

**THE OLD WOMAN AND THE SEA:  
SUBTEXTS IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE***

**BY**

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## **The Old Woman and the Sea:**

### **Subtexts in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse***

#### **Introduction:**

#### **In the Beginning**

In the beginning the earth was without form and void, and darkness moved upon the face of the water. In the beginning was the mother. Thus far, Woolf's creation myth parallels the Greek and Freudian versions, but from this point on she diverges significantly from them. She seems to combine aspects of the Greek myth of the origins of the gods with aspects of a psychoanalytic version of the origins of the individual self. She shares with both the image of the lost mother, and extrapolates from both a final phase, a phase of reunification.

According to the ancient Greeks, the universe began with Gaea, who in a kind of Oedipal conspiracy incited her son Cronos to kill his father Uranos, dismember him, and throw his seven body parts into the sea. Instead of placing power back in the hands of the Mother, this murder of the original Father, ironically, served to complete her own fall and metaphorical dismemberment, for her son Cronos took Uranos' place as father of all the gods. Jane Harrison has traced the ways in which the original mother goddess (known as Isis, among many other names [Bolen 21]) of Europe's first civilization became fragmented by the patriarchal Greeks into the multitudinous goddesses of Olympus, with Hera inheriting "the ritual of the sacred marriage, Demeter her mysteries, Athena her snakes, Aphrodite her doves, and Artemis her function as 'Lady of the Wild Things'" (Bolen 21). All of them became secondary to and subject to Zeus, the male god who

inherited Cronos' position of lordship.

Virginia Woolf's books are all about origins – of self, of language, of society – and about a utopian vision of the future. Woolf points us to a female ancestor, a Mother, who predates even the original Father. Several women in her last novel, *Between the Acts*, are described as having no ancestors: Miss La Trobe (53), Mrs. Manresa (36), and the woman in the portrait who is no blood relative of the family, but whom Bart has adopted as “an ancestress of sorts” (6), although no one knows her name or the name of the artist who painted her (63). Woolf offers us a metaphor for her matricentric theory of origins in that curious journey through which Lucy Swithin leads William Dodge (who is homosexual and therefore, perhaps, sufficiently un-male to understand) (*BTA* 62-64). The fact that she takes him upstairs via “the poets from whom we descend by way of the mind” (63) identifies “up” as the point of origin, and moving upstairs as “descending” backwards in time through history to that origin. But Lucy does not stop at the male ancestors; she proceeds still further until she reaches her mother's rooms (63), and at last the bed where she herself was born (64). She identifies this firmly as the origin: “Here . . . yes here . . . I was born” (64), and then begins, on the downward journey, to show William Dodge a brief synopsis of the history of human development. From her mother's bed, she proclaims her faith that the Mother still lives: “But we have other lives, I think, I hope” (64). Then she moves “up” into a second stage, as “he saw her reflected in the glass. Cut off from their bodies, their eyes smiled, their bodiless eyes, at their eyes in the glass. Then she slipped off the bed” (65). Already fragmented by the mirror, the Oedipal prohibition already in place, she must leave her mother's bed, go past the empty nursery, the “cradle of our race” (66), to where the muslin blinds flutter “as if some majestic goddess, rising from her throne among her peers, had tossed her amber-

coloured raiment, and the other gods, seeing her rise and go, laughed, and their laughter floated her on" (66-7). Once the male gods have thus replaced the mother goddess, Mrs. Swithin announces, "It is time . . . to go and join --" (69), and so they join the audience at the pageant, and thus enter the third phase, of acculturation to patriarchal society.

In Woolf's theory of matricentric origins, the moment of fragmentation / individuation (analogous to Jacques Lacan's mirror stage) is traced not to the mother's murder of the father, but to the father's rape of the mother. Images of rape, often associated with mirrors ("the minds of men" [TTL 122]), abound in Woolf, and it is this intrusion of a third party into the mother-child diad, this intrusion of the phallus into the Edenic womb which, instead of casting the father into the sea, represses the mother into the sea (for Woolf, a symbol of the unconscious and a highly female space) and which, instead of fragmenting the mother, fragments the child, the emerging self. In this reversal of the classical story, Woolf prefigures contemporary theorists like Lacan, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva who posit a matricentric theory of origins. Like them, she imagines a first stage of union with the mother (in the development of the individual), or a kind of Edenic community (in the development of society). Like them, too, she posits a moment of crisis, resembling Lacan's mirror stage, a moment in which we differentiate ourselves from our mothers, in which we are expelled from the garden, and community (as well as the self) is fragmented.

This crisis propels the self / society into a third phase, termed by Lacan *le Non du Père* (Latimer 501). But Woolf also envisions a fourth phase, a utopian phase of eventual reunion with the mother, of regaining lost wholeness, and of androgyny. If the mother is not really lost, but only relegated to the unconscious, then it should be possible to resurrect her, or at least find her

and perhaps join her.

Because Woolf valued wholeness, she created her own myth of unity: unity with the mother / goddess. Although Woolf claimed not to have read Freud until 1939, Virginia and Leonard Woolf's Hogarth Press published Freud's works from 1924 on (Abel 14). Woolf was surely familiar with Freud's patricentric theories of the origins of self and of social development. Furthermore, Melanie Klein (who opposed Freud by attributing the development of culture, the entry into the third stage, to the influence of the mother rather than the father) lectured on child development at the home of Woolf's brother Adrian Stephen in 1925, while Woolf was completing *To the Lighthouse*; Hogarth Press published these lectures in 1932 (Abel 10, 13). London became the centre of "a heated debate about the gender of personal and social origins" (Abel 4), and Woolf must have been intimately familiar with such issues.

Just as the lost mother is repressed into the unconscious, so we find her again in the subtexts,<sup>1</sup> the unconscious, of these novels. According to Terry Eagleton, "All literary works contain one or more such sub-texts, and there is a sense in which they may be spoken of as the 'unconscious' of the work itself" (178). Although Woolf has frequently been studied through myth and psychology, the considerable use she makes of folktales has been neglected. Yet two of these in particular -- "The Fisherman and His Wife" and the legend of Pin Well -- create a matrix of images and symbols which underpins not only *To the Lighthouse* but most of her major novels as well.

Woolf is at one with Lacan, Kristeva and Cixous in describing the first stage of

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<sup>1</sup> The terms "subtext" and "intertext" are often used in confusing ways. For the purposes of this thesis, I use the single term "subtext" to signify those works which underlie and inform a literary text.

development of the individual (and possibly of society, too) as an experience of oneness with the mother, of no differentiation between self and mother. This is a mother-centred phase, in which the child and her mother are in unity, as when the child was in the womb. The child feels that she is her environment, that there are no barriers between herself and her world, her mother. Toril Moi calls this “the mother’s womb . . . the Lacanian Imaginary: a space in which all difference has been abolished” (Moi 117). Kristeva calls this space the chora (Greek for “womb”), “a pre-Oedipal phase where sexual difference does not exist . . . linked to the mother” (Moi 164-5). This world, in Woolf, is often represented by water, by darkness, and by gardens. For Woolf, however, this stage is characterized by a female language, which persists in her works as silence, music, and wordless or meaningless singing, and is often symbolized by fish. (She often contrasts this with the male version of origins: prehistoric monsters, which are both the phallus that now inhabits the watery womb and counterfeit fish.) Even the pageant in *Between the Acts* is about the history of England, beginning when the island is a “child new born . . . Sprung from the sea” (71).

Some of Woolf’s imagery may be explained by the relationship between Greek mythology and Lacanian stages. According to classical myth, Gaea was the first, the goddess of the earth. She was the mother of Uranos, Cronos, and all the other gods. She is therefore the equivalent of the Imaginary, and so is analogous to the earth, including the seas, in Woolf’s writings. The earth part of her represents the sexually creative aspect of the mother goddess. It is both womb and grave, the mother’s body. The water represents female intellectual creativity. It is transformative, the engendering chora, the Imaginary. It is also (because it is the mind) symbolic of the unconscious, and therefore the dwelling place of the repressed / lost mother. The earth is the

grave of men, and of men's rusting swords, but the sea is a place of rebirth. It represents female independence, unlike the earth, which represents the mother within relationships.

As I have already suggested above, Woolf tends to figure the separation from the mother as rape. Like later feminist critics, and indeed like Freud, Woolf saw development as crisis-initiated rather than incremental, a sudden shift from one stage to the next rather than a continuum, with the shift always being impelled by a crisis. For Lacan, however, this shift (which he termed the mirror stage) occurs when the child first perceives herself in a mirror, first objectifies herself and is thereby separated from her mother. This crisis phase, which begins by changing the unity of child and world into a dyad (mother - child), ends with the Oedipal crisis, which changes the dyad into a triad (mother - father - child). Woolf's works are full of lost mothers, but whereas for Lacan it is the Law of the Father, the prohibition against incest and the introduction into symbolic language that rips us out of our mother's wombs and into the (male) adult world, for Woolf it is the father's phallus.

Like Lacan, Woolf often associates this crisis with mirrors, which are not symbols for her, as they are for Lacan, of differentiation, but of rape and death, and with the notion of the gaze (a kind of visual rape, as we shall see). For Woolf, mirrors are inextricably connected with both rape and with the death of the mother,<sup>2</sup> and this connection is common throughout her work. Eugenie, in *The Years*, buys a mirror for her bedroom the day Parnell dies in 1891, and Rose remembers seeing it in Maggie and Sally's apartment in 1910, the day the king dies (125, 126, 134). In *Jacob's Room*, Jacob's mother, represented by her letter locked within a "pale blue envelope," is

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<sup>2</sup> There was a mirror in the hall where Woolf's brother Gerald Duckworth molested her as a child, as well as in the room where her mother died, and these mirrors figure largely in Woolf's memories of both these events (Davies 76).

abandoned on the hall table “under the lamp” while Jacob and Florinda “shut the bedroom door behind them” through which Jacob later emerges “beautifully healthy, like a baby” while Florinda is “arranging her hair at the looking-glass” (99). Jacob’s first sexual experience is here described as a birth. In this early work, it is clearly sex, associated with a mirror, which separates the son from the mother and by which he is reborn into the next stage.

In later works, mirrors become more explicitly fragmenting (as, for example, in “The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection” [*CSF* 215-19] or the ending of Miss LaTrobe’s pageant in *Between The Acts*), and images of rape more predominant, along with images of castration, the child’s desire to remove the father as rival and retain the mother for himself. Think of James, angry at the way his father has stolen his mother’s attention from him, leaving him “impotent, ridiculous, sitting on the floor grasping a pair of scissors” (*TTL* 173); Clarissa opening her scissors when Peter criticizes her (*MD* 61); Rezia, taken away from her mother and sisters by her husband Septimus who then refuses to give her the child she craves, wielding her scissors (*MD* 134-5); and the pocket knife which Peter is “always opening . . . when he got excited” (*MD* 285).

Although in Woolf’s novels the crisis often involves the separation from the mother (or mother figure) by the father (or father figure), Woolf describes each crisis as a violation. The scene in *To The Lighthouse* when Mr. Ramsay interrupts Mrs Ramsay reading a story to James, for example, is clearly a rape of the mother, into whose “delicious fecundity . . . the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass” while the young son James, who “hated him for interrupting them,” stands “stiff between her knees” (38-9). There is a similar Oedipal scene in *Mrs. Dalloway* when Peter Walsh interrupts Sally and Clarissa’s kiss, and Clarissa exclaims “Oh

this horror!” (53). This links the act with Giles Oliver’s vision of himself as “manacled to a rock . . . and forced passively to behold indescribable horror” (*BTA* 55) which, as we shall see later, is the leviathan that devours Andromeda, a rape image. So for Woolf, the crisis is Oedipal, it involves the father coming between the mother and child, but it is also a rape of the mother, which is perhaps a symbolic appropriation of her and murder of her.

Woolf presents two versions of origins, the male and the female. The male version is an evolutionary one; our male ancestors are represented by the prehistoric monsters Lucy Swithin reads about in her *Outline of History*: “elephant-bodied, seal-necked, heaving, surging, slowly writhing, and, she supposed, barking monsters; the iguanodon, the mammoth, and the mastodon; from whom presumably, she thought, jerking the window open, we descend” (*BTA* 8). Mr. Ramsay, Mr. Carmichael and Mr. Bankes are all in the library, in Cam’s memory, discussing Christ, Napoleon, and a mammoth dug up in a London street (*TTL* 175), three good, patriarchal topics: a patriarchal religion, war and imperialism, and the masculine line of descent.

These monsters reappear as sea monsters. Mr. Ramsay reminds his wife “of the great sea lion at the zoo, tumbling backwards after swallowing his fish and wallowing off” (*TTL* 34); and Mr. Carmichael is a “bulk” which floats (*TTL* 143), “puffing and blowing like some sea monster” (177), and basks “like a creature gorged with existence” (165). (Woolf implies that it is Lily’s thoughts and memories with which he is gorged.) There is a “sluggish, sloping-shouldered fish” who “floated up from the depths” of a pond at Versailles to eat Jinny Carslake’s crumbs (*JR* 137), and Lucy goes to the pond to feed bread crumbs to “the great carp himself” (*BTA* 184). She initially identifies the carp and the other two fish as “Ourselves,” (184) but soon corrects herself: “It was always ‘my brother . . . my brother’ who rose from the depths of her lily pool” (186);

despite her acceptance of the masculine narrative (Woolf shows women who “think back through their fathers” as well as those who “think back through their mothers”), she recognizes that these versions of ancestors are purely masculine.

What is the significance of all of these water-borne monsters? This may be made clear by examining another of Woolf’s common subtexts. In *Between the Acts*, Giles feels “manacled to a rock . . . and forced passively to behold indescribable horror” (55). Mitchell Leaska assumes this is an allusion to Prometheus, but admits that “[w]hat is puzzling here is that readers cannot be sure what ‘indescribable horror’ Giles will ‘be forced to behold passively’” (*Pointz Hall* 210). The solution is that this is not (or not only) an allusion to Prometheus, but to Andromeda, chained to a rock as a sacrifice, and the horror she beholds is the approaching Kraken, the sea serpent who is to devour her. This myth is referred to again in *Jacob’s Room*, where Clara Durrant is “a virgin chained to a rock” (132), and in *The Waves*, Bernard complains that painters don’t suffer the way writers do: “They are not like poets -- scapegoats; they are not chained to the rock” (134). The virgin devoured by the serpent is clearly a rape allegory. That Woolf is using these sea monsters as images of a raping phallus is made clear by the fact that they are always referred to as feeding off women (the fish which Mr. Ramsay as sea lion eats are symbols of female creativity and female language, as I will discuss later), and by the fact that Woolf remembered her own experience of being molested in terms of such a monster. (Woolf records in “A Sketch of the Past” that “she saw ‘a horrible face -- the face of an animal[’] looking over her own shoulder into the mirror,” and in the *To The Lighthouse* holograph Woolf writes “and the snout broke the mirror” [Davies 95-6].) Clarissa Dalloway identifies these sea monsters with sexuality: “‘In love!’ she said. That he at his age should be sucked under in his little bow-tie by that monster!”

(*MD* 67). They may pretend to be fathers and gods, our primitive originals, but they are imposters hiding in the female waters, and their effect on both men and women is destructive.

This crisis propels the child into the third, and for Lacan and company, final, stage: the Symbolic Order, the Law of the Father. It is the father's prohibition against incest and the introduction of language (a patriarchal construct, according to feminist psychoanalytic theorists) which complete the severing of child from mother, creating a sense of loss, of absence, which we eternally try to fill. In Woolf, this stage is represented by books, light, and cities. In Woolf's version of the story, rather than the father's body being dismembered and thrown into the sea, the mother is repressed into the unconscious, which is the chora, the sea, and the father's body (specifically his phallus) rules under the Law of the Father, the symbolic stage.

But Woolf presents a new ending to the story, changing it from tragedy to comedy, from loss to re-creation. She imagines the possibility of recovering the lost mother, of reuniting with her, and of transforming the father into a benign, androgynous entity. In Woolf's version of the story, although the world begins with an original Mother and Father, it is not the Mother who engineers the Father's death, but the Father who engineers the Mother's. Woolf, however, gives us an alternate playing out of this story (perhaps a utopian one): her works are full of references to the British custom of dropping a pin (which, as we shall see, represent the father's phallus) into a wishing well in order to make a wish (thus symbolically reenacting the murder of Uranos, and implying that it is necessary to sacrifice the Father in order to obtain the world one would wish for), and images of men who, like the flounder in "The Fisherman's Wife," voluntarily take the Mother's story upon themselves, immersing themselves, as fish, in the chora. These two subtexts, *Pin Well* and "The Fisherman's Wife," thus offer an alternative pattern to the Law of the Father,

and a route to an androgynous future, Woolf's fourth stage, in which male and female are unified, rather than dismembered and dispersed as in the original myth.

Chapter One will examine this first alternative to patriarchy, the sacrifice of the father, by tracing the influence of the Pin Well legend in Woolf's work. Her novels are filled with references to women losing pins or, in effect, disposing of pins (occasionally hairpins or needles, but most frequently brooches), almost invariably in water. These pins are allusions to the British custom of dropping a pin, rather than a penny as we do in North America, into a well to make a wish. There is a Pin Well in Chepstow into which one drops a pin (after saying an *Ave* — it is a holy well) to test the healing power of its waters. There is also a spring in Fenton, Northumberland named Pin Well (it is also called Wishing Well) into which country girls dropped pins to propitiate the fairy who lived there, and another Pin Well in Lewes (now closed) (Leaska, *Pointz Hall*, 218). In Woolf, these pins become symbolic phalluses, the body of the father.

Chapter One will explore not only the phallic pins, but also the related notion of the gaze. In opposition to the gaze, Woolf sets out coverings, and we will briefly examine the significance of shoes and stockings in her work. Also in opposition to pins Woolf has pearls, which represent matrilineage and the power to resist male authority. I am particularly interested in the story of Minta's brooch, which she loses in *To The Lighthouse*, because it combines the notion of lost pins with the symbolism of pearls. Chapter One will therefore examine both the lost mother and the sacrificed father.

Chapter Two will explore the second alternative to patriarchy, the father who voluntarily abdicates his position of power, by examining the significance of the fairy tale "The Fisherman and His Wife," focusing on the way Woolf uses it to explore the relationship between male power and

female creativity, and linking it with the character of Mr. Carmichael in *To The Lighthouse*. This story is replayed in several versions in *To The Lighthouse*: the story Mrs. Ramsay reads James, the earwig in Mr. Ramsay's milk, the minnows in Nancy's rock pool, the mackerel Mr. Ramsay catches, and the evolution of Mr. Carmichael from drowned (and dreaming) leviathan to sea god. The sea is a complex symbol in Woolf, representing not only both womb and grave, but also that other womb, the dangerous chaotic world of the Imaginary, and the realm of the subconscious, in which, perhaps, the Imaginary still exists and so can be reclaimed. The lost pins of Chapter One seem to have become the baited hooks in these stories with which to fish up the next stages from the depths.

Chapter Three will look at a third alternative to patriarchy, the union of the father and the mother, by examining Woolf's marginal characters, particularly Mrs. McNab, the washerwoman who rescues the Ramsay's house in the central section of *To The Lighthouse*. Woolf's marginal characters have been largely overlooked by critics, but in a writer such as Woolf who insists on the importance of margins and silences -- on the gaps between meaning, the troughs between the waves, the dark spaces between the lighthouse beams -- one would surely expect to find meaning in the margins. In fact, all of Woolf's works conform to a pattern of reversal. She seems actively engaged in locating the centre within the margins, where we are apt to find women, servants, and homosexuals. I find the roles of Mrs. McNab and Mr. Carmichael particularly intriguing -- one has to wonder at the function of a character who sleeps through almost the entire novel, as Mr. Carmichael does, speaking only three times for a total of thirty-three words -- but the critics brush him off as merely representing the importance of patience and silence. (Stevie Davies, for example, says that he is not open to interpretation: As "a reader of books who cannot himself be

read" [131], he provides a gap or pause which, as the title of *Between the Acts* suggests, represents "the meaning that can be attributed to silence . . . the revised location of meaning" [132].) Mrs. McNab she dismisses as "a comic embodiment of . . . Hope" (125). Hermione Lee goes so far as to complain, "It's unfortunate that Virginia Woolf is so distant from her working class characters that she describes them as half-witted troglodytes" (171). I disagree. Such a judgment gives Woolf less than her due as a craftswoman: her servants (most of them women, and a surprising number of them cleaning ladies) who are "witless" and who give voice to song, and to incoherent sounds, rather than language, are purposeful. They represent the lost Mother, the ancient mother goddess, and the mother we all lose as the *Non du Père* separates us from our mother and impels us into the Symbolic Order. The mother may be lost, but (despite the wealth of dead mothers in Woolf) the eternal mother is not dead. She lives on in the many old women in Woolf, often wordless and witless, sometimes ghostly and immaterial, but still guardian of the ancient song that preceded male language. In *Between the Acts*, Bart wonders, "Thoughts without words. . . . Can that be?" (50). The answer, for Woolf, is yes: there was no need of words in the original matriarchal song. It is through these characters that Woolf reworks the basic elements of the Symbolic Order into a new pattern, a pattern of unity and wholeness (servants with masters, female with male, absence with presence) which, for Woolf, constitutes Utopia.

Although Elizabeth Abel sees *To The Lighthouse* as being in some ways about the necessity of sacrificing the mother (as James does when he gives up thinking about her in that last boat trip to the lighthouse so that the becalmed boat can move on again) (Abel 46) -- a version of the Iphigenia story -- I disagree. I see this trip to the lighthouse not as a journey of which Woolf approves. Rather, this is a journey into death for Mr. Ramsay, and for the two children who

adopt his values: Cam, who spends much of her childhood standing in the library silently “watching her father write, so equally, so neatly” (175) and who now, remembering, abandons her resentment towards him and thinks only “he was most lovable, he was most wise” (175); and James, who must give up remembering his mother when he becomes conscious of “his father following his thought, shadowing it, making it shiver and falter” so that “At last he ceased to think” (173) and instead of feeling that his mother “alone spoke the truth” (173) he becomes so pleased when his father finally speaks the words of praise he has been wanting to hear that, with Cam, “they both rose to follow him” (191). The way Mr. Ramsay leaps out of the boat (a kind of Charon’s ferry boat) “as if he were saying, ‘There is no God,’ . . . as if he were leaping into space, . . . lightly like a young man, . . . on to the rock” (190-91) makes clear that this is symbolically a death (taking the ferry across the Styx to the land of the dead, regaining lost youth, discovering whether or not there is a God, meeting St. Peter, the “rock” upon which Christ promised to build His church), and it is a very male death -- it is, in fact, the patriarchy, the Symbolic Order, represented by the phallic lighthouse. Perhaps Abel is partly right: James cannot bring his mother with him into this male world -- but his abandonment of her means not her death, but (symbolically) his own.

But the world left behind, where Lily is painting, suddenly springs into life. Mr. Carmichael awakes and in a kind of apotheosis arises and blesses Lily, who is suddenly able to complete her painting. And this is not a male world. The island is shaped like female genitalia, “with a dent in the middle and two sharp crags . . . very small; shaped something like a leaf stood on end . . . with the gold sprinkled waters flowing in and about it” (174-5). Lily is female and Mr. Carmichael, possibly homosexual from the beginning, is now (as we shall discuss more fully in

Chapter 3) androgynous. This ending is not about the sacrifice of the mother but the recovery of the mother, and the resulting brave new world, for to Woolf, this hope of recovering the mother meant the hope of recovering unity, not only for individuals, but also for society.

## Chapter 1

### Minta's Brooch

'Dispersed are we,' she murmured. And held her cup out to be filled. She took it. 'Let me turn away', she murmured, turning, 'from the array' -- she looked desolately round her -- 'of china faces, glazed and hard. Down the ride, that leads under the nut tree and the may tree, away, till I come to the wishing well, where the washerwoman's little boy --' she dropped sugar, two lumps, into her tea, 'dropped a pin. He got his horse, so they say. But what wish should I drop into the well?' She looked around. She could not see the man in grey, the gentleman farmer; nor anyone known to her. 'That the waters should cover me', she added, 'of the wishing well.'

The noise of china and chatter drowned her murmur. 'Sugar for you?' they were saying. 'Just a spot of milk? And you?' 'Tea without milk or sugar. That's the way I like it.' 'A bit too strong? Let me add water.'

'That's what I wished,' Isa added, 'when I dropped my pin. Water. Water . . .'

*(Between the Acts 93)*

In this passage from *Between The Acts*, Isa, during the intermission of Miss La Trobe's play, goes to the barn to drink tea with the rest of the audience. She enters, still repeating the refrain from Miss La Trobe's gramophone, "Dispersed are we" (93), and imagines herself, like the little boy in the story she recalls, dropping a pin into the wishing well to make a wish.

Woolf has many pins, often lost. These pins come to signify the male gaze, control of women, patriarchal tradition, and memory. Pearls, however, signify feminine resistance to the male gaze and power as well as feminine tradition. These significations converge in the important *To The Lighthouse* narrative of Minta's brooch. Moreover, they help us recognize how Cam's experience interacts with Lily's at the end of the novel.

The text that gives us the strongest clue to what pins represent to Woolf is her short story "Slater's Pins Have No Points." In this story, Fanny Wilmot drops her pin on the floor and her

rose (which the pin has been holding in place) falls, too. The flower (which is a rose in the first paragraph, but a carnation by the eighth) represents Fanny herself who is twice described as being “like the flower” (*CSF* 211), and the pin clearly represents a man, for just as the pin holds the flower safely in place, so (says Julia Craye) “It’s the use of men, surely, to protect us” (211). Fanny wonders, “What need had she [the lesbian Julia] of pins?” (209), and Julia’s comment that pins “have no point” is a comment on the pointlessness of men. The pin is clearly phallic, and pointless, to Julia, in more ways than one, being both impotent and unnecessary.

Leaska claims that pins represent paedophilia to Woolf, on the grounds that Woolf was familiar with the fact that Lewis Carroll used to use safety pins to pin up little girls’ skirts so they could go wading at Eastbourne (Leaska, *Pointz Hall*, 218). There is some justification for this belief: in *The Years*, in 1880, Milly uses a hairpin to fray the wick to make the flame burn hotter and the kettle boil faster (9) on the night that her little sister Rose encounters a flasher (and the same night her mother dies -- as with mirrors, sex and the death of the mother are inextricably bound together for Woolf). Then, in 1908, Eleanor (Milly’s sister) again uses a pin to fray the wick, and when Rose comes in and sees her doing this, she is reminded of this night, commenting that children lead awful lives, “And they can’t tell anyone” (171), a reference to the unmentionable sexual experience. That night, too, she tries to slit her wrists with a knife (16, 170), a larger pin, a phallus with the potential to bring death; later, at Maggie’s, the memory of the pin makes her feel she wants to tell her cousins “something about herself that she had never told anybody -- something hidden” (179). So in this case, the pin is associated with paedophilia, but I think Leaska misses too many other mentions of pins when the reference is clearly not so narrow, but is phallic, as in the Slater’s Pins story.

That pins are consistently phallic in Woolf is clear, and they come to encompass all the meanings which for Woolf are associated with patriarchy. There are Betty Flanders' innumerable lost darning needles, which are associated with the rusty (and therefore also pointless and useless) swords buried in the Roman camp/ grave, images of male dominance and violence (*JR* 141-2). There is the tie pin which is swallowed by Masham, a man who "is mentioned in Domesday Book" and will probably be "Lord Chancellor before he's fifty" (*JR* 54), and who, by swallowing the pin, has internalized the Law of the Father. The phallic pin is not only sexual and warlike, but also associated with *le Non du Père*, with propriety and the patriarchal structure as symbolized (for Woolf, as we shall see) by clothing. So Jacob, who is naked as he recounts this tale of Masham swallowing his tie pin, and Timmy Durant, whose "buttons had come off," are sure that Masham "would rather not be seen in [their] company as [they] are now" (53). Removing or loosening their clothing is symbolic of their rejection of the male law which Masham personifies.

Luce Irigaray claims that women privilege touch over sight (*Moi* 143), and men's obsession with shoes and stockings and, to a lesser extent, carpets in Woolf's novels may be explained by their unconscious determination to prevent women from touching Mother Earth. Abel (156) sees the brown stocking Mrs. Ramsay knits as female textuality, in the tradition of Arachne (a figure of the female writer), but I disagree. Shoes and stockings are signs of *le Non du Père*, the prohibition against touching the mother, the social conventions designed by men to keep both men and women in their rigid roles and perhaps to keep women, particularly, away from the source of their strength. The Law of the Father tries to prevent us from coming into contact with the mother's body, the earth, lest, like Antaeus, we should draw strength from her.

William Bankes admires Lily's sensible shoes (they "allowed the toes their natural

expansion" [TTL 22]), worries about all the shoes and stockings the children (but especially the boys) must go through (25) and, out of place and uncomfortable at the dinner party, feels "rigid and barren, like a pair of boots that has been soaked and gone dry so that you can hardly force your feet into them. Yet he must force his feet into them. He must make himself talk" (84). His imaginary boots are indicative of language (his need to talk) as well as social duty.

One result of the mirror stage, like the Fall in the Garden of Eden, is that man feels a need for coverings; he seeks fig leaves: shoes, stockings, words. Mr. Ramsay counts boots "among the chief curses of mankind" (TTL 144), like Adam and Eve's fig leaves, but he is always eager to talk about them, even interrupting his wife when she begins discussing dairy reform over dinner to change the subject to boots, a rebuke to her that in entering the sphere of science and politics she has stepped outside her proper role, and an attempt to re-appropriate language as a male domain (96). Even the stocking which Mrs. Ramsay is knitting is her idea of an appropriate gift from Lady Bountiful to a sick child; it is both her vision of their social relationship and her acceptance of the role she herself is required to fulfill, her belief that in staying within such roles she is protected from the harsh realities of life, just as her shawl hides the horned pig's skull, that phallus of death, in the bedroom, from Cam. (It is associated with the sheep's skull which Jacob discovers when he stumbles over the couple making love on the beach [JR 10]. This incident connects animal skulls with sex as well as death in Woolf.) The foot coverings are a symbol of men's attempts to tame what is female, but Mrs. Ramsay accepts these restrictive roles, telling herself she is not good enough to tie her husband's shoe strings (TTL 34) and even going so far as to create them for other people (the stocking she is knitting, the marriage she arranges).

According to Marina Warner, the Jerusalem Bible (Isaiah 6:2) identifies feet with genitals

(as when the seraphim in Isaiah's vision use two wings to cover their feet) (Warner 113). This would make it even more understandable why Woolf's male characters are so obsessed with feet coverings, given the Father's prohibition against sexual contact with the Mother. This is why Sir Hugh Whitbread, who writes letters to *The Times* appealing to the public to "stamp out immorality in parks," pauses to examine the socks and shoes in a shop window (*MD* 156), and Clarissa cannot believe that he kissed Sally, because "Hugh didn't do such things! . . . Hugh's socks were without exception the most beautiful she had ever seen" (*MD* 288-9). It is why Mr. Ramsay "would talk by the hour about his boots" (*TTL* 96) and shows Lily the system he has developed for tying knots so they never come undone (143) -- and why Lily paints as a way of "untying the knot in imagination" (147); why Peter unlaces his boots as he realizes that his marriage to the conventional Clarissa would have been a mistake, and pulls them off altogether when he contemplates marrying the divorced Daisy (*BTA* 236, 238); why Andrew and Nancy put their shoes and stockings on and pull the laces "rather tight" in outrage over Paul and Minta kissing behind a rock (*TTL* 72); and why the guests leaving Miss La Trobe's pageant murmur, "Were the oracles, if I'm not being irreverent, a foretaste of our own religion? Which is what? . . . Crepe soles? That's so sensible . . . They last much longer and protect the feet" (*BTA* 178). Shoes cover the temporal body, both male and female, and also prevent its contact with the mythic, eternal body of Gaea (both our origin and our grave.) Shoes and stockings represent male-dictated social roles, the language which clothes our bodies as words clothe our thoughts, and, like language and traditional roles, they are restrictive, and interfere with our ability to make contact with the earth, our source of life.

Actually, shoes are not only the Word of the Father, but also the Body of the Father, the

phallus which is the embodiment of the Father's will. This is why Woolf comments on how the Cambridge dons pass by in their gowns, "as though nothing dense and corporeal were within . . . although great boots march under the gowns" (*JR* 34), and why, on Jacob's death, his mother is left with the problem of what to do with Jacob's old shoes (*JR* 189), obviously a version of the corpse. Bloody shoes symbolize the castrated and bloody corpse of the father, as when Giles, after killing the snake (which represents the homosexual William Dodge who calls himself "a . . . little snake in the grass" [*BTA* 67]) walks into the barn with blood on his shoes (*BTA* 89), or Miss La Trobe, fearing her play has been a failure, feels that "Blood seemed to pour from her shoes" (*BTA* 161): she is at once the outcast who has been crushed, and the engineer of her own destruction, the crusher. Her bloody shoes are images both of her own body, her own metaphorical death, and of the castration of the original Father, a defiance of the patriarchy which she (homosexual like William Dodge) represents.

Paired with this male fascination with social coverings is a passion for keeping them in place. As we have seen, Mr. Ramsay has invented a new way of tying shoe laces so that they never come undone (*TTL* 144), but he goes further and makes Lily practise tying her laces three times. William Bankes is mortally offended by the hole in Minta's stocking, seeing in it "the annihilation of womanhood, and dirt and disorder, and servants leaving and beds not made at mid-day -- all the things he most abhorred" (*TTL* 160). And, it turns out, he has reason to fear, for Minta, whom Mrs. Ramsay remembers as always having a hole in her stocking (*TTL* 56), does break out of her restrictive marriage, and in the scene in which Lily imagines the break, there is a hole in the carpet (analogous to the hole in her stocking).

Although many of Woolf's female characters (such as Miss Julia Hodge, the feminist, who

leaves her laces untied [*JR* 114]) resist this male control, others are complicit in this attempt by men to control access to the Mother (Mrs. Ramsay knitting her stocking, for example, or leaning on “this admirable fabric of the masculine intelligence . . . like iron girders” [*TTL* 98]). Betty Flanders is another woman who supports the Law of the Father. She has been thinking about how difficult it is for a woman to manage alone without a man, “and the wind rising, she took out her bonnet-pin, looked at the sea, and stuck it in afresh” (*JR* 11). She thus chooses, at this moment, the male over the female, for she looks at the sea, and keeps her hatpin, using it to keep her covering, her bonnet, on. In this case, the bonnet-pin functions much like Mr. Ramsay’s shoe laces -- as a representative of the male authority, and she chooses to keep it firmly in place.

Another form of male control of women, and one which women find much more difficult to resist (wearing a hole in your stocking or going barefoot is not that difficult) is the notion of the gaze, which for Freud is a means of control. Freud saw it as phallic, and linked it to the anal desire for sadistic mastery, because the object being viewed is passive (Moi 134). For example, when William Bankes looks at Lily’s picture, she feels “it had been taken from her. This man had shared with her something profoundly intimate” (*TTL* 53) -- again, Woolf sets up men’s gaze as rape. This is why Minta, down on the beach, starts a chorus of “Damn your eyes, damn your eyes” (*TTL* 71), almost as a female response to Mr. Ramsay’s “Damn you” (he is cursing his wife for questioning his assertion that they will not be able to go to the lighthouse tomorrow) (*TTL* 34), just as she wears stockings with holes in them -- damning men’s eyes, rebelling against the power of their gaze.

Men’s eyes are very different from women’s eyes in Woolf. Men look with fierce blue eyes -- and every one of the men in *To The Lighthouse* has blue eyes: James (9), Mr. Ramsay

(20), William Bankes (51), Charles Tansley (80), Paul Rayley (93) -- blue, the colour of the sky (the men look up; the women don't), the colour of the past (as Lily "dipped into the blue paint, she dipped too into the past there" [160]) and the colour of the surface of the water as it reflects, like a mirror, the sky.

Women's eyes are never described in *To The Lighthouse* except for Mrs. Ramsay's, which begin as grey (17), but are later imagined by William Bankes (wishing to see her as admirable and therefore masculine) as blue (32), and Lily's, which are repeatedly described as "Chinese." Her eyes are foreign just as her way of seeing the world is foreign to those around her ("struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage, to say: But this is what I see; this is what I see"[23]).

In Woolf's other works, the same pattern obtains. Jacob's eyes are blue (*JR* 32), and so are Colonel Pargiter's (*TY* 11). Mr. Robson (Nelly's father) has "keen and fierce . . . rather alarming blue eyes" (*TY* 73), and Giles Oliver also has blue eyes (*BTA* 43). The only men with eyes of other colours are outsiders -- foreigners, rebels, or madmen. Rene, Maggie's French husband, and his friend Nicholas Pomjalovsky both have "dark eyes" (*TY* 256, 302), and both men have abandoned the patriarchal religion: Rene believes that "Science is the religion of the future" (*TY* 257) and Nicholas does not believe we can "make religions, laws, that . . . fit" (*TY* 303). Eleanor's nephew North who has "just come back from Africa" and who ponders Nicholas's words, is "brown-eyed" (*TY* 329-30), and Septimus Smith, who is insane, has hazel eyes (*MD* 20).

Women, on the other hand, most often have eyes which are described without reference to colour (Fanny's are "beautiful" [*JR* 125]; Sally Seton is "large-eyed" [*MD* 48]; old Miss Parry has "prominent eyes" [*MD* 93]; Elizabeth Dalloway, like Lily, has "Chinese eyes" [*MD* 186, 204];

Eugenie has “large dark eyes” that are “ambiguous” [*TY* 136]). Often, they are associated with nature (Doris Kilman has “large gooseberry-coloured eyes” [*MD* 189], and Mrs. Haines, the wife of the gentleman farmer, has “goose-like eyes” [*BTA* 3]). When they are given a colour, they are usually something other than blue (Isa has “glass green eyes” [*BTA* 95]; Kitty Malone’s tutor, Miss Craddock, has “owl-like . . . fine grey eyes” [*TY* 67-8] and Kitty’s friend Nelly has “large grey eyes” [*TY* 71]). When they *are* blue, it is because the woman in question has been trapped within the male order, such as Clara Durrant, the “virgin chained to a rock” who is “blue eyed, looking you straight in the face” (*JR* 132), a very male way of looking, and Crosby, Eleanor’s maid, of whom Martin says, “I’m Crosby’s God” (*TY* 160, 248). Kitty’s eyes only “turned blue with passion” (*TY* 432) (so they must actually be some other colour), and Lucy Swithin’s change colour when talking to the homosexual William Dodge, “as if the wind [later described as “the eyeless wind” (*BTA* 139)] had warmed the wintry blue in her eyes to amber” (*BTA* 67).

We are told, however, how women use their eyes. Whereas men fix their gaze straight ahead and seem able to see things in the distance, women’s eyes are vague, blurred, or short-sighted and they gaze down or sideways. Men look directly, women look indirectly. (Perhaps this is one way for women to avoid being trapped by the men’s gaze.) Mr. Oliver thinks Mrs. Swithin would have been clever “had she fixed her gaze” (*BTA* 22); the ancestress in the painting “looked at nobody” (*BTA* 42); Mrs. Ramsay has “short-sighted eyes” (*TTL* 33); Lily can only really see “with the dim eyes” (*TTL* 52); and Mrs. McNab’s “eyes fell on nothing directly, but with a sidelong glance” (*TTL* 121) which “slipped and turned aside even from her own face” in the mirror (122).

On the other hand, Jacob Flanders “fixed his eyes” (*JR* 32), and William Bankes, looking

“at the far sandhills,” thinks of Mr. Ramsay “striding along a road by himself” (*TTL* 24), an image of both distance and linearity. Mr. Ramsay looks “straight at” Lily (*TTL* 138), and Mr. Evan Williams “kept his eyes fixed upon the window. . . . But Sandra’s eyes wandered” (*JR* 152-3). Mr. Ramsay has “long-sighted eyes” (*TTL* 190) that can see right back from the boat to the cottage, but Cam’s eyes are “vague” (*TTL* 156) and “It was all a blur to her” (190). Clarissa’s poor cousin, Ellie Henderson, has “weak eyesight” (*MD* 257), and Mrs. Ramsay is short-sighted and loses innumerable pairs of spectacles each summer (*TTL* 159) (the implication is that she sees more accurately without them), while Lily’s eyes as she considers her painting are “full of a hot liquid (she did not think of tears at first) which . . . made the air thick” (*TTL* 166). These tears, which are miniature oceans, blur her vision so that she cannot even see her painting for a moment, but when she looks again, she sees it clear “for a second,” just long enough to draw the central line which completes it (192). The air, thick with sea water/ tears, blurs her sight and makes it possible for her to have her vision.

Nor do the women direct their gaze straight ahead like the men do. Lily keeps “looking down, purposely, for only so could she keep steady, staying with the Ramsays. Directly one looked up and saw them, what she called ‘being in love’ flooded them. They became part of that unreal . . . universe which is the world seen through the eyes of love” (*TTL* 47). If she looks directly up, she loses her ability to see reality. Mrs. McNab’s “eyes fell on nothing directly, but with a sidelong glance . . . she was witless, she knew it” (*TTL* 121); her ability to see (and she is able to see the past through an imaginary telescope [127, 130]) depends upon her not looking directly and not depending on her wits, her conscious mind. The power of the visionary is to know through other means than the senses. Therefore Lily is able to “see” Mr. Ramsay landing

at the lighthouse without really seeing it (*TTL* 191) and Mr. Carmichael (Lily imagines) hears and understands her while he is asleep and without her speaking: “A curious notion came to her that he did after all hear the things she could not say” (*TTL* 166) and he “seemed (though they had not said a word all this time) to share her thoughts” (179).

Except for Mr. Carmichael (a significant exception, as we shall see in Chapter 2) it is only women who are able to see in this visionary way. It is not that women do not value seeing; in fact, they value true sight so much that when the flowers that grow around the house during the ten year interim in *To The Lighthouse* are judged to be “looking before them, looking up [both male ways of looking], yet beholding nothing, eyeless, and thus terrible” (126), Mrs. McNab comes along in the very next sentence like the Grim Reaper and picks a bunch of them. It is just that they value a certain way of seeing. When her opera glasses break the artistic experience for Kitty, showing her “Siegfried’s fat brown arms glistening with paint” and shiny face (*TY* 198), she puts them down again and leans back. That is not the kind of truth she is looking for. Lily reduces the reality of Mrs. Ramsay and James to a purple triangle. When Mr. Ramsay insists that Cam try to see their house on the shore, but she is not able to look in the right direction, her father is astonished that she does not know the points of the compass. But compass points and directionality (on a surface plane) are linear, two-dimensional, and although Woolf’s men see things in terms of singularity, linearity -- if you move to male, you must abandon / replace female -- the chora, the Imaginary, the realm of the mother, holds all things in unity.

Women see the complexity of life, whereas Mr. Ramsay insists on the knowability of truth. Men’s thought, like their eyesight, tends to be linear, fixed upon a single goal. Lily says of Mr. Ramsay that he “kept always his eyes fixed upon it [the kitchen table], never allowed himself to be

distracted or deluded" (*TTL* 146), and Woolf tells us that he sees thought as a straight line, like a piano keyboard (35), or the letters of the alphabet through which one progresses serially (35-8). But Mr. Ramsay cannot get as far as R, which is the letter of his own name. He cannot even comprehend or realize himself, he sticks at Q (perhaps Q for "question," the questions which the fisherman asks of the flounder and Lily asks of Mr. Carmichael, but which Mr. Ramsay does not ask of anyone.) But women, says Mr. Ramsay, "could not keep anything clearly fixed in their minds" (156). What Mr. Ramsay voices as a criticism, however, Woolf sees as a virtue, for it is by this lack of rigidity, this fluidity, that women see more of reality than men. The novel (and its women) recognizes that there is no pattern, no "learning by heart of the ways of the world," no "guide, no shelter" (167), but only "that half heard melody, that intermittent music which the ear half catches but lets fall . . . irregular . . . never fully harmonized" (131).

This is the song of the earth itself, and women, who blur their eyes and look tangentially, may hear it. It is the song of Mrs. McNab, which loses its meaning as she translates it, the language of the lighthouse beams, the language of the waves with their crests and hollows, a language which is intermittent, composed of light and dark, sound and silence, presence and absence.

Men seek language to clothe the nakedness of their thoughts, but language and its syntax are linear and therefore inadequate to express women's reality, which is three-dimensional, and perhaps even four-dimensional, since they seem to move in and out of time (Lily dipping her brush into the past, Mrs. McNab recreating the past in her memories, Mrs. Ramsay coming to sit for Lily again in part III.) If women are moving along the fourth dimension of time, their vision would be understandably blurred. Woolf's narrative style is quintessentially female by these

definitions: it is not single-minded (has no clear end in view), and it presents the reader with a blur of impressions.

Women are associated with darkness, space, silence: non-linear and non-temporal.

Women, in *To The Lighthouse*, tend then to reject language: Mrs. Ramsay is “silent always” (31), thinks (Lily says) that silence is “more expressive” (160), and finally triumphs because she refuses to say the words “I love you” (114) to her husband – she will only live them. Lily wonders how “to say not one thing, but everything” and realizes that “one could say nothing to nobody. The urgency of the moment always missed its mark. Words fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low. Then one gave it up; then the idea sunk back again” (165). Women seek vision instead.

Pins are thus connected not only with clothing but also language, all of them, in Woolf, symbols of male tradition. This tradition, for Woolf’s male characters, is often passed on in the form of books. Young boys are always given books: Reverend Floyd gives Jason the works of Byron (*JR* 23), Sandra Wentworth Williams lends him the stories of Tchekov (*JR* 154), and Bart Oliver’s mother gives him a copy of Byron (*JR* 4). This is not only because books represent male language (for women do write: Mrs. Ramsay her letters, Isa her poetry hidden in an accounts book), but because they represent this critical gaze / mirror. “Books are the mirrors of the soul,” as a visitor to the Olivers’ library exclaims (*BTA* 15), and the only times they are given to women is to control their sexuality, to reinforce the Law of the Father, as when Clarissa’s father, “who had begun to be attracted rather against his will” to Sally Seton, “lend[s] her one of his books” (and the unconventional and lesbian Sally leaves it on the terrace where it gets “soaked”) (*MD* 52). Mr. Ramsay gives a book to Minta, who flirts with him and pretends to be “even more

ignorant than she was, because he liked telling her she was a fool" (*TTL* 91-2). Her relationship with Mr. Ramsay has "that element of sex in it which made his manner to Minta so gallant" (159). Florinda, claiming that she is "chaste," leaves Jacob "with one of Shelley's poems beneath her arm" (*JR* 83), and Jacob lends books to Fanny. Although Fanny wants to buy herself a dress (to wear to a dance, a tool for attracting men), a sudden thought of Jacob causes her instead to walk away from the dress shop and buy herself *Tom Jones* (since Jacob has told her that Fielding is the only novelist she should read) (131). Later, however, when they are sitting together and Jacob's thoughts turn to Clara, "Fanny laid down *Tom Jones*. She stitched or knitted. . . . For the dance at the Slade" (132). Her former lover, Bramham, paints her "holding in her hand a yellow novel" (123), and even Mrs. Ramsay is given books by the young men who have a romantic interest in her, "books that had been given her, and inscribed by the hand of the poet himself: 'For her whose wishes must be obeyed' . . . 'The happier Helen of our days'" (*TTL* 30). (Like Sally Seton, however, both Minta and Mrs. Ramsay manage to resist reading these books. Minta leaves "the third volume of *Middlemarch* in the train [*TTL* 91] and Mrs. Ramsay admits that "disgraceful to say, she had never read them" [*TTL* 30].)

Thus clothing and books become associated with male control, and therefore with pins, the father's phallus. As I have said, these pins -- needles, brooches, hairpins (as we shall see in Chapter 3) -- are often lost. There appears to be a distinction, however, between pins lost on land and those lost in water. Woolf's mother goddess, like Gaea, is the earth (Mother Earth), both womb and grave, the female body. The earth is associated with marriage (as when Lily imagines Mrs. Ramsay accepting Mr. Ramsay's proposal and stepping out of a boat: "Yes, she would marry him. And she stepped slowly, quietly on shore" [*TTL* 183]). This sexual creativity

tends to be deadly (Prue, for example, dies in childbirth [*TTL* 123]), just as the phallic pins buried in the earth in *Jacob's Room* become the rusty swords, images of decay and death. But Woolf's mother goddess has a second aspect, the sea, which is the chora, the Imaginary. In Woolf, the earth represents the mother's body, her fertility, her sexual creativity, but water represents her artistic creativity. Water is the place of female independence, and as we shall see, unlike earth, is a place of transformation and rebirth rather than death and decay.

Burying pins in the mother's body, however, (perhaps an image of the rape of the mother) does not seem to bring forth anything — they simply rust there, like bones in a grave. The Roman Camp in *Jacob's Room* is analogous to Lily's perception of Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* as a tomb of kings bearing sacred tablets. The earth is the womb of the mother, both a place of historical origins (ancient Rome, ancient Egypt) —but male origins (a tomb of kings, a Roman soldier's camp) — and of linguistic origins (those sacred tablets are the Law of the Father). Perhaps that is why there is no fertility there, no regeneration. Betty Flanders has lost innumerable darning needles on the hilltop, which is a Roman camp or a grave (Mrs. Flanders is not certain which.) The lost needles are therefore associated with her dead husband, and with Jacob, whom she will also lose to death, and to war, at the end of the novel. Men's bones are not transformed. Like the pig's skull in Cam and James' room (*TTL* 105), like the ram's skull carved over the bedroom door where Jacob first has sex with Florinda (*JR* 75, 99), like the sheep's skull Jacob finds on the beach when he has a primal experience, observing the couple making love on the beach (*JR* 10), they represent sex and death, both fates contained within the phallus which is the Law of the Father. But when this phallus is lost on land, the result for women is not freedom, but vulnerability: Betty Flanders, now widowed, lives in poverty, and Fanny Wilmot's flower

(which, as we have seen, is a symbol for herself) falls to the floor, now lacking male protection.

But whereas losing pins on land is equivalent to rape and results in hardship for women, dropping them into water, as in the Pin Well custom, is equivalent to throwing the dismembered corpse of Uranos into the seas, and specifically, throwing his phallus into the sea, as in the Isis myth, which Woolf also made use of (Isa's name, for example, in *Between The Acts*, is an allusion to Isis). This sacrifice of the father results in greater freedom for women and perhaps even the possibility of the return of the mother. When Jacob enters her railway carriage, for example, the old lady who is sitting there (a mother goddess figure) fears rape, for "it is a fact that men are dangerous" (*JR* 32), but in the end her memory of him is "completely lost in her mind, as the crooked pin dropped by a child into the wishing-well twirls in the water and disappears forever" (33). So the threatening phallus is thrown into the sea and thus rendered harmless; in fact, it disappears entirely and the mother is free to go her way.

\* \* \* \* \*

The most significant lost pin in Woolf's novels is Minta's brooch. The day she becomes engaged to Paul Rayley (in fact, only moments after she first kisses him) and therefore willingly enters into the male Symbolic Order, the Law of the Father, she loses her grandmother's brooch, "a weeping willow . . . set in pearls" (*TTL* 73), on the beach. The brooch is clearly a female artifact, not only because she has inherited it from her grandmother, but also because it depicts a tree, which throughout Woolf's works is associated with women. Lily, sitting at Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party and thinking about her painting, thinks that at least she "need not marry, thank Heaven: she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution. She would move the tree rather more to the middle" (*TTL* 95). Mrs. Ramsay is "like a tree which has been

tossing and quivering" (*TTL* 109), and many of Woolf's female characters wear green: Clarissa's favourite green dress (*MD* 58), Miss Kilman's green mackintosh (*MD* 57), Mrs. Ramsay's green shawl (*TTL* 63) -- even Minta's name is associated with green (like mint).

But the most female aspect of the brooch is the pearls it contains, which are associated with the mother goddess, the sea world of the mother, and the ability to transform or resist male authority. Men's gaze equals the Law of the Father, but women seem to have a protection against men's eyes. Just as pearls are the oyster's means of transforming something dangerous into something benign, so in Woolf pearls represent the transformation of the male gaze into something harmless, or at least a female power to resist the male gaze. Like Shakespeare's "Those are pearls that were his eyes," (*The Tempest* I ii 398) which is recalled by Cam's underwater world of pearls, these pearls used to be men's eyes, and the power men had over women. Minta loses her pearl (which is also associated with Christ's "pearl of great price" [Matthew 13:46], a symbol of spiritual integrity), because she gives herself to a man. Earlier, still armed with her grandmother's pearls, she had the power to chant (in fact, to lead Nancy, Paul and Andrew into chanting with her) "Damn your eyes" (*TTL* 71), but when she voluntarily enters the Law of the Father, she immediately loses her grandmother's female power, (significantly, on the beach, the margin of the sea, which will soon cover and reclaim the brooch) and can only weep that "she would rather have lost anything but that" and shriek that they "shall be cut off" by the sea, by the incoming tide (73). Nancy senses that Minta "wasn't crying only for that. She was crying for something else. We might all sit down and cry, she felt. But she did not know what for" (73).

What Minta is crying for is her lost (grand)mother. As we have seen, Woolf's mirrors

seem to prefigure Lacan's mirror stage: they objectify the self, while at the same time separating the self from the mother. They also, however, (and here is where Woolf goes beyond Lacan) fragment the self, because, as I pointed out in the Introduction, for Woolf, the mirror stage is linked with sex, particularly rape. In Woolf's short story "The Lady in the Looking Glass" a long mirror hangs, significantly, outside the room which represents the Imaginary, the unconscious ("full of . . . things that never happen . . . if someone is looking . . . . And there were obscure flushes and darkenings too, as if a cuttlefish had suddenly suffused the air with purple; and the room had its passions . . . like a human being" [*CSF*: 215].) This mirror is right next to the Imaginary, because the mirror stage immediately follows the Imaginary for Woolf as for Lacan, and the mirror fragments the self, for Isabella Tyson (the woman in the story) "had vanished, sliced off by the gilt rim of the looking-glass" (216). It is also clearly associated with rape, for "[s]uddenly these reflections were ended violently . . . . A large black form loomed in the looking-glass; blotted out everything, strewed the table with a packet of marble tablets . . . . One realised at last that they were merely letters. The man had brought the post" (217).

Here we see, in the mirror, a rape (the form reflected in the mirror recalls Woolf's own experience of molestation, as we saw in the Introduction), and it is a rape of the female mind (for "[h]er mind was like her room" [*CSF* 219]) by the Law of the Father, symbolic language, as if it were the ten commandments; this new Symbolic is quickly integrated into the mind of the individual, for these letters are at first "crude and unabsorbed," but soon "drawn in and arranged and composed and made part of the picture and granted that stillness and immortality which the looking-glass conferred . . . as if it would have needed a chisel to dislodge them from the table" (217). These are the same tablets Lily senses Mrs. Ramsay, that upholder of the patriarchy, has

internalized, when “she imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of the woman . . . were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions” (*TTL* 50).

Obviously, the result of seeing oneself in the mirror, of the male gaze (and Woolf calls mirrors “those mirrors, the minds of men” [*TTL* 122]), is fragmentation of self, particularly separation of head from body. In *The Waves*, for example, Jinny hates “the small looking glass on the stairs” because “it cuts off our heads,” so she goes up the stairs (and we have seen in *Between The Acts* how this is equivalent to moving back to an earlier period in history) to “where the long glass hangs and I see myself entire” (34-5). Decapitation is a frequent image in Woolf, as when Orlando is slicing at the Moor’s head hanging from his rafter (*Orlando* 13), or Sally Seton, whose “ancestor had been with Marie Antoinette, had his head cut off, left a ruby ring” (*MD* 48). (We’ll discuss the ruby ring later.) Sally herself decapitates flowers, “cut their heads off, and made them swim on the top of water in bowls” (50).

The end result of the gaze, the mirror stage, is another kind of separation, separation from the mother, the Oedipal crisis. This is shown in the passage already quoted in the Introduction, from *Between the Acts*, where Lucy Swithin takes William Dodge up to her mother’s bedroom. There, he sees Lucy “reflected in the glass. Cut off from their bodies, their eyes smiled, their bodiless eyes, at their eyes in the glass. Then she slipped off the bed” (65). The Oedipal prohibition in this passage is clear: once Lucy sees herself in the mirror, she must leave the mother’s bed.

Young men’s legacies are books, as we have seen, but what mothers pass on to daughters are pearls. The Olivers’ adopted ancestress in the portrait wears “a great head-dress slung with pearls” (*BTA* 6), and her non-biological descendant Lucy Swithin also wears pearls (*BTA* 25).

Even the daughter of Mrs. Levy, the washerwoman in *The Years* (who is the spiritual descendant of that other washerwoman, Mrs. McNab, the mother goddess), wears “pearls as big as hen’s eggs” (30). Julia Craye, the lesbian in “Slater’s Pins Have No Points,” wears “water-coloured rings set in pearls” (*CSF*: 211).

It may be that pearls represent purely female origins – like the solitary Oliver ancestress (no known husband, a solo ancestress). This is why they are proof against the male gaze: the mother goddess was complete in herself, and predates (and therefore is not subject to) the Law of the Father. They are connected with female independence, with women’s self-sufficiency (the lesbian Julia Craye has no need of a man) and perhaps, even more specifically, with women’s virginity. For Minta, losing her brooch is like losing her virginity. After all, the pearls are white, the colour of purity, the bridal colour, and she loses hers at the moment of her engagement and her first kiss, symbolic of the wedding night to come. And Lily, when she is frightened by her own pull towards sexual experiences in daydreaming about Paul Rayley, wishes to immerse herself in the safe world of water and recover her own pearl. Thinking about being “in love,” and visualizing a red and gold fire issuing from Paul Rayley (which is obviously orgasmic, sexual, male, and also dangerous), Lily has a sudden “desire to throw herself off the cliff and be drowned looking for a pearl brooch on a beach” (*TTL* 163). Lily’s attitude towards sexuality is ambivalent: this fire “repelled her with fear and disgust . . . But for a sight, for a glory it surpassed everything in her experience” (163). What is clear, however, is that water and pearls provide protection from it.

Pearls may also represent the female mind, since they come from the sea (which, as I have already said, and as I shall discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, is the mother’s mind, her

intellectual/ artistic creativity, whereas the earth is her body) as opposed to books, which are the symbol of the repository of male intelligence and of male intellectual lineage. (The homosexual Bonamy, for example, “never read a foolish book” (*JR* 149). Note the ambiguity: are all books perhaps foolish to one who is not truly masculine?)

Abel asserts that in Woolf, art “is the female child’s enduring legacy” (75). We have already seen how pearls represent female lineage, so pearls may indeed be connected with art, which is also, for Woolf, what allows us to recapture the Imaginary. Lily says that every time she begins to paint, she has “a few moments of nakedness when she seemed like an unborn soul” (*TTL* 148), and while she is painting, she can hold in unity both the past (Mrs. Ramsay sitting on the doorstep) and the present (Mr. Ramsay sailing to the lighthouse) (186), a condition which she describes as being immersed in water (for when she is interrupted, “she had come to the surface, and found herself half out of the picture” [165]).

That, once transformed into pearls, men’s gaze no longer has the power to control women is demonstrated by the kind of women who wear pearls: the ancestress in the Olivers’ portrait is not actually related by blood to the Oliver family -- they have adopted her because they liked the painting and like to have it hanging in their house (*BTA* 33). As such, she is a non-biological mother, a mystical ancestress, the mother-goddess who is the archetypal lost mother of the world. Lucy Swithin is also described as “some majestic goddess” (*BTA* 67), and although she reads the books of male generation, male lineage, male descent, male origins, she guides the homosexual Dodge, as we have seen, upstairs to the true “cradle of our race,” her mother’s nursery (66). Mrs. Levy’s daughter is probably Jewish and therefore marginalized and outside of the male world, as well as the daughter of a washerwoman, who I will argue in Chapter 3 is Woolf’s most

common image of the mother goddess as she survives within the male world. Julia Craye is a lesbian, and therefore has demonstrated the power to resist male-defined roles.

Betty Flanders also loses a brooch, but this loss is different from Minta's in significant ways. First of all, it is a garnet, not a pearl brooch. Secondly, this brooch was given her by her son Jacob, not inherited from a female ancestor. For both of these reasons, it is linked with the patriarchy rather than the lost mother. In fact, it appears to be specifically linked to the mirror stage, which for Woolf, as we have seen, is associated with both sex and death. Garnets come from the land, not the sea, and they are the colour of blood (like the reddish-brown stocking Mrs. Ramsay knits [*TTL* 10] and the ruby ring Sally Seton inherits from her male ancestor, the one who lost his head in the French Revolution [*MD* 58]). They are like the rubies and emeralds that Ralph Manresa dug out of the earth (*BTA* 181). If we see the earth as the body of the mother, then this is also a kind of rape, an appropriation of her body. These red jewels represent the blood of rape and of lost virginity. They come from men, having first been taken from women (Mother Earth). Like the earth itself (from which they come), they are associated with both sexuality and death, womb and tomb. It appears that Betty Flanders' brooch represents women's ties to men, or men's hold over women, and it is associated with death. This is what Jacob has given to his mother, and what she has lost.

The third major difference is that Betty Flanders loses her garnet brooch on land, not in water, on land which is a man-made grave, holding the skeletons and rusted swords which are the leftovers of man's wars. She had taken Mr. Parker up onto Dods Hill, a Roman ruin, to show him the view, "and it must have dropped" (*JR* 142). The lost garnet brooch is equated with bones (*JR* 142, 143) (and jewels are the bones of the earth, which men have raped from the earth, as

Ralph Manresa did), and so are her darning needles, for “[t]he Roman skeletons are in safe keeping. Betty Flanders’s darning needles are safe too and her garnet brooch” (143). The garnet brooch is thus linked with phallic needles, not with pearls and with Minta’s pearl brooch. Both brooches share a connection with pins (“pin” is a synonym for brooch, after all), but the brooch with pearls (the whole, unsullied, self-sufficient woman) is returned to the sea, the female mind, where it can be imaginatively transformed, and the brooch with garnets is returned to the earth, the female body, where it simply decays, like the rusty swords and the Roman skeletons.

The garnet brooch is associated with the lost father, as the pearl brooch is associated with the lost mother. Just as Woolf sees sex as being the initiator into the Symbolic Order, so loss of virginity / garnets tie women to men. But self-sufficiency / virginity / pearls resist men and ensure that women retain their female independence and power. If a woman escapes or resists sexual union with men, then she does not fall under the power of their gaze. Indeed, she rather gains power over them -- specifically over their eyes. The adopted ancestress who wears pearls in the Olivers’ painting “led the eye up, down, . . . into silence” (*BTA* 33), and Minta’s lost brooch draws Paul to go looking for it, in a sense controlling his eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

Just as *To The Lighthouse* “maintains that there may be perception without language” (Davies 63), so it upholds Plato (whom Woolf was reading in 1908, 1920, 1923, and 1924 [Davies 68]) and the notion that non-representational (pure idea) is closer to the truth. The mirror stage, like the gaze, fixes things, much as Mr. Ramsay wants to fix truth. The male is engaged in clearly defining reality, and for him reality is construed as the relationship between the active and the passive, the subject and the object -- corresponding to Freud’s notion of the gaze.

As Davies points out, Mr. Ramsay writes about “subject and object and the nature of reality” (Davies 68) which his son Andrew visualizes as “a kitchen table . . . when you’re not there” (*TTL* 26). This parallels Mrs. Ramsay’s surprise that old friends can still live and change when she hasn’t even thought about them (*TTL* 83). (Mrs. Ramsay has adopted, as we have seen her do with her knitting, the male point of view: she thinks the gaze of the subject is necessary for the object to exist in reality.)

The female point of view is that the gaze clouds true reality. The Imaginary is not only unified, but also fluid. This is why women do not fix their eyes, but shift their gaze, and why Lily paints the idea of Mrs. Ramsay, not a representational image of her, and feels that she thereby is closer to representing the truth.

Davies sees pearls as “intimat[ing] recovery of an incorruptible version of the father” (9), but pearls are clearly linked to women’s lineage and women’s power. There is the passage in which Lily and William Bankes walk down to the break in the hedge, surrounded by red-hot pokers, and feel an almost orgasmic release as they watch “wave after wave shedding again and again smoothly a film of mother-of-pearl” (*TTL* 23-4) which clearly associates pearls with the mother, and with something that both men and women long for. Appropriately then, the lesbian Julia Craye’s pearl rings are “water-coloured” (*CSF* 211). They are connected to the “lovely old sea-green brooches” Clarissa admires (*MD* 6) and to her “favourite dress” (58), “a silver-green mermaid’s dress” (264). Cam, becalmed in the boat on her way to the lighthouse, imagines an underwater world “where the pearls stuck in clusters to white sprays” and she is “half transparent” (*TTL* 169). Clearly, this pearl imagery is connected to the world of water (where pearls are born, after all), to the chora, to ghosts, and therefore to the lost mother.

Cam, as she imagines the pearls beneath the water, has just watched as Macalister's boy, who is in the boat with them, tugs his hook out of the gills of another fish (the hook is a phallic pin, and fish, as we shall discuss in Chapter 2, are female symbols) while a mackerel lies "kicking on the floor with blood on its gills" (158) (and we have seen how blood is associated with sex for Woolf). He cuts a square of flesh out of the side of one of the fish, throwing the "mutilated body (it was alive still) . . . back into the sea" (167). Cam witnesses this symbolic rape of the mother and wishes to escape to a female world, represented at first by the island they have left (which is female: shaped like female genitalia, as we saw in the Introduction, and associated with the prelapsarian "garden where there was none of this gloom . . . There was an old woman . . . all was blowing, all was growing . . . that happy world" [TTL 171-2]), where, she thinks, "They don't feel a thing" (169), and she lets her mind wander into the green water world, that other female world, where it is "numbed and shrouded" (169). After she does this, her pain over her father and brother's behaviour "all had slipped, all had passed, all had streamed away" and instead "From her hand, ice cold, held deep in the sea, there spurted up a fountain of joy at the change, at the escape" (174).

But although it is this passage which Davies takes as evidence that pearls represent the immortal, incorruptible father, the reality is that it is at this point in the novel that the boat stops, becalmed, while James remembers his *mother* speaking to a servant, and how his mother "alone spoke the truth" (169), and he remembers Mrs. McNab, the "old woman gossiping in the kitchen" (171), while the *boat* "seemed to . . . sleep" (173). Cam's vision of the pearls is her perception of the truth that the mother is not lost; the pearls are gathering in the waters of the unconscious mind and *can* be recovered. It is Cam's conjuring of the pearls, the *mother's* incorruptible body,

that allows James to remember both his mother and Mrs. McNab, both his own mother and the one who evokes, in the novel, the mother of us all, the ancient mother goddess. Cam's invocation of the pearls also stops the boat's progress, prevents it for the time being from carrying the father, and the two children who (except for this momentary aberration, which delays them) have chosen to think back through their father, to the phallic lighthouse. But James senses that his father is "following his thought, shadowing it, making it shiver and falter" until "At last he ceased to think" (173), that is, to remember his mother. At this point, the boat moves off, and his father raises his hand, and lets it fall "as if he were conducting some secret symphony," which he is -- he is controlling James' thoughts and repressing the dead mother again.

## Chapter 2

### The Enchanted Fish

In Woolf, as we have seen, the phallic pins are often used to keep women or metonymies of them in their places (like Fanny Wilmot's flowers or Betty Flanders' bonnet). But pins have a second function in Woolf: sometimes they become hooks to attract and capture the woman (often represented as a fish) in the first place. Isa, for example, fell in love with Giles when they met each other while fishing. She abandoned her own line to watch him, and then "the salmon had leapt, had been caught, and she had loved him" (*BTA* 44). Obviously, the implication is that Giles has caught Isa herself. Similarly, Lady Bradshaw, the doctor's wife in *Mrs. Dalloway*, "long ago . . . had caught salmon freely," but now is trapped in a marriage that is "the slow sinking, water-logged, of her will into his" (152), and Clarissa's cook (likely a mother goddess figure, like so many of Woolf's kitchen workers) worries that "the salmon was always underdone" (*MD* 251-2), just like Clarissa herself, who has underlived her life, whose soul is underdone. Fish appear to represent the inner self (Peter Walsh speaks of "our soul . . . our self, who fish-like inhabits deep seas" [*MD* 244]), and particularly the independent female self. Just as pearls are associated with women's untouched bodies, and perhaps also the bones of the mother, so fish come to represent women's untouched minds.

So fish are often associated with women, but the symbol tends to deepen into, more specifically, female thought (fish represent thoughts, arising from the very female sea, the female mind), female language, and female creativity. Woolf herself referred to ideas as tadpoles (in a September 1924 letter to Roger Fry, quoted by Abel 18) and speaks of words as things that are created to fit "this wave . . . as it breaks and tumbles in the mind" (Lee 173). Bernard says in *The*

*Waves*, “Whatever sentence I extract whole and entire from this cauldron is only a string of six little fish that let themselves be caught” (220). Mr. Carmichael in *To The Lighthouse* sits dreaming on the lawn “catching words” (159). Fish are also connected with leaves. The “fish-shaped leaves” of the pear tree (*TTL* 26) are related to the geranium leaves which Mr. Ramsay imagines as “scraps of paper on which one scribbles notes” (*TTL* 43) and also (of course) to the leaves of a book. In *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf writes that the “words we seek hang close to the tree” (101), and in *To The Lighthouse*, the “autumn trees . . . take on the flash of tattered flags kindling in the gloom of cool cathedral caves where gold letters on marble pages describe death in battle” [119].

Fish are sole / soul, Christ (a female Christ?) and therefore the Word – but as long as they remain in the sea, the fluid chora, they are *female* words, which are likely to be unintelligible (as the songs of so many of Woolf’s old women are). Just as men insist on covering the body with clothing, so they cover thought with language, but Lucy Swithin in *Between The Acts* insists, “We haven’t the words – we haven’t the words. . . . Behind the eyes; not on the lips.” “Thoughts without words,” her brother Bart muses, “Can that be?” (50), but Woolf implies that such female “words” are closer to true ideas than language is, just as Lily’s non-representational art approaches the Platonic ideal more closely than representational art.

Men use their hooks (phalluses, laws) to hook in the female fish and this is a kind of rape, taking the female words, and bringing them into the realm of the male Symbolic Order. It is the appropriation of female language. In *Between The Acts*, Isa, thinking how the gentleman farmer’s words “could so attach themselves to a certain spot in her; and thus lie between them like a wire” (13), obviously imagines another version of the hook, the phallus of language, and herself

as the caught fish, humming, “Flying, rushing through the ambient, incandescent, summer silent . . .” She stops herself before she can say the final word -- “The rhyme was ‘air’” -- an act of resisting being captured and landed by fisherman’s hook by resisting language. Instead, she immediately picks up the phone and orders fish, murmuring to herself, “There to lose what binds us here,” to escape the hook (14).

The mackerel incident which we examined in Chapter 1 suggests a rape. Lily, who represents female art and independence, becomes closely linked with the mackerel. She feels the pain of the knife in her side as the boy slices away a piece of the fish to use as bait. That this penetration of the fish’s body by the phallic knife signifies a form of rape is reinforced by the very similar episode in *Between The Acts* where Lucy recalls her emotional anguish (a parallel to Lily’s) at being “made to take the fish off the hook herself” by her brother Bart (who, Leaska has convincingly argued, is her sexual partner, her “brother-husband” [*Pointz Hall* 203, 204, 231-3, 246, 442].) “The blood had shocked her -- ‘Oh!’ she had cried -- for the gills were full of blood” (19). Obviously, the penetration of a fish by a knife or a hook is like Minta losing her pearl brooch: it evokes loss of virginity, of female integrity and independence.

Yet just as we saw women sacrificing pins in Chapter 1, so it is possible for women to throw these hooks into the chora and thus escape them. The former cook at the Olivers’ in *Between The Acts* used to leave hairpins in the soup, and their discovery once upset Bart -- very much the patriarch of that family (31). The soup is the symbolic sea, and the hairpin dropped by the female cook represents the sacrifice of, and loosing of female self from, the ruling phallus. Because of these hairpins in the soup, the family hires a new cook, Trixie Sands (whose very name suggests the ocean floor, a mother goddess figure, although the name Trixie appears to

relate her also to trickster figures like Coyote) who never leaves hairpins in the soup (31). This is because the act of throwing a pin into water represents the sacrifice of the father in an attempt to redeem the mother, and once this has been successful there is no further need to make these sacrifices of the phallus.

Even when men succeed in hooking the female fish, however, Woolf implies that it does not bring them happiness, as when Jacob falls in love with Sandra Wentworth-Williams and decides to go to Athens without her and her husband, but “with his hook dragging in his side” (*JR* 157). Here, the phallus has become sexual desire, for in Athens “the hook gave a great tug in his side as he lay in his bed . . . remembering Sandra Wentworth-Williams with whom he was in love” (160). Note that it is referred to as *his* hook -- not Sandra’s. Despite the fact that it appears that she has hooked him, it is his hook, his phallus, that is causing him pain. Clearly Woolf is implying that the phallus, *le Non du Père*, seems to cause pain to men as well as to women.

Why are there so many men who fish in Woolf’s writings? The pins of Chapter 1 have become baited hooks, with which male characters seek to catch the lost mother, who, if she has been repressed to the unconscious, can perhaps be recovered. These are man’s attempts to reverse the mirror stage and to reclaim the Imaginary, which has become the unconscious, with all its (female) power.

The water world comes to represent, among other things, female art. Jean Shinoda Bolen sees Aphrodite as representing creativity (in a broader sense than sexuality and reproduction), especially the creativity of artists and writers (233, 241). According to the Greek myths, Aphrodite was born of the blood of the Father where it flecked the sea foam after his phallus was thrown into the sea, and in Woolf’s myth it appears that perhaps it is indeed necessary to sacrifice

the father, in the form of all those lost pins, before art, particularly female art, can be born and thrive. Woolf's portrayal of male art is, as we shall see, linear and sterile, because it is phallic.

Since men's art has become so far separated from its female roots, how do men relate to female art and female power? How do they behave when they encounter them? In most cases, men respond by either appropriating or crippling them, as Macalister's boy does to the mackerel, as Charles Tansley does by telling Lily, "Women can't paint, women can't write" (*TTL* 48). Some, however, are willing to give up power by sacrificing themselves, entering the chora, both to search for versions of the original ancestor (the male version, as we shall see, is the sea monster; the female version is the pearl) and to reinstate themselves in union with the mother, going beyond sacrifice to transformation.

Woolf in *To The Lighthouse* uses one fish story in particular to explore male responses to female art and power. The story and imagery of "The Fisherman's Wife" permeate Woolf's work, and particularly *To The Lighthouse*. Woolf offers us patterns of male responses in her variations on this story which Mrs. Ramsay is telling James throughout much of part I and which, says Mrs. Ramsay, is "like the bass gently accompanying a tune, which now and then ran up unexpectedly into the melody" (55). In the Grimm fairy tale, a poor fisherman (an image of the artist who, like Lily balancing on her imaginary narrow plank over the sea, must draw meaning out of the sea to shape into art [160]) catches a flounder, who tells him that he is really an enchanted prince and asks to be let go. The fisherman, because the flounder can speak (and complaining that in fact he talks too much) releases him, and the flounder sinks back to the bottom of the sea leaving a streak of blood in the water behind him. When the fisherman's wife hears that her husband has let the fish go without asking for anything in return, she sends him to the shore to call the flounder back

and ask him for a nice cottage instead of the hovel they currently live in. The flounder grants the wife's wish, but she is still not satisfied, and over the course of the next several weeks sends her reluctant husband to the shore to ask first for a castle, then to be made king (after her husband refuses to ask it for himself), then emperor, then pope. Each time, the flounder grants the wife's wish, but each time, the sea turns a darker colour, going from clear to green and yellow, to purple, to dark grey and ill-smelling, to black and thick, and then to dangerously tempestuous. When at last the wife asks to be given power over the sun and moon, effectively to become a god, the storm becomes so destructive that it tears down houses and trees, and the flounder not only refuses the request but returns the couple to their former state, living in their old hovel.

We all still long for the unity and wholeness which we experienced in the Imaginary, and the versions of "The Fisherman's Wife" which appear in Woolf's work are symbolic of man's attempts to recreate this experience, to return to the Imaginary. Mr. Carmichael becomes the central figure in this sub-text, for he is intimately connected with the flounder, the man who immerses himself in the female chora and thereby transforms himself into Woolf's androgynous ideal. Like the washerwoman's little boy in the legend, the one who Isa says threw a pin into the well and got a horse (*BTA* 93) (a symbol of men who seek reunion with the mother, like the nameless rider who, hearing the waves, throws himself onto his horse and gallops off to the sea [*BTA* 26, 94]), Mr. Carmichael symbolically throws himself into the sea in order to seek this union with the lost mother.

According to Warner, fairy tales, being usually "old wives' tales" told by women to women, are usually about the lack of power women experience and the ways in which they can gain more power, or escape from their fathers' or husbands' oppression. They "reflect women's

predicaments and stratagems from their point of view” (Warner 345). In this particular tale, the wife, who on the surface appears to be greedy and grasping, can be read as a woman who has never had any power. When the fisherman goes back to call the flounder, he asks that the flounder return precisely because his wife “wills not as I’d have her will” [*TTL* 55], and the flounder’s response is to give the wife her own will, give her power, although the end result is to teach her that this was a mistake. The storyteller resembles a kind of Fate, “spinning possible versions of the future” (Warner 15-16). In this case, the flounder himself may be this Fate, offering different versions of the future to the fisherman and his wife.

Warner further suggests that if women were “free to express their own desires . . . this would spell the end of male authority in the household” (169). Women who do speak are often depicted as ugly hags in fairy tales, she says (44) while “father figures tend to be excused responsibility” largely because these women’s stories have been recorded and revised by men (207). Thus, although we are invited to scorn this wife as a greedy, grasping woman (like the Biblical Eve, another example of a dangerously ambitious woman) and pity the hen-pecked husband, the underlying story is also one of a woman who resists male authority and seeks to speak her desires freely, as well as the story of a prince who willingly takes on the female shape of a fish, female not only in Woolf’s own private system of images, but also in traditional fairy tales. When illustrating “Beauty and the Beast,” for example, Warner reports that although male illustrators typically portray the Beast with “phallic protuberances on face and limbs,” female illustrators often made him look “fishy . . . less-than-masculine, a clammy, flaccid manifestation” (300).

It would seem, then, that women identify fish with the flaccid, impotent phallus (one is

reminded of Shakespeare's use of "poor john" -- limp, old fish -- as a metaphor for an impotent penis in *Romeo and Juliet* I i 35), so the prince's agreeing to become a fish is especially significant, in terms of what he has given up: the Law of the Father, the phallus itself, his power and potency over women. Such a fish is probably the safest form for a man to take in entering the womb-like environment of the sea / chora if he wishes to make it clear that his presence is not intended as an assault.

Because he has willingly given up the power of the Father, the flounder is a Christ figure. Davies (101) suggests that fish in Woolf represent the sacrificed Christ on the grounds that the fish was a symbol of early Christianity. I think that for Woolf the image of fish encompasses a good deal more than that, as we have seen, but this may be one aspect of the flounder: like Christ, he is the Word (he talks, after all) who is willing to take on alien flesh, and -- like the pins dropped in water -- he is a symbol for sacrifice and atonement. In that narrative, the phallus, which is the Law of the Father and particularly his language, dies, returns to the Imaginary / unconscious, and is reborn in order to truly be workable.

More significantly, the flounder may also be a version of the lost mother. Warner identifies a significant character in fairy tales as the "animal helper, who embodies the dead mother in providing for her orphaned child" (204). In the oldest version of "Cinderella" (a Chinese version) it is a magic fish who gives Cinderella all she desires. Perhaps this tale is related to that tradition. If the flounder is, in fact, a version of the dead mother, then Mr. Carmichael's willingness to take on its form reinforces my contention that he represents the union of father (language) and mother (fish). Just as the prophet Jonah could not fulfill his function until he was swallowed by a whale, so it may be necessary for the father to submit to the same kind of union in

order for society to be transformed, to enter (as we shall see) the fourth phase which Woolf envisioned, androgyny.

The story of "The Fisherman and His Wife" is a story about the need to sacrifice the father in order to achieve wholeness, as in the Pin Well legend. (The fisherman, although he catches the flounder, is induced to throw him back, a form of sacrifice.) And Minta's lost brooch suggests the need to sacrifice the mother if one wants to partake in marriage, a patriarchal form of synthesis, of unity. All of these stories emphasize the necessity of sacrificing something to the depths, the unconscious, and of the power of the unconscious to transform and to enrich.

Not only does this fairy tale inform *To The Lighthouse*, there are echoes of it throughout Woolf's work: Sir William and Mrs. Bradshaw going salmon fishing in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Isa's memories of salmon fishing with Giles in *Between The Acts*, Lucy Swithin feeding the carp in *Between The Acts* (185), Ginny Carslake feeding the fish and nearly falling into the pond at Versailles (*JR* 137), and so on. Perhaps the most telling is the young Jacob's finding a miniature pool with a fish and a crab in it on top of a large rock. He has just captured the crab and put it in his bucket when he sees on the other side of the pool a primal moment, a sex scene in which he sees "stretched entirely rigid, side by side, their faces very red, an enormous man and woman" (*JR* 9-10). He goes crying back to his Black Nanny, but the sight of a skull distracts him and he runs off to get it.

This is a re-enactment of the young boy's growth from the chora (the pool) through the Oedipal crisis (the sex scene) into the Symbolic Order (the skull). Jacob himself is associated with the crab, who keeps trying to climb out of the bucket, but whose legs, like those of a child, are too weak (*JR* 15). Thus the child (signified by the crab) is forcibly removed from the mother (the

fish, as we have seen) and the prohibition is reinforced by his first frightening encounter with sex. According to Freud, the mother eventually becomes castrating, and sex and death become one. This possibility of castration may be what terrifies Jacob so much. Similarly, the fact that, as we have seen in Chapter 1, skulls and bones, like pins, are associated with the phallus explains why Jacob stops crying as soon as he sees the skull: it reassures him that the phallus still exists. This pattern is echoed again in *To The Lighthouse* when Cam is frightened by the pig's skull, but James likes it and won't allow this symbolic phallus to be taken down, so Mrs. Ramsay covers it with her green shawl (green, the colour of the sea which purifies or transforms all things), thus turning it into a garden (a female space) and allowing Cam to sleep at last (105-6).

But the work that relies most heavily on this subtext is *To The Lighthouse*, which contains several versions of "The Fisherman and His Wife." There is, of course, the original fairy tale which Woolf quotes often throughout the first 60 pages of the novel. There are also the scenes in which Nancy discovers a pool full of minnows, Mr. Carmichael finds an earwig in his milk, and Mr. Carmichael asks for a second bowl of soup at the dinner party. There is the important episode in which Macalister's boy catches a mackerel, and there is the symbolic transformation of Mr. Carmichael himself. Through these variations on a theme, Woolf explores different patterns of response to female power and creativity. In all of them, the flounder / fish can be seen as the male, the father, who has immersed himself in the world / body of the mother. The flounder, then, may prefigure Woolf's ideal of androgyny -- male language which has taken on female form and immersed itself in the female world, which is the chora, the origin of everything, including male power. Thus, through the flounder story and its transformations, Woolf will exorcise the demons from the sources of male creativity and power.

\* \* \* \* \*

We first see Mrs. Ramsay attempting to read the tale of “The Fisherman and His Wife” to James as she is interrupted first by her husband demanding sympathy and then by Mr. Carmichael walking past. Mr. Carmichael becomes a “shadow . . . on the page” which reminds her “of the inadequacy of human relationships” so that “some demon in her” makes her call out to him and ask if he is going indoors (41). Thinking of Mr. Carmichael’s wife, she remembers how “that odious woman turn[ed] him out of the house” so that he comes to stay with the Ramsays at the seashore “every year as an escape” (41). The story of the fisherman and the memories of Mr. Carmichael begin to merge, for the passage she reads aloud, the first quoted in the novel, is “The man’s heart grew heavy . . . and he would not go. He said to himself, ‘It is not right,’ and yet he went. . . . And he stood there and said –” (43). These words lead Mrs. Ramsay into a meditation on language: the geranium leaves look like scraps of paper; she thinks how her husband reads *The Times*, discusses Shakespeare, gives speeches, and then goes to stand on the shore alone (like Mr. Carmichael, another version of the fisherman) (44). This in turn leads her into thinking of her husband as the father of their eight children, “as a stake driven into the bed of a channel upon which the gulls perch” (45), and again the narrative of “The Fisherman and His Wife” blurs into the narrative of her husband and children, for the next interruption is their daughter Cam rushing past. Mrs. Ramsay pauses to ask her if Minta and Paul have returned yet, hoping that they have become engaged to be married, and then reads aloud, “Next morning the wife awoke first . . . . Her husband was still stretching himself . . .” (54).

From this point, the real world and the world of the fairy tale become closely intertwined, and we move rapidly and easily from one to the other. Thinking of how shy Paul is and of how

she herself has had to engineer what she hopes will be his engagement, she reads the words of the wife: "Well . . . if you won't be King, I will" (55). She interrupts herself there to send Cam away, thinking that "she would fidget and fight with James as usual," and reads aloud the fisherman's complaint that his wife "Wills not as I'd have her will" (55). "Well, what does she want then?" asks the flounder, a question which causes Mrs. Ramsay to wonder what Minta wants, and whether she is going to accept Paul. She remembers too, indignantly, how she herself has sometimes been accused of "making people do what she wished" (56) so that she becomes associated with the fisherman's wife. Reading next, "and there were numbers of soldiers with kettle-drums and trumpets" (57), she imagines herself "brandishing her sword at life" to protect her children from its harsh realities (58). Wondering if she has been wrong, "if she had indeed put any pressure upon Minta," if the young couple truly has love enough for marriage, she reads, "Then he put on his trousers and ran away like a madman" (59) -- and we learn from Lily later that indeed Paul often leaves Minta alone and that the marriage turns out badly. But wishing to protect her son from the storms of life, she looks him in the eye and says, "And there they are living still at this very time. And that's the end" (59). Thus, the fairy tale functions as a catalyst for Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts, and also as a mirror of and comment on the lives of the characters in the novel.

Before I begin a detailed analysis of the Mr. Carmichael "Fisherman" tale, I want to look quickly at the other versions of the same story, and the attitudes towards female life which they portray. Of the six versions of this tale which appear in *To The Lighthouse*, three demonstrate negative responses to female power and creativity (represented by fish and their watery environment), and three show positive responses. In the three negative episodes (the original

fairy tale, the earwig episode, and the mackerel story) the main characters appropriate and reject the fish, often described by Woolf as undergoing rape or death. The fisherman originally rejects the flounder by throwing it back into the sea; then he and his wife appropriate its powers for themselves. Mr. Ramsay also rejects the tiny earwig (a miniature fish figure) he finds swimming in his milk: he throws both it and the milk out the window in a rage. And we have seen already how the cutting of a piece of flesh out of the mackerel is a symbolic rape, and how it is thrown back into the sea, bleeding (like the flounder in the original story).

In the three positive episodes (Nancy and the minnows, Mr. Carmichael and the soup, and the slow transformation of Mr. Carmichael himself that occurs throughout the novel), the main characters respond very differently to fish and water: they welcome them, enlarge them, and seek unity with them, either by entering into the water world in their imaginations, or by letting it enter them.

In the original fairy tale, the basic negative responses are divided between the husband and wife. (Gender, for Woolf, is a matter of position rather than genetics, and therefore the wife can display a masculine attitude just as Mr. Carmichael can display a feminine one). The husband rejects the flounder (he throws it back), and the wife not only appropriates its power, she misuses it — she wants to acquire the powers of wealth (her first wish is for material property), of imperialism (she wants to be king, and then emperor), and of religion (she wants to be Pope, and finally a kind of god herself), all of which Woolf would define as male domains, or goals. Thus the original story shows us failure to greet this new androgyny (signified, as we have seen, by the flounder) by both male and female: the male rejects it, and the female tries to use it to become male / masculine / one-sided and to reinforce the male Symbolic Order (even if she does install

herself at the head of it in place of the Father).

Although I have classified the fairy tale “The Fisherman and His Wife” with the negative episodes, the character of the flounder demonstrates positive qualities. In the original fairy tale, the flounder is an enchanted prince: clearly a god figure, the Father whose law rules the Symbolic Order, but one who has given up his own power (he is, after all, under a spell which someone else presumably put on him) and taken on a female form. Although the fisherman and his wife exhibit negative attitudes towards the flounder and all he stands for, the flounder himself characterizes a positive attitude: self-sacrifice, transformation, and unity with the mother and the chora. As a result, the flounder becomes linked with Mr. Carmichael, as we shall see.

In the first positive version, Nancy goes to the shore and finds some minnows in a pool. She stretches her hand over the minnow pool in a gesture of blessing and expands them in her imagination, the pool becoming the sea and the minnows becoming sharks and whales (72). Not only does she allow this Imaginary world to increase in size, but also in importance, letting it enter and subdue her, as, feeling all of it “sweeping savagely in,” she becomes “hypnotized . . . by the intensity of feelings which reduced her own body, her own life . . . to nothingness” (72). She, the female, reacts appropriately – the opposite reaction to the revealing male response of young Jacob, who, as we have seen, responds to his discovery of the tiny pool by capturing the crab and then running away from the pool: appropriation and rejection.

Mr. Ramsay’s attitude resembles Jacob’s in the episode in which he finds an earwig in his milk. Here again is another miniature version of the sea, complete with tiny “fish” (and the name earwig, containing the word “ear,” further represents oral language, like the flounder), but does Mr. Ramsay bless it, or increase it? No, his attitude is life-denying. He picks up the bowl of milk

(another female liquid) and hurls it through the window. Like the flounder, the earwig is out of place, in a female environment, and Mr. Ramsay's rage is understandable once we recognize the symbolic import of this tiny creature. Like the original fisherman, he rejects the possibility of union with the mother. Mr. Carmichael, on the other hand, seeks it.

Mr. Carmichael, in one of the only speeches he ever makes in the book, asks the maid, "Ellen, please, another plate of soup" (89). There are no fish in this sea, but he is, like Nancy, welcoming and expanding the world of the chora. The soup is the amnion, the watery female world of the Imaginary, and Mr. Carmichael, by swallowing it, incorporates it, seeks a union with it. Furthermore, he increases it, not only by asking for more, but also by looking at the centerpiece while he drinks his soup, making Mrs. Ramsay think "of the bottom of the sea, of Neptune's banquet" which suddenly "seemed possessed of great size and depth, was like a world" (90). This is the world he himself will enter as the stages he goes through in his symbolic transformation take him, as we shall see, into the sea to become like the flounder himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

The mackerel episode in part III is another revision of "The Fisherman and His Wife." In this version, the fish, instead of being an enchanted prince, is a female; in fact, it comes to represent Lily. Woolf makes it clear that this fish is a parallel to Lily by her use of the human verb "kicking" to describe the fish (158) and by her juxtaposition of the fish's capture and mutilation with the scene of Lily's anguish. In chapter 4 of part III, "Macalister's boy had caught a mackerel and it lay kicking on the floor, with blood on its gills" (158). In chapter 5 (simultaneously, in the chronology of the novel) Lily finds that

Against her will she had come to the surface, and found herself half out of the

picture. looking, a little dazedly, as if at unreal things, at Mr. Carmichael . . . .

Could things thrust their hands up and grip one; could the blade cut; the fist grasp?

Was there no safety? . . . ‘Mrs. Ramsay!’ she said aloud, ‘Mrs. Ramsay!’ The tears ran down her face. (165-7)

The very next sentences (the entire content of chapter 6) are: “Macalister’s boy took one of the fish and cut a square out of its side to bait his hook with. The mutilated body (it was alive still) was thrown back into the sea.” Immediately after (chapter 7) we read: “‘Mrs. Ramsay!’ Lily cried, ‘Mrs. Ramsay!’ But nothing happened. The pain increased. . . . Heaven be praised, no one had heard her cry that ignominious cry, stop pain, stop! . . . No one had seen her step off her strip of board into the waters of annihilation” (167). Again, in this version of the fisherman narrative the men err grievously in dealing with the flounder (in this case a mackerel). They catch it and haul it into their boat, only to mutilate it by cutting a piece of its flesh out of its side, both a symbolic rape and a birth. The fish (which evokes Lily) penetrated by the hook, caught on the end of the taut line (one of the men’s linear symbols, here phallic) becomes part of another version of Mrs. Ramsay being attacked by Mr. Ramsay, “by the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of the male, which smote mercilessly” (39). It is a sexual act which culminates in a birth, the man reaching into the female body and drawing forth a portion of it (flesh of her flesh), a reenactment of the creation of Eve from a rib in Adam’s side. But instead of the birth of the female from the male, as in the Adamic story, this is intended to be the birth of male art from the female muse. Here are the fishermen, the male artists (as we have seen) in the act of creation, and what they are seeking is the mother goddess, the muse, from whom they hope to birth their male art, language. The book Mr. Ramsay is reading with its “shiny cover mottled like a plover’s egg” (175) comes to

signify that which has been taken in a forced “birth” from the mackerel. Thus the mackerel also comes to signify the lost mother, and the muse who is the source of all art.

This catching of the mackerel is not only the most emphatic attempt in the novel to retrieve the female muse, it is also an attempt to capture and control it, but although the males catch the fish-words they seek, they cannot do so without mutilating and perhaps destroying the very muse they seek. In Woolf’s world, then, men deal with female creative energy by either controlling or destroying it, taming or maiming it. How ought men to respond? The correct relationship is modelled in a final version of the “Fisherman” tale: the male must seek reunion with the female, a union that is not an appropriation of, and may even be subordination to, the female principle. Macalister’s boy kills the female sea-words he fishes up; Mr. Carmichael, as we shall see, seeks union with them. It is Mr. Carmichael who represents this ideal response.

The Mr. Carmichael transformation may be Woolf’s way of demonstrating a kind of reversal of evolution, of sending male language back to the female womb in order to be born again in a new form that will not be harmful to women, or that will include both male and female ways of thinking and communicating. This new language of androgyny is represented by Mr. Carmichael. He begins as a fisherman figure (whose wife, as we have seen, has banished him to the seashore, like the fisherman’s wife in the fairy tale), then becomes a flounder who won’t answer (he never responds to Mrs. Ramsay’s queries). By the end of the novel he has become a kind of enchanted prince with power to free Lily, a speaking flounder whose recorded utterances support female life (“Ellen, please, another plate of soup” [89] ) and announce the end of patriarchy (“They will have landed” [191]).

The movement of the novel is towards legitimizing language and creative energy (which

for Woolf, was dangerously close to madness), and finding a god -- or at least a father -- for the artist, if not for the world. Woolf does this by restoring the lost mother, legitimizing her language, and creating a new androgynous godhead. It is Mr. Carmichael who resolves all three issues, becoming god-father to Lily and simultaneously transforming madness into benign inspiration and reuniting male with female language. Through her novel, Woolf takes us back to our true roots, both male and female. Just as she uses the character of Mrs. McNab to signify the original mother goddess, so she uses Mr. Carmichael to conjure up an alternate Adam, our original male ancestor. Carmichael functions as a Uranos figure, the lost father, who sinned by displacing the mother and now has to atone and be redeemed, reborn.

Mr. Carmichael represents for Woolf the male principle in several different phases, moving, like the novel, from the word to the eye, from male language to female language, and in taking him through a cycle of metaphoric death / transformation / rebirth she makes the male principles benign. He becomes the ideal male, a safe father. Mr. Carmichael's progression is the final version of "The Fisherman and His Wife." He begins as the fisherman, whose domineering wife has sent him out of the house to the seashore (41) where he fishes for words (159), but instead of returning to his wife with answers he falls asleep there, metaphorically sinking under the waves and beginning the process of transformation. Through union with the feminine chora, Mr. Carmichael, who initially represents Lacan's final stage, the Symbolic Order, passes through a series of reversals from *le Non du Père* (specifically figured as male symbolic language) through the phallic sea monsters of the mirror stage, to a silent embryo floating in the amniotic chora, to androgynous god.

Despite his silence, Mr. Carmichael still represents male language. It would be difficult to

interpret a poet who stalks words (90) and does “acrostics endlessly” (43) in any other way. What we need to realize in order to understand the way in which he functions as the embodiment of language is that he need not be (and in fact is not) on those grounds a hero; he is rather an element that needs to be transformed. And Woolf takes him through that transformation. The poetry he writes seems to have been composed in his former life (the fisherman phase), and we learn in part III that although his poetry is enjoying “an unexpected success” (125), none of his poems are recent, and he himself appears uninvolved in them: “They went and published things he had written forty years ago” (179). Furthermore, despite its popularity, his poetry suggests sterility. Lily imagines that it is “extremely impersonal; it said something about death” (180). Once in his sleeping phase, he is *le Non du Père*, the king whose passing is acknowledged at the dinner party. Like the Swiss maid’s father’s dying of throat cancer (31), his falling asleep and subsequent transformation is a metaphor for the death and eventual regeneration of male language.

As he sinks into his dreams, which are the depths of the sea, he changes from fisherman to fish. He settles in his chair, for the moment “puffing and blowing like some sea monster” (177). In the holograph version of *To The Lighthouse*, Woolf describes Mr. Carmichael as having “the appearance of some vast brute which is now ~~remembering~~ and has gorged itself and is now ruminating. The book which . . . was his . . . source of nourishment, lay fallen on the grass” (Davies 132). As we have seen, the sea monster is an image of the Father’s phallus (here clearly associated with language), who has violated the Mother and appropriated her primacy. In this phase, Mr. Carmichael appears to be poised between being a sea-monster figure, which is male, and being a fish figure, which is female. It is his passivity which tips the balance, rendering him

harmless and allowing him to continue his progression and finally achieve the unity which Woolf figures as androgyny.

People ask him questions (Lily in particular), but again he differs from his prototype in the original text: he is the flounder who refuses to answer. He is the epitome of silence. When Mrs. Ramsay, for example, asks him, "Going indoors, Mr. Carmichael?" we expect a reply, but instead "He said nothing" (41). Lily also comes to him at the seashore to ask him important questions: "What does it mean? How do you explain it all?" (166). But, although she has the impression that he hears and understands her, he never answers; he has in effect abandoned language in order to enter a foetal state, unite with the mother, and recapture the unity of the Imaginary.

In his flounder state he is infantile: silent; sleeping; without memory ("D'you remember, Mr. Carmichael?" Lily wants to ask him [159], but knows he will not have an answer); and, like a sperm or an embryo, fish-shaped: he is a sea monster (179) who swims and floats on the land as if it were a watery environment, and who needs nothing because this sea-world, like the amniotic fluid in the womb, "satisfied all his wants" (166).

In this stage, he is perhaps already evolving into a female way of being, for he represents the silence which is as necessary to meaning as the pauses between the strokes of the lighthouse (the darkness between the beams of light) or the troughs between the waves. This silence is "more expressive" than speech, and "extraordinarily fertile" (160), another instance of Woolf's "revised location of meaning" (Davies 133). To such a state Mr. Carmichael seems to regress, becoming a sea creature who remains in the womb and will not emerge (or cannot) until Mr. Ramsay, who represents the Father and the Law of the Father, ruler of the Symbolic Order and the third stage, symbolically dies (reaches the lighthouse).

Mr. Ramsay's journey to the lighthouse is a journey away from the Imaginary towards the Symbolic Order, which Woolf figures as a journey towards death, while, in a kind of counterpoint, Mr. Carmichael regresses in the opposite direction, abandoning the Symbolic to seek the Imaginary. Abel (61) points out that Mr. Ramsay is taking his two children in the boat away from the mother's body, which represents the Imaginary -- the island is shaped like a leaf which has been associated with Mrs. Ramsay (for example, she is at one point a "fruit tree laid with leaves" [39]), and is also, with its "dent in the middle and two sharp crags" (174), quite a female geography, as we have seen. The lighthouse, on the other hand, resembles Clarissa's tower in *BTA*, which Elaine Showalter identifies as a phallus as well as a symbol for old age / death (132). James certainly sees the lighthouse in such a way, as a "tower with a yellow eye that opened suddenly and softly in the evening" (172), associating it with the phallic gaze.

Both men seek wholeness, harmony, but Mr. Ramsay's version is masculine, like the "dream . . . of sharing, completing, finding in solitude on the beach an answer" (125) which "the wakeful, the hopeful" seek in the central portion of the novel (123), but which they find marred by "something out of harmony . . . the silent apparition of an ashen-coloured ship . . . a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath" (124). The silent ship, as we shall see in Chapter 3, and the blood beneath the sea are both vestiges of the lost mother. This dream of achieving wholeness, because it is sought in solitude and is contaminated by the rape and repression of the mother (the ghost ship and the bloody stain), is a masculine venture and therefore "but a reflection in a mirror" (125), recalling the shattering effect of the mirror stage. But by the end of this passage "the mirror was broken," and in the very next statement we learn that "Mr Carmichael brought out a volume of poems that spring" (125),

suggesting a transfer of power to him. If the mirror is broken, then there can be no more entry into the Symbolic Order. The patriarchy is also broken. But the broken mirror also means, in this case, that people will have to find wholeness in some other way than in “solitude on the beach” (a very male way of seeking it). In fact, in Woolf, this unity is only to be found in the union of masculine and feminine. Mr. Ramsay and the patriarchy which he represents have passed away, leaving space for Mr. Carmichael to emerge as the god-father of a new order: Woolf’s fourth stage of androgyny.

Mr. Carmichael, who is the new language and the new god, is, unlike the old ones, not exclusively male. Woolf may be subtly suggesting that he is homosexual. He is, for example, “devoted . . . to Andrew, and would call him into his room, and, Andrew said, ‘show him things’” (90). Similarly, “when he had heard of Andrew Ramsay’s death . . . Mr Carmichael had ‘lost all interest in life’” (179). Because he is a “sea monster” (177), he may also be associated with William Dodge, the homosexual in *BTA*, who is associated with the Kraken, a sea monster. Giles Oliver, for example, imagines himself “manacled to a rock . . . and forced to behold indescribable horror” (*BTA* 55). Not only is this horror the sea monster in the Andromeda myth, as we have seen, but it also becomes quickly linked with William Dodge, whose facial expression unwittingly gives “Giles another peg on which to hang his rage,” a “toady . . . not a man to have straightforward love for a woman” (55). We might note, too, that later, Giles crushes a snake (another Kraken image, a sea snake figure) which he finds “couched in the grass . . . choked with a toad in its mouth” (89). The snake evokes William Dodge, not only because (as we saw in the Introduction) Dodge calls himself a “snake in the grass” (67), but also because the toad recalls Giles’ use of the epithet “toady” and because when the seductive Mrs. Manresa notices his

bloodstained shoes, she takes it as evidence “that he had proved his valour for her admiration” (96), as if he has defended heterosexuality.

Whether we see him as homosexual or not, we cannot see Mr. Carmichael as clearly masculine. He is born of the female sea, takes the form of a sea god, and is himself androgynous, even pantheistic. Often, he is closely tied to an animal, not only a fish, but a cat (15, 90), a beast that comes “padding” in (138), and a bee (90). Interestingly, Mrs. Ramsay is described as a beehive (51) as well as a flower (40). The female is still the source of nourishment for the male: Mr. Carmichael as bee feeds off Mrs. Ramsay, just as Mr. Ramsay had fed off her sympathy earlier, becoming “filled with her words, like a child” (40), and as Macalister’s boy “feeds” off the flesh he has cut out of the side of the mackerel which he uses as bait.

Mr. Carmichael even resembles Mrs. Ramsay in curious ways. She is like “a sponge,” soaking up the emotions of everyone around her (34), and he is “a creature gorged with existence” (165); she is “silent always” (31) and he is “without need of words” (15); his name is Augustus and she is “august” (51); and the purple and yellow dish of fruit which is like “a trophy fetched from the bottom of the sea, of Neptune’s banquet, . . . like a world in which one could . . . climb up hills and go down into valleys” (90) is the fruit from the Oceanic (and so original) garden of Eden which both she and Mr. Carmichael recognize: “She saw that Augustus too feasted his eyes on the same plate of fruit, plunged in, broke off a bloom there, a tassel here . . . That was his way of looking, different from hers. But looking together united them” (90).

In fact, he often seems more female than male. His eyes are sometimes yellow, the colour of dreams (like the opium stains on his beard [150]), sometimes smoky green, the colour of female nature (like Mrs. Ramsay’s grey cloak [126] and green shawl [32]; Lily’s grey dress [96];

the “grey-green light on the wall” of the house [138] which is also a metaphor for Mrs. Ramsay herself, being destroyed by too many open doors; and the sea when it first sends up the flounder in “The Fisherman and His Wife” [43]). He inhabits a female environment, “sunk . . . in a grey-green somnolence” (15), sleeping in a “a pool of thought, a deep basin of reality” (166), and surfacing at the end of the novel like Neptune crowned “with weeds in his hair and the trident (it was only a French novel) in his hand” (191). It is the fact that he becomes female that allows both language and godhood in him to be reunited with their female origins and thereby reborn. As Moi says (8) “the seamlessly unified self . . . is in fact a phallic self,” a patriarchal construct. Through Mr. Carmichael, Woolf deconstructs the boundaries of the self, allowing him to merge with the sea / chora and become thereby androgynous.

Septimus Smith, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, is an earlier version of Augustus, but one who fails to achieve the unity Augustus seeks and achieves. He is “a drowned sailor” (104, 140), a man who has been immersed in the sea / chora, but who, instead of being transformed by it, is overcome by it. What is it in him that causes him to be unable to survive union with the mother? The failure may come as a surprise for, like Mr. Carmichael, Septimus has feminine attributes. He writes, “Men must not cut down trees. There is a God” (35), and it is important to note that trees, in *Mrs. Dalloway* as in *To The Lighthouse*, are symbols for womanhood (Rezia is “a flowering tree” [MD 224], for example). And Septimus has had a vision of “an old woman’s head in the middle of a fern” (100), an image of the lost mother. But where Mr. Carmichael accepts and transforms, Septimus rejects. Augustus Carmichael allows his body to metamorphose symbolically into a flounder; Septimus Smith rejects his body in suicide. According to David Dowling, Septimus rejects “the language of power” (94); Mr. Carmichael allows it to be transformed.

We have seen how the mutilation of the mackerel functions as a metaphor for birth. The men associated with this act (Macalister, Macalister's boy, Mr. Ramsay) are fishermen, and therefore artist figures, and what they seek is inspiration from the muse, the lost mother. What they get, however, is a new god, an androgynous one. Or, to look at it another way, the god they have pierced and attempted to kill is resurrected in a new form. Davies is right, I would say, about the second and third parts of this novel being about crucifixion, sacrifice, and atonement (Davies 89-90), but in my reading it is Mr. Carmichael who has willingly sacrificed himself, cast himself into the depths, and now is resurrected as god. The cutting of the mackerel is, within such a pattern, the symbolic crucifixion and rebirth of Mr. Carmichael. It is linked, as I have said, with the passing of the old god, represented by Mr. Ramsay, for it is when Lily, like Mary at the foot of the cross, announces, "He has landed. . . . It is finished" (191), echoing Christ's words at the moment of his death (John 19:30), that Mr. Carmichael awakes and for the first time surges up from his hammock, god-like, and speaks (repeating Lily's elegiac "They will have landed"). The old god is also, in a sense, Mr. Carmichael himself, for his names connect him with God the Father: his first name is the name of the Roman emperor (and self-proclaimed god) in whose reign Christ was born, and his second includes within it the name of an archangel, Michael. Through his willing immersion (a kind of baptism, death and resurrection), however, he is able to transform not only language, but all aspects of the patriarchy. He is reborn as an androgynous god, both his male and female ancestors combined within him.

Although some critics, such as Ferguson, have seen Mr. Carmichael as a god blessing Lily (63), and there is certainly that within his character, he is also her child, the flounder become the speaking prince, freed from his fish shape, born of the sea-mother. He is language, which has

been asleep, like a foetus within the womb, but which is released into birth once the old language, represented by Mr. Ramsay, symbolically dies.

That Mr. Ramsay's voyage to the lighthouse is a death and rebirth is emphasized by the refrain (which Cam echoes) "We perished, each alone" (155, 176), by Lily's impression that the smoke from the steamer "drooped like a flag mournfully in valediction" (174), and by the fact that the shore she has left appears to Cam "as if the people there had fallen asleep . . . were free like smoke, were free to come and go like ghosts. They have no suffering there, she thought" (158). To the dead, the living appear as ghosts. Davies interprets Mr. Ramsay leaping out of the boat at the end "like a young man" as his going "over the threshold into death, willingly" (61). As for Lily's "It is finished" (191), she proposes, it is a reference to Christ's death, and therefore to that of Mr. Ramsay (who "only raised his right hand mysteriously high in the air, and let it fall upon his knee again as if he were conducting some secret symphony" [173], as if he were Christ in the boat calming the wind and waves). Evidently, not only is the old language dying, the old gods are too.

Once Mr. Ramsay reaches the lighthouse (having been ferried across by Macalister, a Charon ferrying him across the Styx) and he springs ashore "lightly like a young man . . . on to the rock" (191) (a symbolic death and entrance into heaven / the isle of the Blest), Mr. Carmichael awakes suddenly, "surging up, puffing slightly, . . . with weeds in his hair" (191). The sleeper awakes, the child is born, still with traces of his watery environment in his hair, and he speaks, at last. In bringing male language (the book which he carries as his trident) through the transforming cycle of death and rebirth, he has become a god -- comical, but a god nonetheless -- who blesses Lily and allows her to complete her painting. Now that the old gods have been banished to the lighthouse, the new order can emerge.

During the central "Time Passes" section of the novel, the house hangs in a delicate balance between the influence of Mr. Carmichael and the power of Mrs. McNab. Mr. Carmichael, who is the only one left awake at the beginning of part II, having "kept his candle burning rather longer than the rest" (117), becomes strongly connected with the "clammy sea airs" whose "soft nose" goes "rubbing, snuffling" through the house (121), just as we have seen "Mr. Carmichael snuffling and sniffing" earlier (49). These "little airs" (which are described in terms reminiscent of the sea monster he is associated with) fumble their way through the entire house before they finally "blew a little sand along the floor" and "all together gave off an aimless gust." The very next sentence is the parenthetical "[Here Mr. Carmichael . . . blew out his candle]" (118). Again, the juxtaposition of these two sentences equates Mr. Carmichael with this bestial wind.

In this guise, he becomes a question asker, much like Lily at the end of the novel, but his questions all concern the balance between male and female, and the advent of the final stage, beyond the Symbolic Order, of unity. The wind asks "the red and yellow roses on the wallpaper whether they would fade, and question[s] . . . the torn letters in the wastepaper basket, the flowers, the books . . . asking, Were they allies? Were they enemies? How long would they endure?" (118). These little airs are obviously trying to find what their place is, if any, between the feminine flowers and the masculine letters and books. A little later, "those stray airs, advance guards of great armies" (120) return to ask the house (which, as we have seen, is associated with Mrs. Ramsay and therefore with the patriarchy which she supports) "Will you fade? Will you perish?" (121).

At this point in his process of transformation and redemption, the masculine principle, which Mr. Carmichael embodies, appears to be engaged in a battle with the feminine principle,

embodied by Mrs. McNab, for control of the empty house, for when Mrs. McNab first gives up trying to maintain the house, complaining that it is “too much for one woman” (127), “the trifling airs . . . seemed to have triumphed” (128). The outcome hangs by a thread for a time, for if only one “feather had fallen, if it had tipped the scale downwards, the whole house would have plunged to the depths to lie upon the sands of oblivion” (129), just as people are uncertain who has died, Mr. or Mrs. Ramsay: “Some said he was dead; some said she was dead. Which was it?” (130). Mrs. McNab has to bring in reinforcements in the person of Mrs. Bast in order to restore the house, rescue it “from the pool of Time” which is fast closing over it (129), but Woolf nevertheless maintains the balance between male and female, for Lily and Mr. Carmichael arrive “by the same train” (131), and although he is again the last one awake, and his is the last word spoken aloud in the novel (“They will have landed”), by that time he has been reborn in a form which embodies both male and female. These two marginalized characters personify two kinds of language -- Mrs. McNab, the original female language, Mr. Carmichael, the secondary male language which, like the flounder in the Fisherman’s tale (and perhaps also like the house itself, symbol of the patriarchal structure), is reborn into a new, utopian form (perhaps androgynous) after reunion with the female life force.

Throughout her life, Woolf struggled with three demons: male language (which she found inadequate for expressing female reality), patriarchy (expressed in the idea of God, but even more strongly in the person of her father, Leslie Stephen), and her own madness. In *To The Lighthouse*, she exorcises these demons. The old language and the old god-father (Mr. Ramsay) are sent away to the lighthouse, a symbolic death, and are supplanted by Mr. Carmichael. He is Woolf’s ideal father. He is protective but not interfering, supportive but not controlling (he

blesses Lily's artistic efforts, a support which Woolf's father never gave her), male language that takes a back seat to female language (either in silence, or else repeating female language as he repeats Lily's words at the end of the novel), both mother (for Lily, an alternative to Mrs. Ramsay) and father.

He also is Woolf's ideal muse: passive, and therefore safe. John Ferguson argues most convincingly that because he inhabits the watery world of opium dreams, because it is his sleep which begins "the radical unhinging of time and space, the dehumanizing of the narrative" in the middle section of the novel (54), and because his protection and approval are so important to Lily (who is Woolf's adult persona in the novel), he represents the "dark side" of her creative power, the madness, "the frightening inner ocean of depression" (60), but embodied and transformed into a benevolent force.

### Chapter 3

#### The Empty Chair

There is an old woman who appears in the background of all Woolf's works. She is Mrs. Papworth in *Jacob's Room* (109) and the "old blind woman" who sits outside "the Union of London and Smith's Bank, clasping a brown mongrel tight in her arms and singing out loud" (*JR* 71); she is the old woman Clarissa sees through her window in *Mrs. Dalloway* (283) and the old woman whom Peter Walsh hears singing with "the voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth" outside the Regent's Park Tube station (*MD* 122); Mrs. Moffat and "Old Mrs. Constable" in *The Waves* (106, 113); Mrs. Levy the washerwoman in *The Years* (30) and the nameless old woman who shows up at the mother's graveside (*TY* 92-3); the washerwoman watching outside Orlando's window the night Orlando begins his transformation into a woman (*Orlando* 131); Trixie Sands, the cook in *Between The Acts*, and the old woman in the audience "whose marriage . . . had obliterated . . . a name that had been a name when there were brambles and briars where the Church now stood -- so indigenous . . . that even her body . . . resembled an . . . animal, now nearly extinct" (84); she is also Mrs. Brown in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," who represents all characters in English fiction, and about whom Woolf is convinced that although she is now "a will-o'-the-wisp, a dancing light, an illumination gliding up the wall and out of the window . . . Mrs. Brown will not always escape. One of these days Mrs. Brown will be caught" (*EVW* 387-8).

Just as Mrs. McNab tends to be underestimated by critics, as we have seen, so are these other marginalized women. David Dowling, for example, says that the old woman whom Clarissa

observes getting ready for bed “is a test for Clarissa, who must see her as an individual rather than as a statistic” (101). Abel says she “only functions in the novel as an object of Clarissa’s awareness . . . a perspective on the future” (40). A character who is such an enduring element of Woolf’s works, though, must surely have a significance beyond what this limited view would allow. Like Mrs. McNab, she is the embodiment of the lost mother, often reduced to servitude (perhaps because Woolf is following a literary archetype which, as Bruce Robbins notes [30], requires the hero -- heroine, in Woolf -- to exchange places with the servant before she is able to assume her rightful place).

This is what Woolf does throughout her works, and most noticeably in *To The Lighthouse*: she relocates the centres in the margins, and in the marginal characters. In Mrs. McNab, who rescues the house from death with her scrub brush and her song, Woolf reverses the traditional role of servant in literature. Whereas the traditional literary servant, according to Robbins, is created by the masters (11), Woolf’s servant creates her masters, conjuring them in her memory and, as we shall see, obtaining power over them. The traditional literary servant is a child expelled from the family (Robbins 152): the word “family” derives in fact from the Latin *famulus*, meaning servant (Robbins 111). Mrs. McNab, however, is the family who has been abandoned by her child, for “one had deserted her” (*TTL* 122). In traditional literature, the master temporarily becomes the servant (as in *The Odyssey*, where Odysseus returns as a beggar, living with Eumaios the swineherd and carrying the torch for his own vassals [Robbins 30]), but in *To The Lighthouse*, Mrs. McNab temporarily displaces the protagonist, coming to resemble Mrs. Ramsay, as we shall see, and controlling the house in the central section “Time Passes.” She even comes to control their narrative, announcing to the reader the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay, Prue, and

Andrew. The fact that her “eyes fell on nothing directly, but with a sidelong glance” (121) which “slipped and turned aside even from her own face” in the mirror (122) is an indication that, unlike the other characters we have seen in Woolf who find themselves fragmented by mirrors, Mrs. McNab is unaffected by them. She never passes through the mirror phase or enters the Symbolic Order, because she represents the ancient lost Mother, come back to take her proper place. She thus embodies the Imaginary and foreshadows the final stage which Woolf predicates, the recovery of the mother and reunion with her.

Mrs. McNab, like all servants according to Robbins (7), stands for something that is absent -- in Mrs. McNab’s case, the mother who has been repressed into the unconscious, which Woolf imagined as being watery, like the Imaginary. Mrs. McNab is like a leviathan from the lower depths who rolls “like a ship at sea” (121), looking “like a tropical fish oaring its way through sun-lanced waters” (124) as she cleans the Ramsays’ house. Like the traditional literary servant, she is also a representative of the old values of community, of Fate as the Homeric Moira, the fate of the entire community, rather than Tyche, the fate of the individual (Robbins 175). Community is a value of the mother goddess, of the old order of the Imaginary, like the unity of the chora between mother and child, between child and universe.

But individuality is a patriarchal value; it belongs to the world of the Symbolic Order, the same order which separates child from mother, which tries to keep feet shod in order to keep them isolated from the earth. This is the real sin of the fisherman’s wife (in the fairy tale we examined in Chapter 2): she seeks individual advancement. It is her own fate with which she is concerned, not the fate of the community, not even the community as represented by her husband, with whom even the patriarchy would assume she should be in union. She is thus a proponent of

the Symbolic Order. It is important to note here that Woolf is not purely male-reviling, female-worshipping. She values unity, community, and androgyny and dislikes separation, segregation, and clearly defined gender roles, whether these values are espoused by men or women. Therefore, the principles she opposes she tends to figure as either masculine or traditionally feminine, and those she values as androgynous.

And she values unity. It is this unity which Peter Walsh seeks in *Mrs. Dalloway* when he daydreams of returning back to a kind of sexual union with the mother. He takes a seat on a bench in Regent's Park outside the underground station (symbolic of the entrance to the underworld of the unconscious) beside an "elderly grey nurse, with a baby asleep" (83) who knits "indefatigably" while he sleeps and dreams. She resembles Mrs. Ramsay (knitting, like the Fates creating people's lives), and also Mrs. McNab, the old woman who permits and creates memories, dreams, and stories. She becomes a kind of mother goddess, a "giant figure" looming in the sky (85). With her left hand "clutching at her side" (122), she recalls both Lily and the mutilated mackerel. She embodies sexuality, proffering "great cornucopias full of fruit . . . like sirens" (86) and the repressed chora / mother, rising "to the surface like pale faces which fishermen flounder through floods to embrace . . . to shower down from her magnificent hands compassion, comprehension, absolution" (86). Peter Walsh dreams of a union with this mother figure which is clearly sexual; he wants to have her "mount [him] . . . and let [him] blow to nothingness" (87).

This dream of unity with the mother ends when Peter is reminded of the *Non du Père*, the consequences of such a union. His reverie closes with him imagining himself returning to his rented rooms in the city (the masculine world in the context of this novel), and he awakens muttering, "The death of the soul" (88), a fate which he instantly associates with the green, female

world of Bourton and the cautionary tale of the neighbouring squire “who had married his housemaid” (88), another mother- goddess figure, a sin for which both members of the couple suffered social ostracism.

The old woman in his vision is a mother “whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world,” a mother who seeks “a lost son” (87). Woolf identifies her song as a garbled love song for her dead beloved, swept away by “death’s enormous sickle” (123) which recalls Uranos, killed by Cronos with a sickle. Perhaps the mother is not content to remain passively repressed. She appears to long for and to seek reunification with both the father and the child. According to Dowling (114), she is singing Richard Strauss’s “Allerseelen” which is about the one day each year when all souls may rise and confront one another openly and honestly. It appears that Woolf’s Mother is one who still haunts the world, seeking restitution and restoration.

Ghosts, says Robbins, are like servants: they come to remedy displacement (182.) This may explain the servant girls’ fascination with ghosts in *Between The Acts*: the kitchen maids are always seeing or wanting to see ghosts – and it is always, complains the cook, when the men, the masters, have come into the kitchen (30). Ghosts can provide a connection to the idyllic past when there was no separation between living and dead, when they were all part of the community. Ghosts and servants are the dispossessed ancestors, the disowned parents, whose reemergence makes society whole again.

Woolf writes about being dispossessed, and about finding a new space from which to create a new community around a different kind of centre. Hermione Lee (179) sees *To The Lighthouse* as a ghost story, and the dinner party as a Dionysian feast for the souls of the dead, at which the priest (in this case Mr. Carmichael) bids the ghosts depart. It is significant that at this

dinner party, there is a kind of torch-passing ceremony in which Mr. Carmichael rises, chanting a song which invites those present to “see the Kings go riding by,” and bows to Mrs. Ramsay “as if he did her homage,” as though to acknowledge her position within the patriarchal system, her place with the kings (whose treasure-keeper she has been, her “mind and heart . . . like . . . the tombs of kings” [50]). She bows in return, symbolically passing the power back to him, the “king” who is to be transformed into the androgynous god of the next, fourth phase, “and passed through the door which he held open for her” (103). She dies shortly after.

Mrs. Ramsay’s dinner party thus pays tribute to the passing of the Symbolic Order and heralds the beginning of a new, redeemed one. This death and rebirth occurs metaphorically in the central section of the novel, “Time Passes,” which parallels the crucifixion in many ways (Davies 90): the shawl loosening and falling is like the rending of the veil of the temple, the mortars in France that crack the teacups are like the earthquake, and the Biblical language, “the rocks rent” (Matthew 27:51) is echoed in “a rock rends itself” (*TTL* 121). Christ’s announcement, “It is finished” (John 19:30), is echoed by both Lily (whose painting is her way of attaining unity) and Mrs. McNab when they complete their “brush-work” (Davies 23; *TTL* 131, 192). In the same words that the apostle John reports the death of the Son, these women announce the death of the Law of the Father, and the establishment of a new era, Woolf’s fourth stage.

In *To The Lighthouse*, Woolf implies that the patriarchy does not simply die; it actually self-destructs. It is war (foreshadowed in part I by the passages from “The Charge of the Light Brigade” that Mr. Ramsay repeatedly quotes, and directly referred to in part II ) that destroys the kings and the father’s law, and ushers in Woolf’s utopian stage of androgyny.

One of the ways in which Woolf suggests androgyny throughout her work is the way she conflates sea (feminine, Gaea) and sky (masculine, Uranos), as when Bernard says, “We shall sink like swimmers . . . through the green air of the leaves” (*TW* 13). Peter Walsh’s vision of the mother goddess, for example, is “made of sky and branches . . . risen from the troubled sea” (*MD* 86). At the end of *Orlando*, Orlando’s husband, the sea captain, comes for her in an airplane (215), as though the two elements were interchangeable, and the story of *To The Lighthouse* takes place on the Isle of Skye, its very name indicating a piece of sky within the sea.

This notion of the dissolution of barriers is important to our understanding of Woolf’s concept of androgyny. According to Moi, androgyny in Woolf is not the union of male and female in some balance between them, but rather “the deconstruction of the duality” (Moi 14), anticipating Kristeva’s position that the proper attitude is “to reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical” (Moi 12). Not only do gender divisions disappear in Woolf’s utopian stage, but class boundaries vanish also. This dissolution of class boundaries is foreshadowed in part I by all the doors the servants leave open (*TTL* 30, Robbins 50). The house, as we have seen, represents patriarchal structure, as does the stocking which Mrs. Ramsay is knitting. So, we might appreciate that as she complains to herself about the servants and children leaving the doors perpetually open so that the house “positively dripped with wet” (29), she also notices that the stocking is “ever so much too short” (31). It would seem that neither of these patriarchal enclosures is sufficient to preserve the Symbolic Order.

Marriage is another such version of paternalist closure (Robbins 189), to women’s lives (it is the death of Prue, for example) as well as to literary plots, and one which Woolf suggests both Mrs. McNab and her cohort Mrs. Bast resist, Mrs. McNab by her base-born children (122) and

Mrs. Bast implicitly by the echoes of the word “bastard” contained within her name. Both of these women who resist *le Non du Père* are loosed from the kitchen by the death of the Symbolic Order, an end which is suggested in the central section of the novel, set free to come upstairs into the realm of the masters where they “drank their tea in the bedroom sometimes, or in the study” (130). Around the house, the microcosm of the father’s world, “the carnation mated with the cabbage” (128) as the barriers between class, gender, and even species dissolve. This is reminiscent of the final scene in Miss LaTrobe’s pageant in *Between The Acts* when children (“Children? Imps -- elves -- demons” [165]) run through the audience holding mirrors (including “My mother’s. Cracked” [165]) which reflect “Here a nose . . . There a skirt . . . Then trousers only . . . Now perhaps a face . . . Ourselves? . . . And only, too, in parts” (165). The result is not only fragmentation of the individuals, but also dissolution of “the barriers which should divide Man the Master from the Brute,” as first the cows and then the dogs join in the uproar (165). Perhaps the implication is that, in Woolf’s eyes, the third stage, the Symbolic, makes us little more than animals, and the fourth phase, androgyny, is needed to make us fully human again, to reconstruct the fragments into a new whole.

In the holograph version of the manuscript, Woolf has written in the margin about the two charwomen, Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast: “ask them what the war had been about -- did they know?” (Davies 22). Davies interprets this as making “clear that it is the very empty-mindedness of the two cleaning women that makes possible the ‘rusty laborious birth’ of the house from its own corruption” and places them in the tradition of Wordsworth’s “Old Cumberland Beggar” and “Idiot Boy” (22). But given Woolf’s argument in *Three Guineas* that war is a masculine endeavour, I see the holographic note as emphasizing their femaleness, their inhabiting of the

unconscious female world. It is not that they are empty-minded, but that they are female-minded. To be unconscious is not to be empty; it is to be inhabiting a different realm. The house being reborn from its own death by the labours of Mrs. McNab is the Imaginary realm rising from its own death to be reborn. This house, which Mrs. Ramsay tries so hard to keep closed, and which is slowly disintegrating from its constant contact with water which she cannot keep out, though she tries, is the world / mind itself, unable to remain closed, in the patriarchal / symbolic system, but able to be reborn in Woolf's new fourth stage of unity. Thus the Imaginary is recovered, and with it, the mother.

\* \* \* \* \*

There are many empty spaces in Woolf's novels. The primeval wilderness Lucy Swithin reads about in *Between The Acts*, for example, is a space from which we can begin again (and from which we can build better). Mrs. McNab's empty-mindedness (she knows nothing of the war, and even the author relegates it to parentheses) is necessary if she is to be a *tabula rasa* upon which to create a new society. Even Andrew's image of reality as "a kitchen table . . . when you're not there" (*TTL* 26) is a space which emphasizes absence, a gap, like the gap between "Q" and "R" which Mr. Ramsay can never quite bridge.

Mr. Ramsay's definition of reality (as imagined by Andrew) is much like the mirror stage which separates subject from object. Andrew makes it clear that the two become so separated that in fact one is lost: "you" are no longer there. Like the silence with which Mrs. Ramsay and later Cam and James resist Mr. Ramsay, absence becomes a space of highly charged significance in this novel. Like servants, it invokes what is not there, the missing signifier.

What is missing from the masculine definition of reality, of course, is the lost mother, the

repressed chora, which, according to Kristeva, remains perceptible only as “*pressure* on symbolic language: as contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption, silences and absences” (Moi 162). One way by which the chaos of the chora invades the realm of the symbolic, in Woolf’s novel, appears to be by disrupting the fixed nature of numbers. In *To The Lighthouse*, they have an odd way of not adding up; the gaps have a tendency to multiply. When the book begins, for instance, it is “the middle of September” (23), and Lily is thirty-three (51) while Mr. Ramsay is “turned sixty” (47). Ten years pass (139), it is again September (131), but now Lily is forty-four (141) and Mr. Ramsay is seventy-one (188): ten years somehow have become the equivalent of eleven.

The lost ships also seem to propagate. As Mr. Ramsay, Cam, and James sail to the lighthouse in part III of the novel, Macalister tells them of the great storm the previous Christmas “when ten ships had been driven into the bay for shelter, and he . . . had seen three men clinging to the mast” (153) of a sinking ship. A moment later, Mr. Ramsay “questioned Macalister about the eleven ships that had been driven into the bay in a storm. Three had sunk” (153-4). These ships recall the ten members of the Ramsay family who used to come to this same bay for their holidays (the parents and eight children), three of whom have died (Mrs. Ramsay, Prue, and Andrew), as well as the three who are in the boat, whose journey is, as we have seen, a metaphorical death. But what is most significant about these ships is the way their numbers shift and multiply. The three men who drown become three entire ships that sink, and there is one extra ship in the convoy, just as an extra year somehow gets added to Lily’s and Mr. Ramsay’s ages.

But the empty space that interests me most is the empty chair, the missing guest at Mrs. Ramsay’s dinner party. Mrs. Ramsay says she is planning on having “fifteen people sitting down to dinner” (75), but she cannot be expecting more than fourteen. Although there are ten

Ramsays, we know that the two youngest, Cam and James, do not attend the dinner party, for William Bankes assumes that his “favourite, Cam, was in bed, he supposed” (84), and so James, who is a year younger, must be in bed too. In fact, he is, for we see Mrs. Ramsay slip upstairs alone to check on them, and “there was Cam wide awake and James wide awake quarreling when they ought to have been asleep hours ago” (105). So that leaves Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, six of their children (Prue, Rose, Jasper, Roger, Andrew, and Nancy), and six guests (Lily Briscoe, William Bankes, Charles Tansley, Augustus Carmichael, Minta Doyle, and Paul Rayley): fourteen total. Whom else could Mrs. Ramsay possibly expect? This gap is highly suggestive.

Furthermore, the discrepancy increases with time, the gap multiplies. In Mrs. McNab’s memory, the party becomes “Twenty she dared say in all their jewellery, and she asked to stay help wash up” (130-31).

Charles Tansley feels uncomfortable at the dinner, “sitting stuck there with an empty seat beside him,” conscious that “nothing had shaped itself at all. It was all in scraps and fragments”(85). Of course, neither Minta nor Paul has arrived yet (they come in late [91]), and Roger may also be late since his mother had to send someone up to his room to get him a few minutes earlier (83) – so the empty seat could be waiting for one of them. But considering the emphasis Woolf gives it, its association with Charles Tansley’s sense of fragmentation, and the fact that Mrs. Ramsay is expecting one more nameless guest, this absence resonates with a much greater significance. The empty chair, perhaps, conjures up thoughts of the lost mother. She would be a fitting guest, surely a guest of honour, at a ritual which is, as we have seen, a celebration of the end of patriarchy, and just as both the patriarchy and the new androgyny are represented at the dinner in the persons of Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Carmichael, so the mother

goddess is present in the house in the character of Mrs. McNab, although she has (of course) been displaced to the kitchen. The empty chair is quite possibly then Mrs. McNab's place. After all, she was (like Banquo's ghost) invited to the feast, if only to wash up.

All of these gaps are connected to the fragmentation of self which accompanies the loss of the mother. Like the empty chair at the dinner table, they serve as both a reminder of the mother and unity we have lost, and an invitation to fill the gap with something new, something better (which for Woolf is androgyny).

Mrs. McNab not only occupies the physical centre of the novel (the "Time Passes" section), she also, as the lost mother, occupies its spiritual centre. She is, as we shall see, a triune goddess. As Mnemosyne (Memory), she is the mother of the Muses; as a female Logos, she is the mother of language; and as Gaea (Earth), she is the original mother of the gods.

She is the warp thread on which the narrative is woven, perhaps even the creator who gives it life, for her memory is the book in which the events of part I are written, memories which she brings to life in part II, and which are carried into part III as she herself lives in the memories of others. It is her memories, her presence, her creative inspiration which underlie the narrative. She is in a very important sense the creator of these lives and the keeper of their memories.

A close reading reveals that she has been intimately connected with the events of the day that make up part I. We first hear of her through Cam, who has been sent by her mother to ask the cook whether Paul and Minta have yet returned. When Cam returns, she must first tell her mother "that there was an old woman in the kitchen with very red cheeks, drinking soup out of a basin" (54) before she is able to produce the desired message from the cook. This woman, who has power to block Cam's production of language until she is acknowledged, is Mrs. McNab,

whose memory of having soup in the kitchen with the cook is mentioned twice (127, 130). Lily remembers her, including her in her catalogue of lives that have spilled into the waters of time at the Ramsays' house: "The Ramsays'; the children's; . . . A washerwoman with her basket" (177). She also figures prominently in James' memory of that day:

and in what garden did all this happen? For one had settings for these scenes; trees that grew there; flowers; a certain light; a few figures. Everything tended to set itself in a garden where there was none of this gloom and none of this throwing of hands about; people spoke in an ordinary tone of voice. They went in and out all day long. There was an old woman gossiping in the kitchen; and the blinds were sucked in and out by the breeze; all was blowing, all was growing . . . (171)

In James' memory, his home is a garden of Eden and Mrs. McNab, the only individual he identifies, is at its centre like God himself, resting after his labour of creation.

Not only do others remember her, but she remembers the events of that day herself, from seeing Mrs. Ramsay on the lawn "with one of the children by her" (126) to the dinner party (as we have seen), recalling how "she had seen them once through the dining-room door all sitting at dinner" (130). She even remembers "the old gentleman . . . talking to himself" (130). "He never noticed her," she adds; in fact, it appears that only Lily and the children (who, their mother says, "never forget" [60]) recognize her significance. The men seem not even to see her, much as the kitchenmaids in *Between The Acts* are the only ones who see ghosts (30).

Who is this woman who is so ever-present and yet almost unnoticed, who wields power of creation, language, and memory? She is what Jane Marcus has called the female *logos*, the kitchen muse (13), the unacknowledged female power behind the patriarchal family.

The song she sings which tears “the veil of silence” (*TTL* 121) and saves the house and the books (male artifacts) from rot and destruction, the “sound . . . that had been gay twenty years before on the stage perhaps, . . . but now . . . was robbed of meaning, was like the voice of witlessness, humour, persistency itself, trodden down but springing up again” (122). It is an ancient (and female) song of life, a creation song, and, like her groans and creaks (129), pre-literate: meaningful sound that falls on the evolutionary spectrum somewhere between the silence of the void and the linear (and therefore male) syntax of language. It is a song of endurance (122), the female voice which has been trodden down by male appropriation of language, that asks, like the martyrs which St. John saw before the throne of God, “how long shall it endure?” (122) but which, in the silence left by the absent Ramsays, who “never wrote, never came” (127), rises again and spills out of the kitchen to flow “upstairs . . . from room to room” (121), filling the house with her song and her memories as she cleans.

The earth is the mother’s body and also lost female language because, according to Lee, the garden is associated with the mother’s language (182). James, at the age of six, feels that Mrs. Ramsay’s “words conveyed an extraordinary joy . . . as his mother spoke . . . the sound of poplar trees, leaves whitening before rain, rooks cawing, brooms knocking, dresses rustling -- all these were so coloured and distinguished in his mind that he had already his private code, his secret language”(9). This “secret language” is even more explicitly the language of the mother’s Edenic garden in the earlier manuscript for *To The Lighthouse*, where his mother’s language is “that miraculous garden . . . before the fall of the world” where his mother “alone spoke the truth” (Lee 182), and, as Lee points out, Cam also remembers her mother speaking a rhythmical and nonsensical nursery language to send her to sleep, about mountains and birds.

According to this female version of creation, in the beginning was Sound, and the Sound re-creates a world out of chaos. So Mrs. McNab's song resurrects the house from the chaos, the void into which it has nearly fallen. She is a creative force, associated with the sea, that primal womb from which all life originates, for not only does she have her hands immersed in water, constantly doing laundry and dishes (water is her environment), but she is, as we have seen, associated with ships and fish. And in Woolf, as we have seen, fish (when in water) signify thoughts without words. She is a fish, but a female *logos*, one who recalls people but not names (127), a wordless Song rather than a Word.

She is more than the female genesis of language, more even than the mother of art. In fact, she tends to grow and take on new dimensions in the silent space of the family's absence, becoming the house itself (she creaks), the sea, and the garden (which also overgrows its boundaries in an ecstasy of creation, just as she herself spreads throughout the house) as boundaries become blurred and individual identities flow into one another like the waters of the sea. As she finds voice and breaks out of the barrier of the kitchen (where she is imprisoned in part I), so does nature come to life and burst out of its boundaries. As earth-sea, she is Gaea who engenders all that exists and contains within herself all that exists. As destroyer of boundaries, she is also an agent whose task is to retrieve or recreate the Imaginary.

\* \* \* \* \*

The sea, as Woolf sees it, is very much like the Freudian concept of the mind, from the conscious and reflective surface through the darker depths of dreams, madness and creativity (which sometimes send up a fountain of inspiration and joy to the surface) to the "sands of oblivion" (*TTL* 129) at the very bottom. And just as the unconscious mind harbours both

inspiration and madness (as Woolf says in her diary, “these curious intervals in life -- I’ve had many -- are the most fruitful artistically -- one becomes fertilized -- think of my madness at Hogarth” [Ferguson 60]), so the sea, in Woolf, is both source and devourer of art. It is the fertile womb, the chaos out of which the world was created, the darkness in which swim the fish-words and out of which spring the fountains of artistic inspiration, the place from which the fisherman fishes up the magical flounder, who has power to create worlds; but also the place over which Lily imagines herself always balancing in danger of falling in, the pitiless grave which swallowed three ships last Christmas, and the element which constantly threatens to consume the pages of Mrs. Ramsay’s letters (a form of written art) which the wind snatches from her (*TTL* 150).

Being an artist, then, appears to be a dangerous activity. The dilemma, however, is that, in Woolf, art also provides a way to recapture, even if in a limited way, what we knew in the Imaginary. Woolf sees art as a unifying force, recreating wholeness, unifying (if imperfectly) the fragments of our lives. Mrs. Ramsay finds this unity in poetry; when she reads, she finds that “All the odds and ends of the day stuck to this magnet [a line of poetry] . . . And then there it was, suddenly entire . . . clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here -- the sonnet” (111). Lily seeks wholeness through her painting. It is her way of recovering, if briefly, the Imaginary, “that vision which she had seen clearly once and now must grope for -- her picture” (52-3). Here also the vision which she seeks is one of completion, her problem “how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left,” how to avoid “the danger . . . that by doing that [drawing a line across her canvas] the unity of the whole might be broken” (53). It takes her ten years finally to find a way to unify all the different elements in her picture, and when she does manage it, the sensation of completeness is fleeting. But even though “she saw it clear

for a second," she is satisfied: "I have had my vision" (192).

The fact that the unconscious mind, figured as sea, as chora, is the only source for artistic inspiration poses a problem for male artists in *To The Lighthouse*. If the only available muse is the mother, and if she is banned from the male world of the Symbolic Order, how then do men create art? In *To The Lighthouse*, they seem incapable of original creativity; they can only imitate. And a pattern emerges as one reads: female art tends to be fecund, living and complex; male art tends to be sterile, dying (or deadly) and linear.

Women in *To The Lighthouse*, like Mother Earth herself, bring forth life: Mrs. Ramsay most obviously in her children, but Cam too creates a world -- "Greece, Rome, Constantinople" (175) -- in her imagination as she trails her hand deep in the sea, spurting up "a fountain of joy" (174); Nancy "changed the pool into the sea, and made the minnows into sharks and whales . . . like God himself" (72); and Lily creates a new "cosmogony" for the ants (182).

Mrs. Ramsay, with her knitting (and she knits constantly throughout the first section of the novel) apparently creates the house and the lives of its inmates: "Flashing her needles . . . she created drawing-room and kitchen, set them all aglow; bade him take his ease there, go in and out, enjoy himself. She laughed, she knitted" (39). (Note that Warner calls such knots "the skein of the paternal family" [334]: this is what Mrs. Ramsay is intent on creating and propagating.)

If Mrs. Ramsay, then, creates life in patriarchal terms with her yarn and her knitting, Mrs. McNab resurrects life in part II as she "unwound her ball of memories" (130). She is the reverse image of Mrs. Ramsay who, like the Fates, spins the yarn into lives; Mrs. McNab winds the unravelled yarn up again into her storehouse of memories. Mrs. Ramsay thinks of herself as "the long steady stroke" of the lighthouse, and in her imagination travels to "the Indian plains . . . a

church in Rome" (61). all patriarchal domains, but Mrs. McNab, as we have seen, resembles a fish. She dwells in the depths of the unconscious, and there also dwell memories, and Mrs. McNab is their keeper. As Gaea, she is the source of all life; as Mnemosyne, Memory, the mother of the nine muses, she is also the source of all art and the the centre of all female creativity within *To The Lighthouse*.

Mrs. McNab, as the lost mother, is eternal. She is the Alpha and Omega, the source and (as when she is restoring the house and the books) the future: her song, her art, which is older than language, may be trodden down, but it springs up again newborn, like the fresh flowers that she lays on the table in front of the mouldy books (126). But the male artist has no way of renewing himself or reversing his barrenness; he can only steal life from the female. The scene in which Mr. Ramsay interrupts Mrs. Ramsay and James on the lawn demonstrates this male sterility and tendency to plunder. He has come to his wife "to be taken within the circle of life, . . . to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life" (39). We have seen how, in a metaphorical rape, "the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare" into "this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life" (38) which is reminiscent of the creative fountain of the muses. Not only is Mr. Ramsay "barren," but Mrs. Ramsay generalizes this to "the sterility of men" (79), and we do see other instances of similar rapes (as in the image of Macalister's boy cutting a piece of flesh out of the side of the mackerel).

Male art in *To The Lighthouse* therefore tends to be derivative, an imitation of either female art or of other male art. The male painters, for example, all imitate Mr. Paunceforte now (says Mrs. Ramsay), and are themselves "watched by ten little boys" (17), the next generation of

derivative male artists -- "But her grandmother's friends . . . mixed their own colours" (17-18). William Bankes advises Lily to visit Rome to study Michael Angelo, Giotto, Titian; he cannot conceive of producing art without imitating, but Lily fears such a visit would only interfere with her own work (69). Mr. Ramsay supposedly writes books, but the only art we actually see him producing is the poetry he quotes endlessly -- others' work, not his own. He is, in fact, more like the Doyles' parrot mindlessly repeating sound (and there could hardly be a more representative image of sterile imitation) than a creative being.

At times, the male is incapable even of imitation. The only time we see Mr. Ramsay writing in the novel is in the boat on the way to the lighthouse, and then he has only written down the cost of his dinner in his book. Otherwise, Woolf implies, the book is blank because no one else knows what is in it, and because it is coloured like an egg, a blank potential rather than a completed work (175-6).

Because they are sterile, men's language and men's art are full of death, and moribund. The poetry which Mr. Ramsay recites evokes the music hall song of Mrs. McNab which he has taken and transformed into senseless (if glorious) death ("stormed at with shot and shell" [21]; "We perished, each alone" [155]). Even the Elton poem ("Luriana, Lurilee") which he and Mr. Carmichael chant after dinner implies their own approaching death, as we have seen. The books (representing male art, since only men in this novel write books) are aging and dying: the poems which finally make Mr. Carmichael famous were written 40 years ago; the pages of Mr. Ramsay's book are yellowed with age (176). (Is this an egg that opens to hatch an already dying language?) And the books in the house are finally covered with mould, and are salvaged only by the power of Mrs. McNab, who, being female, has the power to reverse the rot and corruption.

So far have the mighty fallen that male work (or art -- Woolf makes no distinction between them) is seen by Lily as domesticated. In an ironic reversal of roles it is the men's art which is pictured as nature tamed and brought under control, into the house. Lily thinks of William Bankes and how he lives for science, and "involuntarily, sections of potatoes rose before her eyes" (27). And "she always saw, when she thought of Mr. Ramsay's work, a scrubbed kitchen table" (26). The kitchen table, so often for women writers a symbol for their lack of "a room of one's own" (think, for example, of Morag Gunn typing at the kitchen table in *The Diviners*) and potatoes -- both images of kitchen work (and William Bankes is always thinking about the vegetables being cooked properly) -- have become images of the work men do, and rather trivialized images at that. For not only is Mr. Ramsay's work, his writing, in Lily's vision all reduced to "a scrubbed kitchen table," but she sees the table "lodged now in the fork of a pear tree . . . its four legs in air" (26), the helpless male work space captured and held hostage by the female tree, its legs in the air like a dead animal.

The fork of the tree is also another sexual image, of women conceiving and giving birth to male art and of the male sexually attacking the tree (but looking ludicrous in attempting to do so). The table's sterile legs dangle helplessly in the air, and have no connection with the earth, while the tree, rooted in the earth, grows and thrives, its "fish-shaped leaves" (26) connecting it also to the sea, the female logos of Mrs. McNab, and women's language, the earth song.

It is this song, this original female art which Mr. Ramsay attempts to imitate. In part II, Mrs. McNab begins with a sound, a song, and only later speaks; in part I we see Mr. Ramsay beginning with language and moving towards song. He appears on the first page of the novel, already speaking. In fact, his words precede his own appearance in the narrative: "'But', said his

father . . .”(9). Later, he begins again with language (violent and destructive language): “Damn you,” he says to his wife, and then “dived into the evening air. ‘Someone had blundered,’ he said again . . . . But how extraordinarily his note had changed . . . as if he were trying over, tentatively seeking, some phrase for a new mood, and having only this at hand, used it, cracked though it was. But it sounded ridiculous . . . said like that . . . melodiously” (35).

Here is the male, recognizing (perhaps only dimly) the tendency of his language to blunder, and attempting to find a melodious solution with imperfect success.

Again, Mrs. Ramsay is frightened by the cessation of sound and “look[s] up with an impulse of terror. They had ceased to talk; that was the explanation.” But then, listening, she hears “something rhythmical, half said, half chanted, beginning in the garden, as her husband beat up and down the terrace, something between a croak and a song” and she is soothed (20). This sound, midway between language and melody, partly just “croaking,” is an imitation of Mrs. McNab’s song. It is Mr. Ramsay fumbling his way back towards a female language.

Unfortunately, Mr. Ramsay never goes far enough. To truly redeem male language, one must transform it, not merely disguise it. Miss LaTrobe, for example, instinctively sends her words into the fertile mud on the ocean bed of the chora to be transformed before she uses them to create her next play, her form of art. She seeks “oblivion” (*BTA* 190) and when she finds it (in a bar), “Words of one syllable sank down into the mud. She drowsed; she nodded. The mud became fertile. Words rose above the intolerably laden dull oxen plodding through the mud. Words without meaning -- wonderful words” (191). The oxen recall the sea-monsters, masculine intruders in the female sea, disguised as fish, perhaps, but phallic impostors nonetheless, like Mr. Ramsay with his singing. Miss LaTrobe’s words not only sink, they are transformed and rise

again out of that mud where the oxen remain mired. This is exactly what Mr. Carmichael does, as we have seen: he takes male language through the complete cycle of transformation and rebirth.

And Woolf suggests that is the only way to redeem male language. Both Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Carmichael begin the dinner party, that symbolic coronation ceremony, as “kings” ( Mr. Ramsay because his wife is “like a Queen” [12] and his children are “called privately after the kings and queens of England” [25]; Mr. Carmichael because his name, Augustus, suggests the emperor Augustus). But by the time they return ten years later, Mr. Ramsay, who only imitates the language of the mother, “looked like a king in exile” (140), but Mr. Carmichael, who has completed his transformation into androgyny, not only “looked the same” (179) but has actually achieved a kind of godhood.

It is also through a kind of androgyny that Lily finally achieves unity in her painting. She draws “a line there, in the centre” which completes the picture (192), a line which she has earlier identified as “the line of the branch” (53). This line also signifies Mrs. Ramsay, not only because she is associated with trees, as we have seen, but also because Lily’s quest to complete her painting has been accompanied by her quest for Mrs. Ramsay, to whom she calls aloud (167, 186). When her cries are apparently answered and Mrs. Ramsay suddenly appears, sitting “quite simply, in the chair” (186) where she originally sat as Lily painted her ten years ago, Lily quickly finishes her painting. One feels that the “vision” she has had is of Mrs. Ramsay, and that the line Lily paints is intended to be a portrait of her, just as ten years ago Lily painted Mrs. Ramsay and James as a triangle.

The line in the centre of Lily’s canvas is also related to the lighthouse, however, which Woolf insisted “meant *nothing* . . . One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to

hold the design together” (Lee 168). The central line which holds Lily’s painting together, then, signifies the lighthouse, but it is also the tree and Mrs. Ramsay herself. Thus the line down the centre of Lily’s painting which completes the novel and holds her vision together is an androgynous unification of the phallic lighthouse and the female tree / mother, just as, for Woolf, it is androgyny that will finally heal the fragmentation of self and society. By reuniting the Father and the Mother, society is made whole again. The empty chair is filled.

### Abbreviations Used

- BTA* *Between the Acts*
- CSF* *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*
- EVW* *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume III*
- JR* *Jacob's Room*
- MD* *Mrs. Dalloway*
- TTL* *To the Lighthouse*
- TW* *The Waves*
- TY* *The Years*

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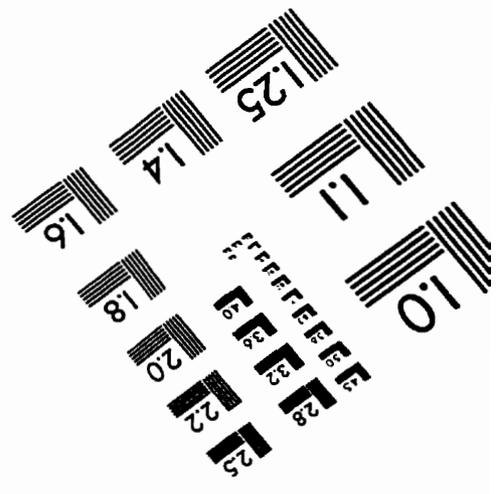
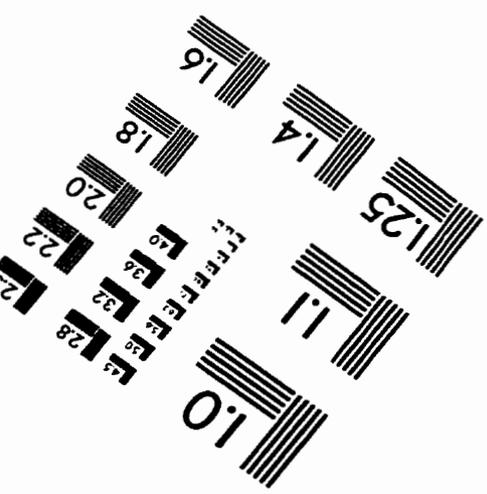
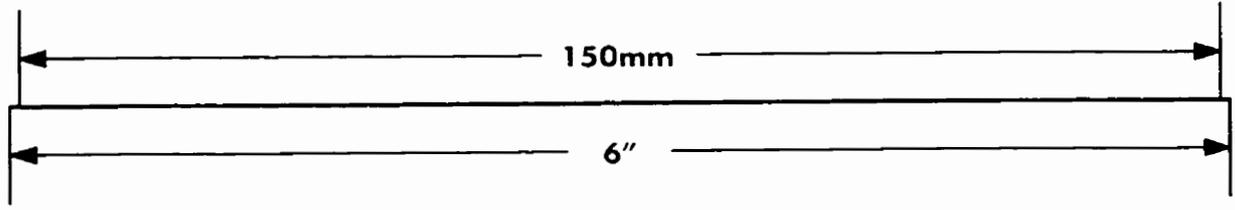
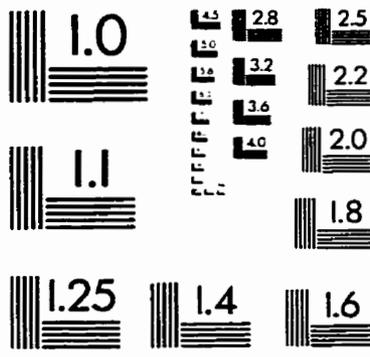
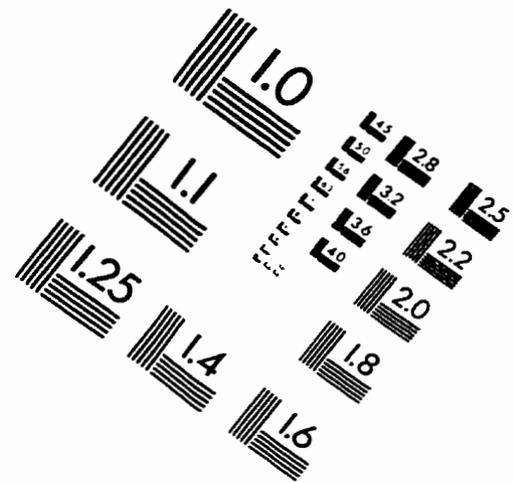
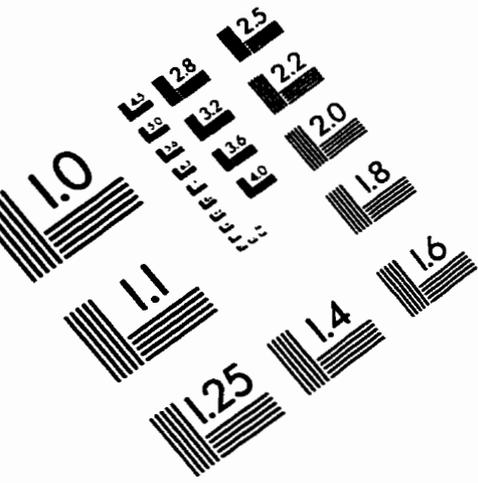
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