

## INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

**The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.** Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

ProQuest Information and Learning  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
800-521-0600

UMI<sup>®</sup>





Université d'Ottawa • University of Ottawa



**“MOMENTS OF BEING” ELIZABETH DALLOWAY:  
A STUDY OF VIRGINIA WOOLF’S DAUGHTER FIGURES**

M.A. Thesis

by Andrea F. McNeil

University of Ottawa

Department of English

Supervisor: Professor Donald J. Childs

January 2002



**National Library  
of Canada**

**Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services**

**395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada**

**Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada**

**Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques**

**395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada**

*Your file / Votre référence*

*Our file / Notre référence*

**The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.**

**The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.**

**L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.**

**L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.**

0-612-72781-5

**Canada**

## ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the trajectory of a number of Virginia Woolf's daughter figures in their struggle to achieve selfhood. The four chapters of this project thus examine Woolf's early daughter figures, Phyllis and Rosamond, title characters of a 1906 work of short fiction: Rachel Vinrace, the heroine of the 1915 novel *The Voyage Out*; Elizabeth Dalloway, the daughter of the central figure of Woolf's 1925 novel, *Mrs Dalloway*, and, finally, the various daughter figures of the 1937 novel, *The Years*: Eleanor, Delia and Rose Pargiter, Kitty Malone, and Peggy Pargiter. The thesis is structured around my close readings of these texts, and is informed by psychoanalytic and feminist theory.

The central focus of this project is a study of Elizabeth Dalloway, who I read as Woolf's pre-eminent daughter figure, as this character alone transcends the fixed gender roles which limit each of the other daughter figures studied in this project. I look to Woolf's concept of "moments of being" to explain this character's vision of a future outside of the marriage plot and domestic existence in which her fictional predecessors and successors are inescapably inscribed.

My examination of the motifs that recur in each of the texts, particularly images of silence and self-abnegation and of the strained mother-daughter relationship, allows me to analyse the author's revision of the developmental stories of her daughter figures over the course of her career. Moreover, Virginia Woolf's narrative strategies, most particularly the question of closure in *Mrs Dalloway*, as well as the representation of female characters who defy the standards of conventional femininity, provide insight into Elizabeth Dalloway's position as a figure of affirmation, emancipation and potentiality.

## CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>page</b>	ii
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....		iv
<b>List of Abbreviations</b> .....		v
<b>Introduction</b> .....		1
<b>Chapter 1 - Phyllis and Rosamond: the Hollow Women</b> .....		11
<b>Chapter 2 - The Dispossessed Daughter: Rachel's Failed Voyage to Selfhood</b> .....		26
<b>Chapter 3 - Scrutinizing the Inscrutable: Elizabeth Dalloway's "Moment of Being"</b> .....		54
<b>Chapter 4 - The Written and the Unwritten: Elizabeth Dalloway's Possible Future(s) in <i>The Years</i></b> .....		90
<b>Bibliography</b> .....		131

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Donald Childs, whose knowledge and insight guided me through every step of this project. I would have been lost without his wisdom, encouragement, and endless patience. I am also grateful to Professors Gerald Lynch and David Jarraway for their thought provoking courses, and to Professor Rampton for the phone call that convinced me to choose the University of Ottawa for my Master's degree. Of the many inspiring individuals who encouraged me to pursue my studies at the graduate level, I must thank Professors Jean-Pierre and H el ene Lapointe of the Trent University Modern Languages Department, as well as Professor Geoffrey Eathorne of the Department of English, as he introduced me to Virginia Woolf in the first place.

Over the past year and a half of this endeavour, many people have helped me to keep my sanity. Of these, I particularly wish to thank Jody Guiney, for climbing Mayan pyramids and eating termites with me during our trip to Belize and Guatemala, and also Allison Stoddart and Lisa Redekop, for hurtling (and sometimes falling) off small cliffs with me during our many crazy mountain bike rides. A special thank you also goes to Rob Grondin for his endless encouragement, and to John Reid for his friendship and support (as well as for a wonderful canoe trip through Temagami). I must also thank my Wednesday-night support group, for many cheerful evenings of herbal tea and camaraderie.

Last but far from least, I would like to thank my family, without whom this project would not have been possible. Thank you to my sister Philippa, who in her infinite wisdom (which stems, no doubt, from her own agonizing thesis-writing experience), often reassured me that the end was in sight and that I would not go insane. I am equally grateful to my twin, Claire, whose faith in me has never faltered, and whose support and love I feel no matter how far away from me she may live. I would also like to thank Sven, my champion and my partner, whose love has carried me through the ups and downs of this undertaking.

Of all the people who have encouraged and helped me throughout this project, the two to whom I owe the greatest debt of gratitude are my parents. This thesis is therefore dedicated to my mother, whose love, support and adventurous spirit inspire me every day, and also to my father, whose wisdom, courage, and passion for literature have figured so significantly in my life. His love and guidance are greatly missed.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- MD Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.
- MOB ---. *Virginia Woolf: Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*. Ed. Jeanne Schulkind. New York: Harcourt, 1976.
- NSFD Abel, Elizabeth. "Narrative Structure(s) and Female Development: The Case of *Mrs Dalloway*." *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland. Hanover: New England UP, 1983.
- PR Woolf, Virginia. "Phyllis and Rosamond." *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Susan Dick. New York: Harcourt, 1985.
- TVO ---. *The Voyage Out*. New York: Harcourt, 1948.
- TY ---. *The Years*. London: Grafton, 1977.
- VWFP Abel, Elizabeth. *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989.
- WW Woolf, Virginia. *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing*. Ed. Michèle Barrett. New York: Harcourt, 1979

## INTRODUCTION

Few Woolf scholars have explored the rich psychology of Elizabeth Dalloway, daughter of the much-studied Clarissa. Classified by one critic as “enigmatic,” “unknown and unknowable,” Elizabeth has been largely classified as a marginal figure of little import (Abel 43). This thesis reappraises this critically neglected character, underlining her textual importance not only in *Mrs Dalloway*, but in Virginia Woolf’s fictional oeuvre as a whole. My study thus identifies her as one of the pre-eminent daughter-figures in Woolf’s fiction, a character who is pre- and post-figured in the author’s short stories and novels and in whom the issues of identity-formation, sexuality, silence and self-construction converge and come to the foreground.

As the title of this project suggests, I use Woolf’s concept of “moments of being,” which the author delineates in her autobiographical “A Sketch of the Past,” as a backdrop for this study. From Woolf’s perspective, while “A great part of every day is not lived consciously,” there are nonetheless “exceptional moments” of awareness during which one experiences “a revelation of some order” (MOB 70, 72). In my reading of *Mrs Dalloway*, Elizabeth experiences just such a moment of revelation during her exploratory voyage down the Strand. As Woolf suggests in “A Sketch of the Past,” these moments stand as “a token of some real thing behind appearances” (72); significantly, then, during Elizabeth’s own moment of epiphany, she transcends the hollow identity – the mould of “young ladydom” (PR 18) that is imposed on her by the British “socio-sexual system” (Swanson 287), and envisions herself accomplishing something “real” – becoming “a doctor, a farmer,” or even going “into Parliament if she [finds] it necessary” (MD 178-179).

My vision of selfhood thus corresponds with Woolf scholar Louise A. Poresky's concept of the "Self," which she defines in her critical work, *The Elusive Self: Psyche and Spirit in Virginia Woolf's Novels*:

The Self, that core or center of the human psyche that Woolf's characters seek, differs from the self, one's superficial identity. We can say that a man or a woman who operates strictly in accordance with society's expectations – for instance, a man should assert himself, whereas a woman should remain passive – adopts a particular self. Yet, as Virginia Woolf suggests in her novels, all individuals possess a Self that defies such categorization. This Self constitutes the psychic core of a person. Outside of this core, the ego reigns, the ego that insists on shallow identities. Within the core, however, to which the ego has no access, one finds the profound psychic wholeness that mystics seek. (15-16)

As my thesis suggests, this "solid grain of pure self" is indeed elusive, for, as Woolf delineates in her early work of fiction, "Phyllis and Rosamond," it lies hidden and dormant beneath the "mass of artificial frivolities" which exemplify the socialization of these daughter figures (26).

Indeed, as Woolf outlines in this 1906 work of short fiction, which is the subject of my first chapter, for a young woman coming of age at the turn of the century, the transition from fulfilling one's upbringing as a superficially "accomplished" young lady to becoming "the real thing" is not an easy one (27).<sup>1</sup> As Woolf suggests in this story, the

---

<sup>1</sup> As Phyllis notes of herself and her sister in this narrative, "we are brought up just to come out in the evening and make pretty speeches, and well, marry I suppose, and of course we might have gone to college if we'd wanted to; but as we didn't we're just accomplished" (27). Phyllis considers herself a fraud, and

duty to marry is a parental decree that young women long both to circumvent and to fulfil. For, as Phyllis notes in her explication of her and her sister's sense of captivity, marriage represents emancipation, as it "means freedom and friends and a house of our own," even though it also potentially represents the commencement of a new form of "slavery" – if no longer to the rule of their parents, then to that of their husbands (28, 22).

This first chapter demonstrates the failure of Woolf's earliest daughter figures to overcome the essential, limited identities imposed on them by a society that considers them not as "human beings," but rather as "young ladies" of a certain type (26). As the young author Sylvia Tristram comments when she considers this distinction, "I know your evening dresses. ... I see you pass before me in beautiful processions, but I have never yet heard you speak. Are you solid all through?" (27). In my reading of the text, this subversive statement highlights Phyllis and Rosamond's silence, a trait that is manifestly linked to their subservient position in society.

Accordingly, my analysis of these two sisters examines their inability to break through the silence that Woolf figures, throughout each of the works I study in this thesis, as both a symptom of her daughter figures' voicelessness within the patriarchal system and as a subversive space from which they observe and critique this very oppressor. My investigation of this paradigm is informed by Patricia Oudek Laurence's critical assessment of modes of silence in Woolf's writing, *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition*. In particular, I use Laurence's distinction between "the 'unsaid,' something one might have felt but does not say; the 'unspoken,' something not yet formulated or expressed in voiced words; and the 'unsayable,' something not sayable

---

identifies Sylvia Tristram, a young woman who is a writer and who lives independently with her sister, an artist, to be the "real thing" (25, 27).

based on the social taboos of Victorian propriety or something about life that is ineffable” as a vocabulary for my analysis of Woolf’s daughter figures (1).

Woolf’s depiction of her daughter figures as both silent and powerless continues in her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, which is the subject of my second chapter. The heroine of this novel, Rachel Vinrace, is a young woman who, like Phyllis and Rosamond before her, fails to attain selfhood, as she is unable to overcome the education that was designed to keep her “ignorant” and “incompetent,” and thus incapable of functioning in the world except as dependent on a man<sup>2</sup> (15, 32). As Woolf notes, Rachel

...had been educated as the majority of well-to-do girls in the last part of the nineteenth century were educated. Kindly doctors and gentle old professors had taught her the rudiments of about ten different branches of knowledge, but they would as soon have forced her to go through one piece of drudgery thoroughly as they would have told her that her hands were dirty. ...there was no subject in the world which she knew accurately. Her mind was in the state of an intelligent man’s in the beginning of the reign of queen Elizabeth: she would believe practically anything she was told, invent reasons for anything she said. The shape of the earth, the history of the world, how trains worked, or money was invested, what laws were in force, which people wanted what, and why they wanted it, the most elementary idea of a system in modern life—none of this had been imparted to her by any of her professors or mistresses. (31)

---

<sup>2</sup> See Swanson, who also comments, “The formal education [Rachel] has received as a girl seems designed to make her unfit for survival. Her emotional education is similarly disabling” (291).

As Woolf suggests in this passage, Rachel's education and upbringing have done little to encourage her intellect or independence. Thus, while Rachel's goal in the novel is to become a "person on her own account," she remains unable to overcome her socialization, which the author clearly depicts as an impediment to female selfhood (90). Ultimately, then, Rachel succumbs to the inexorable marriage plot, as she comes to define her identity through her relationship with her fiancé, Terence Hewet. The alienated young woman thus dies at the close of the novel, falling victim to a fever she contracts even as she accepts Terence's proposal of marriage.

Two critics, Diana L. Swanson and Christine Froula, inform my reading of *The Voyage Out*. Swanson, whose article "'My Boldness Terrifies Me': sexual abuse and female subjectivity in *The Voyage Out*" builds on Froula's earlier reading of this novel, argues that the "central problem" of the narrative "concerns Rachel's struggle to find and develop her own view of the world, to become a subject rather than an object of desire" (288). While Swanson's interpretation of the novel differs from my own, in that she focuses on the narrative's covert depiction of the sexual abuse Woolf suffered at the hands of her half-brother, George Duckworth, this insightful article nonetheless emphasizes Rachel's struggle "to become a person," as well as her "defeat by the socio-sexual forces of British society" (287). Swanson, moreover, identifies Rachel as a "patriarchal daughter," a term which, in my reading of Woolf's fictional oeuvre, applies equally to Rachel's predecessors, Phyllis and Rosamond Hibbert, and to her successors, Eleanor Pargiter and Kitty Malone (287).

As I mention above, Swanson's analysis draws on an article by Christine Froula, "Out of the Chrysalis: Female Initiation and Female Authority in Virginia Woolf's *The*

*Voyage Out.*” In her skilful reading of the novel, Froula suggests that Rachel has “neither the strength nor the resources” to escape the “paradigms of female initiation” which lead her “to identify with nature rather than culture and to imagine marriage and maternity as the destiny that will fulfil her life” (63). This assertion informs my reading of both *The Voyage Out* and *Mrs Dalloway*; thus, in my third chapter, which focuses on this last novel, I suggest that the very characteristic that distinguishes Elizabeth Dalloway from Rachel Vinrace is the fact that Elizabeth succeeds in imagining a future for herself in which she participates in the “public domains of history and culture,” a sphere which, as Froula notes, is traditionally reserved for the male “initiate” (64).

My third chapter studies the development Elizabeth Dalloway undergoes over the course of the novel, as she progresses from an identity contingent on both her mother and her tutor, Doris Kilman, to a position of self-discovery and self-reliance. Accordingly, this chapter explores the tags of passivity, innocence and immaturity various characters impose on Elizabeth in order to illustrate the distance between this young woman’s experience of her self and the identity society has constructed for her. To do this, I analyse the alienation between Clarissa and her daughter, examining in particular the mother’s categorization of Elizabeth as a foreign “Other,” set apart by her “oriental bearing” and sense of “inscrutable mystery” (Beauvoir xvi; MD 171). My discussion suggests that by situating Elizabeth as alien within her own class and family, Woolf frees her from the patriarchal values that restrict her fictional predecessors’ emotional and sexual blossoming.

My subsequent examination of Elizabeth’s sexuality draws on Freudian theory, and, through a close reading of Woolf’s portrayal of the subversive bond shared by the

young woman and her father. ultimately revises critic Elizabeth Abel's positioning of this character in the Oedipal stage of her sexual development. My analysis of Elizabeth's emergent sexuality and questionable sexual orientation is, moreover, punctuated with references to Patricia Juliana Smith's *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fiction*, as well as to sociologist Karin Flaake's "A body of one's own: Sexual development and the female body in the mother-daughter relationship."

This third chapter goes on to explore Woolf's depiction of Elizabeth's voyage of autonomy and self-discovery, and identifies this character's eventual destination, the Strand, as a liminal space in which the young woman is at last able to escape from the external constructions which have thus far defined her identity. In this section of this chapter, I take up Rachel Bowlby's essay, "Thinking Forward through Mrs Dalloway's Daughter," in which the critic suggests that, despite Elizabeth's vision of her future as an independent career woman, this character nonetheless remains bound by the feminine destiny which so clearly defines her mother's existence (70, 83). Evidently, my position differs significantly from that of Bowlby, although our reading of Elizabeth's experience as she journeys down the Strand intersects on many points. Unlike Bowlby, however, I conclude that Elizabeth's epiphanic "moment of being" represents a turning point for the young woman – a "revelation" (MD 179) during which she achieves a level of self-awareness and communion with the world that is unavailable to her in the presence of figures of authority and oppression, such as her mother and Miss Kilman. In my reading of the novel, Elizabeth's vision of her future, as well as her subsequent perception of a disembodied "voice," which brings her an awareness of her mortality, are markers of this character's entrance into agency and selfhood (181).

As the chapter closes, I suggest that Elizabeth's position as a figure of potentiality and liberation stems not only from her transcendent vision of her future, but also from the fact that Woolf leaves this future unwritten at the close of the novel, a narrative strategy which liberates this character from the marriage plot and the *difficulté d'être* that characterize the existence of the author's other daughter figures, including those who populate the 1937 novel, *The Years*, which is the subject of my fourth chapter.

This final chapter focuses on the Pargiter daughters, Eleanor, Delia, and Rose, as well as on their niece, Peggy Pargiter, and cousin, Kitty Malone. One aspect of my analysis of these five characters is my comparison of their youthful ambitions and their ultimate paths in life with the possibilities Woolf suggests are open to Elizabeth at the close of *Mrs Dalloway*. In my reading of this last novel, these possibilities include Elizabeth's pursuit of the political and professional ambitions she envisions during her voyage down the Strand; marriage, represented in the attentions of Willie Titcomb in the final scenes of the novel; and, finally, staying at home to care for her father, a future which is implied through Woolf's portrayal of Clarissa's delicate health, as well as through her portrayal of the evident closeness of Elizabeth and her father.

My analysis of Eleanor Pargiter thus studies this character's failure to emerge from the silence and subservience that characterize her role as the "Angel in the House" (WW 59), a responsibility she takes on after her mother's death, which Woolf depicts in the opening, 1880 section of the novel. Thus "sacrificed to the family" at the age of twenty-two, Eleanor stays at home to care for her father until she is in her fifties (TY 368). Although she is at last freed from this duty by her father's death, she is unable to overcome her socialized self-abnegation, and therefore, despite her adventurous spirit,

she remains an outsider, unable to “partake” in the “talk and life” which characterize the social gatherings Woolf depicts this character attending throughout the fifty-year period covered by the novel (PR 24). My analysis of Eleanor’s failure to break through the silence of the “unspoken” draws on Poresky’s interpretation of this character in *The Elusive Self: Psyche and Spirit in Virginia Woolf’s Novels*, as well as on Margaret (Comstock) Connolly’s “The Loudspeaker and the Human Voice: Politics and the Form of *The Years*” (Laurence 1).

My study of the youngest Pargiter daughter, Rose, identifies this militant suffragette as one of Woolf’s figures of female resistance, a group of characters whom I identify as transgressive women. These characters, who recur throughout Woolf’s texts, consistently have the effect of questioning and subverting the patriarchal values of daughters in their roles as “Angels in the House.” Thus, in *The Voyage Out*, Woolf depicts Evelyn Murgatroyd as a character whose sexuality and social activism serve as a counterpoint to Rachel’s naïveté and passivity; and, in *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf depicts Sally Seton as a character who tantalizes and unsettles the youthful Clarissa, while Doris Kilman serves as a catalyst for Elizabeth’s rebellion against both her mother and the patriarchy. In *The Years*, Rose Pargiter emerges as a similarly transgressive figure, as, through her political activism, she works to break down the repressive values that confine Victorian women within such limited domestic roles.

Another Pargiter daughter, Delia, is equally portrayed as a “defiant” young woman, although, unlike her younger sister Rose, this character fails to follow through on her youthful dreams of emancipation (TY 23). As I suggest in my analysis, in the final section of *The Years*, which is set in the 1930s, Woolf portrays Delia as having betrayed

her dreams of revolution and independence in favour of marriage and motherhood, the “culturally determined destiny” which, in my evaluation, emerges as a clear obstruction to the selfhood of Woolf’s daughter figures (Froula 63).

This chapter concludes with an analysis of Kitty Malone and Peggy Pargiter. In my reading of *The Years*, Kitty’s strained relationship with her mother, infatuation with her tutor and ongoing struggle to find and voice her individuality directly echo Elizabeth Dalloway’s story. My analysis of Kitty thus contrasts her with Elizabeth, as I explore Woolf’s decision to set this narrative in 1880, a choice that serves to re-inscribe Kitty in the marriage plot from which her predecessor was exempted.<sup>3</sup> This revision, I argue, underscores Elizabeth’s unparalleled emergence as a figure of liberation and self-creation, a contention I also forward in my analysis of Peggy Pargiter, the final daughter figure I study in this project.

In my examination of this final character, whom Woolf portrays as having achieved Elizabeth’s goal of becoming a doctor, I suggest that, despite Peggy’s professional achievements, this ostensibly liberated young woman is trapped by a sense of bitterness that marks her as a figure of oppression and frustration. In my reading of *The Years*, Peggy, like Kitty Malone, and Eleanor, Delia, and Rose Pargiter, fails to achieve the level of potentiality and agency that marks Elizabeth Dalloway as Woolf’s foremost figure of female selfhood.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Mrs Dalloway* is set in 1923.

## CHAPTER 1

### **Phyllis and Rosamond: the Hollow Women**

This first chapter begins with an exploration of Virginia Woolf's earliest daughter figures, Phyllis and Rosamond Hibbert, title characters of a 1906 work of short fiction. In this early depiction of female subjectivity, Woolf offers a bleak portrayal of two young women who are trapped in the subservient and hollow roles required by the patriarchal conventions of their family and social milieu. Throughout the text, Woolf metaphorically depicts Phyllis and Rosamond's lives as an ongoing "performance," as "they practise [the] arts" of their trade: that of being dutiful and, most importantly, marriageable daughters (18, 21). As such, they lead the fraudulently "accomplished" lives that characterize "young ladydom," having mastered the "dress and demeanour [which] give them the effect of beauty without its substance" (27, 18). In this quietly political text, Woolf comments on the perfunctory and empty nature of the two sisters' lives, underlining their futile self-awareness as they rail against the world of artifice and ceremony in which they are inescapably inscribed. Unable to bridge the gap between their superficial lives and the world of intellect and vitality they encounter at a Bloomsbury gathering, Phyllis and Rosamond's greatest realization is therefore only a counterfeit "moment of being" (MOB 70) in which they realize that individuality and independent selfhood are beyond their ken. The sad existence and certain fate of Phyllis and Rosamond thus serve to make Elizabeth Dalloway's later liberation from the marriage plot and emergence into self-consciousness and self-expression all the more remarkable.

In his comprehensive study of Woolf's short fiction, Dean R. Baldwin states that Phyllis and Rosamond "have neither the courage nor the talent to break free of the role society has assigned to them" (8), a statement that posits a female "lack" as the root cause of the sisters' inability to move into agency.<sup>1</sup> Baldwin, however, seems not to recognize Woolf's portrayal of the patriarchal social order as a force that ingrains in young women a denial of their very right to exist: "There are five of them, all daughters, they will ruefully explain to you: regretting this initial mistake it seems all through their lives on their parents' behalf" (PR 18).<sup>2</sup> Such a strong statement on Woolf's part clearly earmarks this text as a subversive political statement decrying the inherent negation of female subjectivity within the late Victorian family and social order. As products of this system, young women are, as Woolf points out, "condemned" to suffer the fate of "daughters at home" (18). There is, indeed, no choice of roles or careers available to them. The text therefore repeatedly suggests that the lack of identity and selfhood of these daughters is the same lack responsible for the sisters' inability to move into agency – a lack not so much discovered by patriarchy as installed by it.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I refer here of course to Aristotle's infamous statement, quoted by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*: "The female is a female by virtue of a certain *lack* of qualities ... we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness" (xvi, emphasis in original).

<sup>2</sup> As I note in my second chapter, this sentiment is clearly echoed in *The Voyage Out*, not only in Willoughby Vinrace's attitude towards his daughter, but also in the mentality of Clarissa and Richard Dalloway, whose views and actions clearly negate Rachel's existence as a sentient being. In my final chapter, on *The Years*, I also delineate Colonel Pargiter's dismissive attitude towards his daughters, especially Eleanor, whom he designates as his "housekeeper" (92).

<sup>3</sup> See Woolf's subversive political commentary in the introductory paragraphs of "Phyllis and Rosamond," in which the author clearly refers to women's secondary position, not only in life, but also in literature:

Let each man, I heard it said the other day, write down the details of a day's work: posterity will be as glad of the catalogue as we should be if we had such a record of how the door keeper at the Globe, and the man who kept the Park gates passed Saturday March 8th in the year of our Lord 1568?

And as such portraits as we have are almost invariably of the male sex, who strut more prominently across the stage, it seems worth while to take as model one of those many women who cluster in the shade. (PR 18)

From the commencement of the piece, Woolf thus designates Phyllis and Rosamond as types, rather than individuals, observing that they “epitomise the qualities of many,” representing “a common case, because after all there are many young women born of well-to-do, respectable, official parents; and they must all meet much the same problems and there can be unfortunately, but little variety in the answers they make” (17). In addition to this pointed critique from the narrator, Phyllis herself states to the renegade artist figure Sylvia Tristram: “you must know dozens like us.”<sup>4</sup> as she voices her tired acceptance of her position as an object, a mere commodity “whose exchange constitutes society”<sup>5</sup> (PR 27; Gilbert 262).

Woolf underlines the metaphorical slavery<sup>6</sup> of her daughter figures by characterizing Phyllis and Rosamond as possessing “frivolous, domestic... lighter and more sensitive temperaments,” qualities that “*condemned* [them] to be what in the slang of the century is called the daughters at home” (PR 18, my emphasis). There are, sadly, few options available to them: if they were, like their older sisters, to “cultivate their brains,” their careers would “have so much likeness to those of men themselves” that, in Woolf’s estimation, it would “scarcely [be] worth while to make them the subject of

In *The Voyage Out*, Terence Hewet also notes that literature depicts and glorifies male, rather than female, existence, the latter of which he describes as “this curious silent unrepresented life” (TVO 244).

<sup>4</sup> In *The Years*, Eleanor is likewise designated a “well-known type” (102). Interestingly, while in “Phyllis and Rosamond,” the title characters submit to and inscribe themselves within the generalization made by the narrator, in this later novel, the dismissive observation of a fellow bus-rider (who is, significantly, a man) is juxtaposed with Eleanor’s sense of independence and strength.

<sup>5</sup> In “Notes Toward a Literary Daughteronomy,” Sandra M. Gilbert notes that she draws this concept from Levi-Strauss’ *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (262). See also Minow-Pinkney, who, in her comments on Clarissa Dalloway’s sense of invisibility as she walks through London (see MD 13), notes: “once subdued to the laws of the father, a woman is next handed over to another man, the husband, as a commodity in the structure of patriarchal exchange relations” (71).

<sup>6</sup> As Phyllis comments to Sylvia Tristram, “you must remember that most young ladies are slaves; and you mustn’t insult me because you happen to be free” (27). Notably, Sylvia is a recognizable version of Virginia, as she is described in the narrative as a writer who has “a literary delight in seeing herself reflected in strange looking-glasses, and of holding up her own mirror to the lives of others” (26). See Woolf’s “A Sketch of the Past” for the author’s ambivalent relationship with mirrors (67-68).

[this] special enquiry” into the status and perspective of these young women (18). In order to create characters that typify their gender, Woolf must therefore position Phyllis and Rosamond in the literal no-man’s land of daughterhood, an abstract territory in which they must do battle both with their parents’ ambitions and expectations and, more poignantly, with their own. We are left with little doubt as to the victor – for these two sisters, the patriarchal obligation of marriage represents the only possible escape from the tyranny of their parents’ rule.

Phyllis and Rosamond can thus only try to postpone and undermine their inevitable marriages, which they paradoxically both desire and spurn. As Phyllis sadly comments, “we can’t do what we like – we haven’t a room, for one thing, and then we should never be allowed to do it. We are daughters, until we become married women” (PR 27).<sup>7</sup> As I discuss in my later chapters, this sense of imprisonment in the parental home recurs in Woolf’s novels, most clearly in *The Voyage Out*, in Rachel Vinrace’s description of her life in Richmond with her father and her aunts, as well as in *The Years*, in the author’s depiction of the Pargiter daughters’ life at Abercorn Terrace.

For Phyllis and Rosamond, who are unable to conceive of an existence beyond the domestic roles of daughter and wife, marriage represents not only their sole prospect of escape, but also “the best thing there is – if one were allowed to marry the man one wants” (22). It is this proviso, however, that eludes them, as without a liberated partner, their “way out” will simply lead to another form of domestic slavery (22). Adding to their sense of entrapment is the parental decree that time is running out: Phyllis, the elder daughter, has been given one month to find a suitable mate (22).

---

<sup>7</sup>Almost a quarter-century before writing her seminal *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf thus introduces and identifies this literal and metaphorical space in which the female selfhood can develop and thrive.

It is in this early piece of writing that Woolf first characterizes her daughter figures as silent, struggling not only to voice themselves, but even to experience the independent thoughts that might constitute a subjective voice. The motif of silence is one of Woolf's most subtle and pervasive commentaries on daughterhood: it is this characteristic that generates the labels "incompetent," "inarticulate" and "dumb" for these figures throughout her writings, tags voiced by characters quick to dismiss these young women as virtual non-beings (TVO 16: MD 102, 173). Albeit often voiceless, these daughters are, however, far from "absent" in these texts.<sup>8</sup> Yet their silence does not invalidate them: rather, it represents a subversive position from which Woolf adroitly creates a space of social- and self-reflection for these young women.<sup>9</sup> Within this space, their quiet observations generate a subtle, ongoing critique of the patriarchy, as well as a growing self-awareness and confidence that will eventually culminate, in *Mrs Dalloway*, in Elizabeth's singular and exceptional moment of self-creation.

In order to explore the multi-layered meanings of silence in "Phyllis and Rosamond," I build on Patricia Ondek Laurence's insights into Woolf's use of this motif. It is my position that while Woolf uses silence in the later figures of Rachel Vinrace, Elizabeth Dalloway and Eleanor Pargiter to explore "interiority" and the "life of the mind, particularly on the unconscious level," in this earlier work, she employs silence more to illustrate her "perceptions of the social roles of men and women" (Laurence 12, 11). As Laurence notes, "Woolf's narrative coup is to subvert the sexist tradition of the silent female by infusing her silence with a new being, a new psychic and narrative life.

---

<sup>8</sup> See Patricia Ondek Laurence on Derrida: "Talk, which is often associated with men in Woolf's novels, had traditionally been valued as 'presence mastered' (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 159); women's silence, on the other hand, is marked as 'absence'" (11-12).

<sup>9</sup> See Laurence (11).

Through her marking of silence she shows that silence might express something other than an inferior and subordinate state of mind in women" (41). Phyllis and Rosamond's silence, one of their defining features, is thus a paradoxical symptom of both their power and their powerlessness.<sup>10</sup> Shut out, as Kristeva would say, of the spoken word, realm of the male signifier, these two characters retreat to a subversive female sign language in order to articulate a critique of those who oppress them.<sup>11</sup>

This is most evident during a luncheon in which Phyllis entertains a prospective suitor, the aptly named Mr. Middleton, while her sister observes and rates his character. Ostensibly listening to the colonial stories of Sir Thomas Carew, Rosamond effectuates an admirable performance, stroking his male ego even as she undermines and thwarts the patriarchal decree demanding that Phyllis marry promptly:

Rosamond sat rather silent, as was her wont, speculating keenly upon the character of the secretary, who might be her brother in-law; and checking certain theories she had made by every fresh word he spoke. ... If one could have read her thoughts, while she listened to Sir Thomas's stories of India in the Sixties, one would have found that she was busied in somewhat abstruse calculations: Little Middleton, as she called him, was not half a bad sort: he had brains: he was, she knew, a good son, and he would make a good husband. He was well to do also, and would make his way in the service. On the other hand her psychological acuteness told her that he was narrow

---

<sup>10</sup> See Laurence on Barbara Johnson's interpretation of power and powerlessness (Johnson, *Deconstruction*, 46, quoted in Laurence, 41).

<sup>11</sup> See Laurence on Kristeva's description of women as "Estranged from language" ("Oscillation Between Power and Denial," quoted in Laurence, 26). See also Woolf's comments in *A Room of One's Own* concerning the need for "a woman's sentence" (79).

minded, without a trace of imagination or intellect, in the sense she understood it; and she knew enough of her sister to know that she would never love this efficient active little man, although she would respect him. The question was should she marry him? This was the point she had reached when Lord Mayo was assassinated and while her lips murmured ohs and ahs of horror, her eyes were telegraphing across the table. "I am doubtful." If she had nodded her sister would have begun to practise those arts by which many proposals had been secured already. Rosamond, however, did not yet know enough to make up her mind. She telegraphed merely "Keep him in play." (PR 21)

This metalanguage demonstrates that the sisters, despite their positions as pawns in the marriage plot, do in fact assert some control of the game. Their silence is far from empty; it is instead "a sign of their self-presence and self-resistance: a source of insight and power rather than merely of powerlessness" (Johnson, *Deconstruction*, quoted in Laurence 41). Moreover, Phyllis' response to this silent communication is a brief but significant rebellion, as she refuses to submit to her mother's prying questions:

"Well my dear," [Lady Hibbert] said, with more affection than she had shown yet, "did you have a pleasant lunch? Was Mr Middleton agreeable?" She patted her daughter's cheek, and looked keenly into her eyes. Some petulance came across Phyllis, and she answered listlessly. "O he's not a bad little man; but he doesn't excite me." (21)

Although the heroic dimension of Phyllis' revolt is perhaps undermined by its emergence from petulance and listlessness, I nonetheless see the revolt as a direct verbalization of

her dissatisfaction with her lot – her first attempt at speaking her own mind. In this rebellion, Phyllis breaks through the barriers of Laurence’s “unsayable, something not sayable based on the social taboos of Victorian propriety” (1), and voices the mutinous ideas that momentarily overwhelm her sense of duty. This exchange is but one of several in the text that delineate the distance between the daughters and their mother, a pattern that Woolf explores further in both *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Years*, and that I will analyse more thoroughly in my third and fourth chapters.<sup>12</sup>

Phyllis, who is characterized by Woolf as the weaker of the two sisters, continues to struggle throughout the text to explore and break through the barrier of the “unspoken,” which Laurence defines as “something not yet formulated or expressed in voiced word” (1). It is this mode of silence that I see as the greatest barrier to the self-expression of Woolf’s daughter figures, as they attempt to comprehend and articulate the vague feelings of dissatisfaction that haunt their subconscious, and undermine the socialized values that have designated them as fundamentally limited, domestic creatures.

Phyllis is provided the opportunity and stimulation necessary to break through this barrier in her encounter with the Tristram daughters, transgressive figures who have achieved that elusive independence and its concomitant “room of their own,” a liberating space in which they speak the “unsayable” in their frank discussions of sex, marriage and Christianity. The Tristram girls are characters whose aspirations and intellectual freedom clearly identify them as transgressive figures, aligning them with a masculine position of

---

<sup>12</sup> Laurence notes a similar paradigm in *To the Lighthouse*, in which she interprets the narrator to imply that Mrs. Ramsay’s authority and experience “serv[e] patriarchy, the Empire, and colonialism” (Laurence 2), referring specifically to this moment in the novel: “...it was only in silence, looking up from their plates, ... that [Mrs. Ramsay’s] daughters, Prue, Nancy, Rose – could sport with infidel ideas which they had brewed for themselves of a life different from hers: in Paris, perhaps: a wilder life: not always taking care of some man or other...(p. 14)” (Woolf, quoted in Laurence, 2).

power, a sexual displacement that is heightened by Woolf's labelling of Phyllis' inability to function in this realm as "impotence" (26). The distance between the Hibberts and the Tristrams is manifested in Sylvia Tristram's utter dismissal of the title characters: "She had never considered the Hibberts as human beings before" (26). Such a radical negation of Phyllis and Rosamond's sentience and individuality, especially one voiced by a supposedly liberated female character, underlines the overwhelming force of the patriarchal negation of the female self.<sup>13</sup> The seemingly innocent question posed by Sylvia – "I daresay we are sisters. But why are we so different outside?" – thus takes on a much darker significance in my reading of the text, as it identifies the difficulty of overcoming the boundaries between private and public constructions of identity (PR 26-27).<sup>14</sup> The latter so severely restricts the Hibbert daughters that they exist only on this level, as vacuous shells defined solely by their social status and outings. Their hollowness becomes most apparent in their inability to "partake" in the "talk and life" that characterizes the realm of the Tristram sisters (PR 24). Unable to respond to or participate in conversation that goes beyond the trivial nature of their own social outings, Phyllis and Rosamond's exclusion from this philosophical exchange represents the bitter irony at the heart of the text, as inclusion in these experiences is what they most desire.

---

<sup>13</sup> Later in her career, in a speech given to the London/National Society for Women's Service on 21 January 1931, Woolf commented on the difficulty of overcoming society's denial of women's intellect and abilities. Even having overcome her own reticence to explore and speak her mind, Woolf encountered the problematics inherent in a woman's being "herself":

The Angel was dead; what then remained? You may say that what remained was a simple and common object – a young woman in a bedroom with an inkpot. In other words, now that she had rid herself of falsehood, that young woman had only to be herself. Ah, but what is 'herself'? *I mean, what is a woman? I assure you, I do not know. I do not believe that you know. I do not believe that anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill.* (WW 60, my emphasis)

<sup>14</sup> See Anna Snaith on the public/private dichotomy in Woolf's novels.

Baldwin's rather narrow assessment of the Hibberts is again refuted by Woolf's direct identification of the source of the sisters' difficulties, which she evocatively prefaces with Phyllis and Rosamond's disparaging self-assessment: "With the rapid impulse of youth, they condemned themselves utterly, and determined that all efforts at freedom were in vain: *long captivity had corrupted them both within and without*" (26, my emphasis). In another powerful image of female subjugation, Woolf describes Phyllis as feeling "like a bird with wings pinioned" during her evening at the Tristrams (24). Unlike Woolf, who was able to free herself from the suppressive ghost she referred to as the "Angel in the House," Phyllis remains trapped in this role, "so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own" (WW 59).

In an image that is to recur in *Mrs Dalloway*, Phyllis does, however, move a stage closer to liberation in her outing down the Strand and into the Bloomsbury district. She remains, nonetheless, one step behind Elizabeth Dalloway, as she is unable to conceive of the possibility of another existence for herself. Unlike Elizabeth, Phyllis' sense of potentiality is externalized; that is to say, it does not originate in her. Moreover, her vision of freedom serves only to highlight her sense of enclosure, both on a psychological and on a very literal level:

...Phyllis went separately to the distant and unfashionable quarter of London where the Tristrams lived. That was one of the many enviable parts of their lot. The stucco fronts, the irreproachable rows of Belgravia and South Kensington seemed to Phyllis the type of her lot: of a life trained to grow in an ugly pattern to match the staid ugliness of its fellows. But if one lived here in Bloomsbury, she began to theorise, waving with her hand as her cab

passed through the great tranquil squares, beneath the pale green of umbrageous trees, one might grow up as one liked. There was room, and freedom, and in the roar and splendour of the Strand she read the live realities of the world from which her stucco and her pillars protected her so completely. (24)

In this passage, there is a striking and sudden transition to organic imagery as Phyllis moves into the Bloomsbury district. These poetic images, which are diametrically opposed to the stark description of Phyllis' home environment, depict a liminal space of potentiality and emancipation. Again, in sharp contrast to Elizabeth Dalloway, who is compared to various things representing growth and freedom – “to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies” (MD 176) – Woolf's descriptions of Phyllis connote the stunted growth and externally imposed limitations of this “life trained to grow in an ugly pattern” (PR 24).<sup>15</sup>

Despite these obstacles to her self-actualization, Phyllis tries valiantly to overcome her silence and communicate both her life and her perception of reality to Sylvia Tristram. Woolf's description of Phyllis' attempt to voice herself emphasizes the significance of this opportunity to speak freely; the author, moreover, underlines both Phyllis' self-alienation and the psychological barriers that separate her so decisively from Sylvia Tristram:

Miss Sylvia Tristram... undertook a private conversation with Phyllis.

---

<sup>15</sup> See Swanson: “As DeSalvo has pointed out, in ‘A Sketch of the Past’ Woolf repeatedly describes her family's house at 22 Hyde Park Gate (which was made of brick and stucco) as a cage entrapping her” (296). See also Beer on Woolf's memories of her childhood home (96). Notably, while in “Phyllis and Rosamond,” the Hibbert daughters are “protected” – or, perhaps more aptly, repressed – by the stucco and pillars of their house, in *The Years*, the Pargiter daughters are equally haunted by their hated and oppressive family home, Abercorn Terrace, which is also described as having stucco pillars (329).

Phyllis snatched at it like a dog at a bone: indeed her face wore a gaunt ravenous expression, as she saw the moments fly, and the substance of this strange evening remained beyond her grasp. At least, if she could not share, she might explain what forbade her. She was longing to prove to herself that there were good reasons for her impotence; and if she felt that Miss Sylvia was a solid woman in spite of her impersonal generalisations, there was hope that they might meet some day on common ground. Phyllis had an odd feeling, when she leant forward to speak, of searching feverishly through a mass of artificial frivolities to lay hands on the solid grain of pure self which she supposed lay hid somewhere. (26)

In this last sentence, Woolf pinpoints the damning and cumulative effect of Phyllis' upbringing – the extinguishing of the female self. As Phyllis goes on to voice her awareness of her status and her acceptance of her fate, her passivity and her lack of prospects so horrify Sylvia that she, in turn, proclaims that she would rather die than submit to such an empty existence (28).

Just as Evelyn Murgatroyd and Rachel Vinrace meditate, in *The Voyage Out*, on the absurd reality which dictates that, as women, they are unable to “do” or achieve anything meaningful, and can only aspire to “play” at ridiculous female accomplishments, in this early work of fiction, Phyllis and Rosamond also rail against the emptiness of female existence (TVO 288, emphasis in original). When Sylvia Tristram confronts them with the question “What do you do?” they can therefore only define their “trade” as “order[ing] dinner and arrang[ing] the flowers” (PR 26-7). In response to Sylvia Tristram's bewildered rejection of this answer, Phyllis bitterly reiterates, “*That's*

my trade: I wish it wasn't! Really Miss Tristram, you must remember that most young ladies are slaves; and you mustn't insult me because you happen to be free" (27).

Frustrated and fully aware of the subservient and hollow nature of her and her sister's positions, Phyllis bitterly describes the meaninglessness of her existence: "You see, we are brought up just to come out in the evening and make pretty speeches, and well, marry I suppose, and of course we might have gone to college if we'd wanted to; but as we didn't we're just accomplished" (27).

Woolf ends this discussion by contrasting Phyllis' tired acceptance of her fate with Sylvia's violent opposition to it, as this last character proposes an active alternative to Phyllis, suggesting that instead of being merely decorative, she "should write" (28). But Phyllis scoffs "in comic despair" at such a notion, stating:

"I cannot make you understand that for one thing we haven't the brains; and for another, if we had them we couldn't use them. Mercifully the Good Lord made us fitted for our station. Rosamond might have done something; she's too old now."

"My God," exclaimed Sylvia. "What a Black Hole! I should burn, shoot, jump out of the window; at least do something!" (28)

To Phyllis, nonetheless, such an aggressive response is inconceivable. As Woolf makes clear, the upbringing and education of this daughter figure have completely extinguished her agency and sense of self, and so she remains convinced that her emancipation from her "slavery" is dependent on a man, and, accordingly, will come to her in the form of a marriage proposal. As Sue Roe comments on Woolf's later depiction of Rachel Vinrace in *The Voyage Out*, "It was impossible for a good Victorian daughter to shed the

profound, educated ignorance that was designed to prevent self-knowledge" (167).

Despite her resignation to her lot, when Phyllis returns home at the end of the evening, she cannot shake a gnawing sense of "discomfort," and continues to question herself (28). Woolf cryptically states that "in penetrating to her real self Phyllis had let in some chill gust of air to that closely guarded place," as she wonders "what did she really want...? What was she fit for? To criticise both worlds and feel that neither gave her what she needed" (28). Although this "chill gust of air" is unmistakably the disheartening reality of the world outside her sheltered and suffocating existence, this "real self" Woolf affirms Phyllis to have discovered remains unclear, as Phyllis' only apparent enlightenment has been a growing awareness of her alienation – her sense of invalidation when faced with the intellectual freedom and sophistication of the Tristrams – as well as a further sense of defeat and loss due to her squandered potential. What emerges most clearly from Phyllis' self-reflection, then, is her inability to find a space, either psychological or physical, in which these feelings can be replaced with a true sense of self: of her individuality, ability and potential. The narrative, however, concludes with the young woman's paradoxical realization that although her only choice is to take independent action – to assert her individuality and her ambitions – she is in fact relieved "that Lady Hibbert had arranged a full day for them tomorrow: at any rate she need not think: and river parties were amusing" (29).

The reader is thus left to wonder whether what truly condemns Phyllis is the external, societal values which have constructed and designated her as a "patriarchal daughter," or the self-imposed limitations which are such a poisonous by-product of this upbringing (Swanson 285). It is this question that Woolf continues to explore in her first

novel, *The Voyage Out*, through the fatally dependent character of Rachel Vinrace, as well as in *Mrs Dalloway*, in which the narrator questions Elizabeth Dalloway's ability to make her revolutionary dream of independence reality by appending to this character's "moment of being" the subversive comment, "She was, after all, rather lazy" (MD 179). Moreover, as my final chapter will make clear, Woolf's enduring interest in exposing the destructive nature of female socialization is manifest in her 1937 novel, *The Years*, in which both Delia Pargiter and Kitty Malone betray their ambitions of independence by succumbing to their "culturally determined destiny" and becoming wives and mothers (Froula 33).

## CHAPTER 2

### The Dispossessed Daughter: Rachel's Failed Voyage to Selfhood

Some nine years after writing "Phyllis and Rosamond," Virginia Woolf published her first novel, *The Voyage Out*. In this work, Woolf explores the psychological development of another of her "inarticulate" daughter figures, Rachel Vinrace, narrating her "struggle to find and develop her own view of the world, to become a subject rather than an object of desire" (MD 102; Swanson 288). As she chronicles Rachel's efforts to move from "ignorance" to self-awareness and full selfhood, Woolf explores the distance between this intensely reflective character's ostensible mental "vacan[cy]" and her very real silence (TVO 15, 283).<sup>1</sup> Faced not only with the consistent invalidation of those who purport to educate and guide her in her quest for self-knowledge, but also with a limited choice of roles, each of which negates the very possibility of self-determination, Rachel is, inevitably, unable to achieve the liberating "moment of being" and self-realization necessary for her survival. This failure ultimately proves fatal, as Rachel slowly suffocates beneath the inescapable limitations of her doubly dependent position as both a daughter and future wife. Her death at the end of the novel thus figures as a metaphorical drowning beneath the burden of the roles which have been imposed upon her: as she succumbs to her fever, she is therefore pulled under the waves by a fatal concentration of those visions she has continuously struggled to explore, understand, and express (404).<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Rachel's "ignorance" is also expressed as "absence" in the text: "her eyes were unreflecting as water, ... her mind absent" (17). The word "ignorant" is frequently repeated in reference to Rachel throughout the novel—she is variously depicted as "ignorant" of "morals" (32), of "relations between men and women" and of sexual desire (84, 94); of her own feelings (259), of politics (283), and, on a more symbolic level, of the path on which Terence leads her through the jungle (317).

<sup>2</sup> See Swanson on drowning (298-9).

As Suzanne Raitt notes in "Finding a voice: Virginia Woolf's early novels," "for Rachel Vinrace, learning to be herself... is synonymous with learning to die" (34).

Rachel's death, moreover, is made all the more significant by the survival of the novel's two other daughter figures, Susan Warrington and Evelyn Murgatroyd. Woolf's depiction of these two characters serves to demonstrate the overwhelming force of the marriage plot, as both young women are defined according to their respective positions relative to this social convention. Susan's 'success,' as I discuss below, lies in her triumphant enrolment in this institution, a move that, despite her improved social status and evident contentment, is clearly depicted by Woolf as coming at the expense of selfhood. Evelyn, the final daughter figure, is a rebellious young woman who, frustrated at her repeated construction by men as an object of desire, flees the passivity and captivity of marriage in order to experience "life" as a social and political activist.<sup>3</sup> Significantly, Evelyn's rejection of patriarchal convention serves to cast her not as an avant-garde character, but rather as an aberrant and transgressive one. As I discuss below, Woolf's portrayal of these two characters serves to deepen our understanding of Rachel's fate, for, by developing two other young female characters who are so clearly defined by their positions in relation to the male – as daughters or future wives – Woolf underscores the impossibility of attaining selfhood and self-determination for her early daughter figures.

---

<sup>3</sup> This yearning for "life" is a motif that arises in "Phyllis and Rosamond" as well as in *The Voyage Out*; it is clear that Woolf employs this word to refer to an exclusive, male domain. (This sense of "life" also arises in *Mrs Dalloway* in Lady's Bruton's sense of how men know about life in a way women do not [138-146]). In *The Voyage Out*, Evelyn defines life as "fighting and revolution" (144); she also mirrors the Hibbert daughters' hunger for "the talk and life" which their own social status precludes. In *The Years*, Rose Pargiter aggressively appropriates the realm of political speech, which, until this later novel, is exclusively male. Rose, a militant suffragette, embodies the life of "fighting and revolution" which Evelyn admires in *The Voyage Out*.

Rachel is, on many levels, the weakest of Woolf's daughter figures – less critically aware of herself and of her social position than Phyllis and Rosamond Hibbert, as well as the later figure of Eleanor Pargiter, she is also far from achieving Elizabeth Dalloway's sense of independent selfhood. The voyage around which Woolf structures the narrative thus has a sole purpose, which Rachel's father, Willoughby Vinrace, sees as "making a woman of her," a transformation that, in his repressive patriarchal perspective, is to consist of Rachel's becoming a social hostess whose main function would be to support his own political ambitions – a future that would ensure the continuation of her subject status (TVO 93).<sup>4</sup> Rachel's task throughout the voyage is therefore that of becoming a "*person* on [her] own account," an objective that must entail her "coming out" from what she describes as the "great dim force" of her father's authority (90, 246, my emphasis). I wish to underscore the impossibility of this task, as Rachel's undertaking here is implicitly that of surmounting her very gender: in order to succeed, she must become an *individual*, rather than a *woman*, for, as I have already delineated, the latter designation represents a predetermined and inherently circumscribed existence.

At the commencement of the narrative, Helen Ambrose's assessment of Rachel underlines her tenuous selfhood,<sup>5</sup> as this evaluation clearly depicts Rachel's physicality

---

<sup>4</sup> See Swanson, who also states that "Willoughby's plans for Rachel's future...reveal a disregard for her autonomy" (290). Swanson, I wish to note, focuses on this relationship as analogous to Woolf's own relationship with her father, and concentrates her enquiry into Rachel Vinrace on the covert depiction of "incestuous abuse" in the novel (290). See also Froula on Willoughby Vinrace (69).

<sup>5</sup> Helen's appraisal, while perceptive, exhibits an inherent bias, which stems from her subconscious prejudice towards the male. Helen, like Mrs. Ramsay in Woolf's later novel, *To the Lighthouse*, is an archetypal figure of feminine power, whose aura of knowledge and experience stems from her beauty, as well as her status as a married woman and mother, all sources of power denied to the plain and virginal Rachel. Like Mrs. Ramsay, Helen is more comfortable nurturing her husband (and alienated intellectuals such as St John Hirst) than fostering the psychological growth of a young woman. In a marked contrast with Rachel, whose perceptions and opinions are belittled and dismissed by St John throughout the novel, Helen Ambrose is granted a privileged status by this self-absorbed and misogynistic character, who accepts Helen's quiet wisdom and authority due to her proclivity for listening to, rather than questioning, his

as a reflection of her mental state: “[Rachel’s] face was weak rather than decided, saved from insipidity by the large enquiring eyes; denied beauty... by the lack of colour and definite outline. Moreover, a hesitation in speaking, or rather a tendency to use the wrong words, made her *seem* more than normally incompetent for her years” (15, my emphasis).<sup>6</sup> With the word “seem,” Woolf subtly suggests that there is more to this reserved and socially awkward young woman than would first appear; indeed, over the course of the narrative it becomes clear that the distance between Rachel’s inward and outward realities is not only considerable, but, ultimately, insurmountable.<sup>7</sup> Inhibited by her upbringing, as well as the British patriarchal culture which continues to impose itself on her, even in the midst of South America, she eventually retreats solely to her mind, and thus, in her final illness, wishes “for nothing else in the world” but “to be alone” (405).

Like Phyllis and Rosamond at the Tristram’s soiree, Rachel is highly stimulated by the “talk and life” to which she is exposed on the *Euphrosyne* (PR 24). As the voyage begins, she is brought into contact with many different people whose knowledge and experience serve to emphasize her own lacunae. Unlike Phyllis and Rosamond, however, as well as the later characters Delia and Rose Pargiter, all of whom are very much aware of and frustrated by their inherently limited positions as “daughters at home,” Rachel does not have a sense of blighted potential. Even as she is overcome by self-doubt and

---

egotistic musings. It is this virtue, which stems from her self-assuredness, which ensures that he does not see her as a threat to his authority or sexuality (a threat he clearly reacts to in his interactions with Rachel).

<sup>6</sup> See Froula on this image (69).

<sup>7</sup> Woolf’s clear target in the ongoing critique of Rachel’s incompetence and naïveté is not the young woman, but the patriarchal order itself, which, under the guise of protecting the virtue and innocence of young ladies, effectively ensures their classification and dismissal as inherently limited and frivolous creatures. Rachel’s struggle to overcome this restrictive categorization ultimately proves to be more difficult than that to surmount the inferior education that initially consigned her to this colonized group.

frustrated with her inability to communicate, she sees her new companions, the Dalloways in particular, as representing an unparalleled opportunity for enlightenment. Exposed at last to new ideas and perspectives, Rachel thus simply hovers in rapt silence, quietly absorbing their thoughts and experiences (TVO 45-46). Reacting to her sense of displacement with "supreme self-abasement" (46), Rachel readily blames herself for her inexperience and ignorance and accords Richard Dalloway a position of near-omnipotence<sup>8</sup> :

Rachel had ... questions on the tip of her tongue, or rather one enormous question, which she did not in the least know how to put into words. The talk appeared too airy to admit of it.

'Please tell me - everything.' That was what she wanted to say. He had drawn apart one little chink and showed astonishing treasures. It seemed to her incredible that a man like that would be willing to talk to her. (57)

Humbled by Dalloway's apparent experience and wisdom, Rachel immediately takes on the subservient vision and position modelled by his wife:

"I often wonder" Clarissa mused... "whether it is really good for a woman to live with a man who is morally her superior, as Richard is mine. It makes one so dependent. I suppose I feel for him what my mother and women of her generation felt for Christ. It just shows that one can't do without *something*." (TVO 53)

Positioning Richard as the central, saviour figure in her belief system, Clarissa implies that her Christian faith has been supplemented, if not supplanted, by a faith in the

---

<sup>8</sup> See Froula on Richard Dalloway and on both his and Clarissa's role as Rachel's educators (71-73).

patriarchy. Despite her avowed sense of inferiority, however, she subconsciously questions her enrolment in this hegemony, seeming to realize that it not only prohibits her self-determination but also bars her from self-knowledge. Rachel's values are similarly conflicted: Dalloway is only the first of the male figures whom she perceives as possessing unlimited wisdom and power – she later grants the same status to both St John Hirst and Terence Hewet, whom she envisions as separate and superior beings:

She could not reason about them as about people whose feelings went by the same rule as her own did, and her mind dwelt on them with a kind of physical pleasure such as is caused by the contemplation of bright things hanging in the sun. From them all life seemed to radiate: the very words of books were steeped in radiance. (197)

Like Clarissa, Rachel thus sees the male as a divine, life-giving figure, a perspective that, as Clarissa unequivocally delineates, stands as a clear impediment to selfhood.

Before Rachel's final, fatal involvement with Terence Hewet, however, the darker aspects of this relationship are prefigured by her encounter with the phallic<sup>9</sup> and self-important figure of Richard Dalloway, a character who sets the pattern for Rachel's interaction with men, alternately stimulating and negating her intellect, sexuality and growing sense of self. With his pompous comments on the necessity of protecting women's virtues and domesticity, his condemnation of the suffragette movement and his vocal acclamation of Britain's patriarchal heritage, Dalloway represents an institution that clearly denies female ambition and subjecthood (42, 68, 69). His view of humanity represents a patriarchal stranglehold on history and civilization:

---

<sup>9</sup> Dalloway seems "to come from the humming oily centre of the machine where the polished rods are sliding" (46). See also Swanson on Dalloway as a phallic figure (292).

“It’s the continuity,” said Richard sententiously. A vision of English history, King following King, Prime Minister Prime Minister, and Law Law had come over him... He ran his mind along the line of conservative policy, which went steadily from Lord Salisbury to Alfred, and gradually enclosed, as though it were a lasso that opened and caught things, enormous chunks of the habitable globe. (51)

Faced with such an overwhelming repudiation of her gender, Rachel can only respond to Dalloway’s fervent comments on the incredible “opportunities and possibilities, the mass of things to be done and enjoyed” in the age in which they live, with a poignant commentary that identifies the crux of her *difficulté d’être*: “You see, I’m a woman” (79).

Significantly, it is this very concession of powerlessness that serves as the catalyst for Dalloway’s subsequent sexual aggression. Declaring that Rachel, as a “young and beautiful woman,” has “an inestimable power—for good or for evil,” Dalloway grasps and forcefully kisses her, an act which is rendered all the more violent<sup>10</sup> by his immediate move to inculcate the passive young woman, as he states in a “terrifying” tone of voice, “you tempt me” (80). Dalloway’s portrayal of women’s power in terms that are both abstract and mythical, as well as abounding with connotations of Original Sin, serves only to intensify his psychological manipulation of Rachel. This sexual encounter thus reinforces the patriarchal doctrine of female passivity for Rachel, as well as apprising her of her physical and sexual vulnerability as an unmarried woman.

Rachel’s reaction to Dalloway’s actions is conflicted, as he at once awakens and

---

<sup>10</sup> I concur with Swanson and Froula’s assessment of this encounter as inherently negative, basing my analysis on Woolf’s phrases describing the “black waves” which move across Rachel’s eyes, the “terrifying” tone of his voice, as well as the “physical pain,” numbness and “chill” she feels following the encounter, not to mention her subsequent nightmare (80).

represses her on both a sexual and a psychological level.<sup>11</sup> She thus progresses from a sense of discovery, a sentiment that “Life seemed to hold infinite possibilities she had never guessed at” (80), to a new, more sombre understanding of her place in the world: “By this new light she saw her life for the first time a creeping hedged-in thing, driven cautiously between high walls, here turned aside, there plunged in darkness, made dull and crippled for ever—her life that was the only chance she had—a thousand words and actions became plain to her”<sup>12</sup> (87). With this rude awakening and new awareness of her limited and precarious position in the world, Rachel’s aspirations for independence and self-determination diminish, and she has little choice but to travel inward to explore her ambitions and desires.

One of the more abstract expressions of Rachel’s “interiority” is found in Woolf’s exploitation of an alternate mode of expression for her heroine, one that is similar in many ways to the sign language to which Phyllis and Rosamond turn in order to communicate their perceptions to each other (Laurence 6). Like the Hibberts, Rachel also reverts to a non-vocal means of self-expression through which she can convey those “unspoken” and “unsayable” emotions that often overwhelm her: the subversive language of her piano (1). For Rachel, music represents a purer form of expression than words, for, from her perspective, “It appeared that nobody ever said a thing they meant, or ever talked of a feeling they felt, but that was what music was for” (TVO 35). Woolf makes it

---

<sup>11</sup> See Froula on Rachel’s response to the kiss: “Rachel responds both positively, to its awakening of her own sexuality, and negatively, to its enactment of male privilege in the socially constructed economy of desire. She feels that ‘something wonderful had happened’: she tells Helen, ‘I liked him, and I liked being kissed’ ([TVO] 77, 82). But she also feels terror...” (73).

<sup>12</sup> See Froula on this image (73). Using a vocabulary that will later be employed by Evelyn Murgatroyd when she reacts to a similar attack, Rachel responds to her new understanding of the prohibition which bars her from walking alone with the exclamation: “Because men are *brutes!* I hate men!” (my emphasis, 87). See also Swanson’s comments on the repeated use and connotations of this word (298).

clear throughout the novel that this surrogate language is key to Rachel's fragile sense of self: it figures in the text as a metaphorical process through which she can express and build an alternate vision of the world, and it also serves as an act of defiance and rebellion against the mould of "young ladydom" which is imposed upon her (PR 18).<sup>13</sup>

Rachel is able to escape not only her feelings of exclusion and invalidation through her music, but also the wooden and awkward words that impede her ability to communicate (TVO 138). The piano thus becomes the way in which Rachel gains agency and moves from the realm of the "unspoken" into a more active and expressive role. Through music, she finds the sense of order and logic that eludes her in her understanding of relationships and society as a whole, as her piano playing creates "an invisible line" that links her "absurd jumbled ideas" together to form a coherent and functional shape<sup>14</sup> (58, 70). As Suzanne Raitt states, "Music allows Rachel to confront and articulate the world without mediation: it allows her to craft and to perform her own voice" (35). This power to connect and assemble is most evident when Rachel plays at the dance held to celebrate Susan Warrington's engagement, as her music creates a vision of civilization which not only unites the masculine and feminine, but also spiritually elevates and soothes those listening to her:

Rachel... had gone on playing to herself. ...one by one some of the younger dancers came in from the garden and sat upon the deserted gilt chairs round the piano... As they sat and listened, their nerves were quieted: the heat and soreness of their lips, the result of incessant talking and laughing, was

---

<sup>13</sup> See Poresky on Rachel's piano playing conflicting "with the young woman her aunts expect her to be" (26).

<sup>14</sup> See Swanson on Rachel's piano playing as a "mode of pattern-making" (294); see also Suzanne Raitt (34-38).

smoothed away. They sat very still as if they saw a building with spaces and columns succeeding each other rising in the empty space. Then they began to see themselves and their lives and the whole of human life advancing very nobly under the direction of the music. They felt themselves ennobled, and when Rachel stopped playing they desired nothing but sleep. (187)

One of the most noteworthy images in this passage is that of the union of the masculine and feminine principles – the columns and spaces – to form a structure that serves to herald a positive vision of humanity. This image is all the more powerful as it is created, not by the “incessant” and superficial mode of speech, which in Woolf’s novels is so clearly a male domain,<sup>15</sup> but by Rachel’s music. This triumphant moment of self-expression<sup>16</sup> thus resolves, however momentarily, the problem that lies at the heart of the novel: that of the abyss that separates not only men and women, but all people – both from each other and from themselves. Significantly, though, Rachel is manifestly absent from this passage, a detail that subverts her role in this moment of unity, marking her as a passive instrument of her music, rather than its true creator, a distinction that disqualifies this as a true “moment of being” and self-actualization.

Woolf further explores the opposition of female and male modes of expression in her final depiction of Rachel playing her piano, during which her fiancé, Terence Hewet, expounds on his views of women.<sup>17</sup> In previous instances in the novel, Terence’s vocal attempts to classify and categorize women have had the effect of silencing Rachel, and of fragmenting her already weak sense of individuality, a matter I will discuss below. On

---

<sup>15</sup> Again, see Laurence (11).

<sup>16</sup> See also Poresky (35) and Raitt (35) on what this moment of self-expression represents for Rachel.

<sup>17</sup> See Raitt (35).

this occasion, his insistence on her participation, combined with the demeaning spirit of his comments, sets the tone for a power struggle between the couple:

At last, having written down a series of little sentences, with notes of interrogation attached to them, he observed aloud, "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.' What do you say, Rachel?" He paused...

Rachel said nothing. Up and up the steep spiral of a very late Beethoven sonata she climbed, like a person ascending a ruined staircase, energetically at first, then more laboriously advancing her feet with effort until she could go no higher and returned with a run to begin at the very bottom again....

(339-340)

Focused on their individual, gendered realities, the two attempt to maintain their concentration and autonomy. As Terence continues his intrusive and domineering interrogation in what is patently a symbolic struggle between the sexes, Woolf focuses on Rachel's silent and purposeful retreat into herself and her ultimate vocalization of her sense of oppression:

Attacking her staircase once more Rachel again neglected this opportunity of revealing the secrets of her sex. She had indeed advanced so far in the pursuit of wisdom that she allowed these secrets to rest undisturbed: it seemed to be reserved for a later generation to discuss them philosophically.

Crashing down a final chord... she exclaimed at last, swinging round upon him: "No Terence, it's no good; here am I, the best musician in South America, not to speak of Europe and Asia, and I can't play a note because of you in the room interrupting me every other second."

"You don't seem to realize that that's what I've been aiming at for the last half-hour," he remarked. (340)

While Terence attempts to gain mastery not only over Rachel, but over women as a whole, through his attempts to debase and categorize them, Rachel pursues a separate form of "wisdom" in her withdrawal into her music and her self. Rachel's piano playing is clearly identified here as a powerful and subversive act which sets her beyond Terence's reach, a position which he consequently works to upset. Rachel's silent independence while she plays thus provides an ironic and fitting answer to her fiancé's arrogant assessment of women, as he reduces this gender's virtues to negative traits symptomatic of a lack of intellect or capacity for reflection. As Woolf remarks, it must be left "for a later generation to discuss" the female self "philosophically," as it is evidently beyond Terence's capacity to accept Rachel as a rational being.<sup>18</sup>

Significantly, it is Terence who eventually wins this struggle for control, as he successfully brings Rachel's focus back to him. As I discuss below, despite his ostensibly liberal vision of relationships, Terence feels an overwhelming compulsion to possess and control Rachel completely, and any intimation of independence and self-

---

<sup>18</sup> This later generation fails to emerge in *The Years*, in which North Pargiter bitterly lashes out at his sister Peggy, a doctor, in the "Present Day" section of the novel (this section is set in the 1930's). North is quick to judge his sister, not as an individual, but as a woman: "Damn women – they're so hard, so unimaginative, curse their little inquisitive minds. What did their 'education' amount to? It only made her [Peggy] critical, censorious" (390).

possession on her part thus rouses jealousy and anger in him (TVO 352; Swanson 294).

Before analysing the relationship between Rachel and Terence, I return briefly to the *Euphrosyne* and to the commencement of Rachel's sojourn in South America, as it is on the ship that Rachel's journey of self-awareness, as well as her exploration of her subjectivity, originates. After the departure of the Dalloways, Helen Ambrose determines to take Rachel under her wing, deciding "that she would very much like to show her niece, if it were possible, how to live, or as she put it, how to be a reasonable person" (89). While this statement is inherently patronizing, as it denies the validity of Rachel's thoughts and experiences, it must be taken in the context of Woolf's disdain for and critique of the system which educated Rachel – stunting the development of her intellect, as well as other abilities marked as "masculine" by a patriarchal society (104).<sup>19</sup> Though condescending, Helen's intention is free of the egotism that informs Terence and St John, both of whom ridicule Rachel's idiosyncratic views and ignorance, explicitly identifying her deficiencies as a matter of gender, rather than education and experience, as witnessed by Hirst and Hewet's first exchange in the narrative:

"Women interest me", said Hewet...

"They're so stupid", said Hirst...

"I suppose they *are* stupid," Hewet wondered.

"There can't be two opinions about that, I imagine," said Hirst...

This discussion ends with Hirst's brief and arrogant assessment of Helen and Rachel – he clearly does not consider women as individuals, but instead sees them as objects:

"Describe them," said Hewet.

---

<sup>19</sup> See Raitt on Rachel's aunts' attempts to suppress her piano-playing, as they believe that "practising will develop 'the muscles of the forearm – and then one won't marry'" (Raitt 35, TVO 15).

“You know I can’t describe *things!*” said Hirst. “They were much like other women. I should think. They always are.” (TVO 117, my emphasis)

As Swanson notes, at this early stage in the novel, “Rachel lives in a distanced, disassociated confusion reminiscent of Woolf’s cotton wool of nonbeing, unable to grasp the reality of what goes on around her and why, what other people feel or want, or why she feels as she does or what she wants” (291). Unable to conceive of herself as an individual, Rachel must be apprised of her selfhood by Helen, who proposes, after the Dalloways’ departure, that she “go ahead and be a person on [her] own account” (90), an assertion that has a profound effect on Rachel’s psyche:

The vision of her own personality, of herself as a real everlasting thing, different from anything else, unmergeable, like the sea or the wind, flashed into Rachel’s mind, and she became profoundly excited at the thought of living.

“I can be m-m-myself,” she stammered, “*in spite of you, in spite of the Dalloways, and Mr Pepper, and Father, and my aunts, in spite of these?*”

She swept her hand across a whole page of statesmen and soldiers.<sup>20</sup> (TVO 90, my emphasis)

Again unlike the later figure of Elizabeth Dalloway, whose individuation is self-directed, Rachel can only perceive herself as an individual through an external directive. Even then, as Rachel sadly intuits, her subjectivity remains vulnerable to the prerogatives of

---

<sup>20</sup> This page of “soldiers and statesmen” refers to the book Rachel is reading in this scene, *Who’s Who*. This book, it is clear, is a list of patriarchal figures, including “bankers, writers, clergymen, sailors, surgeons, judges, professors, statesmen...” (89). By including these figures in her list of people who impede her selfhood, Rachel subconsciously recognizes that the struggle to “be [her]self” is against what Froula and Swanson respectively term “male culture” and “the socio-sexual forces of British society” (69; 287). See also Swanson on the above passage (289).

her companions, each of whom imposes upon her his or her own vision of who she should be and how she should behave. In view of this, it is significant that after a few months of solitude in South America, Helen resolves that Rachel is unable to achieve selfhood on her own and, consequently, vocalizes her desire for male intervention and aid (104).

At this point in the novel, more tourists arrive in Santa Marina, among whom are the aforementioned young men, Terence and St John, two more daughter figures, Susan Warrington and Evelyn Murgatroyd, and, finally, a group of women including a spinster, a matron, and a childless woman: Miss Allan, Mrs Thornbury and Mrs Elliot. All of these women serve on some level as a foil for the heroine of the novel, as each represents a particular role or potential future for Rachel. Woolf is mordant in her portrayal of these women, highlighting, in particular, the vapid figures of Susan Warrington and Mrs Thornbury. The latter of these two places her sons at the centre of her existence and unconsciously testifies to the absolute self-effacement of her maternity, stating: "One doesn't realize how interesting a debate can be until one has sons in the navy. My interests are equally balanced though: I have sons in the army too; and one son who makes speeches at the Union—my baby" (124). Woolf deftly satirizes this matron's absurdly narrow vision of the world, mocking her vacuous domestic existence:

When she had heard what one of the million voices speaking in the paper had to say, and noticed that a cousin of hers had married a clergyman at Minehead – ignoring the drunken women, the golden animals of Crete, the movements of battalions, the dinners, the reforms, the fires, the indignant, the learned and benevolent, Mrs Thornbury went upstairs to write a letter

for the mail. (129)

In my reading, Mrs Thornbury's hollow life symbolizes a figurative state of non-existence – the very life Sylvia Tristram declares she would rather die than accept in “Phyllis and Rosamond” (28). Thus, as the marriage plot advances for both Rachel and Susan Warrington in *The Voyage Out*, it becomes clear that this institution stands as an unequivocal, and even fatal, barrier to selfhood.<sup>21</sup>

The character of Susan Warrington provides a useful counterpoint to Rachel's psychological development, as Woolf explicitly constructs this daughter figure as achieving a modicum of selfhood solely through her engagement to a fellow traveler. Until this momentous event, Susan's ailing aunt treats her as little more than a servant, but, “Directly she became engaged, Mrs Paley behaved with instinctive respect, positively protested when Susan as usual knelt down to lace her shoes, and appeared really grateful for an hour of Susan's company where she had been used to exact two or three as her right” (202). This abrupt transformation in her status leads Susan to envision marriage as the transcendent signifier of women's existence:

Already her mind was busy with benevolent plans for her friends, or rather with one magnificent plan—which was simple too—they were all to get married—at once—directly she got back. Marriage, marriage, that was the right thing, the only thing, the solution required by everyone she knew, and a great part of her meditations were spent in tracing every instance of discomfort, loneliness, ill-health, unsatisfied ambition, restlessness, eccentricity, taking things up and dropping them again, public speaking, and

---

<sup>21</sup> See Froula, who identifies the marriage plot in this novel as Rachel's “Great War” (68).

philanthropic activity on the part of men and particularly on the part of women to the fact that they wanted to marry, were trying to marry, and had not succeeded in getting married. (201)

Susan's experience thus reinforces her subconscious understanding that her personhood is contingent on her marital status: thus, to be an "unmarried girl" is, as the prefix denotes, to be inherently lacking, and as Woolf suggests, worthy not of respect but of pity.<sup>22</sup> Marriage thus stands as a tradition that paradoxically negates the female self even as it ostensibly grants it, a perverse logic that ensures the suppression of women and, consequently, the continuation of the patriarchy. Susan's ready assumption of a dependent existence thus darkly foreshadows Rachel's fate: despite both her and Terence's vision of a deeper, more meaningful union and partnership, traditional gender roles are not so easily revised. Susan's survival at the end of the novel therefore serves as a quiet commentary on the impossibility of Rachel's quest for independent selfhood, making it clear that a woman's self-effacement through marriage represents success, while the struggle for self-determination of not only Rachel, but also of the novel's third daughter figure, Evelyn Murgatroyd, stands as a seditious and unacceptable act.<sup>23</sup>

The character of Evelyn Murgatroyd is in many ways analogous to Woolf's prior and subsequent transgressive daughter figures, the Tristram daughters<sup>24</sup> from "Phyllis and

---

<sup>22</sup> In *The Years*, Woolf notes this perspective, in comments such as the Mrs Lamley's vision of Eleanor Pargiter: "It was such a pity she didn't marry – such a mistake to let the younger sister marry before the elder" (103). In *The Voyage Out*, see also Woolf's depiction of spinsters such as Miss Allan, and society's perception of them (TVO 127, 155).

<sup>23</sup> Mrs Elliot's description of her sister-in-law places her in the same aberrant, "unsayable" category as Evelyn: "Of course, my sister-in-law is one of those active modern women, who always takes things up, you know – the kind of woman one admires, though one does not feel, at least I do not feel – but then she has a constitution of iron" (177).

<sup>24</sup> Significantly, Evelyn wishes to have a house in Bloomsbury, like that of the Tristrams, where talk serves to foment political and social change.

Rosamond" and *Mrs Dalloway*'s Sally Seton and *The Years*' Rose Pargiter. Like them, Evelyn wilfully disregards the social conventions of female passivity and domesticity: from her illegitimate birth to her impulsive exclamation of her longing "to be a man" so that she might raise an army and conquer "some great territory" in South America, Evelyn embodies a renunciation of docile ladydom. Associated with the male realms of speech and action, Evelyn is a masculinized figure who chafes at the burden of marriage, motherhood and submissive conduct demanded of her gender:

Love was all very well, and those snug domestic houses, with the kitchen below and the nursery above, which were so secluded and self-contained, like little islands in the torrents of the world; but the real things were surely the things that happened, the causes, the wars, the ideas, which happened in the great world outside, and went on independently of these women, turning so beautifully towards the men. She looked at them sharply. Of course they were happy and content, but there must be better things than that. Surely one could get nearer to life, one could get more out of life, one could enjoy more and feel more than they would ever do. (373-374)

For Evelyn, the familial domain functions as a protectorate, a subjugated territory populated by compliant, yet ignorant and unfulfilled subjects. This realm represents a form of captivity to Evelyn, with its "little islands" functioning to keep her and her gender segregated from masculine, active reality. From her perspective, civilization as a whole, "the great world outside," figures as an exclusive male domain that has shunted women aside, declaring them to be nothing more than superfluous ornamentations. Evelyn, however, refuses this submissiveness: she sees herself as being just as capable as

any man, hampered solely by the weaknesses that society attributes to and expects of her gender. Her statement to Terence, "I thought the other day on that mountain how I'd have liked to be one of those colonists to cut down trees and make laws and all that instead of fooling about with all these people who think one's just a pretty young lady. Though I'm not. I really might *do* something," thus highlights her perception of passivity as the factor that limits women to a subservient role in society (216, emphasis in original).

Evelyn again voices her frustration with female inactivity in a subsequent discussion with Rachel in which she subverts the meaning of the verb "to play," employing it to represent the emptiness and frivolity of female accomplishments:

"That's what's the matter with us. . . We don't *do* things. What do you do?"

she demanded, looking at Rachel with a slightly ironical smile.

... "I play," she said with an affectation of stolid composure.

"That's about it!" Evelyn laughed. "We none of us do anything but play...

But I'm tired of playing," she went on... "I'm going to do something." (288-

289, emphasis in original)

Rachel's musical talent is thereby dismissed as ineffective and superfluous. Relegated to an absurd pastime, the heroine of the novel's one true skill – and sole medium of self-expression – thus becomes a metaphor for female futility. As Rachel admits to Terence, in her own estimation, her whole life has been meaningless: like St John's sister, who is condemned to the shadow of her brother's great intellect and potential, she has done nothing but "fe[e]d rabbits for twenty-four years" (241).

But while Evelyn is manifestly frustrated with the submissive nature of women such as Susan Warrington, her vision of the opposite sex is not as clear. In effect, Woolf portrays Evelyn as envying men their position and power, even as she disdains them for their vanity and aggression and, seemingly, seeks their sexual attention. There is a significant distance, however, between Evelyn's experience of herself and others' perceptions of her, a discrepancy that is nowhere more evident than in her encounters with men. In my analysis, this inconsistency stems from this young woman's independence, vitality, and quiet militancy, all of which make her a threat to masculine power. Her unsettling self-awareness and self-determination drive men to focus on her physicality and, in an attempt to dominate and repress her, to seek either to coerce her into marriage, as Perrot, Oliver, and Sinclair do, or to dismiss her as a flirt, as do Terence and St John (216, 356).

Significantly, Woolf chooses to have Evelyn, rather than the narrator, recount the most violent of her encounters with men, an assault which closely parallels that of Richard Dalloway on Rachel. Evelyn's description of this attack represents an important shift in perspective, as it marks Woolf's rejection of the detached, third-person narration she employs to depict the scene between Dalloway and Rachel for an emotional, first-person account of the demoralizing and self-negating impact of such sexual violence. As Evelyn tearfully and tremblingly describes this event to Rachel, she refers to Sinclair as a "disgusting brute," and desperately tries to wash away the feeling of his "nasty hairy face," images which evoke Rachel's terrifying visions following her molestation by Dalloway. In what reads as a replay of this previous incident, Evelyn recounts that

Sinclair grabbed and forcefully kissed her, accusing her of instigating his actions.<sup>25</sup>

Woolf's choice to recreate the assault scene serves to expose this form of sexual aggression as an omnipresent pattern of violation against young women. Rachel's reaction to Evelyn's tale testifies to this grim reality, as she can only comprehend the attack on a global, rather than a personal scale: "Rachel sat watching her. She did not think of Evelyn's position: she only thought that the world was full of people in torment" (287).<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, by revisiting the assault scene and re-casting Evelyn as the victim, Woolf is able to rewrite Rachel's response through a more self-aware and vocal character who, unlike her naïve counterpart, does not feel any sense of wonderment at this event, but rather an immediate and deep sense of outrage and oppression. This encounter thus serves only to fuel Evelyn's contempt for men as well as her repudiation of their superior status: "I've never met a man that was fit to compare with a woman! ... they've no dignity, they've no courage, they've nothing but their beastly passions and their brute strength! Would any woman have behaved like that—if a man had said he didn't want her? We've too much self-respect; we're infinitely finer than they are" (287).

Despite this evident strength and passion, Woolf's portrayal of Evelyn is far from heroic. By choosing to develop Evelyn through other characters' perceptions of her, Woolf undermines her strengths, and she thus becomes, not a figure of empowerment and modernity, but rather a masculinized and shallow figure, who is incapable of intimacy

---

<sup>25</sup> Sinclair calls Evelyn a "Siren" (287), a term which is as loaded with connotations of guilt and seduction as Dalloway's reference to woman's "inestimable power—for good or for evil" (80).

<sup>26</sup> See Swanson, who identifies the earlier scene with Richard Dalloway, rather than this scene, as the "sexual violation" that "functions in Rachel's psyche and in the novel as a whole as a synecdoche for rape and sexual abuse of women" (290). Swanson also notes the novel's "Possible implications...that sexual violence against women is integral to the founding of the British nation, built into the structures of family and state" (298).

and constantly seeking attention and approval (292, 217).<sup>27</sup> Thus, despite her obvious self-awareness and independence, Evelyn remains a flawed character: like Rose Pargiter in *The Years*, she lacks the emotional depth and sense of potentiality that would position her at the vanguard of Woolf's daughter figures.

While Evelyn scorns her suitors, choosing instead to pursue a career as a social activist, Rachel becomes involved with, and ultimately engaged to marry, Terence Hewet, a shift in her social status that dooms her through its requirement of "selflessness" on her part. That Rachel's fate should diverge so grimly from that of Evelyn must be traced, in large part, to their contrary conceptions of men: whereas Rachel, like the earlier figures of Phyllis and Rosamond, remains trapped in the fatal mindset of the "patriarchal daughter" (Swanson 285), envisioning men as figures of enlightenment and liberation, Evelyn perceives men as barriers not only to her own ambitions and selfhood, but to the emancipation and fulfilment of her gender as a whole.

Accordingly, as Rachel's relationship with Terence develops, it becomes clear that she will not attain self-knowledge and self-determination through her own means: indeed, it is only through the intermediary figure of Terence that she is able to gain any degree of selfhood. Thus, even when Woolf ostensibly accords Rachel psychological independence, as she does in the following passage, she immediately undermines this apparent autonomy by making it dependent on her heroine's romantic involvement:

...although she was going to marry him and to live with him for thirty, or forty, or fifty years, and to quarrel, and to be so close to him, she was independent of him, she was independent of everything else. Nevertheless,

---

<sup>27</sup> See Batchelor, who writes that Woolf's distrust "of organized political activity for women is felt in the caricatur[e] of Evelyn Murgatroyd in *The Voyage Out*" (171).

as St John said, it was love that made her understand this, for she had never felt this independent, this calm, and this certainty until she fell in love with him and perhaps this too was love. She wanted nothing else. (367-368)

In this passage, moreover, Woolf depicts Rachel as unable to comprehend her new-found individuality and maturity, save for the intervention of male insight and wisdom. Sadly, for Rachel this contingent form of subjectivity is inescapable:<sup>28</sup> society is predisposed to identify any action on her part not as self-directed, but as dependent on male impetus, as foregrounded by Mrs Elliot's observation of Terence and Rachel's first encounter: "Did you notice at the picnic? He was the only person who could make her utter" (176).

Thus dispossessed of her own consciousness, Rachel remains trapped in the "cotton wool of nonbeing" (Swanson 291), a "curious condition of unanalysed sensations" in which she is "incapable of making a plan which should have any effect upon her state of mind" (TVO 367). She can therefore do nothing other than position herself as supplicant to Terence, awaiting the breath of life that will bring her intellect and emotions into existence:

If Rachel was ignorant of her own feelings, she was even more completely ignorant of his. At first he moved as a god; as she came to know him better he was still the centre of light, but combined with this beauty a wonderful power of making her daring and confident of herself. She was conscious of

---

<sup>28</sup> Even the strong figure Helen Ambrose submits to her husband, something which Terence sees as a "strange and piteous flaw in her nature," a comment which reveals his own bias and short-sightedness: Even the Ambroses, whom he [Terence] admired and respected profoundly—in spite of all the love between them, was not their marriage too a compromise? She gave way to him: she spoils him: she arranged things for him: she who was all truth to others was not true to her husband, was not true to her friends if they came in conflict with her husband. (282)

Note here that Terence omits that Helen is not true to *herself* when conflict arises with her husband, an oversight that more likely shows ignorance on his part than insight into the reality that what she is being true to is her socialization as a woman (that is, as a wife).

emotions and powers which she had never suspected in herself. and of a depth in the world hitherto unknown. (259-260)

Brought into being through her relationship, Rachel, like Susan Warrington, thus loses all sense of self just as she ostensibly gains it. Although before her engagement, Rachel had railed at St John's arrogant "assumption of the superiority of his nature and experience," she is duped by Terence's latent, and thus infinitely more dangerous, phallogentricity (174).

While St John is unable to relate to so reserved and inexperienced a young woman as Rachel, and thus openly resorts to belittling her, Terence is fascinated by her silence and introspection, although, ironically, these self-same qualities instigate his subconscious desire to dominate and possess her. For Terence's interest lies not in knowing Rachel herself – "her shivering private visions" (69) – but in what these represent: female existence itself, the "curious silent unrepresented life" that he longs to comprehend and master in his writing (245). Thus, despite Woolf's attempts to portray Terence as having "something of a woman in him"<sup>29</sup> (288), he is manifestly a fundamentally patriarchal being, not far removed from Richard Dalloway, whose social vision he mirrors in his comments to Rachel that he is "inclined to doubt that you'll ever do anything even when you have the vote," as well as in his acceptance of an order of existence in which "the daughters have to give way to the sons: the sons have to be educated: they have to bully and shove for their wives and families, and so it all comes over again" (240). In effect, the very quality that attracts Terence to Rachel is that which dooms her to submission and, consequently, death: her "great" and passive "gift" of

---

<sup>29</sup> Evelyn commends Hewet's character in this way: Woolf describes him as "adopt[ing] the feminine point of view" in his dialogue with Rachel (240).

“underst[anding] what was said to her” (283). Despite his assertion that “You could say anything [to Rachel]—you could say everything, and yet she was never servile.” Terence is dismissive of her opinions and ideas, and, tellingly, sees her as “less desirable as her brain beg[ins] to work” (239).

Accordingly, when Rachel describes the sense of freedom and empowerment she experiences upon “walking in Richmond Park and singing to [her]self and knowing it doesn’t matter a damn to anybody.” Terence cannot accept either this vision of her independence or her subsequent comparison of herself to the elemental forces of the “wind or the sea” (248). Feeling an “intense depression” at Rachel’s recollection of this moment of self-possession and self-creation, unable, or unwilling, to amend his vision of her as nothing more than a “pretty young lady,”<sup>30</sup> he condescendingly comments: “Nonsense.... You like people. You like admiration” (248). With this repudiation, Terence effectively denies Rachel her selfhood, and further ridicules her by stating: “Your real grudge against Hirst is that he doesn’t admire you.” a remark chosen to repress and humiliate her by positioning her as a subject who is defined and motivated by the supreme goal of attracting a husband (248).

Rachel’s potential for agency and self-actualization escapes her when she proves unable to sustain the boundaries crucial to keeping her own thoughts and opinions separate from those of Terence. This fatal openness is symbolized in her room at the villa, which Woolf depicts, early in the narrative, as “a fortress as well as a sanctuary” in which Rachel could “play, read, think [and] defy the world” (136). Her relationship with Terence, however, distorts this “enchanted place” where “things [fell] into their right

---

<sup>30</sup> This is Evelyn Murgatroyd’s term, as I mention above (TVO 216).

proportions" (136).<sup>31</sup> Like Rachel herself, this territory has fallen under Terence's dominion: with him now occupying, on both a literal and metaphorical level, this formerly liberating and creative space. Rachel now finds her reading material, piano playing, physicality and very consciousness vulnerable to his scrutiny and critique (340-341; 347).

Although Rachel experiences recurrent, yet fleeting, moments of insight during which she recognizes the true nature of her relationship with Terence,<sup>32</sup> she is unable to break free from the "ponderous stupidity" of her cultural enslavement (301). Lacking self-knowledge, unable to imagine or create herself as a "person on [her] own account," she thus responds to Terence's self-centred and confused declaration of intent with the poignant and fateful question: "Am I in love—is this being in love—are we to marry each other?" (327).<sup>33</sup> With this unbalanced union, Rachel's psychological development comes to a complete halt. Subsiding into a state of dreamy acquiescence, she accordingly revises and dismisses her entire existence prior to Terence, looking upon it "tenderly and humorously, as if she had been turning in a fog for a long time" (366). Now possessing the new identity of the future Mrs Hewet, Rachel, like Susan Warrington before her, is thus inescapably inscribed in the patriarchal social system, which she perceives as providing "satisfaction and meaning," a unifying and universal "pattern" to life (366). In this way, Rachel reaches a state of "certainty," and tranquillity, which, with her singular naïveté, she comprehends as the "process that people called living" (366). Evidently,

---

<sup>31</sup> Note that Woolf later depicts Rachel's moment of "crisis" as one during which "the world is finally displayed in its *true proportions*" (300, my emphasis). In my reading of the novel, the distance between the "right" proportions, which exist only in Rachel's "enchanted," enclosed and inherently female space, and those of the "true" (masculine or external) world, is both momentous and traumatic.

<sup>32</sup> Upon their engagement, she recognizes and states to Terence, "it will be a fight" (328).

<sup>33</sup> See Froula (80-81).

however, the process that is occurring is the very inverse of this, as Woolf darkly foreshadows in Rachel's meditation on her future:

For the moment she was as detached and disinterested as if she had no longer any lot in life, and she thought that she could now accept anything that came to her without being perplexed by the form in which it appeared. What was there to frighten or to perplex in the prospect of life? Why should this insight ever again desert her? The world was in truth so large, so hospitable, and after all it was so simple. "Love," St John had said, "that seems to explain it all."<sup>34</sup> (367)

Ironically, love does explain it all, as Rachel succumbs to a mysterious fever a mere four weeks after her engagement to Terence.

As Rachel's condition deteriorates, the narration alternates between relating her retreat into delirium and documenting Terence's increasingly egocentric response to the illness. Thus, an ongoing subtext of this portion of the narrative subtly depicts Terence's self-centred nature, his need for Rachel, and his sense of control over her. His reflection that "He could not let her die: he could not live without her" (405-6) thus stands as a subtle expression of his egotism and his need to dominate her, as does his expression of grief upon Rachel's death: "This has not happened to me. It is not possible that this has happened to me" (410-11). Moreover, and perhaps most significantly, it is at the moment of her death that Terence feels his deepest connection with Rachel: "It seemed to him that their complete union and happiness filled the room with rings eddying more and more widely. He had no wish in the world left unfulfilled. They possessed what could never be

---

<sup>34</sup> In what stands as a sombre response to Rachel's reflection, upon her engagement to Terence, that "It will be a fight" (328), Terence experiences "perfect certainty and peace" upon her death (412).

taken from them" (412). In my interpretation, these abstract images of union and possession must be read ironically. They must also be held against Rachel's earlier idea of, and hope for, her future – her "vision of her own personality, of herself as a real everlasting thing, *different from anything else, unmergeable*, like the sea or the wind" (my emphasis, 90). This vision, Woolf underlines, had the effect of making Rachel "profoundly excited at the thought of living" (90). Evidently, however, the goal of individuality remains beyond her reach, as, even as she dies, her consciousness is claimed and absorbed by Terence.

Manifestly, then, the very concept of selfhood remains beyond the grasp of Woolf's earliest daughter-figures. Alienated, trapped in "the cotton wool" of "non-being," Phyllis, Rosamond, and Rachel each struggle and fail to conceive of a future that is not dependent on a man or on marriage (MOB 70). It is not until the 1925 novel, *Mrs Dalloway*, that Woolf will create a daughter figure who attains a liminal space, both physical and psychological, in which she can not only "...think [and] defy the world" (TVO 136), but also envision herself as taking a leading and independent role in it. This exceptional figure is, of course, Elizabeth Dalloway, the enigmatic and much overlooked daughter of the title character of this novel.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Scrutinizing the Inscrutable: Elizabeth Dalloway's "Moment of Being"**

Concealed amongst Virginia Woolf's depictions of the diverse characters whose psychological and physical realities populate her fourth novel, *Mrs Dalloway*, is a striking study of the burgeoning consciousness of Elizabeth Dalloway, daughter of the title character. Although this character has been both overlooked and underestimated by critics such as Elizabeth Abel, who, in *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*, characterizes Elizabeth as an "enigma" – "unknown and unknowable," in my estimation, this daughter figure occupies a position of pivotal importance in Woolf's fictional oeuvre (43). In this third chapter, I therefore present Elizabeth as Woolf's pre-eminent daughter figure, a character whose marginal role in *Mrs Dalloway* belies her significance as a figure of potentiality and success. In this chapter, I thus continue my focus on the issues of subjectivity, silence, and sexuality, exploring Elizabeth's marked development over the course of the novel, as she progresses from an identity contingent on both her mother and her tutor to a position of self-discovery and independence – an evolution constructed in the novel as nothing less than the birth of her consciousness. I also examine Woolf's revision of her transgressive female figures, previously represented in such characters as Sylvia Tristram and Evelyn Murgatroyd, both of whom are overtly rebellious and independent women who defy the patriarchal conventions of passivity and subservience. As I argue below, it is Elizabeth's quiet rebellion which sets in motion her unparalleled attainment of a true "moment of being," as it is during her transgressive voyage of self-

discovery<sup>1</sup> that she experiences a transcendent vision of autonomy and self-creation which liberates her from the confines of her identity as a “patriarchal daughter” (Swanson 285).

In order to locate Elizabeth’s role within *Mrs Dalloway*’s extensive and interconnected narrative strands, I start my analysis with a look at the structure of the novel as a whole. By placing Elizabeth’s story on the level of a subplot, Woolf excludes her from the focused story-telling that has, in her previous works, subordinated her daughter-figures to the obligatory marriage plot, that “urgent requirement of society that a woman should accomplish her destiny through and within the constraining limits of a man” (Miles 52). With her story remaining largely untold at the close of *Mrs Dalloway*, Elizabeth’s paradoxically absent-presence creates a subversive narrative gap in the novel, an empty space that unsettles and undermines the paradigms that have heretofore determined the fate of Woolf’s daughter figures.<sup>2</sup>

Though disjointed and incomplete, Elizabeth’s story nonetheless figures as a revision of the failed attempts at self-discovery by Woolf’s earlier daughter figures, Rachel, Phyllis, and Rosamond: one in which identity is not dependent on or determined by a choice in the courtship plot, but is rather an act of self-creation, figured in the text as a revelatory and liberating vision of the autonomous female self. Woolf’s rejection of the marriage plot as an element of Elizabeth’s narrative is in fact the key to her attaining the individuality that is so far beyond the reach of the above-mentioned characters, as Rachel Blau Duplessis confirms:

---

<sup>1</sup> See Patricia Juliana Smith, who briefly comments on Elizabeth’s bus ride as “a journey of self-exploration and autonomy” (53).

<sup>2</sup> See Laurence on Jeanne Kammer, Xavière Gauthier, and Derrida’s vision of women’s silence, “absence” and “presence” in literature (36).

As a narrative pattern, the romance plot muffles the main female character, represses quest, valorizes heterosexual as opposed to homosexual ties, incorporates individuals within couples as a sign of their personal and narrative success... In short, the romance plot, broadly speaking, is a trope for the sex-gender system as a whole. . . . [T]he conventional outcomes [are] strongly identified with certain roles for women.<sup>3</sup> (324)

Elizabeth's position outside of this plot serves, first of all, to free her from these "certain roles."<sup>4</sup> which are so clearly depicted as "slavery" in "Phyllis and Rosamond" and, secondly, to establish her story as an amended version of the developmental narrative of Clarissa Dalloway. As I argue below, this revision of Clarissa's story leaves Elizabeth's sexual orientation open and unresolved at the novel's conclusion. Unlike her mother, then, Elizabeth is not "subsumed into institutional heterosexuality" in the name of narrative closure (Smith 7). In my reading, Elizabeth Dalloway thus represents an alternate vision of female subjectivity, as hers is an existence that does not involve a "slow sinking" beneath the suffocating role and duties of daughterhood (MD 131).<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> While I cite this passage from an article Duplessis published in the Spring 1988 edition of *Novel*, the article in fact reprints material from the author's 1985 book, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*. My attention was also drawn to Duplessis' work by Patricia Juliana Smith, who quotes the same passage in *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fiction* (7).

<sup>4</sup> See Liesbeth Woertman on "the skills, qualities and personal characteristics traditionally linked to the female subject... such as nurturing, self-sacrifice, self-denial, empathy and emotionality" (58). See also Miles on the "traditional concepts of womanly behaviour: to be self-effacing, supportive, un-judging, and to invest all their efforts in their man's success rather than their own" (4).

<sup>5</sup> I refer here to Woolf's metaphor for Lady Bradshaw's existence in *Mrs Dalloway*, which I see as another version of the fate which awaits the failed, "selfless" daughter figures, Phyllis and Rosamond:

Fifteen years ago she had gone under. It was nothing you could put your finger on; there had been no scene, no snap; only the slow sinking, water-logged, of her will into his. Sweet was her smile, swift her submission; dinner in Harley Street, numbering eight or nine courses, feeding ten or fifteen guests of the professional classes, was smooth and urbane. Once, long ago, she had caught salmon freely; now, quick to minister to the craving which

It is Clarissa's daughterhood, rather than Elizabeth's, that Elizabeth Abel identifies as the "palimpsestic" subplot of the novel in "Narrative Structure(s) and Female Development: The Case of *Mrs Dalloway*" (161).<sup>6</sup> While I concur with her analysis of this "buried" story as central to Clarissa's identity and sexuality, I believe she errs in her easy dismissal of Elizabeth's own, similarly "textually dispersed and disguised" developmental narrative (161). Indeed, it is Abel's insistence on the primacy of Clarissa's past in relation to the establishment of her identity that sets the logic for my vision of Elizabeth's nascent sexual and self-awareness as representing an equally significant point in time for the latter character.

In the narrative, the mother and daughter's intersecting, past and present developmental tales are accompanied by images contrasting the present-day aging of Clarissa with the budding beauty of her daughter. Thus, while for Clarissa, "it was all over:" her "sheet was stretched and the bed narrow" (MD 60), Elizabeth is depicted as an embodiment of potentiality, for whom all is only just "beginning"<sup>7</sup> (176). Although from the perspective of the patriarchal character Peter Walsh, Elizabeth's youth and inexperience figure as a lack, it is this very sense of promise and possibility that makes her such a powerful figure. In effect, Peter's view that Elizabeth "feels not half what we

lit her husband's eye so oilily for dominion, for power, she cramped, squeezed, pared, pruned, drew back, peeped through.... (131)

I read the image of Lady Bradshaw's "water-logged" sinking as particularly relevant in relation to the metaphor of drowning Woolf employs to describe Rachel's death.

<sup>6</sup> This chapter from the critical anthology *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, of which Abel was an editor, was reworked and published as a chapter entitled "Between the Acts of *Mrs Dalloway*" in her later book, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*.

<sup>7</sup> In the section which marks the start of Elizabeth's voyage down the Strand, in passages describing this character's youth and beauty, Woolf repeats this word three times in two paragraphs: "And already, even as she stood there, in her very well-cut clothes, *it was beginning*...."; "For *it was beginning*. Her mother could see that—the compliments *were beginning*" (176 my emphasis). See Bowlby on Woolf's use of this phrase (75).

feel, not yet" (254), stands both as a pompous denial of her psychological faculties – especially in reference to his own admission of how deeply he and Clarissa felt and experienced their own lives at the same age – and as an inadvertent recognition of her potentiality, as Elizabeth, unlike him, is not an emotionally fixed figure, who is stuck in a struggle to come to terms with the emotional wounds and regretted choices of yesteryear. If Elizabeth does not, indeed, feel half what Peter or Clarissa feel, this is for the simple reason that she lacks the memories that haunt these older characters, and which serve not to propel them forward, but to call into question their present existence.<sup>8</sup>

The relationship between Elizabeth and her mother provides much insight into this daughter figure. Despite Clarissa's portrayal as a deeply empathetic being who is able to understand and experience an emotional connection with as removed a character as Septimus Warren Smith, whom she has never met, she nonetheless regards her own daughter as mysterious and "inscrutable" (171). The effect of this marked alienation is significant: by resisting Clarissa's attempts to possess her and claim her allegiance.<sup>9</sup>

Elizabeth manages to escape the interpretations and impositions of "young ladydom" (PR 18) which would limit her identity by inscribing her in the patriarchal social order that moulded Clarissa:

As a young, upper middle-class woman in fin-de siècle British culture, Clarissa had been reared without any expectation of her achieving any significant accomplishments or, for that matter, assuming any significant responsibilities. Rather, the greatest expectations – indeed, an imperative –

---

<sup>8</sup> See Schaefer on memory in Woolf's novels (*The Three-Fold Nature of Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf*, 93).

<sup>9</sup> As I elucidate below, I read Elizabeth's disconnection from her mother as an act of resistance, rather than a passive lack of interest or temporary estrangement.

imposed upon her was simply that she should marry well and be decorative... (Smith 50-51)

Woolf foregrounds the liberating nature of Elizabeth's psychological detachment from her mother in the novel's earliest reference to this daughter figure, in which her removal from her mother's feminine, or "decorative" mindset is clear. Elizabeth's introduction thus figures as an ironically empty declaration of maternal ownership on Clarissa's part: "Her old Uncle William used to say a lady is known by her shoes and her gloves. ... Gloves and shoes; she had a passion for gloves; but *her own* daughter, *her* Elizabeth, cared not a straw for either of them" (MD 13, my emphasis). Clarissa's repeated use of the possessive pronoun, combined with her tone of incredulity at her daughter's lack of interest in the "shoes and gloves" that figure here as time-honoured, patriarchal markers of femininity, serves to emphasize Elizabeth's freedom from both her mother's control and her oppressive Victorian mentality.<sup>10</sup>

A later proprietary outburst in which Clarissa "histrionic[ally]" exclaims to Peter Walsh "Here's my Elizabeth" upon her daughter's entrance into the room<sup>11</sup> illuminates her attempt to place Elizabeth in a subordinate position, a power-play that is re-enacted throughout the novel in Clarissa's continuing interpretation of Elizabeth as "like a child still... a perfect baby" (61: 180). Interestingly, even as Peter notes and rejects the insincerity of Clarissa's exclamation of ownership, his own vision of Elizabeth is equally

---

<sup>10</sup> See Minow-Pinkney on Clarissa's "obsessive" focus on gloves and shoes (62).

<sup>11</sup> Abel also analyses this scene. Interestingly, her original interpretation of it read Elizabeth's interruption of Peter and Clarissa's reunion as "asserting ... the primacy of female bonds," and further categorized Clarissa's use of the possessive pronoun as "accentuating the intimacy of the mother daughter tie" (NSFD 169). She amended this position with a parenthesis in her book, noting that Clarissa's assertion belies "the actual attenuation of these [female] bonds between Clarissa and Elizabeth" (VWFP 33). For another vision of this scene, see also Rosenman, who interprets Clarissa's use of the possessive pronoun in this scene as unfeminine (81).

as oppressive, as he appraises her in terms of her role in the domestic economy, assuming that she must be old enough to have come “out” (102), an assessment that situates her as a commodity in the marriage market. Peter’s construction of Elizabeth is thus just as confining as Clarissa’s: both are unwilling to grant her an independent subjectivity, choosing instead to envision her as psychologically undeveloped and “extremely immature,” thereby dismissing any agency or individuality on her part (180).

By having Clarissa’s vision of Elizabeth, as well as those of Peter Walsh and Miss Kilman, occupy a prominent place in her portrayal of this daughter figure, Woolf effectively and subtly underlines the barriers this character must overcome in her quest for selfhood. Ultimately, Elizabeth must separate herself, both physically and psychologically, from her mother and her tutor in order to escape the subordinate position and passive behaviour which characterize her in these relationships. When she does so upon her voyage through London, her experience stands in stark contrast to that of her fictional predecessors, Phyllis and Rosamond, who discover during their excursion to the Tristrams that they are unable to move beyond their upbringing, which has shaped them to be fashionable, yet intrinsically superficial young ladies.

Before analysing Elizabeth’s entrance into an active consciousness later in the narrative, I will first identify and explore Woolf’s portrayal of this young woman as seen not just from the third-person point of view of the narrator, but also from the third-person perspectives of other characters, paying close attention to the perspectives of both Clarissa and Miss Kilman.<sup>12</sup> One of Woolf’s most intriguing and powerful passages depicting Elizabeth is one that portrays this character as a budding flower, and as a

---

<sup>12</sup> See Minow-Pinkney on the difficulty of locating the narrative voice in *Mrs Dalloway* (58-59).

foreign. "Other" figure<sup>13</sup> possessing an "oriental bearing" and a sense of "inscrutable mystery" (Beauvoir xvi; MD 171):

Was it that some Mongol had been wrecked on the coast of Norfolk (as Mrs Hilbery said), had mixed with the Dalloway ladies, perhaps a hundred years ago? For the Dalloways, in general, were fair-haired; blue-eyed: Elizabeth, on the contrary, was dark; had Chinese eyes in a pale face: an Oriental mystery; was gentle, considerate, still. As a child, she had had a perfect sense of humour; but now at seventeen, why, Clarissa could not in the least understand, she had become very serious; like a hyacinth sheathed in glossy green, with buds just tinted, a hyacinth which has had no sun.

(160)

The rich imagery of this passage provides several levels of meaning from which to approach Elizabeth. First of all is Woolf's remarkable depiction of Elizabeth as the embodiment of an ancestral indiscretion, an image that marks the distance between daughter and her mother, as it symbolically aligns Elizabeth with the Dalloways rather than the Parrys.<sup>14</sup> The suggestion that the Dalloway ladies had mixed with "some Mongol" is, moreover, a statement that is rife with connotations of scandalous and transgressive behaviour, and which therefore taints Elizabeth with racial degeneration<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> I build here on Beauvoir's definition of "Otherness": "She [woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, the Absolute – she is the Other" (xvi). According to this theory, Elizabeth is in fact "doubly othered" by her "oriental bearing" (MD 171), for, as Linda McDowell notes in *Gender, Identity and Place*: "Just as women as a group are Othered, so minority women are doubly othered..." (219).

<sup>14</sup> Although this image severs the matriarchal ties, it does not, however, situate Elizabeth entirely within the patriarchal order, as it binds her to the "Dalloway ladies," ensuring that despite her estrangement from her mother, Elizabeth is not completely detached from the feminine world.

<sup>15</sup> See Childs (48-51).

and sexual impropriety. With these connotations of misbegotten ancestry, Woolf opens a space for Elizabeth outside of the oppressive social values which were so detrimental to the emotional and sexual blossoming of her mother, who, like all of the “virtuous women of the day [was] thought, as a matter of course, to feel no sexual desire or pleasure” (Smith 51).

In contrast to Woolf’s earlier daughter figures, whose sexuality is depicted either as non-existent, or as repressed, as it was for the Hibberts and Rachel Vinrace respectively, the above passage provides us with an image implying that Elizabeth’s sexuality is literally budding, “like a hyacinth sheathed in glossy green, with buds just tinted, a hyacinth which has had no sun” (MD 171). This image subtly suggests purity and virginity, even as it hints at Elizabeth’s burgeoning sexual development. Furthermore, the floral motif associates Elizabeth’s sexual orientation with that of her mother, whose sexual attraction to women is depicted by Woolf as a “match burning in a crocus” (41).

The Freudian reading Abel employs in her analysis of this crocus image categorizes Clarissa’s sexuality as “actively directed toward women... implicitly ‘masculine’ in attitude and character, yet also receptive and ‘feminine’” (NSFD 174). In my reading, the hyacinth imagery similarly “conflates Freud’s sexual dichotomy,” mixing “male and female imagery,” as well as images of both a “passive and active” sexuality (174). My interpretation of this passage thus sees the hyacinth’s sheath as a metaphorical hymen, and the buds and lack of exposure to the sun as figures for Elizabeth’s developing body, as well as her sexual innocence and sheltered upbringing. Following this logic, one can interpret the image to represent a “passive vaginal sexuality” (VWFP 35), which

situates Elizabeth in the Oedipal stage of her development. The hyacinth can, however, also be interpreted as a clitoral image which represents the "erotogenic zone" proper to the pre-Oedipal phase, in which the young girl has a "masculine," or active sexuality (Freud 287; VWFP 35). If read in this light, the image again allows the implication of an "inverted" sexual orientation for Elizabeth, with the flower's buds signifying her delayed development and difficulty in moving into a "normative" sexuality (Freud 287).

Whichever way this intriguing image is read, what becomes clear in this passage, as well as in later depictions of Elizabeth, is that her sexuality is emergent and undecided, a position that places her on a path of sexual and self-discovery, rather than on the predetermined course of courtship and marriage which figures as such a repressive obligation not only for Woolf's earlier daughter figures, but also for the young Clarissa Parry.

To explore the novel's other and more direct suggestions of Elizabeth's potentially lesbian orientation, it is necessary to delve further into her relationship with her mother. As I have already outlined, Clarissa is frustrated with her daughter's alienation from her, and so reacts strongly to Elizabeth's closeness to her tutor. In my analysis, this reaction originates in Clarissa's repressed emotions, not the least of which is her sense of rejection and loss, as she sees Miss Kilman as having usurped her privileged place in Elizabeth's life – as having "taken [her] daughter from her" (MD 163). Clarissa's excessive negativity regarding Miss Kilman also denotes a projection of her own repressed sexuality onto this "odious" woman (165), a subconscious act which is abetted by Elizabeth's blushes (155), which Clarissa views as a sexual arousal corresponding to her own youthful reaction to Sally Seton (Smith 55). As sociologist

Karin Flaake argues in the aptly titled "A body of one's own: Sexual development and the female body in the mother-daughter relationship."

From the mother's perspective the bodily development of her daughter confronts her with the upcoming separation and her own aging process. It can remind the mother of her own unsatisfied sexuality, her own unfulfilled desire for autonomy, and her own problems with femininity. The daughter's growth into womanhood and the fact that her adult life lies before her can cause the mother to reflect on her own life, previous hopes and disappointments, gratification as well as her sense of limitations. What will happen when this balance is removed, how the mother perceives her future life, how she values her own physical womanhood and sexuality – all determine the nature of her relationship with her adolescent daughter. (9-10)

Clarissa's interpretation of her daughter's relationship with her tutor can thus clearly be read as an act of psychological displacement.

This said, I do not mean to dismiss Miss Kilman's evident desire to "consume" and possess Elizabeth, which is so clearly outlined by Patricia Juliana Smith in *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fiction*. In this examination, Smith identifies Miss Kilman's "fleshy desires" as a darker reflection of Clarissa's own longings (MD 168; Smith 60).<sup>16</sup> While I acknowledge Miss Kilman's sexual fantasies regarding Elizabeth, what I wish to underline here is the distance between the sexual identity Clarissa would impose on Elizabeth through her interpretation of her daughter's

---

<sup>16</sup> Smith contrasts the homoerotic fantasies of these two in her connection of Clarissa's "Shakespearean sentiment, 'if it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy'" with Miss Kilman's "'If she could grasp her, if she could clasp her, if she could make her hers absolutely and forever and then die: that was all she wanted'" (60). Abel also notes this parallel (VWFP 43).

relationship with Miss Kilman, and Elizabeth's own experience of this relationship. By labelling Doris Kilman as the "seducer" who "defile[s]" her daughter, Clarissa implicitly forces a sexual identity on Elizabeth and, in doing so, completely disregards the possibility of her daughter's exercising her own autonomy or expressing her own sexual preferences in this matter (MD 229).

Yet Clarissa's hasty conclusion about the "Degrading passion" of "Kilman and her daughter" (166) does not correspond with Woolf's depiction of Elizabeth's interaction with her tutor, whom she later abandons in an apparent desire to free herself from the older woman's suffocating presence.<sup>17</sup> In effect, Elizabeth's sexual orientation remains highly ambiguous throughout the novel, as we are presented with such contradictory information as Clarissa's observations that her daughter "might be falling in love" with Miss Kilman, as well as Elizabeth's acknowledgement of, and excited reaction to, her construction as a sexual object by fellow pedestrians in the streets of London (14, 176). Furthermore, at the close of the novel, Woolf depicts Elizabeth favouring the admiration and attentions of her father over those of her would-be suitor, Willie Titcomb (254). The ultimate effect of these divergent images, combined with Clarissa's suspicions regarding Miss Kilman, as well as with this last character's unmistakable desires, is that of simultaneously positioning Elizabeth as the potential heir to her mother's lesbian tendencies and also as a heterosexual figure who is beginning to recognize and slowly respond to her construction as an object of desire under the male gaze. Thus, in contrast to Clarissa's sexual development, which is characterized by Abel

---

<sup>17</sup> Miss Kilman's experience of this dismissal denotes a definite change in Elizabeth's feelings for her: "to see Elizabeth turning against her; to be felt repulsive even by her—it was too much; she could not stand it" (173).

as a forced “acculturation” (NSFD 168). Elizabeth’s sexuality is portrayed as a gentle process of growing self-awareness and affirmation, a process that, significantly, remains disconnected from the marriage plot.<sup>18</sup>

Elizabeth’s ultimate entrance into self-awareness can, however, only occur after she has emancipated herself from her oppressive relationships with both her mother and Doris Kilman. In the passages of the novel in which we are privy to Elizabeth’s interaction with Miss Kilman, Elizabeth’s thoughts are voiced for the first time. Woolf immediately modifies her syntax to suit this shift in perspective: the sentence structure loses its sophistication, taking on a childlike diction and stream of associations:

“Elizabeth had never thought about the poor. They lived with everything they wanted, – her mother had breakfast in bed every day; Lucy carried it up; and she liked old women because they were Duchesses, and being descended from some Lord” (MD 171). The naïveté of this perspective serves to highlight Elizabeth’s sheltered upbringing and, furthermore, sets a point of reference from which we can track the development of her burgeoning self-knowledge, sense of purpose and ambition and, finally, her awareness of and interaction with the world around her.<sup>19</sup>

As Elizabeth’s tête-à-tête with her tutor continues and Miss Kilman’s attempts to dominate her become more overt, the young woman is described as sitting silently, “Like some *dumb* creature who has been brought up to a gate for an unknown purpose, and stands there longing to gallop away” (173, my emphasis), a portrayal which demonstrates

---

<sup>18</sup> Clarissa runs into the “granite wall” (MD 46) of obligatory heterosexuality in the form of Peter Walsh, who forcefully intrudes on her moment of sexual initiation, during which Sally Seton kisses her in the garden at Bourton. See Abel, who classifies this interruption as the “brusque and painful” “moment of Oedipal rupture,” and identifies Peter as “the jealous male attempting to rupture the exclusive female bond, insisting on the transference of attachment to the man, demanding heterosexuality” (NSFD 168-169).

<sup>19</sup> See Bowlby on Elizabeth’s naïveté (83).

Elizabeth's mounting – but as yet subconscious – need to free herself from the predatory Miss Kilman in order to express her autonomy and individuality. In effect, at this point in the narrative, this image of Elizabeth as a “dumb creature” stands as a comprehensive summation of her identity, as thus far she consists of nothing more than a hollow, externally constructed figure, a blank and captive persona similar to the empty identity from which Phyllis and Rosamond, in Woolf's earlier narrative, also longed “to gallop away.”

This depiction of Elizabeth as “dumb” is, moreover, part of a larger pattern in Woolf's fiction in which her daughter figures are portrayed as silent or “inarticulate” (102). As Patricia Ondek Laurence notes in *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition*, in her analysis of “dumbness” and “stupidity” (words she identifies as related to silence), “‘Stupid’ has the connotations ‘benumbed’ and ‘dazed’, which connects [sic] with ‘slow-witted’; ‘dumbness’ implies ‘vexatious obtuseness’ or ‘lack of intelligence’” (41). She further comments that “Such usage... connotes the subordinate and inferior position of women in society” (41), a point which is particularly relevant in reference to Rachel and the Hibberts, as they are all perceived as lacking in intelligence due to the combination of their gender and their “inwardness” (6). As I argue in my first two chapters, all three of these “pre-Elizabethan” daughter figures ultimately fail in their struggle to communicate their individuality and needs to their families and companions.

As the terms “dumb,” “inarticulate,” “inscrutable” and “still,” with all of their attendant connotations, are used in reference to Elizabeth throughout *Mrs Dalloway*, it becomes clear that in order to attain an independent subjectivity, this young woman will

have to escape the society of those who impose this deficient identity on her. Although in *The Voyage Out*, Rachel similarly struggles to surmount her label as “incompetent” and “absent” (16, 17), she progresses only so far as to be perceived as someone who is “always thinking of something [she doesn’t] say” (293), a characteristic that represents a slightly more enlightened version of “dumbness.” Significantly, it is Rachel’s experience of finding herself in the middle of a failed conversation (in which Miss Allan, despite her repeated attempts, fails to communicate the most mundane of comments to Mrs Paley) that instigates a moment of insight for Rachel: a moment in which she comprehends her powerlessness to express or even comprehend herself:

She had now reached one of those eminences, the result of some crisis, from which the world is finally displayed in its true proportions. She disliked the look of it immensely – churches, politicians, misfits, and huge impostures – men like Mr Dalloway, men like Mr Bax, Evelyn and her chatter, Mrs Paley blocking the passage. Meanwhile the steady beat of her own pulse represented the hot current of feeling that ran down beneath: beating, struggling, fretting. For the time, her own body was the source of all the life in the world, which tried to burst forth here—there—and was repressed now by Mr Bax, now by Evelyn, now by the imposition of ponderous stupidity, the weight of the entire world.<sup>20</sup> (300-301)

In this passage, it is clear that Rachel, despite both her awareness that the world is “repressing” her, and her perception that people have no “aim except to impede her”

---

<sup>20</sup> See Swanson, who reads this passage as one of Rachel’s “occasional moments of clarity in the midst of the fog in which she lives...” (292). Swanson notes that, “In these moments, [Rachel] moves toward feminist insights into her social/sexual position as a woman” (292).

(301). is nonetheless unable to conceive of a space in which she can escape the burden of the "intolerable" and asphyxiating expectations which block her self-knowledge and self-expression (300). Trapped, she can neither confront nor move beyond her sense of helplessness and confusion: "Thinking was no escape. Physical movement was the only refuge, in and out of rooms, in and out of people's minds, seeking she knew not what" (301).

Elizabeth embarks on this self-same quest, journeying through London to seek this elusive and ineffable "she knew not what." Despite her earlier portrayal as "gentle, considerate, still" (MD 160), words that connote not only silence, but also passivity and immobility, Elizabeth sheds these qualities in her dismissal of Miss Kilman. As soon as the moment presents itself – at the end of their tea break in the Army and Navy stores – Elizabeth thus breaks free from the "great" and clutching grasp of her tutor (173). Paradoxically, this triumphant move is presented in terms of the earlier image: "Right away to the end of the field the dumb creature galloped in terror" (173). But this image is the last one to depict Elizabeth as an inferior being. It is as though in this impulsive act, Elizabeth gallops not only "to the end of the field," but through the gate and into a new and sovereign territory: "She was delighted to be free. The fresh air was so delicious. It had been so stuffy in the Army and Navy Stores" (177).

Through this leave-taking, Elizabeth emancipates herself from this oppressive relationship and achieves individuation: "Elizabeth went off, drawing out, so Miss Kilman felt, the very entrails in her body, stretching them as she crossed the room, and then, with a final twist, bowing her head very politely, she went" (173). This image is a fascinating subversion of childbirth, with the image of entrails figuring as a sinister

umbilical cord that Elizabeth must sever in order to emerge from this overwhelming relationship and into her own consciousness. Despite Miss Kilman's immediate declaration that victory belongs to Mrs. Dalloway ("She had gone. Mrs. Dalloway had triumphed" [173]), the triumph in fact belongs to Elizabeth, as she at last escapes from the classifications and impositions of both her mother and teacher, and subsequently undertakes her own journey of self-discovery and awareness.

Unlike Rachel, then, whose movement in *The Voyage Out* is toward death, Elizabeth is symbolically reborn in this scene, from which she goes forward into the "public domains of history and culture" which have thus far remained beyond the ken of Woolf's daughter figures.<sup>21</sup> This journey sets Elizabeth on what Christine Froula, in "Out of the Chrysalis: Female Initiation and Female Authority in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*," defines as a traditionally male path:

female initiation institutes women's *absence* from the culture of the public sphere, which becomes "male" insofar as the male and female rites of passage succeed in preserving a dichotomy between "male" culture and "female" nature. Insofar as women's priorities must be home, husband, and children, public culture becomes a male domain; and insofar as culture is a

---

<sup>21</sup> Froula, drawing on Mircea Eliade's *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth*, writes:

Male initiation accomplishes the boy's separation from the mother and his dwelling place and inducts him into the culture of his fathers. The initiatory rite is conceived as a symbolic death - followed by a rebirth, through revelation of the culture's sacred myths, into knowledge of the origins and history of the cosmos...  
While the "male initiate's education... prepares him to participate in the public domains of history and culture," the girl's initiation and her subsequent education "confir[m] [her] likeness to her mother and prepar[e] her for the domestic and reproductive roles of wife and mother..." (Froula 64).

male domain, the woman artist or culture-maker becomes a contradiction in terms. (65, emphasis in original)

Interestingly, Froula notes that, for both Victorian and “preliterate cultures,” this initiation process marks a transformation in the daughter’s psychology and behaviour: “She is no longer wayward, romping and careless, but becomes reserved and modest in deportment. In short, she is now a woman, prepared to love and be loved, and capable of performing the highest and most important functions of her sex”: marriage and motherhood (Eliade in Froula 64-5). Yet, as I argue below, Elizabeth’s next move defies this model of femininity, as she embarks upon what is nothing less than a “wayward” exploration of London – “venturing” into a space where “no Dalloways” go, and, subsequently, envisioning not her marriage, but her career (MD 180).<sup>22</sup>

As Elizabeth awaits the bus that will take her on this voyage, Woolf depicts the “burden” of this character’s youth and beauty, two qualities that clearly obstruct her autonomy and subjectivity. Rather than representing assets, Elizabeth’s beauty and youth instead work against her, as they firmly position her in a world of superficiality that she recognizes as “silly” (179) or inconsequential, and longs to escape:

And already, even as she stood there, in her very well-cut clothes, it was beginning... People were beginning to compare her to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies; and it made her life a burden to her, for she so much preferred being left alone to do what she liked in the country, but they would compare her to lilies, and she had to

---

<sup>22</sup> See Bolwby, who, in a Bloomsbury allusion, labels this an excursion to a territory “Where Dalloways fear to tread” (84).

go to parties, and London was so dreary compared with being alone in the country with her father and the dogs.<sup>23</sup> (176)

Notably, Elizabeth wishes to escape the parties that are associated throughout the novel with her mother. For Elizabeth, this social sphere represents a realm of “trivial chatterings”<sup>24</sup> (179) which construct her as nothing more than an object – not a thinking being, but a lily, a hyacinth, a fawn – all metaphors that afford no room for a young woman’s individuality, thoughts and interests. Elizabeth’s designation of this form of social exchange as “trivial” and “silly” demonstrates her maturity and perceptiveness and, furthermore, lends an aura of wisdom to her silence (179).

In a passage describing a moment of hesitation and uncertainty as Elizabeth awaits the bus, Woolf gives us a visual portrait of this character, one that again highlights her “oriental” mystery,<sup>25</sup> and describes her as both passive and impassive:

But which should she get on to? She had no preferences. Of course, she would not push her way. She inclined to be passive. It was expression she needed, but her eyes were fine, Chinese, oriental, and, as her mother said, with such nice shoulders and holding herself so straight, she was always charming to look at; and lately, in the evening especially, when she was interested, for she never seemed excited, she looked almost beautiful, very stately, very serene. What could she be thinking? Every man fell in love with her, and she was really awfully bored. (176)

---

<sup>23</sup> Although I discuss Elizabeth’s relationship with her father below, I will refer here to Abel, who notes that although the country represents a pre-Oedipal world of feminine bonding for Clarissa, for Elizabeth, the country is a male realm, associated with her father, and her close relationship with him (VWFP 43).

<sup>24</sup> See Poresky on Rachel Vinrace’s similar distrust of “idle chatter” (27).

<sup>25</sup> See Laurence on Elizabeth’s “Oriental Silence,” which she mentions in connection with Lily Briscoe of *To the Lighthouse*. Abel also connects these two characters (VWFP 43–44).

This question of “what could [Elizabeth] be thinking” draws attention to the private/public dichotomy – the untold distance between external perceptions and inward experience. Although Woolf does depict this gulf in the main storyline of *Mrs Dalloway*, particularly in the Clarissa-Septimus plot, in the narrative strand focusing on Elizabeth, she leaves us only with the gnawing and escalating sense that there is more to this young woman than there would seem. It is in *The Voyage Out*, in her depiction of Rachel, that Woolf truly focuses on the enormity of this “abyss” (TVO 33). Interestingly, an image of this earlier daughter figure bears a remarkable resemblance to the above description of Elizabeth: “if Rachel were ever to think, feel, laugh, or express herself... she might be interesting though never exactly pretty” (a comment voiced by Rachel’s surrogate mother figure, Helen Ambrose) (21). Commenting on the same passage, Swanson perceptively states, “But ‘thinking, feeling, laughing, or expressing herself’ is precisely what Rachel has been taught not to do, and Helen numbers among her teachers” (289).

In the paragraph following the above passage, Woolf counters her previous images of Elizabeth’s reserve with an emphatic announcement of this character’s movement into agency: “Suddenly Elizabeth stepped forward and most competently boarded the omnibus, in front of everybody. She took a seat on top” (MD 177). In this striking juxtaposition of Elizabeth’s expected passivity with her sudden, authoritative act, Woolf highlights the young woman’s movement forward into a future of her own creation – as this action ultimately leads Elizabeth to the Strand, where she imagines a future for herself as “a doctor, a farmer” or a member of parliament (178). By boarding the bus, Elizabeth escapes both the identity and the destiny patriarchal culture would impose upon

her, an achievement that is unmatched by Woolf's earlier daughter figures. That Elizabeth triumphs where her fictional predecessors failed is a vision shared by critic Rachel Bowlby:

When Elizabeth Dalloway steps out and takes the bus up the Strand on a fine June day in 1923, everything seems to suggest that she is the bearer of new opportunities for her sex, a woman who will be able to go further than her mother, still bound to the conventional femininity of the Victorian Angel in the House denounced by Woolf in "Professions for Women."<sup>26</sup> (70)

Although Bowlby only considers Elizabeth's success in relation to Clarissa, I will again draw attention to the fate of Rachel Vinrace, who, as Swanson states, was unable to either "understand her position in a patriarchal world" or "negotiate that world so as not to succumb to it either by playing the required roles or by dying" (301).

Once Elizabeth boards the bus, she becomes associated with this vehicle, and is accordingly transformed into an aggressive, "impetuous creature—a pirate" (MD 177; Bowlby 70). With images describing her both as an innocent bus-rider and as the "figurehead" of the "reckless, unscrupulous," "eel-like and arrogant" bus (177), Elizabeth defies classification – she is at once a highly feminine character, and a masculine one.<sup>27</sup> through her association with the phallic actions of the bus; both an archetypal and a

---

<sup>26</sup> Bowlby's essay "Thinking Forward through Mrs Dalloway's Daughter" intersects with my own analysis of Elizabeth, although she compares the young woman's actions and nature with those of the Brontë sisters' Lucy Snowe and Jane Eyre. While Bowlby notes, as I do, the discrepancy between Elizabeth's actions and how she is perceived and, furthermore, analyses this character's journey down the Strand, her conclusion (as she hints with the line "everything *seems* to suggest that [Elizabeth] is the bearer of new opportunities for her sex" [70, my emphasis]) differs significantly from my own.

<sup>27</sup> See Bowlby's "Virginia Woolf as flâneuse," in which the author interprets Elizabeth's bus ride as analogous to "the daring masculinity adopted by Peter Walsh" in his amorous pursuit of a young lady through the streets of London (34). (All other references are to Bowlby's essay "Thinking Forward through Mrs Dalloway's Daughter," from her book *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays*).

revolutionary daughter figure. Insight into this paradoxical nature can be gained from Carol Watts' perceptive article, "Releasing possibility into form: cultural choice and the woman writer," which uses as its theoretical framework both Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Judith Butler's interpretation of this feminist text. Drawing on these two authors, Watts states:

...an individual is clearly not able to interpret her gender as she pleases in an act of free invention, but must comply with those social constraints – economic, patriarchal – which seek to define her unambiguously within binary gender norms. One such constraint, and an important site for the contestation of social norms is of course the body itself. (84)

Elizabeth Dalloway's body is clearly one such site of "contestation." As I have repeatedly argued throughout this chapter, Elizabeth is positioned outside of both the marriage plot and her mother's control. Possessing, moreover, an undefined and potentially transgressive sexuality, she clearly cannot be "unambiguously" defined according to the "binary gender norms" of her time. Beyond the scope of such reductive classifications, Elizabeth is thus a figure of resistance who, through her quietly subversive presence in the novel, comes to embody Laurence's "'unsayable,' something not sayable based on the social taboos of Victorian propriety ..." (1). As such, this character represents "something about life that is ineffable," or inexpressible (1), except through images which, as Abel has noted, are highly resistant to literary analysis (VWFP 43). It is thus fitting that Woolf presents us with an image of Elizabeth as a Sphinx-like creature who, from her perch atop the bus, is at once all-knowing and all-seeing, and unknowing and unaware of the powerful future she is about to envision. Thus, as

Elizabeth sits on the bus, "her fine eyes, having no eyes to meet, gaz[e] ahead, blank, bright, with the staring, incredible innocence of sculpture" (MD 177-8).

As Elizabeth travels down the Strand, the voices of Clarissa and Miss Kilman both haunt and inspire her. While Bowlby identifies Elizabeth's voyage and ambitions as expressly and solely "anti-maternal" in their motivation (74), I read the continuing influence of Clarissa (and Miss Kilman) on Elizabeth not as a negative point but as a clear sign of the young woman's progress towards an independent subjectivity. For as we know, the process of "being oneself, in spite of all the others," to paraphrase Rachel Vinrace, is not without its challenges. The voices of Clarissa and Miss Kilman, who are Elizabeth's role models and mentors, are a part of her psyche, and as such, these two women represent a reference point for her decisions, but not, as Bowlby might argue, their driving force. Thus, in my reading, Elizabeth moves beyond the echoes of her mother and tutor's voices to form a vision of both her identity and her future that is entirely her own, an accomplishment which stands as Woolf's affirmative revision of Rachel Vinrace's failure to "live her body in the world,"<sup>28</sup> and to "negotiate a pathway of her own, a *Bildung* that [could] balance desire and a separate identity" (Swanson 301).

Accordingly, as Elizabeth travels up the Strand, Miss Kilman's voice can be seen to inspire her to imagine a variety of possible professions: "She liked people who were ill. And every profession is open to the women of your generation, said Miss Kilman. So she might be a doctor. She might be a farmer" (MD 178). With Miss Kilman's

---

<sup>28</sup> See Watts on Butler's "Variations on Sex and Gender": "The body is both a 'locus of cultural interpretations' which have been socially pre-established, *and* a 'field of interpretative possibilities' in which possible roles and identities proliferate: a nexus, then, of culture and choice. 'Becoming' a woman is thus a ceaseless activity, an 'active style of living one's body in the world' ([Butler 'Variations on Sex and Gender'] p. 131)" (Watts 85, emphasis in original).

progressive attitude providing a starting point for Elizabeth, the young woman is able to conceive of and explore her own ambitions:

This was Somerset House. One might be a very good farmer – and that, strangely enough, though Miss Kilman had her share in it, was almost entirely due to Somerset House. It looked so splendid, so serious, that great grey building. And she liked the feeling of people working. She liked those churches, like shapes of grey paper, breasting the stream of the Strand. It was quite different here from Westminster, she thought, getting off at Chancery Lane. It was so serious; it was so busy. In short, she would like to have a profession. She would become a doctor, a farmer, possibly go into Parliament if she found it necessary, all because of the Strand. (178)

In this remarkable vision of self-determination, Elizabeth identifies the Strand and Somerset House as liminal spaces that enable her to imagine her own future: a mental association that is reminiscent of Phyllis Hibberts' sense of liberation upon her arrival in Bloomsbury: "There was room, and freedom, and in the roar and splendour of the Strand she read the live realities of the world from which her stucco and her pillars protected her so completely" (24). Elizabeth, whose journey down the Strand is remarkably similar to that of Phyllis (in that it represents a temporary "voyage out" from the familial home), is to be distinguished from this earlier character, given that, unlike Phyllis, Elizabeth is able to envisage a future of limitless possibilities for herself. The idea that she might "become a doctor, a farmer" or a member of parliament thus stands in marked contrast with the utter failure of Phyllis and Rosamond – as well as of Rachel Vinrace – to envisage themselves outside of "the paradigms of female initiation" which have taught them "to

imagine marriage and maternity as the destiny that will fulfil [their] li[ves]" (Froula 63). With this simple act of imagination, Elizabeth Dalloway therefore emerges as Woolf's most successful daughter figure, the only one to find a mental and physical space in which she can escape "the laws that govern female destiny" and "speak her own ends into being" (Froula 68).

This act of self-creation is, however, almost immediately jeopardized by the echo of Clarissa's voice, which Elizabeth struggles with and fails to completely subdue during her walk.<sup>29</sup> While Rachel Bowlby concludes that Elizabeth's ambition is but fleeting, representing a short-lived "rebellion against maternal wishes" (83), I believe Woolf's text suggests otherwise. I recognize, of course, that Elizabeth's struggle to achieve self-determination is inherently a struggle against the traditions her mother embodies, as Clarissa's voice figures throughout this episode as a call to domestic duty ("She [Elizabeth] must go home. She must dress for dinner"), as well as a reminder of the codes of propriety ("Her mother would not like her to be wandering off alone like this") (MD 179, 181).<sup>30</sup> Thus, while Elizabeth's observations of the "serious" and professional activities taking place around her "Made her quite determined, whatever her mother might say, to become either a farmer or a doctor," this promise evidently represents no easy task (178-9). In my view, the most powerful argument against Bowlby's view that Elizabeth is likely to turn from her "masculine" career visions to "the more usual feminine place she presently refuses" (83) is to be found at the close of the novel, when the young woman, despite having returned home and "dress[ed] for dinner," as her

---

<sup>29</sup> See Naremore on Woolf's narrative transitions; he also locates in this passage a movement between Clarissa and Elizabeth's voices (88).

<sup>30</sup> See Bowlby (75).

mother's voice urged her during her afternoon excursion, moves to her father's side at the party – an image that represents her continued disconnection from her mother's lifestyle. Throughout this episode, then, Miss Kilman's voice, which earlier encouraged Elizabeth to lay claim to the opportunities available to her outside of the home, comes to symbolize that of the post-war mentality, while Clarissa's voice emerges as the call of the patriarchal Victorian mentality, in its continued construction of Elizabeth as a possession or a domestic commodity.<sup>31</sup>

Elizabeth's struggle at this point is not so much with these distant voices as with her own, self-defeating one, as Woolf follows up this character's silent promise to become a doctor or a farmer with the narrator's comment: "she was, of course, rather lazy" (179). Elizabeth consequently evaluates her vision of herself as a professional as on a par with that of the people who "compar[e] women to poplars": as something "silly" (179).<sup>32</sup> With this fleeting mention of Elizabeth's self-doubt, Woolf suggests that, for both this character and her other daughter figures, the path to self-realization is impeded not only by the extrinsic factor of a patriarchal society, but also by the concomitant and intrinsic factor of their own value systems, as they have been socialized not to "do" anything other than become women such as their mothers: society hostesses like Clarissa Dalloway and Lady Hibbert or "Angels in the House" like Rose Pargiter of *The Years*.<sup>33</sup>

But Woolf's depiction of Elizabeth's thought process in the subsequent passage gives us reason to believe that this young woman's ambitions will not be so easily

---

<sup>31</sup> See Gilbert and Gubar on the effect of the war on women in *Sexchanges*, Volume 2 of *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (275-280).

<sup>32</sup> While I read this comment as Elizabeth's own voice, it is equally possible to read this interjection as the narrator's voice. Such a reading would not alter the significance of this statement of Elizabeth's apparent laziness, but instead highlight the fact that her chosen career paths would involve a great deal of hard work, as they represent groundbreaking choices for a young woman.

<sup>33</sup> I refer, of course, to the Colonel's wife, rather than his daughter.

dismissed, as the author marks this moment as a private “revelation” – the same expression she used to describe Clarissa’s own transcendent moment, when Sally Seton kissed her in the garden at Bourton (179, 46). Woolf thus marks Elizabeth’s vision as an epiphany, a true “moment of being”:

It was the sort of thing that did sometimes happen, when one was alone – buildings without architects’ names, crowds of people coming back from the city having more power than single clergymen in Kensington, than any of the books Miss Kilman had lent her, to stimulate what lay slumbrous, clumsy, and shy on the mind’s sandy floor, to break surface, as a child suddenly stretches its arms, it was just that, perhaps, a sigh, a stretch of the arms, an impulse, a revelation, which has its effects for ever, and then down again it went to the sandy floor. (MD 179)

This moment of revelation, Woolf makes clear, can only occur when Elizabeth is alone, and therefore able to reach a level of self-awareness that is only available to her in the impersonal world represented by the Strand. Unlike Rachel, then, who, try as she might, cannot overcome her socialized self-abnegation, and instead only attains an overwhelming sense of isolation and “dissolution.” Elizabeth experiences a moment of individuality, a life-altering vision of liberation and potentiality (Froula 75).<sup>34</sup> The importance of this moment in Elizabeth’s life is clear – it will have “its effects for ever,” resonating and resurfacing from the “sandy floor” of Elizabeth’s consciousness to add

---

<sup>34</sup> Froula identifies Rachel’s sense of “dissolution” as she reads in her room at the villa (TVO 138) as this character’s sole “moment of being” (Froula 75, SP 70). Swanson and I both point to Rachel’s moment of “eminence” as another such moment (Swanson 293, TVO 300).

meaning and direction to her existence.<sup>35</sup>

Before returning home, Elizabeth ventures even further on her own: She looked up Fleet Street. She walked just a little way towards St Paul's shyly, like someone penetrating on tiptoe, exploring a strange house by night with a candle, on edge lest the owner should suddenly fling wide his bedroom door and ask her business, nor did she dare wander off into queer alleys, tempting by-streets, any more than in a strange house open doors which might be bedroom doors, or sitting-room doors, or lead straight to the larder. For no Dalloways came down the Strand daily; she was a pioneer, a stray, venturing, trusting. (MD 179-80)

This passage again serves as a subtextual portrayal of Elizabeth's budding sexuality. She has evolved from a position of innocence – that of “a hyacinth which has had no sun” (160) – to one of exploration – having now become a “penetrat[or]” of new and forbidden spaces. Yet Elizabeth's shyness keeps her from entering those tantalizing and secret spaces that lead to consumption and pleasure, represented here by the larder. She thus stands in contrast to the more sexual and transgressive figure of Sally Seton, noted for such adventures as stealing a chicken from the larder at Bourton and running through the hallways naked (43, 237) in a house in which she was nothing if not “strange” or “queer” (180).

Nonetheless, Woolf does label Elizabeth's continuing explorations as outside of the Dalloway's traditional territory, thus emphasizing the young woman's movement

---

<sup>35</sup> See Schaefer on memory (93).

beyond the conventions of her parents' generation. This "pioneer[ing]" voyage, furthermore, points to Clarissa's utter misconception of her daughter's psychological development, an error in judgement that Woolf communicates by integrating Clarissa's categorization of her daughter as "extremely immature, like a child still, attached to dolls, to old slippers; a perfect baby" into an episode which indisputably depicts Elizabeth's psychological coming of age (180).

As this extraordinary voyage draws to an end, Woolf describes a vibrant "uproar" in the streets, a "tremendous" noise that "seemed to [Elizabeth] good" (180). And yet, even as Elizabeth responds positively to this clamour, liking its "geniality, sisterhood, motherhood, brotherhood" (180), Woolf underlines its omnipotence, portraying it as the impersonal, yet oddly "consoling" voice of life itself:

It was not conscious. There was no recognition in it of one's fortune, or fate, and for that very reason even to those dazed with watching for the last shivers of consciousness on the faces of the dying, consoling.

Forgetfulness in people might wound, their ingratitude corrode, but this voice, pouring endlessly, year in, year out, would take whatever it might be: this vow, this van; this life; this procession: would wrap them all about and carry them on, as in the rough stream of a glacier the ice holds a splinter of bone, a blue petal, some oak trees, and rolls them on. (180-181)

I read this voice as initiating Elizabeth into an awareness of her mortality, as well as into the uncompromising progression of existence. The morbid imagery of this passage, with its "splinter of bone" caught and carried by a glacier, stands in marked contrast to the "ancient song" of life and rebirth Peter Walsh hears earlier in the narrative (106). But

Peter, in contrast to the youthful Elizabeth, is "elderly, past fifty now," and, consequently, needs no reminder of his temporality, so the voice he hears sings not of death but of renewal and regeneration (74).<sup>36</sup>

In the final passage depicting Elizabeth's voyage, Woolf again focuses on Elizabeth's environment, rather than her psychology. In this peculiar passage, Woolf describes the clouds that suddenly move across the sun as the "lawns of celestial pleasure gardens... settled habitations assembled for the conference of gods above the world"

(181). She further depicts these cloud-cities as being in "perpetual movement":

now a summit dwindled, now a whole block of pyramidal size which had kept its station inalterably advanced into the midst or gravely led the procession to fresh anchorage. Fixed though they seemed at their posts, at rest in perfect unanimity, nothing could be fresher, freer, more sensitive superficially than the snow-white or gold-kindled surface: to change, to go, to dismantle the solemn assemblage was immediately possible: and in spite of the grave fixity, the accumulated robustness and solidity, now they struck light to the earth, now darkness. (181-2)

While arguably esoteric, in my eyes, this passage stands as symbolic of Elizabeth's journey as a whole. Just as Elizabeth stood, seemingly "fixed" and unable to move at the bus stop, these clouds "which had kept [their] station inalterably" are suddenly revealed to be free and able "to change, to go, to dismantle the solemn assemblage." With the association of the clouds with the gods, this "solemn assemblage" stands as a covert figure for the patriarchy and its traditions, from both of which Elizabeth has broken free.

---

<sup>36</sup> See André Viola on the mythological imagery of the novel, specifically on Peter Walsh's experience of the street-singer.

Woolf closes the episode centring on Elizabeth with the short and striking paragraph: "Calmly and competently, Elizabeth Dalloway mounted the Westminster omnibus" (182). Notably, this image of Elizabeth "competently" boarding the bus serves as a marker of both the beginning and end of this voyage of self-exploration (177, 182). In my analysis, the use of Elizabeth's full name at the close of this voyage functions as a confirmation of her entrance into adulthood and an independent selfhood, an affirmation that stands in marked contrast to her mother's self-effacing experience in the streets of London:

She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible: unseen: unknown: there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more: this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway.<sup>37</sup> (13)

At the close of her voyage, Elizabeth thus comes into possession of an autonomous identity and is named the female heir to the Dalloway name. This naming solidifies Elizabeth's exceptionality, as it distinguishes her from the typical fate of "patriarchal" daughters as described by Lynda E. Boose in "The Father's House and the Daughter in It: The Structures of Western Culture's Daughter-Father Relationship" (34). In Boose's reading of the Western literary tradition, the daughter is consistently "obliterated" from the "cultural consciousness" when her name is lost through marriage, while the sons

---

<sup>37</sup> This excerpt again highlights Clarissa's insistence on the "marrying" and "having of children" as the transcendent objectives of the female existence. For an analysis of Clarissa's feelings of insignificance and desire "to assert [her] personhood" in this passage, see Louise Poresky's *The Elusive Self* (105). See also Minow-Pinkney, who reads this passage as signifying Clarissa's placement "in the symbolic order constructed around the Name-of-the-Father," as well as her position as a "commodity in the structure of patriarchal exchange relations" (71).

continue the “patronymic identity” in both the public and private (domestic) spheres (22. passim). In *Mrs Dalloway*, however, Woolf rewrites this standard by creating a daughter figure who, even as she bears her father’s name into the realm of public culture (a landmark concept in itself), is in fact set “to inherit the vitality of a powerful matrilineage,” as her “Dalloway ancestresses... have been ‘Abbesses, principals, head mistresses, dignitaries, in the republic of women’” (Gilbert and Gubar 280; MD 180). With this innovative association of Elizabeth’s professional goals with the accomplishments of the “Dalloway ladies” (MD 160), Woolf ensures that this daughter figure, despite her evident closeness with her father, is not positioned entirely within the patriarchal order, an alignment that would classify her as an “unassigned, masculinized femal[e]” (Boose 34). In *Sexchanges*, the second volume of *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, Gilbert and Gubar suggest that such a radical revision of the female initiation plot can be traced to the social changes initiated by the First World War: “the most crucial rule the war had overturned was the rule of patrilineal succession, the founding law of patriarchal society itself” (280). Elizabeth’s ambitions therefore subvert and replace the “marrying” and “having of children” – the plot components that, thus far in Woolf’s fictional oeuvre, have represented the transcendental signifiers of her daughter figures’ existence (MD 13).

While the final scenes of the novel focus primarily on Clarissa and her party, Woolf briefly sketches various characters’ observations of Elizabeth at this social gathering. Both Ellie Henderson and Sally Seton remark with some surprise on the young woman’s beauty and maturity, referring to her as “grown up” (221) and as a “very handsome, very self-possessed young woman” (247). Although these comments support

my vision of Elizabeth's noticeable psychological evolution. Sally and Peter's joint appraisal of the young woman is more cryptic: "The young are beautiful. Sally said, watching Elizabeth cross the room. How unlike Clarissa at her age! Could he make anything of her? She would not open her lips. Not much, not yet. Peter admitted. She was like a lily. Sally said, a lily by the side of a pool" (253). This evaluation is notable for its subconscious recognition of the gulf between Elizabeth and her mother, as the two adults testify to the young woman's movement beyond the Victorian ideals that constructed Clarissa as "the perfect hostess" (80). But even as Peter and Sally label Elizabeth as beyond their understanding, they, like the passers-by on the streets of London, also characterize her as "a lily," a beautiful yet passive object of admiration. Unable to either communicate with or understand this young woman, whose values, behaviour, and self-conception differ substantially from their own, both Sally, the reformed rebel who is now the mother of five sons,<sup>38</sup> and Peter, a colonial bureaucrat and incorrigible womanizer, stand as representatives of a patriarchal mindset that is incapable of envisioning Elizabeth as anything other than an embodiment of conventional "young ladydom" (PR 18).<sup>39</sup>

Elizabeth's relationship with her father, which Woolf details in the final scenes of the novel, also bears some scrutiny. At the party, Elizabeth wears a necklace that is a gift from her father, a present that is noteworthy, considering Richard's admitted inability to buy jewellery for his wife (MD 149). This gift, combined with Richard's sudden

---

<sup>38</sup> See Minow-Pinkney on the transformation of "the novel's arch-rebel" into "a sober conformist, 'Lady Rossiter'" (71).

<sup>39</sup> Ellie Henderson's reaction to Elizabeth's outfit further testifies to this generational gap, as she notes: "...girls when they first *came out* didn't seem to wear white as they used. ... Girls wore straight frocks, perfectly tight, with skirts well above the ankles. It was not becoming, she thought" (my emphasis, 222). I draw attention here to the idea of "coming out," a ritual that has connotations on various levels – sexual, psychological and social – in reference to the character of Elizabeth.

outpouring of emotion to his daughter (again in contrast with his earlier failure to tell Clarissa he loves her [155]), speaks to a subversive bond between father and daughter. It would seem then that Elizabeth, rather than her mother, is her father's true emotional partner. Their closeness is further suggested by Elizabeth's ambitions, which are associated with his position as a member of parliament. Elizabeth, moreover, is portrayed as particularly enjoying the time she spends in the country with her father. Significantly, this paternally-identified setting<sup>40</sup> is a space in which Elizabeth feels she can "do what she like[s]" (176, 247), a freedom that stands in contrast to her urban life, with its (maternal) obligations to "go home" and "dress for dinner" (179). I disagree then with Bowlby's view that this relationship "does not make [Elizabeth] her father's equal or surrogate, but effectively returns her to the position of the idealised object of what she dismissed before as 'trivial chatterings (comparing women to poplars...)' (75).

The rationale for my disagreement with Bowlby lies in her focus on Richard's admiring observation of his daughter, an incident that (as Abel points out) is unquestionably laden with Oedipal connotations (VWFP 43). For clearly, of all the gazes Elizabeth captures throughout the novel,<sup>41</sup> her father's is the most potent – she feels "him looking at her as she talk[s] to Willie Titcomb" and consequently moves to his side (MD 254). Significantly, an earlier gaze cast by Titcomb, Elizabeth's prospective suitor, inspired only a dismissive (and subconsciously Oedipal) response from the young woman: "Oh how much nicer to be in the country and do what she liked! She could hear

---

<sup>40</sup> See Abel (VWFP 42-43).

<sup>41</sup> During the party in particular. Lucy states that she can't "take her eyes off" Elizabeth (MD 217). Willie Titcomb also admires her, comparing her to a river, a hyacinth and a poplar (MD 247). Woolf's repetition here of the hyacinth imagery, now linked to Elizabeth's would-be suitor, suggests that the sexual connotations of the floral imagery have now taken on an Oedipal signification.

the poor dog howling, [she] was certain” (247). In their readings of the father-daughter relationship, both Abel and Bowlby seem to neglect Elizabeth’s evident emotional detachment and self-absorption, and this despite Woolf’s depiction of this character’s dismissive response to her father’s admiration and attention: “He had looked at her, he said, and he had wondered, who is that lovely girl? And it was his daughter. That did make her happy. But her poor dog was howling” (254-5). The ostensible closeness of the father and daughter is thus superseded, somewhat comically, by Elizabeth’s affection and concern for her dog. Aside from a fleeting moment of joy at her father’s recognition of her femininity,<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth is thus just as dismissive of her father’s attentions as she was of those of Willie Titcomb.

While Abel and Bowlby concentrate on the image of Richard’s Oedipal gaze, I instead focus on Elizabeth’s experience of her father’s attentions, and therefore argue that her relationship with him does not necessarily subtract from or undermine her new-found autonomy. I thus counter Bowlby’s vision that Elizabeth’s “predicament places her alternatives as between the possibility of participation in the centres of masculine power, as ‘unscrupulous’ and ‘arrogant’ as the bus ([MD] 177), and what appears as an ignominious succumbing to a ‘trivial’ femininity as the object of male admiration” (Bowlby 75) with the suggestion that the young woman’s closeness to her father serves instead to confirm her femininity (in spite of her indifference to its traditional trappings and expression), and thereby ensure that she is not wholly absorbed into the masculine realm with which she has chosen to align herself.

---

<sup>42</sup> See Flaake, who refers to Christiane Olivier’s argument that a “positive evaluation of the female body can only be bestowed by men” (7).

Elizabeth thus stands in stark contrast to Woolf's earlier daughter figures, the first of whom, the indistinguishable pair of Phyllis and Rosamond, envision the patriarchal obligation of marriage as the only avenue which can free them from their meaningless existence as "daughters at home" (PR 18). Woolf revises this bleak tale in *Mrs Dalloway*, in a revolutionary narrative depicting the daughter of the title character achieving a "moment of being" in which she envisions a future for herself outside of the domestic sphere. This novel thus also amends the daughter's story Woolf depicts in *The Voyage Out*, a novel that was meant, but failed, to be "a reformed female initiation plot that would lead [Woolf's] heroine not only toward love and marriage but also to an identity in history and culture" (Froula 66). With Elizabeth Dalloway, Woolf thus radically reconfigures the traditional outcome of the daughter's story, rejecting the marriage plot for a detailed illustration of Elizabeth's liberation from her mother and tutor, and her subsequent, ground-breaking vision of a career and future within the male domain of public culture.

Yet, as I argue in my final chapter, Woolf qualifies this affirmative vision of daughterhood in her later novel, *The Years*, in which she closely details the *difficulté d'être* of the Pargiter daughters and their female cousins. In this novel, Woolf suggests that, even if a young woman is able to imagine a future for herself outside of the "paradigms of female initiation," transforming this private and unspoken vision into speech and action – actually "*do[ing]* something" other than marrying and having children, as Evelyn Murgatroyd dreams in *The Voyage Out* – remains nonetheless a difficult and daunting task (Froula 63, TVO 288).

## CHAPTER 4

### **The Written and the Unwritten: Reading Elizabeth Dalloway's Possible Future(s) through *The Years***

My project in this final chapter is to examine Virginia Woolf's "post-Elizabethan" daughter figures, characters Woolf continues to portray as struggling both to define their identities and to create a space for themselves within the "masculine structure of society" (Minow-Pinkney 70). Accordingly, this chapter examines the 1937 novel, *The Years*, which depicts the lives of the daughters, sons, and extended family of Colonel and Rose Pargiter from the end of the nineteenth century to "The Present Day" of the narrative, the 1930s.

One of my strategies in my analysis of *The Years* is to examine this complex novel through the lens of Elizabeth Dalloway; that is to say, that while I discuss the various daughter figures of this novel according to their own merits, I also consider them in context of the several futures Woolf left open, yet unwritten, for Elizabeth in *Mrs Dalloway*. For, just as Elizabeth dreamed, in her moment of independence in this 1925 novel, of becoming a doctor or a farmer, or even a member of parliament (MD 178), the daughter figures who populate *The Years* harbour these selfsame ambitions: Kitty Malone longs to be a farmer; Rose Pargiter struggles to achieve, if not a position in parliament, at least a political voice; and Peggy Pargiter, the niece of this last character, is revealed in the novel's final section as having actually achieved Elizabeth's dream of becoming a doctor.

In addition to these three characters and their respective ambitions, Woolf also presents a fourth (and far more conventional) future for Elizabeth in *The Years* – one in

which this young woman's close bond with her father takes precedence over her dreams of independence. I speak, of course, of the potential future represented in the "dull" existence of Eleanor Pargiter, a daughter figure who is forced to sacrifice her "dreams [and] her plans" after her mother's death in order to care for her aging father (TY 149, 34). As Woolf makes clear through her development of this last character over the fifty-year period covered by the narrative, Eleanor's "selflessness" (a trait which is both demanded and promoted by her role as her father's "housekeeper") ultimately proves impossible to overcome: and she thus remains, at the close of the novel, unable to conceive of herself as a "person on her own account" (TY 92, TVO 90).

In this final chapter, I focus, first of all, on the Pargiter sisters – Eleanor, Delia and Rose – before examining their cousin, Kitty Malone, and niece, Peggy Pargiter. As Irma Rantavaara states in her description of the Pargiter daughters in *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury*:

The Pargiter family is fairly well off. The sons are well educated and become dons and barristers and other useful members of society. It is in the daughters' lives that bleakness dwells.... The Pargiter girls are in the position of the ordinary Victorian middle-class daughters: unless they marry, there is not much they can do except private charity work, or else they have to enter the camp of rebels. (156)

And indeed, with the exception of Eleanor, the Colonel's daughters fall quite neatly into these two categories: Milly fulfils her early promise as a "mousy, downtrodden inefficient little chit" by evolving into a vacuous matron, mother to "innumerable babies"<sup>1</sup> (TY 18,

---

<sup>1</sup> Woolf's portrayal of Milly and her "damp falling pratter" in the final section of the novel is just as

371). while “defiant” Delia joins Parnell’s campaign against the British Government’s continuing control over Ireland, becoming a lifelong advocate for Irish Home Rule.<sup>2</sup> and Rose grows from a “grubby little ruffian” into a militant suffragette, who is at one point jailed for her brick-throwing revolt against Parliament’s “humbugs” (23, 16, 161).

But Eleanor, the eldest of the Pargiter daughters, eludes Rantavaara’s relatively simple categorization. Neither a rebel nor a matron, this last character, who dutifully cares for her widowed father until she is well into her fifties, stands as Woolf’s portrait of the “curious silent unrepresented life” of a Victorian spinster (TVO 245).<sup>3</sup> Like her youngest sister, Rose, also a spinster, Eleanor must contend with her family and friends’ conviction that “It was such a pity she didn’t marry” (103). As Makiko Minow-Pinkney delineates in *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject*, “Maternity is the only female identity which is valorised by patriarchy. Only as a mother is a woman allowed to have her sexuality as difference, to own her body and social place” (71). Unable to obtain this form of social recognition and acceptance, Rose is consequently marked as a “firebrand” and a “woman of action”: an “unassigned, masculinized” figure (TY 155, 158; Boose 34), while Eleanor is dismissed as “a well-known type: with a bag: philanthropic: well nourished: a spinster: a virgin: like all the women of her class, cold: ... yet not unattractive”<sup>4</sup> (TY 102).

Caught in the gulf between public perception and private selfhood,<sup>5</sup> Eleanor struggles, throughout the narrative, to free herself from the predetermined identity and

satirical (and damning) as her portrayal of Mrs Thornbury as an absurd and empty-headed matron in *The Voyage Out* (TY 369).

<sup>2</sup> I discuss Woolf’s later portrayal of Delia below.

<sup>3</sup> See Peggy’s vision of her aunt Eleanor in the final section of the novel (330).

<sup>4</sup> See Rantavaara on this image in the novel (156).

<sup>5</sup> See Poresky on this division in *The Years*: “The novel’s overall theme of fact and vision, or Masculine and Feminine, appears also in the dichotomy between public and private existence” (217).

existence that are, Woolf suggests, just as inevitably the products of spinsterhood as they are of daughterhood. In my reading, Eleanor's undertaking, in the latter part of the novel, to move beyond her identity as "a daughter at home" has its roots in Woolf's 1906 work of fiction, "Phyllis and Rosamond," in which the title characters find themselves unable to transcend their outward identities as fashionable and superficial "young ladies" who have been educated for marriage (26).<sup>6</sup> As I discuss below, after her father's death, Eleanor, like these two earlier characters, must struggle not only to voice herself, but even to experience the independent thoughts that might constitute a subjective voice.

But before focusing my analysis on this daughter figure, who is one of the novel's only fully developed characters, I will first examine her family as a whole. From the outset of the novel, an atmosphere of limitation and repression haunts the Pargiter home of Abercorn Terrace. The Colonel's older daughters – Eleanor, Delia and Milly – suffer from a sense of imprisonment, as their mother's protracted illness has suspended their social lives, leaving them "cooped up," and able to do little more than peer out from their windows with envy and curiosity as a gentleman calls on their neighbours (34, 22).<sup>7</sup> "Defiant" Delia, the Colonel's favourite daughter, thus "long[s] for her mother to die," and regards her as "an obstacle, a prevention, an impediment to all life" (23, 25).

This vision of the mother as an "obstacle" is a motif that Woolf originally introduced in "Phyllis and Rosamond." As I discuss in my first chapter, in this early work of fiction, Woolf depicts the title characters as daughters who feel both imprisoned and oppressed by the rigid social conventions that govern their lives. Their mother, Lady

---

<sup>6</sup> In this work of short fiction, Sylvia Tristram is noted as having "never considered the Hibberts as human beings before: [having] called them 'young ladies'" instead (PR 26).

<sup>7</sup> See Leaska (viii).

Hibbert, is a "severe critic" of their social "performances," who, with her insistence on her daughters' duty to marry promptly, stands as a forceful representative of the Victorian patriarchal social order (PR 18). This depiction of the mother as an agent of repression continues in *Mrs Dalloway*, in which Woolf highlights the alienation between mother and daughter. As my third chapter delineates, in this novel, Woolf portrays the title character as "a cold but brilliant woman highly admired in patriarchal society" (Moi 12).

In *The Years*, however, Woolf's depiction of the mother figure changes. In stark contrast to her predecessors, Rose Pargiter is depicted as a weak and pitiable figure. A financial and emotional burden to her family, her only dialogue in the novel occurs when she rouses herself on her deathbed to chide her daughter Delia about the expense of the clean linen in her sick room, and to remind the young woman of her Uncle Digby's birthday (TY 27). I read these feverish utterances as emblematic of the self-negation intrinsic to the role of "Angel in the House," a role which, Woolf implies through this character, is both deadly and dying.<sup>8</sup> Rose Pargiter's brief but oppressive presence at the beginning of the novel thus establishes her as a victim of the Victorian socio-sexual system, and, moreover, as the representative of a lifestyle her daughters long to escape.

Nowhere is this desire more apparent in the novel than in Woolf's portrayal of the youngest Pargiter daughter, who bears her mother's name, though not her temperament. Though she is only ten years old in the opening section of the narrative, Rose, like her older sisters, suffers from a sense of imprisonment. But Rose refuses her captivity – stealing a latchkey from her nurse, she sets off for the local store as the night falls, blatantly disobeying Eleanor's order that she is "not to go alone" (20). This illicit

---

<sup>8</sup> See Poresky (220).

excursion represents Rose's first attempt to surmount her existence as a helpless and dependent young woman; as she leaves Abercorn Terrace, she thus recreates herself as a powerful male figure, envisioning herself as her uncle "Pargiter of Pargiter's Horse," "riding by night on a desperate mission to a besieged garrison" (30).<sup>9</sup> But Rose's initial sense of adventure and heroism is quickly shattered as she nears her destination, when she meets a "leering," disfigured man, who reaches for her and exposes himself to her (30, 31). Once she is home, she is haunted by nightmares and a "profound feeling of guilt" and finds herself unable to express her fears or explain the incident to Eleanor, who comes to comfort her (43).<sup>10</sup>

Incapable of voicing her experience due to the "social taboos" Laurence terms the "unsayable," Rose is silenced not only by the sexual nature of the attack but also, however ironically, by the impropriety of her own actions, which defied the Victorian imperative prohibiting a young woman from walking alone after sunset (Laurence 1).<sup>11</sup> As Mitchell A. Leaska comments in his introduction to an earlier version of *The Years*, which Woolf titled *The Pargiters*:

In an ambience of sexual suppression, where virtue and chastity are synonymous, the little girl's traumatic experience of lust and perversion outside the walls of Abercorn Terrace generated a feeling of guilt so strong as to make the innocent victim powerless to express it. Hers was the kind of powerlessness characteristic of an atmosphere where matters of real human

---

<sup>9</sup> See Poresky on Rose's excursion to Lamley's (221). See also Squier (passim) and Briggs (80).

<sup>10</sup> See Margaret (Comstock) Connolly on Rose and the "Prohibitions against speech [that] surround female lives" (55).

<sup>11</sup> See *The Pargiters*, in which Woolf explicitly describes this prohibition in detail, referring to it as a "social taboo" (36-38).

importance are either hushed up or totally suppressed; where communication is either not possible, by the rules of decorum, or dead, from atrophy. And out of that decorous silence grows an appalling confusion between what *love means* and what *sex is*, a confusion enshrined in the double standard, or the notion of conduct becoming a lady of virtue. (ix, emphasis in original)

Rose's struggle is thus set, at the age of ten, as a battle against the repressive patriarchal system that enforces the standard of female passivity by limiting the education, movements, and power of speech of both women and young girls alike.

In my reading, Rose's sense of powerlessness when she confronts her aggressor, as well as her nightmares following the encounter, both mirror Rachel Vinrace's experience of Richard Dalloway's assault in *The Voyage Out*.<sup>12</sup> As Woolf leaves Rose's understanding of this encounter unwritten in *The Years*, I turn to her description of Rachel's reaction, in the earlier novel, as an intimation of this later daughter figure's experience: "By this new light she saw her life for the first time a creeping hedged-in thing, driven cautiously between high walls, here turned aside, there plunged in darkness, made dull and crippled for ever—her life that was the only chance she had—a thousand words and actions became plain to her" (TVO 87). Significantly, while Woolf depicts Rachel's encounter with sexual aggression on the *Euphrosyne* as intensifying the young woman's introverted and introspective nature, in *The Years*, Woolf configures Rose's

---

<sup>12</sup> The similarities between Rose's aggressor and Rachel's nightmarish vision are notable. While the man Rose encounters has a "a horrid face: white, peeled, pock-marked" (TY 31), the man with whom Rachel finds herself trapped in her nightmare has a face that is "pitted and like the face of an animal" (TVO 81). Rose's attacker makes a "mewing noise" when she runs past him (TY 32), while Rachel's "deformed man" "gibber[s]" as he squats on the floor (TVO 81). See also Childs (23, 236, note 6).

traumatic experience as a foundation for this daughter figure's struggle for freedom and autonomy. Refusing to live her life as "a creeping hedged-in thing." Rose consequently transforms her childhood fears and sense of helplessness into self-confidence, as well as a very focused sense of conviction, becoming a militant and vocal participant in the suffrage movement.

Woolf portrays Rose as a fiercely independent and remarkably self-aware woman, who learns over time to disregard other people's perceptions and expectations of her, as evidenced by her reflections in the 1910 section of the novel: "It was a pity ... not to dress better, not to look nicer. Always reach-me-downs, coats and skirts from Whiteleys. But they saved time, and the years after all – she was over forty – made one care very little what people thought. They used to say, why don't you marry? Why don't you do this or that, interfering. But not any longer" (161). Significantly, Rose subconsciously notes here that it is only once she is over forty that she is free to live her life without the "interference" of the expectations, both parental and cultural, which posit "marriage and maternity as the destiny that will fulfil her life" (Froula 63). This reflection mirrors the narrator's remark, in *Mrs Dalloway*, that Elizabeth's youth and beauty "made her life a burden to her" (MD 176). But while Elizabeth remains a singularly feminine character, despite her professional aspirations and dislike of "gloves and shoes" (MD 13), Rose's overt repudiation of the superficial trappings of fashion and beauty, as well as the patriarchal ideals of marriage and passivity, leads to her classification as a masculine figure – "more like a man than a woman," as her cousin Maggie observes (169).

Rose is clearly a member of Woolf's "brotherhood" of transgressive females, a select group of rebellious women, whose founding members, as I suggest in my first two

chapters, are Sylvia Tristram and Evelyn Murgatroyd. Rose is reminiscent of the latter character, a radical feminist who, in *The Voyage Out*, defines life as “fighting” and “revolution,” and defies the conventions of marriage and motherhood to pursue a life of political activism (142, 374). Like Evelyn, Rose is associated with the male realms of speech and action, and thus, despite her strength, self-awareness and sense of purpose, is marked and marginalized for her defiance of the standards of feminine behaviour.

Rose’s gender-realignment speaks to the stark choices faced by a young woman growing up at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> For, as Woolf makes clear, in order for Rose to rebel against the violence inherent in the “socio-sexual forces of British society” (which Woolf so effectively personifies in the sexual aggressor Rose encounters as a young girl), this daughter figure effectively has no choice but to renounce her sex (Swanson 287). In doing so, she ironically becomes an embodiment of her oppressor: a gender reversal which, however incongruously, is symbolized in Rose’s aggressive participation in the suffragette movement, as Woolf informs us that in the service of this cause, this character not only has stones thrown at her (as she speaks at a by-election), but in fact throws bricks herself (an act for which she serves jail time) (TY 156, 230).

As the narrative develops, Woolf underlines Rose’s masculinity to the extent that even the physicality of this character figures as a reflection of the opposite sex: thus, on several occasions she is referred to as “the very spit and image” of her childhood hero, the colonial figure of “Old Uncle Pargiter of Pargiter’s horse” (TY 156, 410). Yet, even as Woolf depicts Rose as a transgressive figure (or, to be more specific, as a woman who

---

<sup>13</sup> See Forbes, who comments on Woolf’s depiction, in *To the Lighthouse*, of the bleak choices with which women are faced: “In Mrs. Ramsay’s eyes, the desire to be accepted by men and therefore to marry and the desire to be independent for the sake of pursuing modern-womanhood drastically conflict, with no hope for compromise, and in subscribing to one, a woman consequently must wholly reject the other” (468).

does not represent an affirmative vision of female selfhood), she subtly acknowledges both the necessity and the positive outcome of Rose's appropriation and subversion of patriarchal authority. Accordingly, in my reading, observations such as Eleanor's silent comparison of Rose to their ineffectual brother Martin ("she ought to have been the soldier" [156, my emphasis]) represent Woolf's subtle questioning of the rules which so strictly delineate appropriate female conduct. In effect, through Eleanor's "unsaid" (and "unsayable") reflection, Woolf suggests that, notwithstanding the obvious and unalterable factor of Rose's gender, this character truly is a soldier; and one who has been justly decorated for her "war efforts" – that is to say, her fight to emancipate her sex (Laurence 1).<sup>14</sup>

While my view of Rose Pargiter may seem contradictory, in that I posit her as an explicitly negative, yet implicitly positive representation of female subjectivity, I will clarify my analysis here by stating that I read this character as a flawed but powerful figure who emerges from the novel as a potent reminder of the very real battles Elizabeth Dalloway's predecessors (historical rather than fictional) had to win in order for this young woman to envision a life for herself in the public sphere. In fact, Rose can be seen both as Elizabeth's predecessor, in a historical sense, and as her heir, in a literary sense, as this Pargiter daughter does indeed "find it necessary" to "go into Parliament," as Elizabeth foresees during her vision of her own future in *Mrs Dalloway* (178). Evidently, Rose must achieve Elizabeth's goal through the means available to her in 1914 – and she does just this, becoming a political speaker and activist whose actions enable women to gain the right to vote.

---

<sup>14</sup> In the "Present Day" section of the novel, we learn that Rose has been decorated for her war efforts (354).

If, then, as Jane Marcus argues, we are to read *The Years* as “one long series of interrupted discourses,” in which the interruptions mark “the daughters’ emergence from the tyranny of the father’s voice,” then Rose Pargiter must be recognized as a primary agent of this disruption (74). Clearly, then, while Rose is undoubtedly a transgressive figure in the novel, or a “firebrand,” as her brother Martin names her, she is nonetheless redeemed by her motivations (TY 158). Thus, when Kitty Lasswade drinks to her cousin Rose in the final section of the novel, as readers, we are aligned with her point of view – for, even if we condemn Rose for her use of force, we nonetheless acknowledge and respect that she “had the courage of her convictions” (414).<sup>15</sup>

While Rose grows up to be the family’s freedom fighter, her older sister, Eleanor, struggles more quietly to find and voice her autonomy and selfhood as she takes on the burden of managing the household after her mother’s death. Woolf depicts this character’s sense of her fragile identity and uncertain future early in the novel, when she returns to the drawing room after having comforted Rose the night of her ill-fated excursion to Lamley’s:

As she passed the doors and went downstairs a weight seemed to descend on her. She paused, looking down in to the hall. A blankness came over her. Where am I? she asked herself, staring at a heavy frame. What is that? She seemed to be alone in the midst of nothingness; yet must descend, must carry her burden – she raised her arms slightly, as if she were carrying a pitcher, an earthenware pitcher on her head. (45)

---

<sup>15</sup> Woolf subtly acknowledges the gender barriers that continue to exist despite women’s having won the right to vote through her portrayal of Martin Pargiter, who “jeers” at his recollection of his sister’s days as a militant even as Kitty commends Rose for her past actions (414).

Eleanor's disorientation and sense of loss are clear here, as she subconsciously recognizes the empty existence she will inherit upon her mother's death, when she will enter into a state of perpetual daughterhood, deferring her dreams and independence while she takes on the responsibility of staying at home to care for her father. Woolf's image of Eleanor raising her arms to balance her "earthenware pitcher," clearly a symbol of femininity and domesticity, must thus be read as representing Eleanor's assumption of the duties that will fall to her upon her mother's death, when she will become the Victorian incarnation of this archetypal female provider-figure, the "Angel in the House." This character's sense of obligation and solitude are clearly expressed in this bleak passage, as the "naturally cheerful" young woman confronts the "nothingness" inherent in the role that will define the next thirty years of her life (18, 45).

Interestingly, earlier in the narrative Woolf depicts Delia experiencing a similar sense of disorientation as she leaves her mother's sick room:

The door opened, and the nurse came in. Delia rose and went out. Where am I? she asked herself, staring at a white jug stained pink by the setting sun. For a moment she seemed to be in some borderland between life and death. Where am I? she repeated, looking at the pink jug, for it all looked strange. Then she heard water rushing and feet thudding on the floor above.

(28)

Like her older sister, Delia is associated here with the feminine imagery represented by the jug/pitcher, although she is unable to identify with this representation of domesticity, seeing it only as something "strange" and remote. Delia feels beset by a sense of stagnation and suspension, as she identifies the oppressive atmosphere of the family

home as a “borderland between life and death” (28). But while Eleanor is doomed to carry the pitcher and its feminine burden, Delia seeks freedom from her meaningless existence as a “daughter at home” (PR 18) by refusing any emotional connection or identification with her mother, choosing instead to align herself with the male “domains of history and culture” (Froula 64), as she imagines herself “speaking in the cause of Liberty” and “Justice” with her hero, Charles Parnell (TY 26).<sup>16</sup> But even as Delia, like her ten year-old sister Rose, subconsciously repudiates her gender in fantasies which transform her voicelessness into powerful political discourse, until her mother’s death, she can do little more than dream that, beyond the “Hell” of Abercorn Terrace, “Somewhere there’s beauty, ... somewhere there’s freedom” (TY 410, 16).

Yet Delia never finds this liberating space in which she can free herself from the tyranny of her parents’ rule and transform her dreams of a powerful selfhood into reality. In effect, the next time we see this character – some fifty years later, in the “Present Day” section of the novel – we discover that she has betrayed her youthful dreams: “Thinking to marry a wild rebel, she had married the most King-respecting, Empire-admiring of country gentlemen, and for that very reason partly – because he was, even now, such a magnificent figure of a man” (393). While Patrick may be physically “magnificent,” he is also a pitiable old “bore,” and a patriarchal relic, who, like Richard Dalloway in *The Voyage Out*, expostulates on the pointlessness of granting women the right to vote (TVO 42, TY 396, 398). Ironically, then, as Ellen Bayuk Rosenman suggests in *The Invisible Presence: Virginia Woolf and the Mother-Daughter Relationship*, rather than liberate herself from her hated parental home, Delia has in fact recreated it, as she has not only

---

<sup>16</sup> See Poresky on Delia’s “need to identify with and be accepted by the Masculine” (220).

succumbed to the imperative of marriage, but also attached herself to “a scion of the empire like her father, Colonel Pargiter” (50).

When placed in the framework of the goals and dreams of Woolf’s previous daughter figures, Delia’s path in life emerges as a testament to the difficulty these young women face in their attempts to escape the inexorable marriage plot. For clearly, Delia, like Phyllis and Rosamond Hibbert and Rachel Vinrace before her, fails in her ambition to create a future for herself outside of this predetermined destiny. With the repeated failure of these young women to surmount the limitations imposed on them by a patriarchal society, the significance of the author’s narrative strategy in *Mrs Dalloway* becomes clear – for, evidently, with the tremendous societal pressures and expectations Woolf depicts in this last novel, as well as in the other works I analyse, Elizabeth Dalloway’s struggle for selfhood and independence does not end with her moment of “revelation” as she walks down the Strand (179). In the context of this consideration, Elizabeth’s status as the pre-eminent daughter figure in Woolf’s oeuvre – her position as an embodiment of potentiality and liberation – becomes dependent as much on what Woolf leaves unwritten about this young woman’s future as what the author does write about her life on that single day in 1923.

I will shift my focus here back to *The Years*, to Eleanor Pargiter and her struggle to establish an identity beyond that of the family’s “soother,” “buffer” and “maker-up of quarrels” (18).<sup>17</sup> Eleanor’s commitment to and participation in social reform represents the one aspect of this daughter figure’s life that gives her a sense of purpose.

---

<sup>17</sup> Eleanor’s functions and qualities are reminiscent of Woolf’s own description of the Angel in the House: “she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others” (WW 60).

accomplishment, and possibility. Yet, as Woolf makes clear early in the novel, once Eleanor returns from “the Grove,” where she works with the poor, to Abercorn Terrace, her sense of affirmation is replaced with one of frustration, as she must subordinate “her dreams, her plans” to her domestic duties – calming her “quarrelling” sisters, calculating the family finances, and writing to her brother Edward (34). In a particularly poignant image, Woolf figures the young woman’s despair at her forced self-repression as the “family joke”: “Look out, Eleanor’s broody. It’s her Grove day” (33, 34).

Woolf’s portrayal of the conflict between Eleanor’s personal desires and her familial obligations continues in the second section of the novel, which is set in 1891. Eleanor is now the official “housekeeper” of Abercorn Terrace, as the Colonel classifies her (92). With this “good-humoure[d]” declaration of his daughter’s worth, he subtly confirms the power structure of their relationship, reaffirming both his authority and her subservience. Woolf further develops this dynamic in a scene in which Eleanor approaches her father in his study to request a cheque for the household expenses. Surveying the room, she subconsciously notes its manifold symbols of power and control: “It looked like an office, with its files of papers and its deed-boxes, except that horses’ bits hung by the fireplace, and there was the silver cup he had won at polo. Would he sit there all the morning reading the financial papers and considering his investments, she wondered?” (93). Woolf saturates this portrait of the Colonel’s study with representations of economic authority (the deed-boxes and financial papers), competition and conquest (the silver cup) and domination (the horses’ bits by the fireplace).<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, while the jug/pitcher serves, earlier in the novel, as a symbol of femininity and domesticity, the cups with which the Colonel is associated symbolize conquest, in the case of the polo cup, and

Once she has entered this exclusive space of patriarchal power. Eleanor finds herself having to delay and adjust her own busy schedule as she submits to her father's demands for her time and attention. As Louise Poresky states in *The Elusive Self*, the Colonel's "Masculine ego demands too much attention from others for him to ever consider the needs of anybody else" (225). Ironically, just after he exhorts his daughter to "stand up for [her]self," he informs her that, in between her morning appointments and her lunch and afternoon at the Law Courts, she must find time to buy him some trinket – "something pretty, something to wear" – as a birthday gift for his niece Maggie (93, 105). This errand ensures that, despite the fact that Eleanor is "going to her work," while the Colonel stays at home, it is she who remains in a domestic, subservient role (95). It is thus of little surprise that once Eleanor does arrive at her committee meeting, she must struggle to overcome her ingrained self-effacement, her sense that "she did not exist, she was not anybody at all" (96).<sup>19</sup>

Authoritarian and intimidating. Abel Pargiter is reminiscent of *The Voyage Out's* Willoughby Vinrace, another widower who expects his daughter to stay at home in order to act as both a housekeeper and a hostess (TVO 93). In this earlier novel, Rachel describes her father's oppressive presence in the house she shares with her spinster aunts:

They were very much afraid of her father. He was a great dim force in the house, by means of which they [Rachel and her aunts] held on to the great world which is represented every morning in the *Times*. But the real life of the house was something quite different from this. It went on independently

---

patriarchal authority, in the case of the "huge old cup that had been his father's," out of which the Colonel drinks his tea (16).

<sup>19</sup> See Poresky on this image (224).

of Mr Vinrace, and tended to hide itself from him. He was good-humoured towards them, but contemptuous. She had always taken it for granted that this point of view was just, and founded upon an ideal scale of things where the life of one person was absolutely more important than the life of another, and that in that scale they were of much less importance than he was. (246)

In my reading, this description provides an insightful depiction not only of Rachel's relationship with her father, but also of Eleanor's relationship with, and vision of, the Colonel. For although Eleanor may chafe at her father's demands – his slow and “deliberate” requests which interrupt her just as she is hurrying off to a meeting – she never seems to feel the depth of her sacrifice: in fact, her only expression of regret in the novel occurs as she considers her cousin Maggie's “happy marriage,” when, “for a moment she resent[s] the passage of time and the accidents of life which had swept her away from all that” (TY 93, 296). Notably, in this brief instant of bitterness, Eleanor blames only the “accidents of life,” and not her father, for her thirty-year stint as his housekeeper.

Rachel's meditation in the above passage provides an explanation for this remarkably passive mindset. Like this earlier figure, Eleanor was educated to accept a “point of view ... where the life of one person was absolutely more important than the life of another,” and, as Woolf makes clear in *The Years*, according to this rationale, the life and freedom of a twenty-two year old woman are “of much less importance” than the needs and comfort of an aging man.

Clearly, then, Woolf represents Eleanor's obligation to care for her father as being as equally oppressive a responsibility as her earlier daughter figures' duty to marry, a

burden she details so poignantly in "Phyllis and Rosamond." In effect, Eleanor's obligation to stay home can be read as a simple variation of the marriage plot which imprisons these two earlier characters – for, in both narratives, the daughter's position is not that of an individual, but that of a domestic "commodity," an object "whose exchange constitutes society" (Gilbert 262). Eleanor's fate thus stands as an addendum to Elizabeth Dalloway's narrative: a warning that the father-daughter relationship, which seemingly provides Elizabeth with a refuge from both the marriage plot and her mother's lifestyle, in fact represents another path leading to the extinguishment of the female self.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1911 section of the novel, Woolf depicts Eleanor's sense of change and possibility as she visits her brother Morris in Dorsetshire. Tellingly, these feelings of emancipation are a direct consequence of the Colonel's death:

Every summer she came to visit Morris at his mother-in-law's house. Seven times, eight times she had come she counted; but this year it was different. This year everything was different. Her father was dead; her house was shut up; she had no attachment at the moment anywhere. As she jolted though the hot lanes she thought drowsily, What shall I do now? Live there? she asked herself, as she passed a very respectable Georgian villa in the middle of a street. No, not in a village she said to herself; and they jogged through the village. What about that house, then, she said to herself, looking at a house with a verandah among some trees. But then she thought, I should turn into a grey-haired lady cutting flowers with a pair of scissors and

---

<sup>20</sup> As I mention in my introduction, this potential threat to Elizabeth's independence is implied in *Mrs Dalloway*, both by Richard's solicitousness in behalf of Clarissa's health and by Clarissa's own sense of impending death (her heart apparently having been affected by influenza) (4).

tapping at cottage doors. She did not want to tap at cottage doors. And the clergyman – a clergyman was wheeling his bicycle up the hill – would come to tea with her. But she did not want the clergyman to come to tea with her.

(194)

With her father's death, Eleanor is free to imagine a new life for herself. But her visions are cut short by her fear that, just as she became the Colonel's "housekeeper" at Abercorn Terrace, a new house will irrevocably "turn [her] into" an equally limited "grey haired lady" (194). She therefore rejects the enclosure of village life, as well as the image of lonely spinsterhood she associates with the house with the verandah. Yet, even as Eleanor dismisses these new beginnings as inherently restrictive, she remains unable to create a more affirmative vision of either her future or her selfhood.

Accordingly, in this section of the novel, Woolf portrays Eleanor's sense of dissociation – her growing awareness that, even as she wonders what she will do, now that she has no "attachment[s]," other "people's lives, their changing lives" are nonetheless "moving past her" (194, 210).<sup>21</sup> Woolf develops this theme of alienation through a mirror-motif, twice portraying Eleanor's inability to connect the person she

---

<sup>21</sup> Significantly, Woolf also portrays Eleanor as being left behind by life in an episode in the 1891 section of the novel, in which this character, like Elizabeth Dalloway before her, ventures down the Strand. But while Elizabeth moves into agency during her excursion, in *The Years*, Eleanor remains imprisoned by her responsibility to her father, and therefore remains unable to imagine a future for herself. Rather than experiencing a vision of self-creation during her walk down the Strand, Eleanor thus experiences a sense of envy and captivity:

Cabs, vans and omnibuses streamed past; they seemed to rush the air into her face; they splashed the mud on to the pavement. People jostled and hustled and she quickened her pace in time with theirs. She was stopped by a van turning down one of the little steep streets that led to the river. She looked up and saw the clouds moving between the roofs, dark clouds, rain-swollen; wandering, indifferent clouds. She walked on. ... People on foot, people in cabs were being sucked in like straws round the piers of a bridge; she had to wait. Cabs piled with boxes went past her. She envied them. She wished she were going abroad; to Italy to India... (113)

sees in the mirror with herself.<sup>22</sup> In the first of these two scenes, Woolf describes Eleanor's aging body as she depicts this character dressing for dinner:

She twisted her thick hair, with the grey strand in it, rapidly into a coil; hung the jewel, a red blob like congealed raspberry jam with a gold seed in the centre, round her neck; and gave one glance at the woman who had been for fifty-five years so familiar that she no longer saw her – Eleanor Pargiter.

That she was getting old was obvious; there were wrinkles across her forehead; hollows and creases where the flesh used to be firm. (197)

In this passage, Eleanor's self-alienation is evident, as she perceives "the woman" in the mirror as removed from herself. Significantly, Woolf moves from this scene of misrecognition to a parallel episode, in which she depicts Eleanor's perplexed reaction upon encountering a former suitor, "Dubbin," who is now Sir William Whatney: "But are we all like that? she asked herself, looking from the grisled, crumpled red-and-yellow face of the body she had known – he was almost hairless – to her own brother Morris. He looked bald and thin; but surely he was in the prime of life, as she was herself? Or had they all suddenly become old fogies like Sir William?" (198).

It is clear from these two scenes that Eleanor, having remained the Colonel's daughter for so long, is unable to connect her sheltered existence with the life experience of a fifty-five year old woman, and she thus is taken aback by the realization that she is no longer "in the prime of life" (198). As suggested in the above passage, the "seed" of Eleanor's selfhood has remained "congealed" in its embryonic state, blocked from

---

<sup>22</sup> See "Sketch of the Past" on Woolf's ambivalence concerning mirrors (MOB 67-68).

development during the years she spent caring for her father (197).<sup>23</sup>

In a second image in which Eleanor confronts her reflection in the mirror, Woolf continues to highlight the gulf between this character's self-perception and other people's perceptions of her. Before heading out to the terrace to have coffee with her sister-in-law Celia and her niece Peggy, Eleanor returns to her room to fetch some glasses (which she needs in order to see the owl that is nesting in a nearby church). When she is in her room, she again regards her reflection in the mirror, which provokes her realization that she has now been "labelled...an old maid who washes and watches birds" (202). Struggling with this insight, she articulates her denial and despair as she turns away from the mirror: "That's what they think I am. But I'm not – I'm not in the least like that..." (TY 202).

Eleanor is thus faced with the difficult task of surmounting this externally-imposed identity and becoming "a person on her own account," although, unlike her predecessor in this struggle, Rachel Vinrace, she confronts this challenge at the age of fifty-five (TVO 90). I underline Eleanor's age here because, in contrast to the twenty-four year old Miss Vinrace, Eleanor's quest to fill the "vast gaps" and "blank spaces" in her knowledge and experience is unhindered by the youthful obligations of marriage and motherhood (TY 154). But even though Eleanor sells Abercorn Terrace and begins a

---

<sup>23</sup> See *Mrs Dalloway* for Woolf's more explicit portrayal of Clarissa's selfhood as a jewel: "That was her self—pointed: dart-like: definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing room and made a meeting-point, a radiancy no doubt in some lives..." (47-48). Notably, this image of Clarissa, like the one depicting Eleanor in *The Years*, highlights the gap between public and private perceptions of selfhood and, moreover, develops from the character's contemplation of her reflection in the mirror. See also "Phyllis and Rosamond," in which Woolf depicts selfhood as a grain, rather than a seed: "Phyllis had an odd feeling, when she leant forward to speak, of searching feverishly through a mass of artificial frivolities to lay hands on the solid grain of pure self which, she supposed lay hid somewhere" (26).

new life as an independent woman, she has difficulty overcoming the socialized self-abnegation of her fifty-odd years as a “patriarchal daughter” (Swanson 285).

Woolf’s first intimation that Eleanor has progressed in her quest for selfhood occurs in the 1917 section of the novel, when, as this character dines at her cousin Maggie’s house, she participates in a philosophical conversation with Nicholas Pomjalovsky. As Margaret (Comstock) Connolly discusses in “The Loudspeaker and the Human Voice: Politics and the Form of *The Years*,” during the course of this evening, Eleanor is at last able to transcend her habitual state of self-negation and engage in what had originally been an exclusively male discussion between Nicholas and Renny (56). Overcoming her shyness and her initial fear that Nicholas will “think her a fool,” Eleanor asks him to explain his thoughts “about the relation between great leaders and the way ordinary people live” (TY 279, Connolly 56). But instead of listening passively, Eleanor in fact provides Nicholas with the words he needs to voice his meaning, and, in doing so, she breaks the silence which has figured throughout the novel as her “inability to participate in the intellectual, social and public spheres of life”<sup>24</sup> (Laurence 56):

“I was saying,” he went on. “I was saying we do not know ourselves, ordinary people; and if we do not know ourselves, how then can we make religions, laws that –” he used his hands as people do who find language obdurate. “that—”

“That fit—that fit,” she said, supplying him with a word that was shorter.

---

<sup>24</sup> I refer here to Eleanor’s difficulty speaking in public, specifically at her committee meetings. The most significant example of this occurs when Eleanor is listening to the “bickering” of the other members in the 1910 section of the novel, when she suddenly realizes she has understood “the only point that was of any importance” (177). But, even as she clears her throat and opens her mouth to speak, Mr Pickford interrupts her by announcing his departure, and, even though the meeting continues, Eleanor never voices her concerns (177). See also Poresky on this scene and Eleanor’s inability to voice her “private musings” (228).

she felt sure, than the dictionary word that foreigners always used.

"—that fit, that fit," he said, taking the word and repeating it as if he were grateful for her help.

". . . that fit," she repeated. She had no idea what they were talking about.

Then suddenly, as she bent to warm her hands over the fire, words floated together in her mind and made one intelligible sentence. It seemed to her that what he had said was, "We cannot make laws and religions that fit because we do not know ourselves." (TY 279)

In this exchange, we recognize that, on a symbolic level, Eleanor is a "foreigner" like Nicholas; for, like Woolf's earlier daughter figures, this character "finds language obdurate." And indeed it is, particularly in Woolf's oeuvre, in which language is consistently portrayed as alien to women, who lack both education and a political voice, and have been conditioned to listen, rather than to speak.<sup>25</sup> But, as Woolf makes clear here, Eleanor, through her active role in formulating this communication, is at last able to come out of "her woman's condition of internal exile," and comprehend the meaning of an argument that she had originally (and instinctively) assumed to be beyond "her reach" (Connolly 57; TY 279).

Eleanor is thus able to achieve a transitory "moment of being," in which she emerges from "cotton wool" of "non-being"<sup>26</sup> and into consciousness (MOB 70). Yet, just as Eleanor attempts to transform this private moment of comprehension (in which

---

<sup>25</sup> See Laurence.

<sup>26</sup> Woolf's use of domestic tasks to illustrate the meaning of this state (which she also refers to as the "cotton wool of daily life") provides some insight into Eleanor's daily existence as her father's "housekeeper" (MOB 72, TY 92). As Woolf states in "A Sketch of the Past," "A great part of every day is not lived consciously. One walks, eats, sees things, deals with what has to be done: the broken vacuum cleaner: ordering dinner: writing orders to Mabel [Woolf's maid]; washing: cooking dinner: bookbinding" (70).

“the words floated together in her mind and made one intelligible sentence”) into a public thought, she finds herself unable to communicate her own insight to Nicholas (TY 279). Eleanor’s sense of authority and self-possession is thus only transitory. When she sees that Nicholas does not understand her, she therefore returns to her former state of introversion and self-abnegation, thinking: “probably she had misunderstood what he had said: she had not made her own meaning plain” (TY 280; Connolly 58).

In my reading of this exchange, although Eleanor’s hesitant and fleeting moment of awareness and self-expression represents a significant progress for this character, her subsequent failure to vocalize her own thoughts marks her more strongly than her initial success, for, as I discuss below, in the final section of the novel, Eleanor explicitly identifies herself as unable to communicate her vision of the “pattern” of existence and names Nicholas as her chosen spokesperson (TY 365). In terms of Laurence’s vision of modes of silence in Woolf’s novels, Eleanor remains caught in the realm of the “unspoken,” as her insights remain private, as “something not yet formulated or expressed in voiced words” (1). She therefore achieves only a contingent form of selfhood, as she remains dependent on another character to voice her perception of reality.

My reading of Nicholas and Eleanor is parallel to that of Louise Poresky in *The Elusive Self*, although the contexts of our arguments differ. While Poresky analyzes this relationship as representing Woolf’s vision of the dichotomy between the “Masculine and the Feminine,” which corresponds to that “between public and private existence” (217), I read it in context of Eleanor’s ongoing struggle to achieve independent selfhood. As Poresky argues, “Eleanor represents the Feminine force because of her private visions,

and Nicholas represents the Masculine force in his ability to extend the privacy of the vision into the public world of society" (237). Although I concur with this analysis, which implicitly states that Eleanor is unable to achieve selfhood, as she is blocked by her "wordlessness" from achieving "an identity in [the public sphere of] history and culture" (Froula (76, 66), I will be more explicit here by stating that I see Nicholas and Eleanor's relationship, in itself, as another barrier to this character's selfhood.

I read Woolf's depiction of the friendship between Nicholas and Eleanor as reminiscent of Rachel Vinrace's relationship with Terence Hewet. While I will hasten to state here that Nicholas and Eleanor's relationship is neither sexual<sup>27</sup> nor domineering (the two traits that defined Terence's relationship with Rachel), what I wish to underline is Eleanor's reliance on Nicholas to complete and voice her vision. "to take her thought and carry it out into the open unbroken, to make it whole, beautiful entire" (TY 365).<sup>28</sup> Just as Rachel, in *The Voyage Out*, views Terence as possessing "a wonderful power of making her daring and confident of herself" and making her "conscious of emotions and powers which she had never suspected in herself, and of a depth in the world hitherto unknown." Eleanor regards Nicholas as having "released something in her," and she thus feels "not only a new space of time, but new powers, something unknown within her" due to her relationship with him (TVO 259-260, TY 294). I would thus amend Poresky's more positive evaluation of this friendship, and suggest that, in the context of the struggle, not only of Rachel Vinrace, but also of Phyllis and Rosamond Hibbert and Elizabeth Dalloway to attain and express their subjectivity in the public sphere, such a relationship can only be seen as inauspicious.

---

<sup>27</sup> Nicholas is homosexual (TY 295).

<sup>28</sup> See Poresky (237).

As Woolf demonstrates in the final section of the novel, Eleanor's failure to achieve selfhood lies in her fundamental inability to conceive of herself as an individual. This incapacity is manifest in Eleanor's reaction when she learns that her nephew North and her cousin Sara have been discussing her life:

That was odd, it was the second time that evening that somebody had talked about her life. *And I haven't got one*, she thought. Oughtn't a life to be something you could handle and produce? – a life of seventy odd years. But I've only the present moment, she thought. ... Millions of things came back to her... Atoms danced apart and massed themselves. But how did they compose what people called a life? She clenched her hands and felt the hard little coins she was holding. Perhaps there's 'I' at the middle of it, she thought: a knot: a centre: ... (362-3, my emphasis)

It seems here that Eleanor is unable to conceive of her life because of its insubstantiality – because in her “seventy odd years,” she has not fashioned anything she can either “handle” or “produce” as evidence of her existence. In contrast with her sisters, Delia and Milly, who have children, or Rose, who was decorated for her war efforts, or even her brother Edward, who translated Sophocles' *Antigone*, Eleanor's accomplishments and contributions to the world have been largely indefinable – her work with the poor, her years caring for her father, her voyage to India – none of these represents a concrete legacy. And seemingly, without this legacy, Eleanor cannot perceive her existence as a “life,” and cannot posit herself as this elusive “I” (363).

Eleanor therefore remains mired in her *difficulté d'être*, unable even to envision herself, as Rachel did in *The Voyage Out*, “as a real everlasting thing, different from

anything else, unmergeable" (90). Indeed, as Woolf makes clear, Eleanor is unable to establish boundaries between her own subjectivity and those of her friends and family, for, as this character notes herself, "My life's been other people's lives... – my father's; Morris's; my friends' lives; Nicholas's . . ." (363). Clearly, then, Eleanor fails to "break out of the female initiation plot that her culture imposes upon women," a plot which, as Froula argues, designates women "not as fully legitimated participants in history and culture" (that is to say, persons on their own account), "but as culture's material support" (Froula 63).

At Delia's party, which provides the setting for the final section of the novel, Eleanor experiences what I read as myriad "moments of being" – visions that leave her with a profound feeling of happiness, as well as a sense of hope and renewal (TY 377, 381). As the party comes to its end, Eleanor experiences a vision that represents both her frustration with her inability to communicate her inner reality to the world, and her sense of optimism and possibility that even if she does not achieve self-knowledge, others will in the future:

There must be another life, she thought, sinking back into her chair, exasperated. Not in dreams; but here and now, in this room, with living people. She felt as if she were standing on the edge of a precipice with her hair blown back; she was about to grasp something that just evaded her. There must be another life, here and now, she repeated. This is too short, too broken. We know nothing, even about ourselves. We're only just beginning, she thought, to understand, here and there. . . . She held her hands hollowed; she felt that she wanted to enclose the present moment; to make it

stay: to fill it fuller and fuller, with the past, the present and the future, until  
it shone, whole, bright, deep with understanding. (421-22)

Significantly, although Eleanor attempts to communicate this vision to her brother Edward, she cannot break into his exclusive conversation with North, as he is recounting "an old college story" to his nephew, a topic that is evidently closed to her (422). Thus, although Eleanor is identified as a visionary figure, a "prophetess," in this section of the novel, she is also "a foolish old woman," a rambling and easily dismissed old maid, who remains unable to "hold forth" her wisdom and break through the abyss of silence which blocks her from communication (324, 401). Eleanor therefore tries but fails to fill "the present moment" with the force of her vision; without the authority of selfhood, though she is "full" of the wisdom of "the past, the present, and the future," she cannot emerge as a "person on her own account," "whole, bright, deep with understanding" (TY 421- 422, TVO 90).

Manifestly, then, Eleanor remains subordinated, throughout her life, to the protocols of a system that condemns her to spend fifty years of her life as her father's caretaker. Ultimately, as Woolf makes clear, the self-effacement that this domestic role requires proves too difficult for Eleanor to overcome: though she experiences numerous moments of revelation, particularly in the final section of the novel, each of Eleanor's visions is followed by an image of failure, in which Woolf depicts her remaining caught in the realm of the "unspoken" and, consequently, letting her vision "fall" into the "endless night" of her silence and cultural isolation (TY 422).

Throughout the various narrative strands of *The Years*, Woolf also details the struggle of the other Pargiter daughters, Delia and Rose, to transcend their repressive

upbringing and liberate themselves from an existence which, as Woolf notes in "Phyllis and Rosamond," condemns them as "slaves," first to their parents, and later, to the cultural imperatives of marriage and motherhood (PR 27). In this 1937 novel, Woolf depicts Rose Pargiter as a freedom fighter – a militant suffragette who, though she achieves both independence and a political voice, must forfeit her social acceptance, as her political activism marks and marginalizes her as a masculine figure. But even though Woolf portrays Rose as a transgressive figure, she is depicted in a more positive light than her ineffective sister, Delia, who betrays her own dreams by marrying a man who represents the embodiment of the British patriarchy.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, beyond the plot lines depicting these two characters' respective paths in life, Woolf also details the lives of two other daughter figures, Kitty Malone and Peggy Pargiter, and their own struggles to liberate themselves from the oppressive forces of the Victorian socio-sexual system. Like the narrative strands depicting the Pargiter daughters, the storylines that portray Kitty and Peggy reflect the difficult choices a young woman must confront in her struggle to attain selfhood.

As I suggest in my introduction to this chapter, these two characters also provide some insight into the unwritten future of Elizabeth Dalloway, for, like this last character, Kitty also dreams of becoming a farmer, and Peggy in fact fulfils Elizabeth's dream of becoming a doctor. While Peggy, who I discuss below, is a very minor figure in the novel, appearing only as a sustained character in the final, "Present Day" section of the narrative, Kitty Malone is a character whose development Woolf depicts throughout the fifty-year period covered by the text.

---

<sup>29</sup> The most negatively depicted of the sisters is, without a doubt, Milly, who marries the pompous Hugh Gibbs and becomes a grotesque, obese and mindless figure, "prolific, profuse, [and] half-conscious" (370).

We first encounter Kitty Malone in the opening, "1880" section of the novel, in which this character is portrayed as a shy young woman on the cusp of adulthood. The young Kitty bears a marked resemblance to Elizabeth Dalloway, for, like the latter character, her relationship with her mother is strained, and she is infatuated with her history tutor – in this case, the impoverished but compassionate Miss Lucy Craddock. Just as Elizabeth "turns pink" in the presence of Miss Kilman, so Kitty's "heart beat[s] faster" as she approaches Miss Craddock's villa, where she has lessons each Friday (MD 155, TY 65).

Interestingly, although Woolf notes both Kitty's attachment to her tutor and her self-confessed "love" of history, neither of these passions results in the young woman's applying herself to her schoolwork (71). Yet, even though Kitty identifies her neglect of her studies as laziness,<sup>29</sup> Woolf suggests that the fault is perhaps to be found not in the young woman herself, but in her hectic social schedule, which leaves her little time for schoolwork (71, 64). For Kitty, unlike her male cousins, Martin, Morris, and Edward Pargiter, for whom education is a primary concern, benefits little from parental support for her academic interests.<sup>30</sup> Thus, whereas, earlier in the novel, Woolf depicts Martin

---

<sup>29</sup> When Kitty tells Professor Robson that she loves history, she immediately follows up this statement with the self-deprecating comment, "But I'm frightfully lazy" (71), a remark which is reminiscent of the narrator's reflection, during Elizabeth Dalloway's "moment of being," that, even though she is "quite determined, whatever her mother might say, to become either a farmer or a doctor... she was, of course, rather lazy" (MD 179). In my reading, Woolf chooses the term 'laziness' as a metaphor to represent the young women's awareness of the difficult path they must face should they choose to pit themselves against their parents' expectations, not to mention the societal expectation (or perhaps, more precisely, the cultural "imperative") that they "marry well and be decorative" (Smith, 50-51). That Woolf associates both Kitty and Elizabeth with laziness suggests that both of these characters struggle subconsciously with the choices they must make, as well as against their upbringing, which has taught them to have ambitions in line with those of society as a whole – that is to say, ambitions of marriage and motherhood.

<sup>30</sup> After Kitty spills ink across a manuscript of her father's that details "five generations of Oxford men" (a study which, notably, highlights the male exclusivity of the academic world), Dr Malone tells his daughter,

Pargiter's being sent to his room to study in the evening (19). Kitty is granted no such opportunity by her parents. In fact, Woolf instead depicts Kitty's weary realization, after an evening spent entertaining her parents' houseguests, Professor and Mrs Fripp, that although she is looking forward to her lesson with Miss Craddock the next day, she has not yet completed her work:

It was late. She began to brush her teeth. She glanced at the calendar above the wash-stand and tore off Thursday and screwed it into a ball, as if she were saying "That's over! That's over! Friday in large red letters confronted her. Friday was a good day; on Friday she had her lesson with Lucy; she was going to tea with the Robsons. "Blessed is he who has found his work" she read on the calendar. Calendars always seemed to be talking at you.

She had not done her work... She should have finished her chapter for Lucy; but not tonight. She was too tired tonight. (64)

While Kitty may blame herself for being "lazy" when it comes to her studies, in my reading of the above passage, Woolf suggests that another and more forgiving interpretation of this shortcoming is possible.

When Kitty arrives at her lesson with Miss Craddock the next day, she informs her tutor that she was unable to do her work because "we had people staying in the house" (66). When Miss Craddock responds with disappointment and asks her pupil why she does not use her "original mind," Kitty's reply is telling, as she, like her cousin Delia, identifies her mother as an "impediment" to her development and success (66, 25):

---

"Nature did not intend you to be a scholar, my dear" (82, Poresky 222). See also *The Pargiters* for Colonel Pargiter's logic concerning his financial support of his sons' educations and his refusal to finance his daughters' educations (28-34).

Miss Craddock took up her pen and dipped it in the red ink. Then she turned to the essay.

"It wasn't worth correcting," she remarked, pausing with her pen in the air.

"A child of ten would have been ashamed of it." Kitty blushed bright red.

"And the odd thing is," said Miss Craddock putting down her pen when the lesson was over, "that you've got quite an original mind."

Kitty flushed bright red with pleasure.

"But you don't use it," said Miss Craddock. "Why don't you use it?" she added, looking at her out of her fine grey eyes.

"You see, Miss Craddock," Kitty began eagerly, "my mother—"

"Hm ... hm ... hm ..." Miss Craddock stopped her. Confidences were not what Dr Malone paid her for. She got up.<sup>31</sup> (66-67)

As Poresky notes, Kitty's abortive communication implies that Mrs Malone "discourages her intellect" (222). In my reading of this exchange, it is not only Mrs Malone, but also Lucy Craddock who emerges as a source of repression in this scene, as it is Lucy who prevents Kitty from speaking just as the young woman "eagerly" begins to express herself. Thus, while Miss Craddock ostensibly wishes to encourage Kitty's "original mind," she instead silences it, and this out of respect for the patriarchal Dr Malone, a man who very possibly numbers among the Dons who "snee[r]" at her, rather than respect her for her learning<sup>32</sup> (TY 67, 70). Clearly, then, with this brief portrait of

---

<sup>31</sup> See Poresky on this scene (222).

<sup>32</sup> Woolf depicts Kitty reacting positively to Mr Robson because he seems to respect Lucy Craddock, in contrast with the majority of the Dons (71). Interestingly, Woolf further depicts the power dynamics of the

Kitty's education. Woolf suggests that young women are trained to be silent and submissive, rather than expressive and ambitious.

Although Kitty is silenced in this scene with her tutor, she does experience a brief moment of self-expression when she visits her friend Nelly Robson after her lesson with Lucy Craddock. In my reading, the Robson's house figures in the novel as a liminal space, which enables Kitty, however momentarily, to envision an existence in which her future is determined not by her gender, but by her ability. During this visit, Kitty is therefore able (indeed inspired) to respond to Professor Robson's inquiry concerning her interest in history with the declaration, "I love it" (71). As Woolf notes, Kitty's ability to voice her response to this question comes in part from the fact that, at the Robsons, the young woman feels freed from her parents' expectations: thus, Woolf depicts the young woman reacting positively to "the feeling" that Mr Robson "made her feel, that she was nobody's daughter in particular" (71).

As Kitty leaves the Robsons' house, she observes with some wonder that "They were all about to go on with what they were doing [before her arrival]. Nell was about to go into the kitchen and wash up the tea things; Jo was about to return to his hencoops; the children were about to be put to bed by their mother" (74); in short, "they were all going off to their work," while Kitty must return to the "obsolete, frivolous [and] inane" world of Oxford, where her own (and her only) responsibility is simply "to dress for dinner" (75, 76). This realization is reminiscent of Elizabeth Dalloway's observation, as she

---

academic world in her juxtaposition of Lucy and Kitty's respective visions of the Oxford Professors. Thus, while Miss Craddock sees Kitty as privileged for her social interaction with Dr Andrews, whom she refers to as "the greatest historian of his age," Kitty in fact experiences her relationship with this man to be one of sexual aggression: "'Well, he doesn't talk history to me,' said Kitty, remembering the damp feel of a heavy hand on her knee" (68).

walks down the Strand, of people who are "busy about their activities," people whose minds are "occupied not with trivial chatterings (comparing women to poplars – which was rather exciting of course, but very silly), but with thoughts of ships, of business, or law, of administration" (MD 179).

Significantly, while Elizabeth's recognition of the distance between her own existence and that of the working-class makes "her determined, whatever her mother might say, to become either a farmer or a doctor" (179), Kitty has neither her predecessor's resolve nor her sense of possibility, as she sees the existence her parents have planned for her as inescapable. As she returns home after her visit with Nelly, Kitty thus reflects that "if she had been the daughter of people like the Robsons, ... if she had lived in the north—" (TY 74). With this "if," Woolf clearly intimates that Dr and Mrs Malone's expectations, as well as the family's social class, prevent Kitty from fulfilling her dreams (74).<sup>33</sup>

Notably, Kitty does indeed go on to fulfil her mother's dreams, rather than her own, as we learn in the second section of the novel that, at some point in the narrative gap between 1880 and 1891, Kitty has married Lord Lasswade – the very man whom Mrs Malone identifies, in the novel's opening section, as the ideal husband for her daughter (84).<sup>34</sup> It is not until the final, "Present Day" section of the novel, which is set in the

---

<sup>33</sup> See Jane Marcus, who notes "Robson is a working-class professor... Kitty thinks he's 'the nicest man' she ever met and is jealous of Nell and full of self-pity, feeling limited by her gentility from ever accomplishing anything" (45). Marcus also notes that, "In 'Two Women,' a review of Lady Stephen's *Emily Davies and Girton College*," Woolf had also described the "drabness of [the] lot" of middle-class women (45).

<sup>34</sup> In Mrs Malone's meditation on her daughter's future, she decides that the "young Lord Lasswade" would "give [Kitty] what she wants" (84). In my reading, the verb "to want" can be read in this image as meaning both "to desire" and "to lack." (Mrs Malone goes on to identify what Kitty "wants" as "scope" – that is to say, the privileged lifestyle and social opportunities that such an advantageous marriage would provide [84]).

1930s, that Kitty, now an old woman and a widow, is finally able to articulate her own dreams, as she looks back on her life and states, "...I'd have given anything to be a farmer! ... But in my youth ... *that wasn't allowed*"<sup>35</sup> (395, my emphasis).

Whether Kitty's career choice is forbidden by her parents, or by society as a whole, the implication is clear: her life is shaped, not by her personal choices, but by the patriarchal protocols that govern her existence throughout her youth. It is thus only in Kitty's old age that she gains the freedom to live as she desires: for she tells Eleanor at Delia's party, "How nice it is, ... not to be young! How nice not to mind what people think! Now one can live as one likes, ... now that one's seventy" (415).<sup>36</sup> But this belated moment of self-knowledge and self-realization is tinged with regret, as Kitty concludes her reflection with the poignant statement, "Pity one can't live again" (416).

I will close my analysis of Kitty Malone by noting that, while this character's alienation from her mother, infatuation with her tutor, and ambition to be a farmer link her with Elizabeth Dalloway, these two daughter figures are nonetheless marked by the forty-odd years which separate their respective developmental narratives. For Woolf sets Kitty's youth in 1880, a narrative strategy that clearly limits the "scope" of this character's options, as it situates her in a time when her ambitions are "unsayable," and when, moreover, the only real option available to her, as a "good Victorian daughter," is

---

<sup>35</sup> Phyllis and Rosamond similarly note, in Woolf's 1906 work of fiction, "we can't *do* what we like – we haven't a room, for one thing, and *then we should never be allowed to do it*. We are daughters, until we become married women" (27, my emphasis).

<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, when Kitty loses the family (Lasswade) estate to her sons after her husband's death, she begins a happy life of seclusion, rejecting the society which she found so imprisoning, even during her marriage (see Woolf's depiction of Kitty at her own party in the 1914 section of the novel). In the last section of the novel, we learn that Kitty has at last claimed the liberating space which evaded her for so long, as she has moved into the "grey stone house" not far from the estate in the North, where previously a "mad lady lived alone with her peacocks and her bloodhounds" (272, 416). Evidently, this is a space that exists outside of either patriarchal or social norms.

to make as advantageous a marriage as possible (TY 84. Laurence 1. Roe 167).

I do not suggest that Elizabeth's quest to become a "doctor, farmer" or to "go into Parliament" represents an easy task for a young woman growing up in 1923 (MD 178-179). Nor do I suggest that Woolf thinks it is an easy task. Indeed, while Elizabeth's goals represent "a realistic possibility," as Rachel Bowlby argues in "Thinking Forward through Mrs Dalloway's Daughter," this does not necessarily translate into an inevitability. For, as this critic notes, at the close of the novel, Woolf leaves Elizabeth's future unwritten, and so this character's "destiny" is "far from certain" (72, 75).

As though to remind her readers of how uncertain each apparently liberated woman's destiny will be, Woolf provides a glimpse into Elizabeth Dalloway's unwritten future in the final section of *The Years*, in the form of Peggy Pargiter, a character who has achieved her predecessor's goal of becoming a doctor. Interestingly, despite Peggy's professional achievements, Woolf depicts this character not as a positive model of female selfhood, but instead as a "bitter and disillusioned" woman who has become fixed "in a groove" of cynicism and detachment (389, 350).

As Rantavaara notes, Woolf suggests that Peggy has forgotten the struggles faced a mere generation earlier by women such as her aunts, Rose, Eleanor and Delia (157): thus this character, who, like Elizabeth Dalloway, was born shortly after the turn of the century, sees the past of Eleanor's youth as both "safe" and "unreal" (TY 330). Yet, just as Kitty describes the "old days" as "bad days, wicked days, cruel days," so Peggy experiences the present as a time of "tyranny: brutality: [and] torture" (396, 383). Through Peggy, Woolf thus suggests that, ultimately, modern womanhood is potentially as negative an experience as oppressive Victorian womanhood.

But the fifty-year period covered in the novel witnessed significant social change and progress, not the least of which were advances in the rights of women. Eleanor seems subconsciously to recognize these advances in the final section of the novel, when she reacts to Peggy's request that she talk about her youth with the thought, "I do not want to go back into my past. I want the present" (332). Eleanor feels a sense of optimism and confidence in both the present and the future, as she, unlike her niece, understands the importance of the possibility of choice – the opportunity for a woman to create whatever future or career she would choose for herself. Though Peggy may undervalue this freedom, Eleanor does not, as it represents the privilege that was denied her in her own youth.

In my reading of *The Years*, though Peggy Pargiter may have achieved the goals which mark Elizabeth as such a revolutionary character in *Mrs Dalloway*, and she may also have more freedom than either her aunts or her predecessors, Phyllis and Rosamond Hibbert and Rachel Vinrace, could ever have imagined, she is nonetheless imprisoned in a stunted, unfulfilling existence. Significantly, however, the "groove" in which Peggy is caught is of more of her own making than any of the grooves in which her aunts were caught (350). For Peggy is both unable and, more importantly, unwilling to empathize or communicate with the other guests at Delia's party: as Woolf notes, this character experiences "all social relations" as consisting of "pain... outbalanc[ing] pleasure by two parts to one" (350). This self-described "hard" and "cold" woman is, moreover, so far estranged from the marriage plot, previously so central to female existence, that she can only wonder, "how do they manage it – love, childbirth? The people who touch each other and go up in a cloud of smoke: red smoke?" (350). Seemingly, then, in her quest

for independence and individuality. Peggy has come to connect both marriage and intimacy with the negation of the self.

With such a misanthropic perspective, Peggy is unable to comprehend the happiness of the other partygoers; thus, when Eleanor notes that “things have changed for the better” since she was young, as she believes that now, “We’re happier – we’re freer...” (381-382, ellipsis in original), Peggy cannot comprehend her meaning, and asks herself, “What does she mean by ‘happiness’, by ‘freedom’?” (382). Yet Peggy seems to note that perhaps her inability to see beyond the “miseries of the world” is a “pose” – the attitude of someone who does not “love [her] kind” (384).<sup>37</sup> As Peggy herself observes when she randomly reads a passage from a book she picks up at Delia’s party, her sense that “*la médiocrité de l’univers m’étonne et me révolte ... la petitesse de toutes choses m’emplit de dégoût... la pauvreté des êtres humains m’anéantit*” represents not a verity, but simply her own vision of existence (379).

Clearly, then, if Peggy has, on one level, “spoken her own ends into being” (to paraphrase Christine Froula), by becoming a doctor, she nonetheless remains caught in the realm of the “unspoken,” as she is unable to take part in the “talk and life” of Delia’s party, or even enter into meaningful communication with her family members, most particularly her brother North, from whom she is estranged (Froula 71; Laurence 1; PR 24). For, although Peggy experiences a moment of joy and vision at the party, in which she sees “not a place, but a state of being, in which there was real laughter, real happiness, and this fractured world was whole: whole, and free.” she is not only unable to attain this “state of being,” but is also unable to communicate this vision to her brother

---

<sup>37</sup> See Poresky (238).

and aunts. She thus misspeaks, unwittingly transforming her message of hope into an expression of her "animosity" towards North (385-386). Peggy must consequently let her vision "drop," and she then retreats back into her silence, overcome by a sense of "desolation" (422, 388).

In my reading of *The Years*, I therefore see Peggy as analogous to Woolf's earlier daughter figures, Phyllis and Rosamond, whom the author depicts as trapped in an existence that has been imposed upon them by their social class and by society as a whole. Like these two earlier characters, Peggy remains unable to break out of her "groove" (350). Her greatest achievement is thus learning "to smile, to bend, to make believe [she's] amused when [she's] bored" (350), as she eventually concludes that, in order to enjoy herself at the party, she must speak only of superficial matters with her brother, rather than risk making "a fool of [her]self again" by attempting to communicate her real thoughts and concerns to him (391-392). Like Phyllis, who ultimately decides that "it was rather a relief that Lady Hibbert had arranged a full day for [her] tomorrow," as this means that "she need not think" (PR 29), Peggy also decides she would do better to "give up thinking," and try instead to "force her mind to become a blank and lie back, and accept quietly, tolerantly, whatever came" (TY 384).<sup>38</sup> Evidently, then, Phyllis fails to achieve the liberating moment of self-creation that would mark her as a positive portrayal of female selfhood.

I will close my argument here with a quote from Simone de Beauvoir's introduction to *The Second Sex*: a citation which, from my perspective, captures the distinction between Peggy and her predecessor, Elizabeth Dalloway:

---

<sup>38</sup> See Poresky on Peggy (238).

There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation, there is a degradation of existence into the "en-soi"—the brutish life of subjection to given conditions—and of liberty into constraint and contingency. This downfall represents a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted upon him, it spells frustration and oppression. In both cases it is an absolute evil. Every individual concerned to justify his existence feels that his existence involves an undefined need to transcend himself, to engage in freely chosen projects. (xxix)

In my reading of *The Years*, Peggy is a figure of "stagnation" – caught in her "groove" of bitterness, she is unable to transcend her cynicism and isolation, despite being an ostensibly liberated woman – that is to say, a woman who has escaped the marriage plot and achieved a career in the public sphere. Elizabeth Dalloway, however, in contrast to Peggy, is a young woman who truly embodies emancipation and potentiality – a young woman whose vision of herself as a "doctor, farmer" or a member of parliament represents her "undefined need to transcend [her]self, to engage in freely chosen projects" (MD 178-179, Beauvoir xxix).

For, as I argue throughout this study, Elizabeth Dalloway is an exceptional figure, whose "moment of being" positions her at the forefront of Woolf's daughter figures. Contrary to the central characters of *The Years* – the Pargiter daughters and their cousin Kitty Malone – Elizabeth surmounts her position as an object in patriarchal society and becomes a "person" on her "own account" when she journeys down the Strand and into a future of her own creation (TVO 92).

As I have argued throughout the four chapters of this thesis, my vision of Elizabeth Dalloway as the foremost daughter figure in Woolf's fictional oeuvre stems not only from what she does accomplish during her voyage of self-discovery, but also, however paradoxically, from what she does not accomplish within the narrative of *Mrs Dalloway*. For, while Woolf concludes her early work of fiction, "Phyllis and Rosamond," with an image of Phyllis' tacit acceptance of her future as a shallow, frustrated society wife, and closes her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, with the death of the heroine, Rachel Vinrace, and, what is more, concludes one of her last novels, *The Years*, with images of her several heroines questioning and regretting their paths in life, she leaves Elizabeth's future unwritten at the end of *Mrs Dalloway*. With this subversive authorial act, Woolf effectively leaves a space open for Elizabeth to remain a figure of promise, with a life ahead of her that may well be created according to her own terms, rather than those of the oppressive socio-sexual system in which she lives. Clearly, then, in my reading of four of Woolf's works of fiction, the marginal and critically overlooked Elizabeth Dalloway emerges as a triumphant representation of female selfhood.

## WORKS CITED

### 1. Primary Sources:

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own, Three Guineas*. Ed. Michèle Barrett. London: Penguin Books, 1993.

---. *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Susan Dick. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1985.

---. *Mrs Dalloway*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

---. *The Pargiters: the novel-essay portion of The Years*. Ed. Mitchell A. Leaska. New York: New York Public Library, 1977.

---. *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing*. Ed. Michèle Barrett. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979.

---. *To the Lighthouse*. London: Grafton Books, 1977.

---. *Virginia Woolf: Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*. Ed. Jeanne Schulkind. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.

---. *The Voyage Out*. New York: Harcourt, 1948.

---. *The Years*. London: Grafton, 1977.

---. *Women and Writing*. Ed. Michèle Barrett. New York: Harcourt, 1979.

### 2. Secondary Sources:

#### a. Virginia Woolf Criticism

Abel, Elizabeth. *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989.

- . "Narrative Structure(s) and Female Development: The Case of *Mrs Dalloway*." *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland. Hanover: New England UP, 1983.
- Baldwin, Dean R. *Virginia Woolf: A Study of the Short Fiction*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989.
- Batchelor, J.B. "Feminism in Virginia Woolf." *Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Essays*. Ed. Claire Sprague. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971.
- Beer, Gillian. *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground: Essays by Gillian Beer*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1996.
- Bowlby, Rachel. *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997.
- . "Virginia Woolf as flâneuse." *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*. Ed. Isobel Armstrong. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Briggs, Julia. "The novels of the 1930s and the impact of history." *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*. Eds. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Childs, Donald J. *Modernism and Eugenics: Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, and the Culture of Degeneration*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.
- Connolly (Comstock), Margaret. "The Loudspeaker and the Human Voice: Politics and the Form of *The Years*." *Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Margaret Homans. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993.
- Duplessis, Rachel Blau. "Feminist Narrative in Virginia Woolf." *Novel* 21.2-3 (1988): 323-330.

- Forbes, Shannon. "'When sometimes she imagined herself like her mother': the contrasting responses of Cam and Mrs. Ramsay to the role of Angel in the House." *Studies in the Novel* 32.4 (2000): 464-486
- Froula, Christine. "Out of the Chrysalis: Female Initiation and Female Authority in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 5.1 (1986): 63-90.
- Gilbert, Sandra, and Susan Gubar. *Sexchanges*. Vol. 2 of *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in The Twentieth Century*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1988.
- Laurence, Patricia Ondek. *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991.
- Leaska, Mitchell A. "Introduction." *The Pargiters: the novel-essay portion of The Years*. By Virginia Woolf. Ed. Leaska. New York: New York Public Library, 1977. vii-xxiv.
- Marcus, Jane. *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.
- Minow-Pinkney, Makiko. *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1987.
- Naremore, James. *The World Without a Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1973.
- Poresky, Louise A. *The Elusive Self: Psyche and Spirit in Virginia Woolf's Novels*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1981.

- Raitt, Suzanne. "Finding a voice: Virginia Woolf's early novels." *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*. Eds. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Rantavaara, Irma. *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury*. Folcroft PA: Folcroft Press, 1970.
- Roe, Sue. "The impact of post-impressionism." *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*. Eds. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Rosenman, Ellen Bayuk. *The Invisible Presence: Virginia Woolf and the Mother-Daughter Relationship*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1986.
- Schaefer, Josephine O'Brien. *The Three-Fold Nature of Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf*. London: Mouton, 1965.
- Smith, Patricia Juliana. *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fiction*. New York: Columbia UP, 1997.
- Snaith, Anna. "Virginia Woolf's Narrative Strategies: Negotiating Between Public and Private Voices." *Journal of Modern Literature* 20.2 (1996): 133-148.
- Squier, Susan. "The Politics of City Space in *The Years*: Street Love, Pillar Boxes and Bridges." *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Jane Marcus. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1981.
- Swanson, Diana L. "'My Boldness Terrifies Me': Sexual Abuse and Female Subjectivity in *The Voyage Out*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 41.4 (1995): 284 - 310.
- Viola, André. "'Buds on the Tree of Life': A Recurrent Mythological Image in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 20.2 (1996): 239-247.

## b. Theory

Boose, Lynda E. "The Father's House and the Daughter in It: The Structures of Western Culture's Daughter-Father Relationship." *Daughters and Fathers*. Eds. Lynda E.

Boose and Betty S. Flowers. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989.

de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. H.M. Parshley, Trans., Ed. New York: Knopf, 1971.

Flaake, Karin. "A body of one's own: Sexual development and the female body in the mother-daughter relationship." *Daughtering and Mothering: Female Subjectivity*

*Reanalysed*. Eds. Janneke van Mens-Verhulst., Karlein Schreurs and Liesbeth

Woertman. London: Routledge, 1993.

Gilbert, Sandra M. "Life's Empty Pack: Notes toward a Literary Daughteronomy."

*Daughters and Fathers*. Eds. Lynda E. Boose and Betty S. Flowers. Baltimore:

Johns Hopkins UP, 1989.

McDowell, Linda. *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies*.

Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999.

Miles, Rosalind. *The Female Form: Women Writers and the Conquest of the Novel*.

London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1987.

Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Methuen, 1985.

Watts, Carol. "Releasing possibility into form: cultural choice and the woman writer."

*New Feminist Discourses: Essays in Literature, Criticism and Theory*. Ed. Isobel

Armstrong. London: Routledge, 1992.

Woertman, Liesbeth. "Mothering in context: female subjectivities and intervening practices." *Daughtering and Mothering: Female Subjectivity Reanalysed*. Eds. Janneke van Mens-Verhulst., Karlein Schreurs and Liesbeth Woertman. London: Routledge, 1993.

### 3. Select Works Consulted:

Bradshaw, David. "The socio-political vision of the novels." *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*. Eds. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.

Caughie, Pamela L. *Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism: Literature in Quest and Question of Itself*. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1991.

Davidson, Cathy N., and E.M. Broner, eds. *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1980.

Dowling, David. *Mrs Dalloway: Mapping Streams of Consciousness*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991.

Emery, Mary Lou. "'Robbed of Meaning': The Work at the Centre of *To the Lighthouse*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 38.1 (1992): 217-234.

Harris, Andrea L. *Other Sexes: Rewriting Difference from Woolf to Winterson*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2000.

Kavaler-Adler, Susan. "Charlotte Brontë and the feminine self." *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 50.1 (1990): 63-66.

Kennard, Jean E. "Power and Sexual Ambiguity: The *Dreadnought Hoax*, *The Voyage Out*, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 20.2 (1996): 149-164.

- Lilienfeld, Jane. "'The Deceptiveness of Beauty': Mother Love and Mother Hate in *To the Lighthouse*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 23.3 (1977): 345-376.
- Lynch, Eve M. "Circuits of Desire: Constructing Female Subjectivity in Virginia Woolf" *Virginia Woolf: Themes and Variations: Selected Papers from the Second Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*. Eds. Vara Neverow-Turk and Mark Hussey. New York: Pace UP. 1993.
- Novak, Jane. *The Razor Edge of Balance: A Study of Virginia Woolf*. Coral Gables: U of Miami P. 1975.
- Panken, Shirley. "Virginia Woolf: the feminine self." *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 50.1 (1990): 45-56.
- Schaefer, Josephine O'Brien. "The Vision Falter: *The Years*, 1937." *Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Essays*. Ed. Claire Sprague. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. 1971.
- Tremper, Ellen. "In Her Father's House: *To the Lighthouse* as a Record of Virginia Woolf's Literary Patrimony." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 34.1 (1992): 5-33.
- Wang, Ban. "'I' On the Run: Crisis of Identity in *Mrs Dalloway*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 38.1 (1992): 177-190.