoting professions for women and a rebuild of a women’s college, Woolf considers her position and articulates the distinct nuances between private and public, which she perceives as two modes of cultural dominance. The “patriarchal system” she notes, is “behind” modern culture, a Victorian model of oppression seen in “the private house, with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its servility” (86). And yet, as contemporary Europe is on the precipice of war, “the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed” is what will meet those who traverse the divide. Indeed, the barrister writing to Woolf requests that she and her readers “fill up a form and become members of [his] society” (119). The request, though simple enough, is met with hesitation, for in women joining the public world “it would seem that [they] must lose that difference and therefore sacrifice that help” (119). In donating the guinea, Woolf demands a right to speak “freely without fear or flattery” to the unnamed barrister, explaining that the private world of women is one of reason and emotion which “have their origin deep in the darkness of ancestral memory” (120). Her counterfactual thinking presents an alternative society to the one offered by the barrister – the Outsiders Society.

This “anonymous and secret Society of Outsiders” is characterised as a collection of “educated men’s daughters working in ... their own methods for liberty,

equality, and peace” (122). Unbound by oath and ceremony, the society prides itself on anonymity and the collective appeal of pacifism, for their role is to “maintain an attitude of complete indifference” to the subject of war and patriotism. The idea of fighting for one’s country may stir in a woman a “patriotic emotion”, but as an outsider the question of what her country means to her will be more pressing than the war itself (123). While the barrister-figure is perceived as unsympathetic to her pacifist cause, the educated woman is equally indifferent to his question of preventing war. The insistence upon a difference between men and women in the text reaffirms Woolf’s political stance that her opinion on how to prevent war will be misunderstood by her male recipient; their positions in society are divergent, but equally relevant. As an outsider, Woolf’s perception in *Three Guineas* of a patriarchal hierarchy reflects an alternate experience of the private world, confirming her moral indifference to the public. But can the female artist in society ever truly be an outsider, and to what extent does anonymity assist her creativity? Moreover, if the differences are acknowledged, the female artist’s concept of the public sphere stands in stark contrast to the male, simultaneously opposing and illuminating. If women do not wholly reflect the pulse of a patriarchal culture, what society do they show?

4.2 Anon’s Song: The Private World of Miss La Trobe

Woolf’s unremitting exposition of the artist’s need to straddle the worlds of the private and the public, the personal and political, is a subject first raised in an exchange between Richard and Clarissa Dalloway in *Melymbrosia/The Voyage Out*. Woolf’s earliest novel demonstrates the private and public demands on an artistic heroine, but there the resolution is grim: Rachel Vinrace, aware of her expected role as wife and mother in the public sphere, retreats to her private world of silence, music, and drowned creatures of the deep sea. While Woolf’s female artist figures in *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando: A Biography* to some degree exist on the periphery of society, Lily and Orlando cannot be considered as true outsiders. Despite prizing creativity above marriage, Lily Briscoe’s rejection of domesticity is not enough to identify her as a social outsider. In the same vein, Orlando, both as man and woman, traverses land and sea, time and place, and with the publication of “The Oak Tree” finds herself firmly rooted within the public world of the “present”. But it is Miss La Trobe, the artistic heroine of *Between the Acts*, who embodies the private female

experience as social outsider, overpowered by the hyper-masculine threat of fascism. La Trobe is the private voice of a feminine culture who attempts to repurpose her public silence as a creative vehicle. In this way, Woolf presents La Trobe as a figure not dissimilar to the historicised artist in her posthumously published essay, “Anon”.

To read *Between the Acts* as a *Künstlerroman* is to consider the developing figure of the artist – and their relationship to their art – in the context of England on the brink of the Second World War. La Trobe’s pageant is to her villagers what Woolf’s novel is to her readers, and with the novel examining the tension inherent in a pre-war country society, La Trobe’s pageant develops alongside Woolf’s public consciousness. In 1936, the *Daily Worker*, established by the Communist Party of Great Britain, invited Woolf to present her ideas on the relationship between art, the artist, and politics. The resulting essay, “Why Art To-Day Follows Politics”, laments the artist’s increasing occupation with the present, where all art is necessarily propaganda against the established order, or at the very least a reflection of the artist’s social milieu. Woolf observes that the duties of writers have undergone a metamorphosis of sorts, for the “historian to-day ... [is] writing not about Greece and Rome in the past, but about Germany and Spain in the present; the biographer is writing the lives of Hitler and Mussolini, not of Henry the Eighth and Charles Lamb; the poet introduces Communism and Fascism into his lyrics; the novelist turns from the private lives of his characters to their social surroundings and their political opinions” (75). Woolf claims that the artist’s successes in the past have largely coincided with his release from public life, “since the value of his work depended upon freedom of mind, security of person, and immunity from practical affairs – for to mix art with politics he held was to adulterate it – he was absolved from political duties” (76). Here Woolf identifies a dramatic shift in the relationship between artist and society, and perceives that in order “to understand why the artist – the plastic artist – is affected by the state of society we must try to define the relations of the artist to society”, a feat she describes as wholly uncharted territory: “this is difficult, partly because no such definition has ever been made” (75-76). And though Woolf suggests artists with patronage have historically been allocated a space to create – to “[write] and [paint] without regard for the political agitations of the moment” (76) – she signals a warning to her contemporaries on the threat of public, political censorship:

And finally, there is the voice which many artists in other countries have already heard and had to obey – the voice which proclaims that the artist is the servant of the politician. You shall practice your art, it says, at our bidding. Paint us pictures, carve us statues that glorify our gospels. Celebrate Fascism; celebrate Communism. Preach what we bid you preach. On no other terms shall you exist. (77)

Though Woolf does not distinguish a gendered difference between the social demands imposed on male and female artists in “Why Art To-Day Follows Politics”, she nevertheless rallies against the injection of political motivations in artistic production. But there is a palpable irony in her presentation of the artist as the servant of the politician after centuries of absolution from public duties. Female poets and novelists, according to the speaker of *A Room of One's Own*, had been labouring for centuries under masculine suppression and, according to “Professions for Women” (1942), the self-censorship imposed by the angel in the house. Therefore La Trobe's development as an artist with respect to her pageant must be considered outside the dominant homogeneity of a patriarchal culture; rather than a vehicle of political propaganda, La Trobe's pageant presents a version of English history as a flashing sequence of interrelated moments of being, knitting the fragmentary nature of the human condition between scenes of domestic rivalry. La Trobe as an artist blurs the characters of the villagers, the actors, and the audience, who all intermittently perform a hybrid role in her play, as the unified, collective identity, and the dispersed, individual self.

As an artist in a female *Künstlerroman*, La Trobe, more so than Woolf's previous figurations, is explicitly emblematic of the creative genius existing on the fringes of society. Her origins are ambiguous, her character virtually unknown to the rest of the villagers. Her face gives the impression of “Russian blood”, for “those deep-set eyes; that very square jaw” reminds one of the villagers “of the Tartars” (46). In lieu of truth and fact, the villagers create their own mythic version of Miss La Trobe:

Rumour said that she had kept a tea ship at Winchester; that had failed.

She had been an actress. That had failed. She had bought a four-roomed cottage and shared it with an actress. They had quarrelled. Very little was actually known about her. Outwardly she was swarthy, sturdy and thick set; strode about the fields in a smock frock; sometimes with a cigarette in her mouth; often with a whip in her hand; and used rather strong language – perhaps, then, she wasn't altogether a lady? (46) ¹⁶

The positioning of La Trobe as an outsider, a foreigner, parallels the construction of the speaker, Anon, in Woolf's uncompleted essay of the same name. The preoccupation of "Anon" with a prehistoric characterisation of the landscape alludes to the timelessness of his character and the mutability of his artistry, exposing the engendering of Anon's creativity as a preternatural quality:

Everybody shared in the emotion of Anon's song, and supplied the story. Anon sang because spring has come; or winter is gone; because he loves; because he is hungry, or lustful; or merry; or because he adores some God. Anon is sometimes a man; sometimes a woman. He is the common voice singing out of doors, He has no house. He lives a roaming life crossing the fields, mounting the hills, lying under hawthorn to listen to the nightingale. (581-582)

In the essay, Anon is described as first staging his pageants in the churchyard, then later "was given a pitch for his drama in the market place" (582). Anon's ability to stage his spectacles is facilitated by his relative anonymity. Therefore, just like Anon, Miss La Trobe's outsider status allows her command over the villagers. But just as prehistory and the past encroach upon the present at Pointz Hall, so too does Anon suffer the same fate: "The printing press brought the past into existence. It brought into existence the man who is conscious of the past the man who sees his time, against a background of the past; the man who first sees himself and shows himself to us. The first blow has been aimed at Anon when the author's name is attached to the book. The individual emerges" (584-585). The loss of anonymity in printing the pageants,

¹⁶ Rather than the sapphic inferences in *Orlando* or *A Room of One's Own* it appears that La Trobe's presumed lesbianism is based on a crude, masculine stereotype, a means of further establishing her as an outsider. La Trobe's sexuality is not a prerequisite for creative autonomy, but instead a sign of social ostracisation.

songs, and poetry of Anon means his creativity moves to the public sphere, for “No grammar bound them tightly together. They could be read aloud; danced to or sung to; but they could not follow the pace of the speaking voice. They could not enter the private world” (589). Where Anon enjoys freedom as an artist in prehistory, his creative capacity is reduced by his ever-increasing role in the public space. Similarly, the successful staging of La Trobe’s pageant depends on her relative anonymity, a transposition of the relationship Woolf as a novelist had with her readers.

Nora Eisenberg identifies the connection between the essay and the novel: “Miss La Trobe, the novel’s hero, takes up Anon’s part, urging her audience to shed their habitual names and words and anonymously join a life together” (256). In this way, La Trobe’s “pageant displays the false distinctions created by names” and advances the artist’s need for anonymity: “the historical time presented in the pageant, disguises – costume and name – change, but the people beneath them remain the same” (Eisenberg 256). Similarly, stage directions delivered by La Trobe are split between actors and audience and it becomes increasingly unclear to whom they are directed. Though the audience is aware of its own unique role in the pageant, the narrative of the pageant absorbs the audience’s response into the plot, unifying art and experience. During the Renaissance period of the pageant, the audience members whisper among themselves, consulting the carbon sheet, gathering to realise the scene: “Now what comes next? ... Were they about to act a place in the presence of Queen Elizabeth? Was this, perhaps, the Globe theatre? What does the programme say?” (67). The distinctive identities of pageant and audience merge, and we are unable to distinguish Carinthia, Ferdinando, and Eliza from Miss Winthrop, Mrs. Otter, and Mrs. Elmhurst. Moreover, as the act concludes with blood on the arm of the actor, Isa Oliver, in the audience, repeats the line “there is little blood on my arm”, immersing herself in the performance, for in the “bawling of the youths, and the confusion of the plot ... she could make nothing of it” (69).

Wood reads *Between the Acts* as “a sustained work of cultural criticism through which Woolf interrogates art’s social role” (104). To do so is to see Woolf using La Trobe and her pageant to explore “to what extent art can influence the outlook and behaviour of those who receive it and to question what role aesthetics can occupy in a society threatened by violence” (Wood 114). Aesthetics here do not directly influence political thought, but instead critique culture at large. The novel, set

on a June day in 1939, was written after the outbreak of war and during a time of increasing political turbulence, and the text's engagement with the "threat posed to art, literature, and society by fascism and war" (Wood 124) is achieved through La Trobe's jumbled performance of English history, from Chaucer to the 'present', where her stage directions are ignored, unheard, or drowned out by a gramophone. In the pursuit of art and the compartmentalising of creativity against the endless passage of time, La Trobe's audience too becomes part of the performance, with the "tick, tick, tick", and the "chuff, chuff, chuff" (63) of the gramophone holding them together in the moment, reminding the reader of the convergence of modernity and the mechanisation of time's passage.

La Trobe wants to show her audience Englishness and English history from her own perspective, and, even more so, to "turn her audience's focus on themselves" (Wood 127). La Trobe, stepping onto the grass during the pageant's interval, wonders if "for one moment she held them together – the dispersing company. Hadn't she, for twenty-five minutes, made them see? A vision imparted was relief from agony ... for one moment ... one moment" (74). At the pageant's conclusion La Trobe laments the audience's equivocal reception of her vision: "You have taken my gift! Glory possessed her – for one moment. But what had she given? A cloud that melted into the other clouds on the horizon. It was in the giving that the triumph was. And the triumph faded. Her gift meant nothing" (151). Like Prospero in *The Tempest* (1610), La Trobe is acutely aware of her pageant's status as a performance. Her short elegy on the fading triumph, the melting clouds, and the vision lost, recalls Prospero's description of the dissolving scene:

Our revels are now ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air,
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous places,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. (IV.i.147-156)

As the pageant resumes, La Trobe returns to her hidden position behind the tree, “[gnashing] her teeth” and “[crushing] her manuscript” (91), for the actors delay the resumption of the final act. As the gramophone’s words die away, overpowered by the wind and leaves, “the great words became inaudible” as the stage is left empty and La Trobe is overcome: “[she] leant against the tree, paralyzed. Her power had left her. Beads of perspiration broke on her forehead. Illusion had failed. ‘This is death,’ she murmured, ‘death’” (103). But nature is on Miss La Trobe’s side and here fills the void in the pageant, with cows in a nearby field bellowing in unison to cover the silence. The interruption is welcomed and praised by La Trobe, who watches with renewed creative vigour as the audience resumes reading its programme.

When the play passes the Victorian age and finally reaches the present, the audience’s role is indistinguishable from the pageant itself. La Trobe, reading her script, wishes to “expose them, as it were, to douche them, with present-time reality. But something was going wrong with the experiment ... She felt everything they felt. Audiences were the devil. O to write a play without an audience – the play” (130). That La Trobe could develop a work of art without an audience seems to be the desire of the private self – to create for one’s own sake – rather than as the public artist, who directs their audience’s focus. Here, the experiment is at risk because the artist, not the medium, begins, much like the audience, to confuse their function in society. According to Wood, Woolf’s novel asks, “what place can there be for art ... in a wartime climate? What audience can be there to receive it?” (127). As the pageant awkwardly concludes with a stammered “God ... save the King”, and the audience disperses to the gurgling lamentations of a broken gramophone, La Trobe waits until the crowd has disappeared entirely before emerging from her stooped position: “A failure,” she groaned, and she stooped to put away the records. (151) Perhaps the most striking feature in Woolf’s last female *Künstlerroman* is the inclusion of an audience, much like the presence of a fictional barrister in *Three Guineas*. La Trobe’s portrayal as a female artistic heroine differs from that of Rachel Vinrace, Lily Briscoe or Orlando in that La Trobe has a defined, visible interlocutor for her creativity. Of course, one could argue that Nick Green, as the critic, is an interlocutor of sorts, but his relationship with Orlando’s poem, “The Oak Tree”, is not integral to its final construction; the critic exists to critique, not to enable creation. By contrast, the

audience, as it appears in *Between the Acts*, participates fully in the performance of history, as the barrister engages in the dialogue of *Three Guineas*. Moreover, Vinrace, Lily, and Orlando as artistic figures perform and create for personal satisfaction: Vinrace plays the compositions of Bach, Beethoven, and Wagner for her own pleasure; Lily's individual growth is tied to the completion of her painting, and her relationship with her art is viewed in the context of her relationship with Mrs. Ramsay, Charles Tansley, and Mr. Ramsay; Orlando's completion of "The Oak Tree", which she carries for centuries, is an indication of her achieving the necessary mental incandescence to transcend time and the boundaries of gender to create as a woman.

A pageant is a less tangible creation than a painting or a poem; it cannot be transported, only performed. In the context of political strife, La Trobe in *Between the Acts*, realigns herself as an artist whose desire to recreate human experience encourages a creative existence as one more fully immersed with life itself. Woolf's focus on La Trobe's struggle to create makes a significant advance on her previous female *Künstlerromane*. La Trobe's success as an artist depends entirely on the public reception of her work. Where Woolf's earlier *Künstlerromane* probed the internalised, private experience of female creativity, *Between the Acts* presents the female artist's public attempts to impart a vision of the human condition to an audience, an attempt, however, which derives from a position of relative anonymity.

4.3 Unified and Dispersed: The Aesthetics of Failure in *Between the Acts*

When La Trobe emerges from her hiding place behind the tree during the interval in her pageant, she does so in despair, for "she hadn't made them see. It was a failure, another damned failure! As usual. Her vision escaped her" (74). La Trobe's dissatisfaction parallels the vexation felt by Lily Briscoe in "The Window". As Lily strives to "clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her" (19), so too is La Trobe stripped of her creative dominion in the flight between script and stage. But whereas Lily's torment is private, La Trobe's is shown to be dependent on her sense of a public audience. As an artistic figure, La Trobe is an ambitious, imperious outsider and her creative enterprise is paralleled by that of the introspective, submissive poet, Isa Oliver. Using the location of Pointz Hall, a country house renowned for its peculiar construction in a hollow, Woolf intersects the characters of La Trobe, a dogmatic playwright, Isa, a

secret poet, and Dodge, a self-effacing aesthete, to examine the aesthetics of failure and reclamation in the female *Künstlerroman*.

Woolf's initial conception of *Between the Acts* reveals an underlying preoccupation with substituting the individual for the collective. Beginning her writing of the novel in 1938, she recorded in her diary with frantic pace the origins of her final work:

But to amuse myself, let me note: why not Poyntzet Hall: a centre: all lit. discussed in connection with real little incongruous living humour ... but "I" rejected: "We" substituted ... composed of many different things ... we all life, all art, all waifs & strays – a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole – the present state of my mind? (V: 135)

The disintegration of the individual "I" substituted for the collective "We" is a marked feature of both the framing and secondary narratives. As noted in the introduction to the Shakespeare Head Press edition of *Between the Acts* the framing narrative includes the familial interactions of the Oliver family at Pointz Hall (xxxiii). The pageant, therefore, "forms the second narrative line" and is marked by amateur actors from the village who perform a variety of roles in La Trobe's pageant; in their duplicitousness they "enact the movement between unification and separation as they become their roles and then resume their own identities" (xxxiii). Between these two narratives is the relative positioning of Miss La Trobe herself, who is "the only character who acts in both narrative lines, a role that makes her, as is appropriate for the artist, a bridge between them" (xxxiii). Reading the novel as a *Künstlerroman*, these two narrative lines suggests a re-evaluation by Woolf of the relationship between the interior and exterior self. The same can be said of the artist's relationship to their artwork. This interaction is facilitated in *Between the Acts* by reflecting the public and private division in the figure of the artist: La Trobe as a playwright, Isa as a poet who wishes to conceal her writing, and Dodge as the hidden aesthete.

The question of an enduring creative identity is marked in the novel by silence, jealousy, and rivalry between the characters in the framing narrative. Moreover, the form of this endurance is narrated in terms of the particular character's relationship to the opposing factions of the internal (private) self, and the external (public) role they

perform. When Isa Oliver is initially introduced, she appears as an interruption and casts an imposing figure against Mrs. Haines, the wife of the gentleman farmer, Rupert. Isa, pig-tailed in a faded peacock dressing gown, arrives like a child in the night, like “a swan swimming its way; then was checked and stopped; was surprised to find people there; and lights burning” (8). The discussion, which she interrupts, rests on the council’s inaction over the local ward’s cesspool, but Isa remains indifferent, silent and focused on Rupert Haines:

She had met him at a Bazaar; and at a tennis party. He had handed her a cup and a racquet — that was all. But in his ravaged face she always felt mystery; and in his silence, passion. At the tennis party she had felt this, and at the Bazaar. Now a third time, if anything more strongly, she felt it again. (7)

The fleeting moment between Isa and Rupert is marked by Bart Oliver’s quoting of Byron as much as it is by the fact Isa and Rupert do not exchange a single word. Instead, the poetic allusions from Bart “made two rings, perfect rings, that floated them, herself and Haines, like two swans down stream” (8). Where Isa notes Rupert’s “snow-white breast was circled with a tangle of dirty duckweed”, she records herself as being similarly ensnared, “by her husband, the stockbroker” (8). The exchange is looked upon by Mrs. Haines, whom the narrator describes as allowing ten seconds to pass before she intervenes, “aware of the emotion circling them” (9). Though no dialogue is exchanged between Isa, Mrs. Haines, or Rupert Haines, the use of silence, punctuated with poetic allusions, juxtaposes the internal and external view of Isa in the framing narrative of Pointz Hall.

When Isa reappears the following morning, the narrator introduces her according to a patriarchal identifier: Mrs. Giles Oliver. Again, her distinctive private and public persona is on display, both figuratively and literally. Standing before a mirror, Isa describes her wedding gift, “a heavily embossed silver brush”, as a means of guaranteeing public satisfaction, rather than personal gratification: “[the brush] had its uses in impressing chambermaids in hotels” (14). As she holds herself before “the three folded-mirror, so that she could see the three separate versions of her rather heavy, yet handsome, face”, Isa returns to the public-private dialectic forged the

evening prior by her chance reconnection with Rupert Haines: “Inside the glass, in her eyes, she saw what she had felt overnight for the ravaged, the silent, the romantic gentleman farmer ... But outside ... was the other love; love for her husband, the stockbroker ... Inner love was in the eyes; outer love on the dressing table” (14). As Isa views her private and public emotions simultaneously in the looking-glass, the narrator ventures that “the mirror that reflected the soul sublime, reflected also the soul bored” (16). Thus, the approximation of Isa’s internal dissatisfaction with Giles, characterised here as the “outer love on the dressing table”, completes Isa’s transference of feelings onto Rupert Haines.

Isa, then, presents as a character marked by failure, for though she publicly identifies as wife and mother, she privately resents the sense of entrapment Giles Oliver, and his father Bart, impose upon her, and so comes to envisage an absurd dalliance with Rupert Haines. Like Rachel Vinrace, Isa’s description of herself in the looking-glass suggests she exists with a degree of duality in the sense that she is able to fulfil public duty, but silently retreats to a private world of fantasy. In terms of Isa’s potential to reclaim a sense of autonomy, as Cramer reads her character, “the first stage of Isa’s awakening requires that she recognise the role that male physical and psychological violence has played in silencing her, and that she identify with other women on the basis of their common oppression” (177). The first instance which Isa is presented with her failure in her public duty as wife and mother is through Bart Oliver, chastising her for raising a cry-baby. Scornfully, Bart describes how, when he sought to frighten the child, “he howled. He’s a coward, your boy is”, attributing the blame to her as a mother, and not to his own scary antics. The narrator records Isa’s dissatisfaction, noting that “she loathed the domestic, the possessive; the maternal” (18). Isa once again fills the silence with Spenser, Keats, Shelley, Yeats, and Donne, all male poets, suggesting that, imaginatively, Isa is controlled by men.

Moving from fiction to biography and then the newspaper, Isa reads about the rape of a young woman by a group of soldiers. Beyond the fantastic, the romantic, and the fictional, Isa recalls the news story as being “so real that on the mahogany door panels she saw the Arch in Whitehall; through the Arch the barrack room; in the barrack room the bed, and on the bed the girl was screaming and hitting him about the face” (19). Isa ruminates on the assault in the same manner as Rachel revisits the violent kiss from Richard Dalloway. The memory of the rape is recalled again at the

end of the novel, when Isa is alone with Giles. Her description of their impending union is punctuated with visions of violence, and echoes of Conrad:

Left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night. (159)

And so while Lucy reads in her own book of a “Prehistoric man ... half-human, half-ape, who roused himself from his semi-crouching position and raised great stones”, Isa is left to fight, alone, the modern bestial equivalent, Giles. Indeed, it is imagined that “the memory of the girl screaming accompanies [Isa] when she returns to the violent love-making which characterises her sexual relations with her husband Giles”, suggesting that “Isa’s return to her husband with their relationship unchallenged and unchanged is Isa’s defeat” (Cramer 178). But in Isa’s final recollection of the rape narrative, she realises that though it is recorded that the girl hit the soldier with a hammer, what happened after is unknown. It is an acknowledgment that the violence done to Isa is sustained and psychological: she is unable to imagine the conclusion for the girl against the soldiers just as she is unable to imagine her own future with Giles, echoing the end of *Melymbrosia/The Voyage Out*. As “the curtain rose” and “they spoke”, the narrative of Isa’s potential is completed in parallel to the unseen resolution of the girl’s assault, without closure, her silent fate is unknown to the audience.

Isa as a character contradicts the traditional qualities of the artist figure in the female *Künstlerroman*, for she is herself a model of failure – like Rachel Vinrace – rather than as a symbol of artistic potential. In this way, Isa attaches herself to the “uninvited, unexpected” William Dodge, who arrives with Mrs. Manresa. Like La Trobe, Manresa’s history is fractured, obscure, and pieced together by rumour. Dodge is only privy to the public character of Manresa, and the narrator divulges through Dodge that “she strolled the garden at midnight in silk pyjamas, had the loud speaker playing jazz, and a cocktail bar” (33). But presently he lacks any biological, private facts of her being. Manresa is of course the antithesis to Isa: “vulgar, over-sexed,

over-dressed” and plain speaking (34). Manresa instructs Dodge to look at the paintings on the wall, though the nature of his aestheticism is glossed over in favour of Manresa the “wild child of nature” fizzing a flute of champagne and handing it to Bart, making him “feel young” (35). Earlier correcting Manresa, who identifies him as “an artist”, Dodge reduces his position in society to “a clerk in an office” (32). And when prompted by Bart to divulge which “camp ... [he belongs] to”, Dodge – a fictional case of nominative determinism – expertly dodges the question, leaving Isa unable to “place him” (37). Instead, Dodge confesses to have been gazing at the paintings, which “looked at nobody” and drew the party gathered “down the paths of silence” (37).

The scene is marked by the arrival of Giles, described by Manresa as “the very type of all that [she] adored” (38). Isa, recalling the “arrow of desire” which shot through her in the presence of Rupert Haines some twelve hours prior, reminds herself of the “old cliché” when Giles enters: “He is my husband ... The father of my children. It worked ... She felt pride; and affection; then pride again in herself, whom he had chosen” (39). Giles’s anger upon arrival is noted by Bart, who reminds himself that “the family was not a family in the presence of strangers”, again surmising the double nature of the characters in the framing narrative. When Dodge is called upon to confirm his identity as an artist, he denies it, “for the second time in half an hour”, as Isa notes. Moreover, Dodge is quickly and quietly detected by Giles to be a homosexual, a “half-breed”, whose “silence made its contribution to talk” (40). Isa, unable to discern Dodge’s sexuality, recognises a fearful comrade in Dodge, pitted against Giles: “A poor specimen he was; afraid to stick up for his own beliefs – just as she was afraid, of her husband. Didn’t she write her poetry in a book like an account book lest Giles might suspect?” (40). Like Dodge, Isa, too, dodges her own creative self in public, for it is an identity she only acknowledges to herself in private. Together they censor their behaviour and speech in the presence of an overbearing masculine force: Giles Oliver.

In a scene reminiscent of Isa’s initial entrance in the novel, Manresa and Giles share a moment much like Isa’s fantastical romancing of Rupert Haines. Where Manresa had earlier prompted Giles to finish her recital of Hamlet’s soliloquy on suicide, it is Isa and Dodge, the poet and the aesthete, who respond, misquoting Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale”. Manresa, looking over her coffee cup at Giles, with

whom “she felt in conspiracy”, aligns herself with the prevailing patriarchy of Pointz Hall, setting forth a thread of emotions that enchants the gathering, a parallel to the unity of La Trobe’s audience:

A thread united them – visible, invisible, like those threads, now seen, now not, that unite trembling grass blades in autumn before the sun rises ... the air round her became threaded with sensation. Bartholomew felt it; Giles felt it. Had he been a horse, the thin brown skin would have twitched, as if a fly had settled. Isabella twitched too. Jealousy, anger pierced her skin.
(45)

Here Isa is reduced to the role of Mrs. Haines, twitching and jealous of Manresa, and Giles associates his roles in the audience of the pageant with a Promethean punishment, “manacled to a rock ... forced passively to behold indescribable horror” (47-48). Isa, half-purposely, knocks over a coffee cup to disperse the scene, and Dodge, catching it, internally remarks on its condition, its status and origins. His reaction further fuels Giles’s rage and displeasure at sharing the company of “a toady; a lickspittle; not a downright plain man of his senses ... not a man to have straightforward love for a woman – his head was close to Isa’s head – but simply a – At this word, which he could not speak in public” (48). Though Dodge’s private identity becomes apparent to Giles and the imagined reader, it still cannot be spoken of in public. It is not until Manresa comments on the delicate and perfectly formed signage of Dodge’s handwriting that Isa glimpses his sexuality, becoming conscious of his private conditioning and aversion to Giles. As a pairing, the sexually successful Giles and Manresa are contrasted to the failed aesthetics of Isa and Dodge: Giles and Manresa are co-conspirators with the hierarchical patriarchy of Pointz Hall; Isa and Dodge desire an alternative.

In the interval of the play, Isa and Dodge align themselves as co-conspirators, countering the dominant masculinity and hegemonic order inherent in Manresa, Giles, and Bart Oliver. Meeting in the barn, they move from members of the audience to actors on the stage, reciting lines from the first act, Isa as Carinthia and Dodge as lord and liege. He perceives her as handsome, but

laments her relative domestic positioning against a tea urn, a symbol of crushing domesticity, wishing to see her as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood would, with “her glass green eyes and thick body, the neck [as] broad as a pillar, against an arum lily or a vine” (79). Instead, they stand in silence, but momentarily his perspective shifts, and Isa’s face subsequently changes, “as if she had got out of one dress and put on another” (79). Once more Isa changes, this time relative to her husband – whom Dodge describes as “hirsute, handsome, virile” – but where the relationship between husband and wife is “strained”, Dodge finds himself unable to look away from Giles, unable to imagine how Isa would look “against vine leaf in a greenhouse” (80). In the ensuing moments, Isa does as Dodge desires and shows him the greenhouse, continuing their earlier recital of “Ode to a Nightingale”. Presently he sees her “standing against the green glass, the fig tree, and the blue hydrangea, knife in hand” (85). Of course, Dodge is unaware of Isa’s recollection throughout the day of the rape she read earlier in the newspaper, so, to him, her violent proclamation to “plunge” the “gleaming ... blade” suggests a classical interpretation. But, as Isa observes that she “[wishes] that the play didn’t run in [her] head”, we can begin to untangle the repetitiveness of the rape narrative in Isa’s role as wife, mother, and audience. As Dodge and Isa sit as “statues in a greenhouse”, the sedentary and stagnated potential of their lives becomes increasingly clear: “the future shadowed their present, like the sun coming through the many-veined transparent vine leaf; a criss-cross of lines making no pattern” (86).

Isa’s and Dodge’s aesthetic potential is thwarted through their subservience to an established patriarchal order, characterised in *Between the Acts* by the domineering Giles Oliver. Isa as a poet manqué creates in silence, retreating to her library and masking her poems in an accounts book. Meanwhile Dodge’s identity as an artist is broad; his preferred medium is never revealed, but he exhibits a taste for fine painting and is able to identify eighteenth-century china, thereby suggesting he is an aesthete. Both their chosen pursuits are individualistic, reflecting the *l’art pour l’art* ideology of aestheticism. But *Between the Acts*’ primary function as a female *Künstlerroman* is the realised presentation of La Trobe’s pageant, a performance which aligns itself to Woolf’s desires for art to remain free from the infection of propaganda and a political

agenda. To this end, Isa and Dodge, as creative identities, are therefore more inclined to represent the self-enterprising artistic figure, but are unable to achieve any level of creative satisfaction; they languish instead between the acts.

4.4 “It was an awkward moment. How to make an end?”

As the evening settles on Pointz Hall, the “peering, fumbling” audience turns and sees “the flaming windows, each daubed with golden sun” (143). And so “straightening themselves for the last time”, and bidding farewell to the actors, the audience “dispersed, across lawns, down paths, past the house to the gravel-strewn crescent, where cars, push bikes and cycles were crowded together” (143). Of all the moments presented in La Trobe’s pageant, the resolution is arguably the most fraught. The audience hovers, unsure if the performance is over, uncertain whether to disperse. Some applaud, some linger. Some describe La Trobe’s play as “utter bosh”, but others speculate on whether they caught the “meaning”, if any, behind “something hidden, the unconscious call”, and some suggest “it’s true, there’s a sense in which we all ... are savages still” (143-145). The final triumph of La Trobe’s pageant is to turn a series of mirrors on the audience, forcing them to doubly view their own private self with the public image they present, even though one audience member recoils at the temerity of La Trobe for cruelly “[catching]” them “unprotected” and unguarded: “The looking-glasses now – did they mean the reflection is the dream; and the tune – was it Bach, Handel, or no one in particular – is the truth? Or was it t’other was about?” (145). As the audience disperses, their speech becomes entangled. The old cronies chatter themselves away: Mr. Umphelby is indistinguishable from the Brookes, just as Mr. Streatfield merges with Mr. Carfax; the Hispano-Suizas, the Rolls-Royces, the Bentleys, the Fords all roll into one. The narrative descends into a stream of direct speech, but there is no interlocutor, no defined speaker, and no identified audience. Here, the audience shifts between the collective unity to their individual identities in the village and back again, nit-picking amongst themselves the didactic features of the historical narrative presented by La Trobe.

In Pointz Hall, strangers finally absent, the family returns to a familiar normalcy. But Isa is yet to undergo one final transition. Pressed by Lucy Swithin, Isa is asked, “Did you feel ... what he said: we act different parts but are the same?”

(155). Of course, Isa, Giles, and Mr. Oliver, though all present for the same performance, “each ... saw something different. In another moment it would be beneath the horizon, gone to join the other plays” (154). La Trobe’s play, as an objective performance, is understandably perceived differently by the relative psychological positioning of these three identities. Lucy, reflecting on previous years’ performances, is overshadowed by Isa’s reference again to the repetitiveness of the pageantry, the ceaseless passage of time: “This year, last year, next year, never...” (155). For Isa, her character is and isn’t changed. She oscillates, now, “It was Yes, No. Yes, yes, yes, the tide rushed out embracing. No, no, no, it contracted” (156). Her self is reduced to waves of the “orts, scraps, and fragments” of the vanishing play. Here Giles enters once more, changed again, and Isa sneers at the “black coat and white tie of the professional classes”, before mentally chastising herself, reminding herself who Giles is to her: “The father of my children, whom I love and hate. Love and hate – how they tore her asunder! Surely it was time someone invented a new plot” (156).

But of course a new plot is entirely what the novel does not deliver. There is no alternative narrative, no new invention for Isa Oliver. She relents, and continues to exist unchanged, foreshadowed in her observation of the traditional pageantry and the ceaseless performances of English history. Marked by inaction, Isa’s submissive nature sees her vacillate between hate and love, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, before her narrative ends with complete resignation. In relinquishing the creation of a “new plot” to “someone” else, Isa forgoes the self-determination that has come to characterise the artistic heroine of the female *Künstlerroman*, an invisible failure between the acts of Miss La Trobe’s partial, public success.

But what of Miss La Trobe? She, of course, in order to retain her distance from the audience, does not appear until the final guests, Manresa and Dodge, drive away. She knows, standing from her stooping position, that “it had been prolonged to avoid attention” (111). She returns to the inn, another inference that she is not a local, not privy to the social politics of the nearby village, and expresses the need for a drink, something La Trobe does with regularity “since the row with the actress who had shared her bed and purse” (113). “One of these days”, La Trobe muses, “she would break – which of the village laws? Sobriety? Chastity? Or take something that did not properly belong to her?” (113). The implication here is that the audience took

her vision. But it is her association with the “women in the cottages with the red geraniums” that reinforces La Trobe’s self-identification as an outsider; describing herself as an “outcast”, La Trobe suggests “nature had somehow set her apart from her kind” (113). Again, the implication of La Trobe’s sexuality is a means of maintaining her artistic distancing, for while she is not part of village life, she “had scribbled in the margin of her manuscript: “I am the slave of my audience”” (113). That she privately identifies as an outcast, and yet strives to uphold a relationship with her audience is a clear indication that her creative potential is tied to the public reception of her work, making her a full member of Woolf’s Society of Outsiders.

And yet La Trobe manages, from her position beyond the village, to suggest she has degree of agency in the narrative of Pointz Hall. The description of the concluding moments between Isa and Giles, with its overtones of performativity and the suggestion of their marriage bed as a stage, carries with it the unseen presence of La Trobe as an anonymous director. Indeed, the final appearances of Isa and Giles and Miss La Trobe are inextricably linked, for Isa and Giles appear to be an extension of the village pageant, actors in their own right. Where the curtains rise on the married couple and “they spoke” (117), La Trobe, in her inn, hears the trees outside pelted with starlings, and “heard the first words” (113). That these are written in the narrative as synchronous events encourages an understanding of La Trobe’s ability to retain a physical distance from society, while still maintaining a degree of control over the actions of her actors.

Where Woolf’s previous female *Künstlerromane* tend to privilege either the creative success of an artistic figure, like Lily Briscoe or Orlando, or examine the conditions of failure, like those experienced by Rachel Vinrace, *Between the Acts* considers both the creative achievement and aesthetics of failure in the female artist. Woolf’s contrasting of Miss La Trobe, the public artist with an audience, with the private, secretive Isa Oliver and William Dodge, combines the feminist pacifism within her political writings – *Three Guineas* and “Anon” – with her aversion to the increasing pressures on artists to adhere to a wider cultural message. That Woolf wished for art to remain ambivalent towards politics is made clear in her essay, “Why Art To-Day Follows Politics”, and, accordingly, *Between the Acts* lifts the veil on the female artist’s experience of resisting the infection of propaganda in her work.

Conclusion

In the beginning of Woolf's writerly career, to be both a woman and an artist was a seemingly paradoxical state of mind, two mutually exclusive identities rather than a cohesive whole. Prior to Woolf's uptake of the female *Künstlerroman*, women textually identified as creative-types in novels – such as *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* or *The Hand of Ethelberta* – never explicitly self-authorised their artistic identity or, instead, were compelled to live a double-life. Art and the creative pursuit were presented in the male *Künstlerroman* as one wholly compatible with masculine sensibilities and the virility of leisure, and if women were involved in the artistic process, they did so only in their capacity as muses, not creators. That women were the fertile origins of men's artistic inspiration diminished the capacity of earlier female *Künstlerromane* entirely to resolve the oxymoronic concept of woman-as-artist.

And it is precisely this venture that occupies the characterisation of Rachel Vinrace in *Melymbrosia*. Rachel as an embryonic artist desires a destiny beyond that courted for her by Helen Ambrose, her aunt, and Clarissa Dalloway, who briefly travels with Rachel aboard their vessel, the *Euphrosyne*. The removal of the budding female artist from the bustling streets of London to the fertile landscape of South America suggests, too, that the nurturing of an exclusively feminine creativity cannot be achieved in an imposing patriarchal society. But the conditions of confinement travel with Rachel, implying that the sequestering of female creativity is both a physical and psychological state of being. The novel therefore uses Rachel to explore the disconnection between her identity as a woman, and her attempted self-determination as a musician, examining the public-private dialectic of artists and their role in society. Rachel's real passion and enjoyment of life is drawn from her love of playing the piano. But, though an accomplished musician, she mostly performs for herself, privately, in her quarters on the *Euphrosyne* or in her room at the resort in Santa Marina. When Rachel encounters the burgeoning novelist Terence Hewet, she is forced to define herself as either belonging to the public sphere, the world of women as wives and mothers, or retreating to her private self, her creative enterprise. And, while Rachel accepts Terence's proposal of marriage, Terence reduces her artistic talent to a means designed specifically to aid *his* literary abilities. That Woolf's revision of her first novel includes this dismissal of Rachel's creativity

implies a recalibration of the waning woman-as-muse. But, of course, the future for Rachel is disheartening, bleak. Rejecting her afforded place in public society as the future wife of Terence, Rachel enters a metaphorical fugue state, enclosing in on herself with feverish hallucinations. When she dies, she has lost all semblance of time, place, and self-identity. The tangled relationship between the Rachel's concept of herself as a woman and her self-determination as an artist is mapped in *Melymbrosia* by a thematic reading of the female *Künstlerroman*, for her death reflects the impossible narrative ending many fictional female artists tried and failed to imagine for themselves.

The disjointed identity of the female artist is examined at length by Woolf in *To the Lighthouse*, specifically within the context of the relationship between Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay. Within the novel's first section, "The Window", Lily and Mrs. Ramsay are contrasted as artistic individuals with different mediums at their creative disposal. As a painter, Lily yearns for unity and harmony on her canvas, the ability objectively to represent the subject before her, namely Mrs. Ramsay and her son, James. But she is unable to comprehend the task before her – to connect the mass on the right with that on the left – and so her artistic vision remains unrealised. Instead Lily is briefly overcome by the agitator Charles Tansley, who insists that women can neither write nor paint. But Mrs. Ramsay's creative outlet is tied to her identity as a wife and mother, suggesting her primary medium is her body. In this way, the social interactions and collective sense of oneness achieved at the dinner-party operate as an extension of her creative prowess, thereby intimating that the dinner-table, like Lily's canvas, is a physical representation of Mrs. Ramsay's artistry. Moreover, the creativity of Mrs. Ramsay enables Lily to solve her artistic problem – to move the line to the middle of the canvas – and ushers in her decision never to marry: to create outside of domesticity. The conceptualisation of Mrs. Ramsay as the phantom angel of the household permeates the final section of the novel, "The Lighthouse", where the purported central action of the text – a visit to the lighthouse – is achieved. That "Time Passes" presents an entire decade in a single night suggests that the proximity of Mrs. Ramsay is necessary for Lily's artistic vision: where a shadow here requires a light there. And while the travelling motif of the female *Künstlerroman* sees Rachel Vinrace transported to the edges of civilisation, Lily retreats inwards, metaphysically journeying closer and closer to the spectral image of

Mrs. Ramsay as Lily first saw her in “The Window”. Ameliorating then these two distinct identities – artist-as-wife-and-mother and artist-as-heroine – Lily comes objectively to represent the subjective form of Mrs. Ramsay, overcoming the anxiety of production inherent in the female artist of the *Künstlerroman*. Though Lily completes her painting, she does so for her own sake. She cares not whether the painting is destroyed, hung in the attic, or forgotten. Lily is the first artist in Woolf’s use of the *Künstlerroman* that achieves her creative vision without sacrificing agency.

But Lily does not have an audience, besides herself, and therefore the subject of women’s production of art – and its inclusion in the public sphere – is still unresolved. And so, where *To the Lighthouse* presents as Lily’s creative achievement as being defined by the narrative’s adherence to a rigid form, Woolf’s first foray into the world of biographical fiction constructs an artistic protagonist of unyielding malleability. But it is the presence of a biographer in *Orlando: A Biography* that allows the reader to assume a degree of authority in Orlando’s development as an artist. The novel’s intertextual relationship with the polemic *A Room of One’s Own* invites a reading of Woolf’s own ideas on the function of biography, the conflation of fact and truth, fiction and personality. To write a women’s literary history, to determine the origins of female creativity itself, Woolf deliberately allows the facts of history to secede to the personality of her speakers – Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael, and Mary Hamilton. In doing so Woolf presents an alternative line of argument, a fictive account of truth. This treatment of the subject filters into the characterisation of Orlando, where the biographer of the female *Künstlerroman* is able objectively to render Orlando’s creative progress. Moreover, the travelling motif of the artist is again observed in the text. Voyaging out to Constantinople as a man, Orlando returns to England a woman, wholly embracing her female identity on the passage back. But it is Orlando’s ability to marry, to have a child, and to continue to produce art that marks her as achieving a vision beyond that desired by Lily Briscoe. That Orlando creates within domesticity, and publishes her poem in the public sphere to much acclaim, suggests Woolf’s augmentation of the female *Künstlerroman* finally presents a creative protagonist whose artistry is not defined by their status inside, or outside, the home.

The intimations of sapphism in *Orlando: A Biography* and *A Room of One’s Own* continue throughout Woolf’s later writing, where the suggestion of an alternative

female sexuality becomes a source of maintaining a sense of separation and anonymity in the artist. Increasingly Woolf's writing of the 1930s sought to reconcile the position of artists in a society on the precipice of war. In *Three Guineas* Woolf uses the epistolary form to examine women's function in addressing the prevention of war, determining that it would be prudent for women to exist as a Society of Outsiders in order to resist the cultural influence of the hyper-masculine. Similarly, her posthumously published essay, "Anon", implies that the artist's anonymity is directly correlated with his ability to perform for an audience and, in turn, the reception of his work. These issues form the consideration of the female *Künstlerroman* in *Between the Acts*. Again, the public-private dialectic is seen in the representation of Miss La Trobe, a dictatorial pageant director, William Dodge, a homosexual aesthete, and Isa Oliver, a secret poet. La Trobe and Dodge are identified in the text as belonging to the Society of Outsiders by means of their sexual orientation, and La Trobe uses her relative positioning outside the local village to maintain command over her audience, her actors, and her script. Like Mrs. Ramsay and Lily, she desires unity, the ability to make her audience see the performance of her pageant from her perspective. Meanwhile, Dodge shies away from his identity as an aesthete, and Isa hides her poems from her husband, Giles Oliver, in an accounts book. But where the private artists, Isa and Dodge, fail, La Trobe's equivocal success is directly linked to her role as a public figure, an identity that hinges on her ability to remain anonymous, ambiguous, and distant.

The examination of the female *Künstlerroman* in Woolf's writing yields a number of successful creative identities, such as Mrs. Ramsay, Lily Briscoe, Orlando, and La Trobe. There are, too, examples of failure, such as Rachel Vinrace, William Dodge, and Isa Oliver. Aware that gender necessarily complicates the narrative ending of a creative protagonist, Woolf incorporates into her writing the use of historical non-fiction, biography, essayistic, and epistolary forms to construct this varied catalogue of creative identities. That Woolf took a fractured genre to illuminate the origins of female creativity suggests that her toilsome revision of the form is, fundamentally, her interrogation of the aesthetics of women's creative production and, concurrently, an exploration of the factors propagating the regression of a feminine imagination.

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