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"The lawn was the world" garden imagery in To The Lighthouse

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"THE LAWN WAS THE WORLD"
GARDEN IMAGERY IN TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Jimmée A. Greco

December 2001

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ABSTRACT

"THE LAWN WAS THE WORLD" GARDEN IMAGERY IN TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

by Jimmée A. Greco

This thesis is a feminist analysis of garden imagery in Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse. The introduction sets up the analysis with an overview of the importance of garden imagery in the Victorian era and examines Woolf's relationship to the Victorians. The first chapter details Woolf's use of Demeter, Persephone, and Hecate and discusses her use of the rape of Persephone within To the Lighthouse.

Chapter 2 focuses on the Genesis story of creation, explicating Woolf's reclamation of this myth, reappropriating the garden as symbol. The garden is transformed in To the Lighthouse, becoming a place where women can be creators.

The final chapter discusses the meanings of individual garden elements within the larger plot of To the Lighthouse. The symbolic garden is a place where women and men can escape the patriarchal oppression of the Victorian era or be controlled by it.

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Introduction

Novelists who are thus sensitive to the inspiration of the land are alone able to describe the natives who are in some sense the creatures of the land.

—Virginia Woolf, “Literary Geography”

The skillful novelist must create a fictional world in which readers can lose themselves, blurring the boundaries between fantasy and reality. The creation of a convincing fictional landscape—the setting in which authors choose to have their characters act out their dramas—is integral to a novel’s greater meaning. As Virginia Woolf posits in the “Literary Geography,” a writer’s sensitivity to issues of place allows her to reveal characters truly; in fact, often it is the setting itself through which the author reveals the characters’ concerns within this world and, thus, the author’s concerns outside it. This idea extends

not only to larger landscapes—countries and cities—but to smaller ones as well: homes and their gardens. Unlike real life, there is no chance in fiction; characters react to the world around them, and are revealed by this world through the author's careful placement of them in a particular setting. Since there is no chance, we must pay close attention to all elements of an author's carefully crafted world. Characters live in certain worlds because of the significance of those worlds to the author.

The issues of place, especially domestic place, were of particular importance to Victorian writers. Reacting against the idealization of the wild, natural world by the Romantics, many Victorian writers portrayed people in domestic settings: houses and gardens. These settings became the vehicles for messages about the nature of Victorian life, especially the role of women within that life, as many Victorians saw the domestic sphere as the only viable jurisdiction of women. The role of woman as wife and mother was of primary importance to Victorian women, overshadowing any other role, as Shirley Foster observes: "Because so much importance was attached to the roles of wifehood and motherhood, marriage was deemed the apotheosis of womanly fulfillment, alternatives to which were regarded as pitiable or unnatural"(6). As such, the domestic sphere as woman's place was glorified within both real and fictional

life, and the alternatives to home and garden for women deemed both socially and economically undesirable. Of course, this new emphasis on domesticity was reflected by the Victorians' increasing interest in family life and the roles of the members of the family within the women's writings. Women writers in particular were encouraged to write about what they knew (if they were encouraged to write at all—many female writers reveal an ambivalence about writing, as it took them away from fulfilling the household duties society prescribed for them). Thus, the domestic sphere takes on a primary role within the writings of female Victorians such as Sarah Stickney Ellis and others. The “angel in the house” and the “queen of the garden” roles were ones that were idealized by some writers, and many Victorian women sought to live up to these roles.

This idealization of domestication can be seen in these terms, the “angel in the house” and “queen of the garden,” which became popular during this period. The “angel of the house” is from Coventry Patmore's long poem of the same name. The Norton Anthology of English Literature says this about the poem: “Feminist critics, such as Virginia Woolf, criticized The Angel in the House both for the sentimentality of its ideal of woman and for the oppressive effect of this ideal on women's lives. Since Woolf, the phrase ‘the angel in the house’ has

often been used to characterize a patronizing Victorian sentimentality toward women, with the implication that, if the woman is the angel in the house, her husband is its lord" (1599 n. 1). The "queen of the garden" represents this same type of idealization. This term originated from John Ruskin's lecture Of Queens' Gardens, compiled in the volume Sesame and Lilies with Of Kings' Treasuries. We see Ruskin proposing the same type of duality here, with women controlling the domestic sphere represented by the garden, and men controlling the world of work, represented by the emphasis on money and finances.¹ Ruskin directly addresses this duality in Of Queens' Gardens:

Now their [men's and women's] separate characters are briefly these. The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle,--and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. [. . .] Her great function is Praise . [. . .]

¹ See Coventry Patmore, The Angel in the House, in Poetical Works Vol. 1 (London: George Bell and Sons, 1906) and John Ruskin, Of Queens' Gardens, in Sesame and Lilies (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1865) for the complete works.

By her office and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. (146–47)

It is this duality found within Ruskin and Patmore—and those who accepted the beliefs outlined in the abovementioned works—that women such as Virginia Woolf found oppressive. Ruskin goes on to outline women’s place within the home:

This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home. [. . .] And wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her.

(148–49)

Both terms—the “angel in the house” and “queen of the garden”—are important to our discussion because they became part of the popular discourse of the period, and it was this stereotype that Woolf was reacting against in her portrayal of both Mrs. Ramsay and Lily in To the Lighthouse.

We can see Woolf's reaction to this stereotyping in other writings as well.

Woolf states in "Professions for Women"(1931):

when I came to write I encountered her [the angel in the house]
with the very first words. [. . .] She slipped behind me and
whispered: "My dear, you are a young woman. [. . .] Be
sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of
your sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your
own." (59)

Woolf clearly feels the influence of the angel/queen in this passage, as is no surprise to those familiar with her biography. As an editor and avid reader, Woolf "was deeply aware of the female literary tradition and cognizant of her own place in it,"(281-82) as Elaine Showalter notes, and thus was aware of the popular discourse surrounding Patmore's and Ruskin's works. Showalter goes on to observe that "Woolf inherited a female tradition a century old; no woman writer has ever been more in touch with—even obsessed by—this tradition than Woolf" (264). Although Woolf strives to free herself from the tradition of the Victorians with her innovative techniques—her "moments of being" and her "method"—she cannot fully do so, and her work reveals this ambivalence:

And so it is with Woolf: her innovativeness is everywhere counterbalanced by a strong traditional identification, a concern with material and social reality that mirrors the way Victorian society and the traditional English novel demonstrate the same concern. (Showalter 23)²

Thus, the Victorian past haunts Woolf's writings, which is demonstrated by Woolf's concern with externals within her fiction: the importance of place.

This thesis seeks to explore the role of the domestic setting within To the Lighthouse, paying particular attention to the role of the garden within the domestic sphere, and how that setting influences the characters within it. Some questions that must be addressed are as follows: how are characters influenced by the world around them? How does the "real" world compare to and influence its fictional counterpart? Why has Woolf chosen garden settings for particular events within To the Lighthouse? And what is it about the garden as setting that makes it conducive to the message Woolf wants to convey to readers? While other studies have discussed elements of setting within Woolf's novels, none have focused solely on the garden as image and setting in To the Lighthouse. This study seeks to fill that gap, first by providing an overview of

² See Woolf's letters and the essay "A Sketch of the Past."

gardens as setting and imagery in the Victorian novel, and then by examining how Woolf uses these images, how she takes her Victorian heritage and uses it, reacting against feminine stereotypes but recognizing their power and influence over women of her generation all the same.

Therefore, in order to fully understand what this sense of place means to Woolf, we must first examine Woolf's Victorian influences. The next section in this introduction focuses on a discussion of garden imagery in the Victorian novel, and seeks to illuminate the further sections by setting up a context within which Woolf's novels can be discussed. The sections that follow can then explore Woolf's use of garden imagery, paying particular interest to the feminist implications and themes found within that imagery.

Victorian Garden Imagery

[A] garden may be a re-creation on earth of the mythical garden from which man came or an anticipation of an ideal otherworld to

which he may ultimately pass. The gardener looks back to Paradise or forward to Heaven. Both states are ideal [. . .] all gardens aim at the ideal. (Hadfield and Hadfield 185)

The idealized view of the garden as a paradise on earth is very much in keeping with Victorian beliefs. This view, however, was a reaction against the Victorians' immediate predecessors, the Romantics, whose idealization of the natural world was made famous in the early poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and others. The Victorians accepted the notion that while the garden is part of the natural world, it is the natural world shaped to people's desires, and as such, is controllable, not wild. This is in direct contrast to the Romantic belief that the wild itself was to be glorified.³ Also, the Victorians viewed the garden as an oasis from the urbanization so prevalent within this period of industrialization. Here, people could escape the world of the city without actually leaving it by stepping into their enclosed gardens, leaving the outside

³ We can see the manifestation of this belief in looking at Romantic-period gardens, in comparison with Victorian-period gardens. With gardens developed during the Romantic period, there is an emphasis on creating a "wild" look, to imitate and enhance nature. In the Victorian era, gardens became much more "tame"—the emphasis in this period was on creating a sanctuary, a place where the occupants could escape from the outside world into an enclosed, "safe" space. See Laurence Fleming and Alan Gore, The English Garden (London: Michael Joseph, 1979) for further explication of this phenomenon.

world behind for the domestic world within the home and garden. The garden itself was an extension of the home, an extension of domestic life, which the Victorians also idealized. So the garden was a place of created beauty, yet an escape from development and into domestic life; as such, the symbology of the garden communicates the Victorian version of the ideal: controlled nature and domestic bliss, an escape from the realities of urban life. Predictably, Victorian novelists drew heavily upon this rich source of imagery to reinforce the societal values of the day, particularly concerning the domestic role of women.

However, the role and function of the English garden is not a stagnant one; the idea of the “ultimate” garden, the garden that fulfills its owner’s desires, is one that alters from period to period, following changing trends and social mores. Because home and garden were so closely associated within the Victorian mind—the garden space thought of simply as an extension of the home space—any discussion of the garden and its symbolism in literature must address the role of women as arbiters of the domestic sphere. As Waters states, “It is virtually impossible to say anything about the garden in Victorian fiction without referring to the concept of home and the place of women within it” (227). As noted in the previous section, the idealized sphere of women within Victorian society was a small one: domestic life. The alternatives to marriage and family

brought severe economic consequences, as few paying jobs were available to women, and severe social consequences as well, as “emotional and psychological pressures on women to marry were thus added to the social and economic ones of earlier periods” (Foster 6). Therefore, the domestic role took on paramount importance in the lives of women, as home and family were the main outlets for their energies, and authors of the day (particularly widely read authors such as Dickens and Tennyson) supported this division between the male world of work and the female world of the home through the literature they created.

The importance of the domestic role in the lives of women was mirrored in the literature of the time, and new names were given to describe these roles. The “angel of the house” and “queen of the garden” are telling labels, as they reveal the values ascribed to ideal womanhood. The angel embodies purity and grace; as instructors of morality within the home, women were required to be pure, to be “good” role models. They were to be kind, and to take care of the family’s needs before their own. Angels are placid, without upsetting emotions and needs. The “queen of the garden” label is equally informative, as the garden was the place where the woman had complete dominion, but it is a title devoid of power, as these queens did not control the purse strings (again, as Ruskin makes clear in his companion lecture to Of Queens’ Gardens, Of Kings’

Treasures). The female had power only in her relationship to the male (thus, the power of the queen to the king).

Of course, the queen and the angel are connected, just as the garden is an extension of the home. A quotation from 1877 by Joseph Shillito explains this relationship:

And is it not a high vocation to make homes, like gardens, bloom in the wilderness of life; to be the centre around which hearts gather, and the fondest affections cling; to strengthen, brighten and beautify existence; to be the light of others' souls, and the good angels of others' paths. [. . .] And what to be a mother? To give birth to young immortals! To guide and train the opening minds of those who shall influence the coming generation.⁴

Besides the obvious idealization of family life found here, Shillito's statement connects woman's role as gardener outside the home to woman's role as gardener (caretaker, nurturer) inside the home. In much Victorian ideology and fiction, the two are equated.

⁴ As quoted in Walters, The Garden in Victorian Literature, 227–28.

Further, the idea that the state of the garden is a symbol for the physical and mental health of the occupants of that garden's home is extremely prevalent within Victorian fiction. Using this logic, a well-kept garden equals well-ordered home, as Waters explains: "a positively evaluated garden not only confirms to commonly held notions of beauty and taste, but also implies a commitment to the values and virtues of home, and assists (rather than resists) the making and maintaining of happy family life" (228–29). The reverse, of course, is also true. Because the garden was looked upon as the woman's realm, and women were seen as the guardians of morality, the garden itself revealed much about the nature of woman, according to Victorian beliefs.

Because of its unique symbology, the walled garden is the type most idealized by the Victorians, as it is the type of garden most in keeping with Victorian beliefs about home and family. The walled garden was a private, safe enclosure, and reinforced the idea of the family as a self-contained unit that did not need to merge with those around it. Similarly, the ability of the family to place itself within that garden was important to the garden's value. Gardens that could not support family life—either because of unkemptness or stifling formality—are revealing of their owners' personal flaws.

Woolf was certainly aware of the garden as symbol in Victorian literature, and how the garden acted as a way to keep women oppressed, playing their role within the hegemonic society of Victorian England. The idealization of the domestic sphere and women's roles within that sphere served to keep women within this very narrow scope: women were allowed power within the world of the home and garden, but not outside of it. While Woolf cannot escape this domestic symbology, she can transform it, changing the meanings of the symbols to better fit her ideas of female empowerment, as she does in To the Lighthouse.

Woolf's Use of Garden Imagery

While Woolf's style of writing makes her a modernist, we cannot discount the influence of the Victorian ideology on Woolf's writing. However, while Woolf does rely heavily on the garden and its imagery, she does not use it in a traditional Victorian way, nor does her writing discuss the same issues that a Dickens or a Tennyson might. Woolf cannot ignore her heritage; rather, she addresses it, using the garden as a means for discussing women's issues. For

Woolf, the garden is not a place of female imprisonment; rather, she transforms the garden and its imagery, creating a place where women can overcome the male hegemony that has kept them bound to the garden. Readers see this transformation in many Woolf novels, but it is particularly evident in To the Lighthouse, as this thesis will demonstrate.

Woolf achieves the transformation of the garden imagery through her use of myth and symbol. In chapter 1, we see how Woolf encodes the figures of Demeter and Persephone in To the Lighthouse, creating a text within a text. As Demeter is the goddess of the harvest and Persephone the goddess of spring, these figures have much garden and nature symbolism surrounding them, which Woolf uses in To the Lighthouse. Woolf superimposes the story of Demeter onto Mrs. Ramsay, and in so doing, creates another layer of meaning that tells the story within the story of To the Lighthouse. By identifying Mrs. Ramsay with Demeter, Woolf creates a figure of power, a figure who is an advocate for her daughter, and by extension, for women everywhere. The garden is critical to the understanding of this encryption, and it is through the garden that Mrs. Ramsay's full power is shown.

Paradoxically, Woolf also uses the Persephone story in relation in Mrs. Ramsay, thereby identifying her as both mother and daughter. This is

significant, because in the myth of the abduction of Persephone, the daughter is truly helpless, raped and taken into a world of darkness and death. By likening Mrs. Ramsay to Persephone, we see Woolf's views on traditional patriarchal marriage and its effects on women. Demeter has control in her garden but not outside of it, as she cannot prevent her daughter's fate. Mrs. Ramsay cannot save herself, and this was true for many Victorian women as well.

In chapter 2, we see Woolf's use of another important garden myth: the Garden of Eden. With this myth, Woolf tells the story of Lily, and of women artists everywhere, who must face the Charles Tansleys of the world and their "women can't paint, women can't write" beliefs. This chapter examines the stifling control the Genesis myth has had on women who would be creators in Western culture, and through the myth's transformation Woolf shows us "the voyage out." Lily's search is for female authority, a tradition of creation that men have, through their linkage to Adam, but that women lack. Ultimately, Lily confronts the patriarchal culture that would stymie her, and "has her vision" — where else, but in the garden.

Chapter 3 ties in individual garden elements — hedges, flowers, trees — to the thoughts and emotions of the characters themselves. The hedge, for example, represents different ideas to different characters. For Mr. Ramsay, the hedge

reveals the barriers to his career success, while to Lily, the hedge acts as a barrier to the completion of her art, but one that she must work within. As chapter 2 demonstrates, Lily cannot renounce her heritage (as Mr. Ramsay secretly wishes he could do with his), represented by the garden, but rather, must find a way to work within it. For Mrs. Ramsay, the garden acts as an imprisoning force, representing Mrs. Ramsay's strict adherence to her gender role. For all three characters the garden acts as a sort of Rorschach test: each character gives his or her own meaning to the elements therein.

These chapters trace different aspects of garden imagery within To the Lighthouse. Through her use of garden symbology, Woolf is able to tell the story of To the Lighthouse and create an examination of the changing nature of women's roles during the late-Victorian period. The imagery creates a story within a story, as the real interest lies not with Woolf's use of traditional images and stories, but through her transformation of them to serve her own storytelling desires, as we will see.

Myth and Symbol in the Garden:

Demeter, Persephone, and Hecate in To the Lighthouse

Much scholarship has been done in recent years detailing Virginia Woolf's mythopoetic technique in To the Lighthouse. I am indebted to such scholars as Madeline Moore, Lisa Tyler, Anne Golomb Hoffman, and others for their work in explicating Woolf's use of the figure of Demeter.⁵ My analysis in this chapter builds on the work of these scholars, and takes their ideas in a new direction, focusing on the importance of the garden as symbol in To the Lighthouse. On the plot level, Woolf encodes within her garden symbology powerful ideas about the roles of women, particularly within marriage, in To the Lighthouse. On the symbolic level, Woolf discusses these same issues by embedding within her novel the myth of the abduction of Persephone. This myth heavily emphasizes garden symbols, including both an enclosed, cultivated space and the plants found within it. Woolf uses this commonality to tie the stories together: garden imagery acts as a cohesive force in To the Lighthouse, bringing myth and plot

⁵ See Madeline Moore, The Short Season between Two Silences (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1984); Lisa Tyler, "Mother-Daughter Passion and Rapture: The Demeter Myth in the Fiction of Virginia Woolf and Doris Lessing," Woolf and Lessing: Breaking the Mold, ed. Ruth Saxton and Jean Tobin (New York: St.

together. But as “nothing [is] simply one thing,”⁶ Woolf’s use of garden imagery extends beyond a simple literary device, becoming a retelling of the myth and the creation of a new story, one that details female power and influence in the late-Victorian world of To the Lighthouse.

The Victorians strongly believed in the idea of separate spheres for men and women, with the garden and home—the domestic world—as the woman’s sphere. However, it is important to remember that Victorian women had little choice about home and garden as their realm. As Woolf reminds us in Three Guineas, laws were in place at this time forbidding women to work in most jobs, and most were completely dependent on men for their livelihoods. We also know from Three Guineas that Woolf thought this state of affairs a travesty, and opposed it in her own writings.

We can see this keen interest in feminist issues mirrored in To the Lighthouse. In her allusions to the myth of the abduction of Persephone and the figure of Demeter, Woolf retells these stories, creating, as Lisa Tyler has observed, a new type of plot that emphasizes female relationships and the importance of these bonds, instead of the typical heterosexual romance plot so

Martin’s Press, 1994) 73–91; Anne Golomb Hoffman, “Demeter and Poseidon: Fusion and Distance in To the Lighthouse,” Studies in the Novel 16.2 (1984): 182–96.

⁶ Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1927) 227. All quotations from To the Lighthouse will be taken from this edition, cited hereafter parenthetically in the text..

prevalent in the literature of the time.⁷ The garden is crucial to this retelling.

Tyler notes that “gardens or floral images play an important symbolic role, metaphorically representing the lost unity [between mother and daughter], the joy of reunion, or both” (76).

But the garden represents more than that, as Woolf’s use of myth shows us. As the woman’s sphere, it is a place devoid of power, representative of the women themselves. In To the Lighthouse, however, the garden takes on a new meaning. Woolf reappropriates this symbol of women’s powerlessness and sets it in a world of powerful women: the world of Demeter and Hecate, goddesses who rule in their spheres and frequently exercise their powers within their stories. To do this in its totality, she must retell Persephone’s story as well, which she does, emphasizing the importance of the mother-daughter bond implicit within the Demeter-Persephone relationship; by alluding to the unity of Demeter, Persephone, and Hecate, Woolf emphasizes the power of the three, and of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily as well. Woolf’s use of myth, which is supported by garden symbology, creates a plot that emphasizes female relationships and identification, but her use of garden imagery not only supports this plot, but

⁷ See Tyler, “Mother-Daughter Passion” (73–91) for a full explication of the idea of the subverted heterosexual romance plot in Woolf’s work.

adds to it, transforming the garden into a place of power for women, but also evoking the limitations of this power.

In Joseph Blotner's important article "Mythic Patterns in To the Lighthouse," he tells us that "When meaningful, coherent, and illuminating parallels are discerned, [a] work may be interpreted in terms of [a] myth. Often what appears fragmentary or only partially disclosed in the work may be revealed as complete and explicit through the myth."⁸ Here, Blotner is referring to the mythological figures of Demeter and Persephone alluded to in To the Lighthouse. Important to this discussion is the idea that an examination of an appropriate myth reveals the fragments alluded to in the plot of the novel, in this case, To the Lighthouse. As Blotner goes on to state: "It is like laying a colored transparency over a sheet covered with a maze of hues to reveal the orderly pattern which otherwise resides within them unperceived" (548).

However, while I, like other scholars, am indebted to Blotner's examination of myth in To the Lighthouse, my view differs considerably from his. Blotner does not explore the idea of the Persephone/Demeter myth as Woolf's commentary on the imprisoning gender roles found within the patriarchal world of Victorian England. Further, Blotner's ultimate view of Mrs.

⁸ Joseph Blotner. "Mythic Patterns in To the Lighthouse," PMLA 71.4 (1956): 548.

Ramsay is positive, while I would argue that Woolf's use of myth reveals her ambivalence regarding Mrs. Ramsay, and ultimately, for the women bound within these gender roles for which Mrs. Ramsay is a surrogate. Blotner is unable to truly reconcile the Mrs. Ramsay/Persephone connection because he does not acknowledge the phallogentric culture that keeps Mrs. Ramsay imprisoned, metaphorically raping her again and again. This connection is the crux of my analysis. Blotner does not address these key points or the parallels between Mrs. Ramsay and the Demeter/Persephone/Hecate figure and the new type of plot created by the interpolation of the abduction of Persephone myth. By examining these points, we can decode some of Woolf's ideas regarding female power and gender roles in Victorian England.

The abduction of Persephone by Hades is particularly relevant to this study because of its heavy dependence on garden symbolism to tell its story. This symbolism embodied within the triple figure of Demeter/Persephone/Hecate and their related myths and To the Lighthouse is crucial to the meanings found within both the myth and To the Lighthouse. By "laying a colored transparency" — the use of the garden symbolism — over both the myth and the plot within the novel, we can unfold the meanings implicit within both texts.

Of course, this study is primarily concerned with the garden and its symbolism, so it is important to discuss how the roles of each goddess and her relevant story fits into that realm. A discussion of the role of Demeter is a good place to begin, as she is the goddess most frequently likened to Mrs. Ramsay throughout most critical interpretations that discuss myth and To the Lighthouse. Although often thought of as the goddess of the earth, Demeter's role is actually more specific than that. As Jane Harrison⁹ reminds us, "Demeter is not the Earth-Mother, she is the goddess of the fruits of the civilized cultured field of the *tilth*—her name probably means *spelt*-mother or more generally Grain-Mother" (Mythology 79). So Demeter herself is the goddess of cultivated land, the *tilth*, out of which the English garden of Woolf's world grew. Harrison connects cultivation with the women's realm in ancient Greece: "so long as primitive man was taken up with hunting and fighting, it was natural that woman should be the first agriculturist" (79). Grain cultivation in ancient Greece is connected with the women's realm, just as garden cultivation in Victorian England is. The interconnections between the Greek and Victorian ideas of the garden as woman's realm become relevant when we consider Mrs. Ramsay as a Demeter figure.

⁹ See Jane Marcus, Madeline Moore, Eileen Barrett, and others for a discussion of the importance of Jane

Blotner claims that Mrs. Ramsay is “an incarnation of Demeter” (552), and he uses the symbols of fruitfulness [that] cluster around Mrs. Ramsay” to link her to the Goddess: “She plants flowers and sees that they are tended. The others, thinking of her, associate flowers with her instinctively. She adorns herself with a green shawl. Running throughout the book [. . .] is an almost obsessive concern that the greenhouse shall be repaired and preserved” (553). Woolf identifies Mrs. Ramsay as Demeter primarily through her interest in her garden, an idea which makes sense given Demeter’s association with cultivated landscape.

Direct references to Mrs. Ramsay as Demeter abound in the text. William Banks sees her as “very clearly Greek, straight, blue-eyed. How incongruous it seemed to be telephoning to a woman like that. The Graces assembling seemed to have joined hands in meadows of asphodel to compose that face” (46). In this passage, Banks makes the connection between Mrs. Ramsay and the “meadows of asphodel” —a cultivated flower. When Lily describes her, she thinks “There was something frightening about her. She was irresistible. Always she got her own way at the end” (152). Lily also notes that Mrs. Ramsay wore “an august shape” (80); Paul Rayley “worshipped” her (152). These images portray Mrs.

Ramsay as a larger-than-life figure, the goddess incarnated. Mrs. Ramsay sees herself in this goddess-like way. She feels she is

like some queen who, finding her people gathered in the hall, looks down upon them, and descends among them and acknowledging their tributes silently accepts their devotion and their prostration before her [. . .] she went down and crossed the hall and bowed her head very slightly, as if she accepted what they could not say: their tribute to her beauty. (124)

The novel abounds with such comparisons; Mrs. Ramsay, beautiful and regal, stands above the other characters. She is the goddess, they her subjects.

Mrs. Ramsay also describes herself in terms of nature images. She thinks, “It was odd [. . .] how if one was alone, one leant to inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one [. . .] in a sense they were one” (97); all of the above items—trees, streams, and flowers--could be found in a traditional English garden. These descriptions, taken together, show the importance of the garden as a primary symbol by which to see Mrs. Ramsay as Demeter. This comparison is important because of the palpimpsestic plot within To the Lighthouse: the abduction of Persephone.

The earliest version of Persephone's abduction by Hades is found in the Hymn to Demeter (attributed to Homer but not actually authored by him). This work describes how Hades, god of the underworld, abducts and rapes Persephone while she is picking flowers in a field. Traditionally, this myth has been used to explain the change of seasons, but we can infer from the story more than just this simple explanation of a natural event. Demeter's pain and grief at the loss of Persephone is an integral part of the story, and so Demeter/Persephone's rebirth: "To enter into the figure of Demeter means to be pursued, to be robbed, raped, to fail to understand, to rage and grieve, but then to get everything back and be born again" (Jung and Kerényi 123). The above quotation alludes not only to the violation of Demeter because of the abduction of her daughter, but also the mysterious unity between the Demeter and Persephone (Kore) figures. Demeter as mother is an aspect of Persephone, who herself, as maiden, is an aspect of Demeter.

Harrison discusses Persephone—or Kore as she also called—her relationship to Demeter, her mother, and the concept of the two goddesses in one: "It was mainly in connection with agriculture, it would seem, that the Earth-goddess developed her double form as Mother and Maid. [. . .] Demeter and Kore are two persons through one god" (Prolegomena 272). Here again, the

emphasis on agriculture—the cultivated—as integral to this idea of Demeter and Persephone as a double figure, an idea Woolf picks up on and uses throughout To the Lighthouse. Jung and Kerényi also recognize that Demeter and Persephone “are to be thought of as a *double figure*, one half of which is the ideal complement of the other” (109). Mrs. Ramsay is this double figure throughout To the Lighthouse.

If Mrs. Ramsay is both Demeter and Persephone, she is particularly the Persephone who represents the ephemeral nature of life, who reminds us that everything born in the spring must die in the winter, as does Persephone herself when she returns to the realm of the dead for a portion of each year. Mrs. Ramsay thinks about this duality:

As she sat with the children the words of some old cradle song, murmured by nature “I am guarding you—I am your support,” but at other times [. . .] had no such kindly meaning [. . .] made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea [. . .] it was all ephemeral as a rainbow. (27)

Here, Mrs. Ramsay is reminded, as the entire “Time Passes” section reminds readers, that life changes. Persephone is the embodiment of this change. As goddess of spring and queen of the underworld, she represents both life and

death. Woolf makes nature benevolent—as it can be when it is shaped by human hands—and yet malevolent. Within the garden lie the “seeds of death” (151), the knowledge that winter follows spring.

Other characters in the novel also recognize the goddess in Mrs. Ramsay. Charles Tansley sees her as the dual figure of Demeter-Persephone on their walk to and from town at the beginning of the novel:

it was this—she was the most beautiful person he had ever seen.

With stars in her eyes and veils in her hair, with cyclamen and wild violets—what nonsense was he thinking? She was fifty at least; she had eight children. Stepping through fields of flowers and taking to her breast buds that had broken and lambs that had fallen; with stars in her eyes and the wind in her hair—he took her bag. (25)

Here, Mrs. Ramsay is both real woman and mythological goddess; Tansley sees both aspects of Mrs. Ramsay here. While his realization regarding her age brings him back to reality, he is still overwhelmed by the flower imagery that portrays her goddess nature—the cyclamen and violets, the fields of flowers that she steps through on her way through the town. The figure of Demeter is represented in this paragraph, with its images of the fertile mother of eight and the mothering

aspect that is embedded in the idea of one who mends broken flowers and small, young creatures. But the maiden aspect of Persephone is alluded to here as well, as Persephone is herself walking through fields of flowers when she is taken by Hades. While Mrs. Ramsay is primarily a Demeter figure here, Tansley sees the maiden within the mother that is inherent within the Demeter-Persephone archetype; in this passage, Woolf reminds us about the transitory nature of life itself: Persephone of the spring becomes queen of the dead. So too will Mrs. Ramsay's "reign" end in the next section. The garden imagery reveals this message.

Tansley is initially overpowered by this goddess figure and the emotion she instills in him at the beginning of their walk, which Woolf is careful to note begins in Mrs. Ramsay's garden:

the influence of that extraordinary emotion which had been growing on the walk, had begun in the garden when he had wanted to take her bag, had increased in the town when he had wanted to tell her everything about himself, he was coming to see himself, and everything he had ever known gone crooked a little. It was awfully strange. (24)

The typical Victorian garden was the realm of the woman of the family, the “angel in the house/queen of the garden” role. Instead of a place women are relegated to, a place that lacks power, Woolf portrays the garden as a place of feminine power. Woolf’s reappropriation of the garden transforms it into a place where Mrs. Ramsay is all-powerful, able to influence Tansley’s entire world, making it “crooked a little.” She has power here over the men in her life, but certainly not complete power, and not enough power to protect herself or the other women in her life from the abduction and rape threat implicit within the Persephone archetype.

In Mrs. Ramsay’s garden world there are both violence and elements beyond her control. Throughout To the Lighthouse, the male characters are associated with violence: Jasper shoots Mrs. Ramsay’s rooks, James wants to kill his father, and Mr. Ramsay ritually quotes passages from “The Charge of the Light Brigade.” This violence implied within the male element invades Mrs. Ramsay’s garden world, just as Persephone’s abduction happens within Demeter’s realm:

the house was full; the garden blowing. If he [James] put implicit faith in her, nothing should hurt him; however deep he buried himself or climbed high, not for a second should he find himself

without her. So boasting of her capacity to surround and protect,
there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by;
all was so lavished and spent; and James [. . .] felt her rise in a rosy-
flowered fruit tree laid with leaves and dancing boughs into which
[. . .] the arid scimitar [. . .] smote" (60)

The abduction of Persephone reveals that the "arid scimitar" of male violence against women is always a possibility, even within the seemingly protected world of Demeter's garden. This is another way that Mrs. Ramsay resembles Demeter: her sorrow throughout the novel. Kerényi states that the Homeric version of the myth of the abduction of Persephone "describes Persephone's rape at the beginning of the poem, and from then on it is full of her divine mother's pain and grief. Even in their reunion there is still a portion of bitterness, for Persephone has eaten, while with her husband, of the pomegranate and has to spend a third of every year with him" (Jung and Kerényi 113-14). Mrs. Ramsay expresses her continuous sorrow throughout To the Lighthouse that she cannot protect herself or her daughters from this violence. The fruit tree is no match for the scimitar.

The archetype of Demeter, however, represents the power available to women when they band together and refuse to accept what others have decreed

as their reality. In the abduction myth, Helios tells Demeter that Hades will make a good husband, and that she should simply accept her fate; she refuses, and in this way is able to obtain the compromise of Persephone's part-time return. Mrs. Ramsay does not exhibit this aspect of Demeter, and in some places, is even more like Gaia, Demeter's grandmother. It is Gaia, who colludes with Zeus and Hades by causing a beautiful narcissus to grow; when Persephone picks it, a crack in the earth forms from whence Hades rides out to seize Persephone. It is this aspect of Demeter that Mrs. Ramsay does not exhibit, the aspect of the mother that protects her child. In many ways, Mrs. Ramsay betrays both her daughters and her surrogate daughter, Lily.

Mrs. Ramsay urges all the daughters to marry, leading "her victims [. . .] to the altar" (157). In this respect, these daughters represent the Persephone whom Gaia betrays. Mrs. Ramsay recognizes Paul to be "rather stupid," yet does everything in her power to make Minta marry him. Of course, this marriage turns out rather badly for both Paul and Minta. Lily narrowly escapes marrying William Bankes, while Prue, the daughter who most resembles her mother, dies, like her mother, in the "Time Passes" section. Woolf reveals Prue as Persephone again through garden images:

Moreover, softened and acquiescent, the spring with her bees humming and gnats dancing threw her cloak about her, veiled her eyes, averted her head, and among passing shadows and flights of small rain seemed to have taken upon her a knowledge of the sorrows of the mankind.

[Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth.] (199)

In this passage, the spring itself takes on “the sorrows of mankind,” as Persephone does when she must leave the garden world of Demeter to become queen of the dead. Mrs. Ramsay cannot protect her daughter from this death (indirectly caused by her marriage, as Prue dies in childbirth), just as she cannot protect herself from her own eventual death.

The fact that Mrs. Ramsay cannot protect herself from her own death reveals she is also like Persephone. She is not able to stop the continual “rape” symbolized by Mr. Ramsay’s constant need for sympathy. Lily sees Mrs. Ramsay as this Persephone figure after her death, highlighted through Woolf’s use of flower imagery:

It was strange how clearly she saw her, stepping with her usual quickness across fields among whose folds, purplish and soft,

among whose flowers, hyacinths or lilies, she vanished. [. . .] For days after she had heard of her death she had seen her thus, putting her wreath to her forehead and going unquestioningly with her companion, a shade across the fields. (270)

Here, we see Mrs. Ramsay as Persephone on the day of her abduction by Hades. But Woolf subtly changes the myth. In the original version, Persephone actively resists Hades. Here, she goes “unquestioningly,” further suggesting Mrs. Ramsay’s betrayal not only of other women, but of herself. By not questioning her fate—“they all must marry” (77)—Mrs. Ramsay becomes complicit in her own demise. When Lily thinks “Really, she was angry with Mrs. Ramsay” (223), it is because Lily recognizes the unnecessary nature of Mrs. Ramsay’s death, the sacrifices Mrs. Ramsay made that contributed to this death. In the end, however, Lily acknowledges that this thought contains “a kind of blasphemy” (224). Mrs. Ramsay is a victim of her social circumstance just as Persephone was.

Here it is Lily who, after Mrs. Ramsay’s death, becomes the Demeter figure and transforms the story, creating a new paradigm on which to base her own relationship to men, thereby creating a new possible paradigm for all women. Again, this occurs in Demeter’s place of power, the garden, while Lily is painting:

Mr. Ramsay sighed to the full. He waited. Was she not going to say anything? Did she not see what he wanted from her? [. . .] All Lily wished was that [. . .] this demand that she should surrender herself up to him entirely [. . .] should leave her. [. . .]

A woman, she had provoked this horror; a woman, she should have known how to deal with it. It was immensely to her discredit, sexually, to stand there dumb. [. . .]

“What beautiful boots!” she exclaimed. She was ashamed of herself. To praise his boots when he asked her to solace his soul.

(226-29)

Lily knows what Mr. Ramsay desires from her, as it is the same emotion he required from Mrs. Ramsay: sympathy. Yet Lily also knows that it was these demands that killed Mrs. Ramsay: “That man [Mr. Ramsay] [. . .] never gave; that man took. [. . .] Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died” (223). Throughout the novel Lily has resisted the traps implicit for women within traditional Victorian marriage. In the above passage, she refuses to give Mr. Ramsay what he wants, thereby preserving her own sense of herself and her dignity; yet Mr. Ramsay does not respond to this action with anger: “Instead, Mr.

Ramsay smiled" (229). As Jane Lilienfeld explains: "Refusing to reenact Mrs. Ramsay's role, she does both herself and Mr. Ramsay a liberating service" (Lilienfeld 369). Because Lily does not play the traditional female role that his wife played, Mr. Ramsay is free to step out of his traditional role as well, and is able to put aside his feelings of grief and complete his pilgrimage to the lighthouse. Further, Lily symbolizes here a new type of relationship that can exist between men and women. Lily's action transforms the Persephone story; there can be another fate for women in relation to men besides the "love of man for woman [. . .] bearing in its bosom the seeds of death" (To the Lighthouse 151).¹⁰

The last aspect of Demeter, according to Kerényi, is Demeter as Hecate, who is connected with the moon: "like the sun, this third goddess appears to belong to the Demeter-Persephone world: *Hecate*. [. . .] She is often held to be the representative of the moon, particularly as she is closely related to this heavenly body in other ways. On the other hand she would seem to be the *double of Demeter herself*" (110; emphasis in original). This idea of the triple goddess is

¹⁰ Even in this metaphor we see the image of the garden, here representing the stifling nature of traditional Victorian marriage. For more on the relationship between men and women leading to death in Woolf's novels, see Tyler.

important, because Mrs. Ramsay exhibits aspects of all three goddesses at different times.

While the clues to seeing Mrs. Ramsay as Hecate are not as obvious, we can see them when we examining Mrs. Ramsay in her garden. The moon, the symbol sacred to Hecate, reveals Mrs. Ramsay in this aspect:

But into what sanctuary had one penetrated? Lily Briscoe had looked up at last, and there was Mrs. Ramsay, unwitting entirely what had caused her laughter, still presiding, but now with every trace of willfulness abolished, and in its stead, something clear as the space which the clouds at last uncover—the little space of sky which sleeps beside the moon. (78)

This passage is taken from a section where Lily is remembering a night she spent with Mrs. Ramsay in the garden. At the beginning, her memories float to jokes and laughter shared, a time when there seemed to be no one else but the two of them. Lily wishes “not knowledge, but unity” (79) with Mrs. Ramsay, and seems to achieve this for the brief time shared alone in the garden. In the end, however, Mrs. Ramsay reminds Lily that this unity cannot last, as in the end “they all must marry,” thus separating one from the other, Persephone from Demeter. In the myth of the abduction of Persephone, it is Hecate who reveals to Demeter what

has happened to her daughter, how she has been taken by Hades. Mrs. Ramsay as Hecate explains to Lily what she understands to be a woman's fate within Victorian culture: Woolf, through Mrs. Ramsay, simply "reveal[s] the problematic social situations in which her heroines exist rather than solve[s] them" (3), as Madeline Moore observes. The moon, a symbol sacred to Hecate, is given prominence in this passage, as if the cover of night allows Mrs. Ramsay, like Hecate, to reveal the problem. The garden acts here as a distinctly female realm, a place where women can tell their truths and relate to each other.

Through her use of myth in To the Lighthouse, Woolf creates a new type of plot, one that emphasizes the importance of the woman-to-woman relationship found in the novel. Because of her superimposition of myth onto the plot of the novel, particularly her use of the abduction of Persephone myth, we are able to see the ways in which women lose and regain their own power and autonomy. Garden symbolism plays a critical role in the retelling of this myth, as it is through these garden symbols that Woolf cues her readers about the function of myth and the characters of To the Lighthouse. The garden acts as an important setting for these characters, and symbolizes both a place of safety and a place of danger. When women act as Demeter and stand up to the forces within Victorian culture that would rape them, as Lily does, the garden can be a

place of power. But for the Persephones of the novel—Mrs. Ramsay and Prue—the garden acts as a place where violence occurs, and can mean their ultimate destruction.

“The Lawn Was the World”:

Woolf’s Reclamation of the Garden of Eden Myth

This chapter examines Woolf’s use of setting in To the Lighthouse as the means by which she reappropriates the garden as symbol, changing it from a place where women are imprisoned by their gender roles to a place where women can undertake the heroic journey toward finding an identity as an artist. We have seen this journey in Woolf’s use of the Demeter/Persephone myth, but it is also illuminating to examine the use of garden as setting for the actions of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily. When we examine the garden through this lens, we see Mrs. Ramsay as constrained by her gender role while Lily is able to free herself from this constraint and create a different life than the one Mrs. Ramsay envisions for her, the one Mrs. Ramsay herself lives. However, Lily must first confront the ambivalent role of Mrs. Ramsay as both liberator and jailer for Lily’s artistic vision. This confrontation allows Lily to embody a new archetype for women—one that Woolf herself helped to create—the woman as artist. The garden plays a crucial role as the context for this fresh idea of woman.

Is Woolf's recurring use of the garden as setting simply accidental? No. Woolf herself was both a careful writer and extremely aware of the gender roles that her mother had embodied, and those that she had to overcome in order to be a writer. Because Victorians considered the garden to be the "domain" of women, Woolf's choice of garden as setting is particularly apt: it is here that Mrs. Ramsay, who never truly overcomes her own imprisonment, makes the compromises that lead to her death; it is also here that Lily must paint her painting. Why? She must overcome the influence of Mrs. Ramsay, and the tradition of the angel of the house that she symbolizes, in order to become an artist. Lily cannot do this by renouncing her feminine heritage, but rather by transforming it. The garden acts as both setting for and symbol of this transformation. Further, Lily—as a woman—must develop her art outside of the tradition of male authority and the lineage of the male artist. She must establish a new tradition, one that allows her the authority to write. She must face that most primal garden myth—the Garden of Eden—and reclaim for herself and her sisters the cultural authority vested in Adam. Only after she reclaims this authority is she able to have her vision, to be the artist in both word and deed.

The Legacy of the Garden of Eden: Woolf's Use of Garden as the Means for
Feminine Authority in To the Lighthouse

In her excellent article "Rewriting Genesis: Gender and Culture in Twentieth-Century Texts,"¹¹ Christine Froula discusses the problem of female writers creating works within a culture defined by figures of male hegemony. Women authors must, according to Froula, create a new literary tradition, one that allows them to be the creators rather than the created, the actor, not the acted upon. She traces this problem back to the Bible, specifically to the story of the Garden of Eden. Froula reminds us that "a culture's creation myth stands as a foundation to its rituals, laws, and customs," and goes on further to note that "the reception of the creation story also powerfully exemplifies the transmission of culture as it operates through literary influence" (197). A culture's creation myth influences all its artists—and they way they tell the story of their culture—but in Western culture, it affects male artists positively and female

¹¹ In Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 7.2 (fall 1998): 197–220. Froula discusses the creation story found in the Jewish's (J's) text, as it is this version that "has dominated the Western literary and cultural imagination" (218).

artists negatively. Froula highlights some fine points of the story that are particularly subversive to the woman artist, particularly the fact that men are the “namers” of all creatures, and as such, are given authority over them by God—an authority that extends throughout the culture: “The man’s privilege of naming is [. . .] significant [. . .], for it endows him with a prior authority in human language and culture that depends upon and confirms his ontological earliness” (Froula 210).

The problem faced by women artists such as Lily or Woolf herself is the problem of placing themselves within an artistic tradition that is dominated by a hegemony that is hostile to the idea of woman as creator. The hegemony that resists women-as-creators is given voice in To the Lighthouse by Charles Tansley’s “Women can’t paint, women can’t write,” and in the Garden of Eden by the creation of Eve as the mother of all creators, yet given this status only after God and Adam have made and named all creatures, including Eve herself. Eve is given the name “mother of all living”; she does not choose it, and in the story, it is a name devoid of the power of original creation, since women become mothers after God and Adam have already created the world. As Adrienne Rich bluntly states, “women have not been makers and sayers of patriarchal culture” (11) referring, of course, to Western culture, those living under the law of

Genesis. Men, via the legacy of Adam, became the keepers of culture and artistic tradition, creating a society that excluded women whenever possible from participating in this creative role.

Froula's study is relevant to this one because of its examination of the Garden of Eden as the most primal of gardens; this garden's effects on the psyche of the artist are ubiquitous. Further, Woolf uses characters in To the Lighthouse as the means by which she embodies and rejects the idea of men as the sole arbiters of culture found in Genesis, seeking instead to revise Adam's role in the garden such that the descendants of Eve can also become the creators of culture, the makers and sayers. While Froula discusses To the Lighthouse briefly, as part of an overall picture, I seek to explain how the Garden of Eden operates in this novel in more detail, focusing on specific passages where the Garden of Eden and Woolf's garden overlap. I expand upon Froula's ideas, focusing on the importance of the garden itself, as the garden—going back to the Garden of Eden—is the primary symbol of the artistic legacy women must reappropriate in order to create a literary tradition of their own, one that allows them to be artists. While I understand that this struggle against the Garden of Eden and its inherent biases toward men as creators is only applicable if one accepts the myth of Genesis as valid, I do believe that, as the primary creation myth found in

Western European culture, a discussion of the myth's influences is valid for To the Lighthouse. This struggle is embodied in Lily, but it is one that is faced by women artists everywhere living under the hegemony of Genesis. Thus, Lily must "have her vision" in the garden so that she can reappropriate Woolf's incarnation of the Genesis garden for the woman artist.

As noted in the previous chapter, the connections Woolf makes between Mrs. Ramsay and a goddess figure are many. That chapter discussed the idea of Mrs. Ramsay as a Demeter/Persephone/Hecate figure, but she can also be looked on as a Jahweh substitute, as Froula explains: "Woolf's revision of Eden's patriarchal law is dramatically explicit in an early draft [of To the Lighthouse], in which she substitutes for Jahweh the mother-god who presides over 'The Window'" (213). Here, Mrs. Ramsay becomes the patriarchal voice of authority, telling the younger women of the novel (such as her real daughters, and her symbolic ones, Lily and Minta) how they must act and what culture requires of them. They all, of course, must marry, and Mrs. Ramsay even goes so far as to manipulate Paul and Minta's betrothal, even though she considers Paul to be somewhat stupid (see p. 85). Lily must "be nice" to the detestable Charles Tansley at the dinner party, and narrowly escapes marriage to Mr. Bankes.

Considering the Ramsay daughters, there are places in the text where both Nancy and Cam question patriarchal authority, specifically within the garden setting, but none can break free of the constraints of their own gender roles as represented by Mrs. Ramsay. Cam is described as “wild and fierce. She would not ‘give a flower to the gentleman’ as the nursemaid told her. No! no! no! she would not!” (36), but eventually she must submit to Mrs. Ramsay’s wishes: “when Mrs. Ramsay called ‘Cam’ a second time, the projectile dropped in mid career, and Cam came lagging back, pulling a leaf by the way, to her mother” (84). Here, Cam’s flower represents her independent spirit—that which she wants to keep. The nursemaid cannot make Cam submit, to “be nice” to Mr. Banks, as Lily is forced to “be nice” to Tansley, but Mrs. Ramsay can. Cam drags her little leaf along beside her—as if in protest—as she comes into the house to give the message to the cook, back to the domestic setting, but she cannot resist her mother’s wishes. For Cam, the outdoors represents a place of freedom, a place where she can be wild and fierce, but Mrs. Ramsay is the real ruler of this garden, as her presence forces Cam into submission. Cam follows her mother’s wishes with a “parrot-like instinct” (85)—she does not rebel, but is poised to grow up like her mother. Cam is not able to transform the message of the

Garden of Eden; she wishes to be independent, to be the creator of her own destiny, but cannot penetrate the world of the makers and sayers.

Nancy also wishes independence, “to escape the horror of family life” (112). After Paul and Minta become engaged, and Minta loses her brooch, Nancy observes Minta crying: “She was crying for something else. We might all sit down and cry, she felt. But she did not know what for” (117). Here, Minta’s sadness—as seen through Nancy’s eyes—is not just about the loss of a precious object. Rather, Nancy sees what the engagement means to Minta, and to Paul as well—the “horror of family life” being created, the perpetuation of gender roles implicit within Paul and Minta’s marriage. Nancy sees this, but cannot change its outcome, for Minta or herself. Both Cam and Nancy are not able to break free of Mrs. Ramsay’s dominating presence, and the other daughters seem not even to try. Mrs. Ramsay is one of the makers and sayers in terms of her daughters; they are controlled by her, bound to do the duties their gender roles require of them.

All of the daughters are controlled in varying degrees by Mrs. Ramsay, who uses her influence to ensure that they remain in the garden patriarchal authority has created for them, the world where they are not the creators but the created, not the actors but the acted upon. Paradoxically, Mrs. Ramsay represents

both these roles. She is the acted upon, the one who is imprisoned by her gender role, yet she is also the actor, as it is she who helps to imprison her daughters. Save Lily, none is able to confront the image of the father found in the mother: “Not Jahweh but Mrs. Ramsay, not a father-god but a mother-god, walks in Woolf’s imaginary garden [. . .] Lily wrestles with this mother, who (like a female version of the male superego) at once endangers her art by commanding her to marry and provides the substance and authority for Lily’s vision” (Froula 214). Here, the archetype of the father represents Adam and Yahweh combined: the father symbolizes the elements that control women throughout both the novel and society. The mother archetype represents both powerlessness in its Victorian garb, but also the avenue to freedom, as mothers have power in their own right, and it is possible—indeed, vital—for Lily to claim the power and authority represented by the mother for herself. As father, Mrs. Ramsay both restricts and contains Prue, Rose, Nancy, Cam, and Minta, and tries to do the same to Lily. Yet Lily needs the authority of Mrs. Ramsay-as-mother to create her art; she must find her own tradition, her own way of claiming authority so that she can finish her painting. Just as Eve had no authority in her garden, so Lily has none in hers—save what she can claim for herself.

For Lily, Mrs. Ramsay becomes this authority, this arbiter of female culture and tradition. Mrs. Ramsay is a creator, an artist, as evidenced by her eight children, her home, her dinner party, and her garden. This is why Lily is so attracted to Mrs. Ramsay — she seeks the female culture and tradition embodied by Mrs. Ramsay, but must resist the hegemony of the father found within the mother, or her art will die. Lily herself states this attraction to Mrs. Ramsay: “‘I’m in love with you?’ No, that was not true. ‘I’m in love with this all,’ waving her hand at the hedge, at the house, at the children. It was absurd, impossible” (32). Here, we see Lily struggling with her mixed feelings for Mrs. Ramsay. On the one hand, she admires Mrs. Ramsay’s capacity to create a life for herself within the acceptable bounds of Victorian culture, so much so that she would consider relinquishing her art for this life. On the other, Lily knows she herself could never do as Mrs. Ramsay has done; this is why her attraction to Mrs. Ramsay’s lifestyle is impossible and absurd. The garden imagery in the above quotation is also telling. Here, the hedge acts as an important symbol for both Mrs. Ramsay and Lily throughout the novel: it signifies the place where Mrs. Ramsay, and indeed any woman who must live under the hegemony of Genesis, is restrained.

Lily knows that living Mrs. Ramsay's life would mean the death of her art; the two cannot coexist for her. As such, the hedge is an important part of how Lily sees Mrs. Ramsay; Mrs. Ramsay and the garden hedge are connected, as the hedge represents the places where Mrs. Ramsay is limited, and Lily would be limited too, if she followed Mrs. Ramsay's example. For her part, Mrs. Ramsay embodies both archetypes of father and mother—the father, because she controls her children, and the mother, because she is both powerful and powerless. If Lily can cull the power from the weakness, then she will be able to find the authority necessary to become an artist, to have her vision.

Lily reclaims the power of the female by immortalizing Mrs. Ramsay as mother in her picture, with the mother becoming the inspiration for the daughter's vision, her art. Here, the garden acts as the setting for this reclamation of power and creation of a new tradition. The Ramsay garden acts as a new Garden of Eden, but one in which women have a voice, and may create art that is true to this voice. Lily herself sums up her intention to create her art in her own way, to have her own vision, focusing on the floral imagery of the garden:

The jacmanna was bright violet; the wall staring white.

She would not have considered it honest to tamper with

the bright violet and the staring white, since she saw them
like that, fashionable though it was, since Mr. Paunceforte's visit, to
see everything pale, elegant, transparent. (31–32)

Here, the jacmanna and the garden setting itself symbolize Lily's truth-telling and her confrontation with male culture, here represented by Paunceforte's vision of transparent landscapes. Lily's rejection of Paunceforte is an act of defiance, and an act of affirmation of her own power. She could paint in his style, and be fashionable and accepted, but she chooses instead the power of her own vision, a vision she only truly achieves at the very end of the novel.

Lily must paint her own picture in her own way; then she may establish her own authority to create. But this vision does not come easily to her:

She could see it all so clearly, so commandingly, when
she looked: it was when she took her brush in hand that
the whole thing changed. It was in that moment's flight
between the picture and her canvas that the demons set
on her who often brought her to the verge of tears and
made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as
any down a dark passage for a child. Such she often felt
herself—struggling against terrific odds to maintain her

courage. (32)

Lily feels like a child here because she is one, in a sense. The authority of her tradition, unlike Paunceforte's, is in its infancy. As we have seen above, it is significant that Lily chooses to paint Mrs. Ramsay in her "mother" aspect—with James—as it is the mother who is the counterbalance to the father, and it is the mother as arbiter of culture that Lily must reclaim from Genesis. Lily's choice of subject matter is also a break with the male tradition represented in the novel by Paunceforte's landscapes. Lily's reclamation of the mother via her painting of Mrs. Ramsay helps to offset her feelings of powerlessness detailed above. But this break with Paunceforte's tradition does not come easily to Lily:

She could have wept. It was bad, it was bad, it was infinitely bad! She could have done it differently of course; the colour could have been thinned and faded; the shapes etherealised; that was how Paunceforte would have seen it. But then she did not see it like that. [. . .]

And it would never be seen; never be hung even, and there was Mr. Tansley whispering in her ear, "Women can't paint, women can't write . . ." (75)

The demons Lily battles in both of the above quotations are the representatives of patriarchal culture—the Pauncefortes—that do not allow Lily her vision. Lily's quest is to create her own authority—using the mother—for her vision, one not dependent upon the Pauncefortes of the world.

Lily draws strength from the garden to help her on her quest for female authority: “some bird chirped in the garden, gathering a desperate courage she would urge her own exemption from the universal law” (77). Here, the bird reminds Lily that there can be a way other than Mrs. Ramsay's vision of women and their roles. Lily finally internalizes this knowledge when she paints her picture in the garden; she embodies the idea that women can be creators of culture.

The establishment of female authority is one of the key issues within To the Lighthouse. The last line of the novel, “I have had my vision” (310), is really the endpoint of Lily's struggle with the authority of Genesis. Lily cannot have an authentic vision without facing down the patriarchal culture that would stifle the artist in her. Woolf's choice of setting for Lily's vision is crucial to the meaning of this vision. By placing Lily within the garden while finishing her painting, Woolf makes Lily a part of the larger transformation that must take place for women to be accepted—and to accept themselves—as creators. Woolf, through

Lily, reclaims the garden—the origin of culture—for women. It is because of this reclamation that Lily is able to have her vision. Lily notes this transformation when she finally starts the process of completing her picture: “Here sitting on the world, she thought, she could not shake herself free from the sense that everything this morning was happening for the first time. [. . .] The lawn was the world” (288). That “first time” is Lily’s own revisioning of Genesis; the world is new to her because through creating her own art in her own way, she is able to break free of the patriarchal shackles that bind her and prevent her from creating. In this entire last section of “The Lighthouse,” she is creating her art in the garden that is the world, but the world is new because she is creating her art on her own terms, in her own way. Through this act of creation, Lily establishes a new Eden for herself, one in which she is her own authority.

Lily’s transforms herself from the acted upon to the actor, and her decision to finish her painting in her own way symbolizes the completion of a larger quest: to live a life over which she has control and authority, and to create art from this authority. To become the actor, Lily must transform the garden itself. That is the real importance of Woolf’s references to the Garden of Eden. The garden cannot be overcome or excluded. It must be transformed, as the garden itself is the symbolic starting point of Western culture. Lily needs the

authority of the garden to become an artist, just as she needs this authority to speak to Eve as well as Adam.

Woolf encodes the many barriers to the female production of art within this new Garden of Eden. The hedge as symbol of the barriers to completion of the heroic quest—and other garden images—is the subject of the next section.

“In What Garden Did All this Happen?”:

Individual Garden Elements as Symbols

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. (To the Lighthouse 275)

What Mrs. Ramsay’s son James notes in the above quotation is the significance of the garden as setting. As the previous chapter demonstrates, examining the garden in which “all this happens” is important to understanding Woolf’s ideas regarding female empowerment and the significance of the Genesis myth for imagining a way to overcome the barriers that prevent women from being creators of culture. This section examines other types of barriers symbolized within the Ramsay garden. While the previous chapter focused primarily on the ways women are repressed by the male hegemony encoded in the Garden of Eden myth, this chapter discusses how the Victorian gender roles

repress both men and women, as seen through Mr. Ramsay, Mrs. Ramsay, and Lily, and what tools these characters use to escape/maintain this repression. Woolf encodes symbols of this repression within the garden itself, using individual garden elements to convey these ideas to the reader.

Further, Woolf creates a setting in To the Lighthouse in which the environment—the garden—reflects the characters' own concerns. Woolf uses the environment as part of her “tunneling” method: she seeks to “tunnel inside” the minds of the characters, and one of the ways she does this is through the characters own projections. As Woolf herself notes in A Writer's Diary: “I hope to have kept the sound of the sea and the birds, dawn and garden subconsciously present, doing their work underground” (165). While Woolf certainly keeps “the sound of the [. . .] dawn and garden” in her work, it seems—at least in To the Lighthouse—that these elements are more than subconsciously present; rather, the garden is consciously on each character's mind: Mr. Ramsay, Mrs. Ramsay, and Lily project onto the garden their own thoughts and issues, and infuse their own meaning onto the garden. Therefore, the garden symbology is very individual: the garden, and the elements inside it, represent something different for each character.

Garden Imagery, Setting, Psyche

We see the importance of symbolism within the Ramsay garden through Woolf's use of individual garden elements—such as the jacmanna and the hedge—to symbolize larger concerns of the novel. For Lily, the external, cultural barriers to writing—the barriers enforced by the father, as discussed in the previous section—are symbolized within the Ramsay's garden by the hedge, which appears at many significant points throughout the novel. For Mr. Ramsay, the hedge represents his duty to his family, which prevents him from reaching the elusive "Z." For the main characters, hedges represent boundaries, enclosures, places where people are kept inside, or not allowed outside. "Hedge" has several meanings relevant to this discussion, which I will explicate further into the chapter, but these meanings include hedge as boundary, as barrier or limit, and as a verb, to plant or trim a hedge. All of these meanings have relevance to this examination, as Lily must overcome these functions of the hedge in order to have her vision and paint her picture, establishing herself as an artist, while Mr. Ramsay must also make peace with the hedge to complete his journey to the lighthouse.

The first meaning of “hedge” is the literal one: “a fence or boundary formed by a dense row of scrubs or low trees”; one of the defining features of the middle-class Victorian garden—like the Ramsay garden on the Isle of Skye—is the hedge that separated the garden from the outside world. Gardens previous to this time period did not always include hedges that acted as fences, delineating the boundary between home and nonhome. It was during the Victorian period that this use of the hedge became prevalent.¹² The development of the garden hedge is significant to our discussion because, as was discussed in the introduction, the Victorian period is also the time when the quasi-deification of women in the home occurred, with the angel in the house/queen of the garden stereotypes becoming widely disseminated. Hedges reflect this emphasis on the separation of spheres, with women in the home and men in the outside world. The hedge acts as a boundary, encouraging and delineating the separation of these spheres. The hedge’s development during the Victorian period is symbolic of the development of the separation of spheres, both in the “real” world and the world of To the Lighthouse.

The literal definition of hedge leads us directly into its second meaning, as a barrier or limit. While Mrs. Ramsay and Lily are clearly affected by the

¹² See Michael Walters, The Garden in Victorian Literature (Cambridge, UK: Scolar P, 1988) for a full

restrictive gender roles of the Victorian era, Mr. Ramsay is affected as well, also seen in Woolf's use of the hedge and other garden images. The hedge acts as a barrier for all these characters, as what the hedge symbolizes for each character is what hinders (or prevents) each from achieving her or his potential. These characters must confront the individual barriers represented by the hedge in order to fulfill the quest each character begins.

For Mr. Ramsay, the hedge symbolizes both his sense of powerlessness regarding his relationship to Mrs. Ramsay and the barriers that prevent him from achieving his career goals. We see Mr. Ramsay's frustration regarding his relationship to his wife throughout To the Lighthouse, but this frustration is particularly apparent when he is in the garden: "when he came to the hedge, he was sad. He could do nothing to help her. [. . .] Indeed, the infernal truth was, he made things worse for her. [. . .] He looked into the hedge, into its intricacy, its darkness" (98). Here, Mr. Ramsay sees the hedge as dark and even mysterious, like his relationship's foibles. Mr. Ramsay would like to help his wife, but he is unable to do so. In fact, he is incapable of penetrating the secrets of the hedge—his own problems—and is stopped by them. For Mr. Ramsay, the

explanation of this phenomenon.

hedge and his inability to help his wife become one here, and he is unable to go beyond the barriers the hedge represents.

The hedge also symbolizes Mr. Ramsay's own frustrations and limitations based on his gender role; as Mr. Ramsay himself says, "'the father of eight children has no choice'" (69). Mr. Ramsay is the economic provider for his children; he believes that his responsibilities to his family have created a situation whereby "he had not done the thing he might have done" (70) with regard to his career. Mr. Ramsay is trapped between what he must do and what he would like to do. We can see this sense of imprisonment symbolized within the garden when Mr. Ramsay "slipped, seeing before him the hedge which had over and over again rounded some pause, signified some conclusion, seeing his wife and child, seeing again the urns with the trailing red geraniums which had so often decorated processes of thought, and bore, written up among their leaves, as if they were scraps of paper on which one scribbles notes" (66). As Jane Lilienfeld notes, the hedge acts here as a metaphor for Mr. Ramsay's gender-role imprisonment: "The hedge is not just a signpost of his many past efforts, its leaves being written on with discarded words; it signals the barrier to the efforts

he has made for the family situation.”¹³ Here, Lilienfeld observes, the the hedge symbolizes both the barriers that hinder Mr. Ramsay’s relationship with Mrs. Ramsay and the familial barriers that prevent him from reaching his career goals, and his frustration at not being able to overcome either to his satisfaction.

Woolf encodes both the hedge and the geraniums with meaning in the above quotation. While the hedge represents the barriers to Mr. Ramsay’s success, the geraniums represent his “processes of thought”; the urn here is also important, as it hints at ancient Greek or neoclassic urns—of course both ancient Greece and neoclassicism are important periods in the history of philosophy—which makes this urn particularly relevant to Mr. Ramsay’s train of thought. We see this focus in Mr. Ramsay’s thoughts in other quotations as well: “The geraniums in the urn became startlingly visible and, displayed among its leaves, he could see, without wishing it, that old, that obvious distinction between the two classes of men” (54-55). Mr. Ramsay’s observation here comes after his long diatribe regarding the two classes of men—plodders and geniuses—and his unhappiness at the fact that he has only reached “R” in his thinking, when he wanted to reach “Z” by now. We see again in this quotation the urns associated with his work, and his failure, as we see in the following quotation: “He stood

¹³ Jane Lilienfeld, “Where the Spear Plants Grew: The Ramsay’s Marriage in To the Lighthouse,” New

stock-still, by the urn, with the geranium flowing over it. How many men in a thousand million, he asked himself, ever reach Z?" (55). In all three of these quotations, Mr. Ramsay infuses meaning onto his environment by observing those objects that have meaning for him, giving them meaning. From the descriptions of other characters, we know that the Ramsay garden is large and filled with many flowers, trees, and other garden elements. Yet Mr. Ramsay focuses on the geraniums, the urn, and the hedge. For Mr. Ramsay, the urns and the hedge represent what he has not done, but might have, had he chosen career over family. The geraniums, too, are significant here, as they flow over the urns, dominating them, just as Mr. Ramsay's family life has dominated his work life, preventing him from attaining his goals.

Beyond its individual elements, the garden represents a buffer zone between home and outside world. Mr. Ramsay looks out from the garden to this other world, but he does not leave: "the fruitful nut-tree and the flowering hedge led him on to that further turn of the road where he dismounted always, tied his horse to a tree, and proceeded on foot alone. He reached the edge of the lawn and looked out on the bay beneath" (68). The garden itself, because of its quality of being between home and outside world, allows Mr. Ramsay to contemplate

Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf, ed. Jane Marcus (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1981) 157.

his life, what is and what could have been. Mrs. Ramsay can be likened to “the fruitful nut-tree,” with her eight children, and the hedge here, although it does prevent Mr. Ramsay from reaching his career goals, is flowering, beautiful in its own way. But these elements lead him to his contemplations, since without Mrs. Ramsay and his family, he would have achieved “Z” by now (or so he tells himself). The edge of the lawn is the furthest place from the home, and thus, is a good place for Mr. Ramsay to brood over what his life might have been like. When he does this he looks out over the sea, untamed, undomesticated. Ultimately, Mr. Ramsay convinces himself that the choice he made—to have a family—is the right one. He tells himself: “he would have been a beast and a cur to wish a single thing altered” (106). And so he turns around and returns to his life within the home.

For Mr. Ramsay, the garden—in the form of the hedge—represents limitations, regrets, the life he chose as a husband and father. For Lily, the garden also represents the world of home and family, a world that she does not ultimately choose. This world is Mrs. Ramsay’s world, and she feels that only by rejecting it—by not marrying—can she create her art. However, it is significant that the moment that Lily finally accepts herself as an artist—when she completes her painting at the very end of the novel—occurs in the garden. Lily

cannot reject the garden, as the last chapter shows, because that is her heritage, her tradition. Rather, she must find a new way to work within it.

For Lily, the hedge symbolizes not only her gender barriers, but all the barriers that hinder her creative process: “It was a miserable machine, an inefficient machine, she thought, the human apparatus for painting or for feeling; it always broke down at the critical moment; heroically, one must force it on. She started, frowning. There was the hedge, sure enough” (287). Here, the hedge acts as barrier to Lily’s vision. She cannot complete her painting without confronting what the hedge symbolizes for her: both the angel in the House and Tansley’s “women can’t paint, women can’t write.” It is these two demons—the imprisoning gender roles embodied within the angel and the patriarchal culture that would deny Lily’s creative potential—that Lily must overcome to create. Lily notices the hedge because it represents these boundaries for her, but the act of noticing the hedge is really a creative process. The hedge acts as a sort of “ink blot test” for both Lily and Mr. Ramsay; they give it their own meanings. Here, Woolf uses the hedge symbol as a means of entry into the psyches and psychology of the characters. The hedge is a barrier, but the type of barrier it is depends on who is observing it.

As with Mr. Ramsay, the hedge represents repression for Lily, the repression that comes with submitting to traditional gender roles. Woolf makes this connection between the hedge-as-barrier and the freedom possible outside the hedge early in the novel: "So off they [Lily and Mr. Bankes] strolled down the garden in the usual direction, past the tennis lawn, past the pampas grass, to that break in the hedge, guarded by red hot poker like brasiers of clear burning coal, between which the blue waters of the bay looked bluer than ever" (33). In this quotation, we see the importance of that break in the hedge, and the freedom represented by the ocean, the waves. Lily sees the way out of her predicament: she does not have to marry anyone, even Mr. Bankes. For Lily, there is a break in the hedge out of which she may escape. It is guarded by red hot poker—people such as Mrs. Ramsay and Charles Tansley who tell her that she cannot do what she wants to do—but ultimately, Lily finds freedom by walking through the break in the hedge. Mr. Ramsay never notices the break: Lily does, and it is through this break that she may escape.

We see Lily's view of Mrs. Ramsay, and the imprisoning gender roles in Lily's own life, in relation to the hedge: "That man [Mr. Ramsay], she thought, her anger rising in her, never gave; that man took. She, on the other hand, would be forced to give. Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had

died—and left all this. Really, she was angry with Mrs. Ramsay. With the brush slightly trembling in her fingers she looked at the hedge, the step, the wall. It was all Mrs. Ramsay's doing" (223). Here, Lily recognizes that the hedge—and all it represents—is Mrs. Ramsay's work as much as Mr. Ramsay's and society's.

This brings us to the third meaning of "hedge," which is an active one: "to plant, form, or trim a hedge." The importance of "hedge" as both noun and verb is relevant here, as Lily is recognizing at this point in the novel that Mrs. Ramsay has "hedged" herself into her own situation. When she states that "It was all Mrs. Ramsay's doing," Lily is reclaiming her power, and power for all women: if women can create the hedge, then they can transform it as well, which is what her relationship with Mr. Bankes at the end of the novel represents, as this relationship is a new way for men and women to relate to one another, outside of marriage. Lily is not "forced to give"—she does not have to live under the hegemony of the hedge any longer—Mrs. Ramsay did not have to, and she does not either. Lily is willing to make the sacrifices that she must—financial and familial—but she is willing to do this to gain the freedom to live her life her way.

Lily, like Mr. Ramsay, must struggle with the fear of not accomplishing what she wants to accomplish, but she has different challenges. Both characters' careers are stifled by the idea of family life, but for different reasons. Mr.

Ramsay struggles because he is the sole provider for the family, while Lily questions the idea that women can be both artist and mother/wife. For Lily, the problem is that she feels a subconscious pull toward family life (or Mrs. Ramsay's machinations concerning Mr. Bankes and Lily would have no effect on her), yet she knows this would mean the death of her art. Lily's struggle lies in resisting the pull and choosing art over family. This resistance is Lily's journey, her heroic quest. By giving readers Lily as the novel's hero, Woolf redefines what the hero is (or can be), especially for women.

Lily's Heroic Quest and Garden Symbolism

Because Lily is able to overcome the obstacles represented by the hedge and the garden itself when she finally has her vision at the end of the novel, Lily can be looked at as an archetype for female artists struggling with the issues of patriarchal authority. By courageously rebelling against the patriarchal culture that would have her conform to Mrs. Ramsay's idea of appropriate female activity, Lily creates new possibilities for women. This is a heroic act, according to Joseph Campbell's definition: "The courage to face the trials and bring a whole new body of possibilities into the field of interpreted experience for other people

to experience—that is the hero’s deed” (41). However, as Simone de Beauvoir notes:

A myth always implies a subject who projects his hopes and his fears toward a sky of transcendence. Women do not set themselves up as Subject and hence erected no virile myth in which their projects are reflected; they have no relation or poetry of their own: they still dream through the dreams of men. Gods made by males are the gods they worship. Men have shaped for their own exaltation great virile figures: Hercules, Prometheus, Parsifal; woman has only a secondary part to play in the destiny of these heroes.” (150–51)

Both Campbell’s and de Beauvoir’s statements are important to this discussion because both describe Lily’s experience. Lily, at the beginning of the novel, embodies the dualistic netherworld of the female artist, because she is in between the hero and the “secondary part” that de Beauvoir discusses above. This journey—from bit part to hero—is the crux of To the Lighthouse: Lily must decide whether she can become (in her own way) a Paunceforte, or whether she will follow his vision, or if she will do neither of these, and follow Mrs. Ramsay’s

vision and marry. Will she play the starring role in her life, or will she play merely a secondary part?

Deborah Guth, in her article "Virginia Woolf: Myth and To the Lighthouse," discusses the quest motif and its relationship to Lily. She states: "If then the Quest can be defined as the search to transcend a given human condition and reach some absolute 'Beyond,' variously defined, then [Lily] may be considered to have failed" (247). While I agree with Guth's definition of the quest, I disagree with her pronouncement of failure, as a return to an examination of garden imagery shows us. Lily must overcome the her own barriers—symbolized by the hedge—to transcend her condition, the "human condition" implicit for many Victorian women. Women can paint and women can write, as Lily's example clearly shows us, and it is this "beyond" that Woolf wishes to explore through Lily. Lily's real journey involves redefining women's roles and in this way becoming one of the heroes de Beauvoir writes of, not merely a heroine.

Lily begins her heroic quest at Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party, as seen again through Woolf's use of garden imagery. Lily's journey begins with her intent to never marry, to paint instead: "In a flash she saw her picture. [. . .] That's what I shall do. [. . .] She took up the salt cellar and put it down again on a flower in a

pattern in the table-cloth, so as to remind herself to move the tree" (128). As Lily tells us later, the decision to move the tree to the middle represents more than a simple artistic preference. Rather, the power to make the decision about where to move the tree reminds her: "She had been looking at the table-cloth, and it had flashed upon her that she would move the tree to the middle, and need never marry anybody" (262). The decision to move the tree symbolizes a new way of existing in the world for Lily. She can create her own garden, moving trees where she wants to move them, instead of being forced to work around them. She need never marry anybody; she can spend her life painting instead. This is a completely different attitude than Mrs. Ramsay's, as she tells us "There was in Lily a thread of something; a flare of something; something of her own which Mrs. Ramsay liked very much indeed, but no man would, she feared" (157). For Mrs. Ramsay, this "flare of something" is to be feared, as it might make her ineligible for marriage. For Lily, this flare becomes the basis for her art and thus, her life.

It is significant that Lily's decision is symbolized by the movement of the saltcellar, which happens on the flowered tablecloth. These elements—the flowered tablecloth, the tree—represent the home and garden, and for traditional Victorian women such as Mrs. Ramsay, the garden and home is their place of

power, but only when they follow the traditional rule structure as well. By moving the saltcellar—and thus the tree, in her mind—Lily transforms the home and garden into a place of power for herself. She is not forced into moving around the tree: she can move the tree instead, and that makes all the difference for her. For unconventional women such as Lily, the garden becomes the place where they can gain strength to do other types of work, such as art. Through the transformation of this symbol, Lily goes from object to subject, from acted upon to the actor of her own life. The importance of transforming this symbol, rather than simply rejecting or overcoming it, was shown in the last chapter, through the discussion of the transformation of the hegemony of Genesis, and we see that importance here as well. Lily's action is heroic because in becoming an actor, she becomes an example for all women, just as Woolf herself was.

Lily also transforms the idea of traditional patriarchal marriage through her relationship with William Bankes; she creates a way to have a satisfying relationship with him outside of marriage, despite Mrs. Ramsay's (and patriarchal society's) wish. Again, Woolf reveals this transformation through garden imagery: "then they strolled through the courtyards, and admired, summer after summer, the proportions and the flowers" (263). This scene is significant for Lily, because it shows how Lily is living life on her own terms.

Mrs. Ramsay wanted her to marry Bankes, and she resists this, resulting not in misery for Lily but instead in freedom. Lily and Bankes can still enjoy the garden together, as they are doing in the above quotation, but without the hedge, only with the flowers.

Both Lily and Mrs. Ramsay note that the hedge, the garden, and the sea represent more than the literal: "What did the hedge mean to her, what did the garden mean to her, what did it mean when a wave broke?" (294). Tellingly, the pronoun reference is ambiguous in this quotation, making the quotation applicable to both characters. I have discussed the significance of the hedge for Lily and Mrs. Ramsay, but the sea itself is also an important metaphor here. As a "wild" place, unable to be cultivated or tamed, the sea for these characters (and Mr. Ramsay as well, as in the previous section) represents the places in each of them where they are free, not subject to societal visions of what each of their lives should be. The sea is somewhat dangerous, as it cannot be cultivated as the garden can—it is beyond human control. All three characters contemplate the sea as the means by which to contemplate their lives outside the garden—the sea is the direct opposite of tamed garden. Both Mr. Ramsay and Lily must access this aspect of their personalities to complete their journeys within the novel: Mr.

Ramsay must make his final pilgrimage through the sea to the lighthouse, and it is at this moment that Lily is able to finish her painting.

As we have seen in this chapter, garden as setting is important to understanding the psychology of Woolf's characters. Through garden imagery, we see the effects of the imprisoning gender roles for both Lily and Mr. Ramsay, and we are able to trace Lily's quest to become a true artist. Through examining the garden in To the Lighthouse, we are also able to better understand Woolf's artistic method, and how she reveals her characters through this symbolism.

Conclusion

Virginia Woolf is both disdainful of and haunted by her Victorian lineage, reacting particularly to the definition of femaleness put forth by this culture. As Elaine Showalter notes, "Woolf inherited a female tradition a century old; no woman writer has ever been more in touch with—even obsessed by—this tradition than she" (264). In To the Lighthouse, Woolf confronts this tradition directly through her use of images and themes found in Victorian literature, especially in regard to her heavy usage of garden symbolism. The idea of the garden as a distinctly female space is important in To the Lighthouse; this idea is Victorian, but Woolf's usage is modernist (and feminist): "In her fiction, but supremely in A Room of One's Own, Woolf is the architect of female space, a space that is both sanctuary and prison. Through their windows, her women observe a more violent masculine world in which their own anger, rebellion, and sexuality can be articulated at a safe remove" (Showalter 264). In To the Lighthouse, the garden extends Woolf's room as a female space, acting as a place where women can nurture their creativity but also where they must confront patriarchal oppression. However, this oppression comes from both outside and inside; Woolf shows us how characters such as Mrs. Ramsay oppress themselves

through their complete acceptance of the role patriarchy ascribes to them, and through Lily, how characters can create a world for themselves in which making art is possible. Yet Woolf is not able to fully reconcile the anger Showalter discusses above: women are allowed two roles in Woolf's world: mother or artist, not both. The garden is this sanctuary, this removed space where women can express their creativity; however, a sanctuary is a retreat from the world, not the world itself. Woolf's sanctuary is the world without conflict, the "stickiness" of life removed. Women can become powerful here, as artists or mothers, because of this fact: living in the garden substitutes for living in the outside world, the real world. But the room/garden has two facets: it protects women from confronting patriarchal oppression — allowing them to create — but it prevents them from encountering the world outside the garden walls. Ultimately, this world must be encountered for women to achieve true equality, and as Mrs. Ramsay discovers, the walls are not protection at all.

Tradition itself is one of the key themes in To the Lighthouse: how can an artist, such as Lily, create art without a tradition from which to draw? Where is Lily's tradition to be found? Lily finds this tradition through her interaction with Mrs. Ramsay, with the older woman becoming both model and source of fear for the younger. Lily, like Woolf, knows she needs the female artists of the past. She

cannot renounce this tradition. Yet Lily sees the trap enmeshed within Mrs. Ramsay's world, and the danger inherent in using Mrs. Ramsay as a model. Mrs. Ramsay is an artist of sorts, but sacrifices herself in order to create her art and nurture her family. Lily fears Mrs. Ramsay: she wants Mrs. Ramsay's artistic model, but not her fate. The unresolved question that Woolf leaves us with is this: can women do both? Can they create for themselves and nurture others? Using the models found in To the Lighthouse, the answer appears to be no, at least for Woolf. As we know from Woolf's diaries, it was a question she herself grappled with, and one that deeply depressed her. Through Woolf's creation of the garden sanctuary in To the Lighthouse, Woolf sidesteps this question. Lily assumes that, like Mrs. Ramsay, to be both mother and artist is to die, but we never see whether this assumption must be true. The garden, Woolf's "room" in To the Lighthouse, enables Lily to accept the legacy of the Victorians without truly transforming it. Lily can be a spinster-artist or a bountiful mother, not both. The sanctuary of the garden allows her to create, removed from the world, but also acts as a shield from the world.

For Mrs. Ramsay, the garden is a prison, while for Lily it is a point of departure, a place to confront the hegemony of Genesis. Throughout To the Lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay never successfully escapes the garden, and the

patriarchal authority represented by its enclosure, and this is what kills her. Lily, however, learns from Mrs. Ramsay's example. She acknowledges the power of the garden, transforming its symbols to those of freedom. It is only through accepting Mrs. Ramsay as part of her tradition that Lily realizes she has a tradition; just as men have the tradition of Adam, so women have Eve. It is Lily's journey in To the Lighthouse to recreate the myth of the Garden of Eden for herself so that women can be creators too. She does this through accepting Mrs. Ramsay as a creator, and immortalizing her in her picture; Lily becomes a model for other women, a part of the female tradition, as Woolf herself was. Lily does this through renouncing (for herself) familial responsibilities and devoting her life to art.

Perhaps Lily is right. Perhaps it was impossible during this time to be both mother and artist because of the strict social enforcement of gender roles. However, Woolf's own sister, Vanessa Bell, was both painter and mother, and Woolf was deeply enviously of the dual role. Certainly, gender roles imposed upon both men and women of the time prevented many of them from stepping outside of their prescribed behavior, as Woolf shows us through her use of garden imagery in To the Lighthouse, particularly in her use of the Demeter/Persephone myth. Mrs. Ramsay is powerful in her own realm—the

house and garden—but powerless outside of it, and can do nothing to help her daughters break out of the prison of the garden, the room. Mrs. Ramsay can be a goddess in her sanctuary, but outside it, in the “real” world, her power is reduced.

Mrs. Ramsay is an ambiguous figure throughout To the Lighthouse. On the one hand, Woolf shows us (through Lily) that Mrs. Ramsay is an agent of patriarchal oppression for all her daughters, Lily included. It is Mrs. Ramsay who insists that all the daughters must marry, and who thinks privately that Lily will have a difficult time finding a husband because of Lily’s essential nature, who she is as an artist and person. On the other, it is only through accepting the tradition embodied by Mrs. Ramsay that Lily is finally able to “have her vision,” complete her painting, become a true artist.

Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and Lily show readers how gender roles, and “doing what is expected,” can be detrimental to one’s achievements and spirit. Again, Woolf shows us these characters’ thoughts through garden imagery. The characters use the plants and trees found in the garden as springboards for their own thoughts and feelings about the many issues confronting them in the novel. The garden acts as a type of Rorschach test, with the characters giving their own meanings to otherwise meaningless objects. For Mr. Ramsay, the garden

symbolizes the career heights he could have achieved if he did not have the responsibilities of a husband and father. For Mrs. Ramsay, the garden is both her place of power and creativity in her Demeter role, but also where power is taken from both her and all her Persephone-daughters. For Lily, the garden is the place where she finally “has her vision,” overcoming the tyranny of Mrs. Ramsay and the outside world to do so.

But Woolf does not provide any pat answers for the dilemmas artistic women like herself face. Woolf does not really exorcise the angel in the House; Mrs. Ramsay is still this angel, even if we do see the effects the role take on her. And Lily is very clearly not the angel. There is no middle ground here, no clear right answer to the question of whether women can be both mothers and artists. Perhaps it is this remaining ambiguity that most identifies Woolf as a modernist. While Woolf is deeply indebted to her Victorian heritage, perhaps it is her ability to leave questions unanswered and puzzles unsolved that places her with Joyce and Eliot, and makes the issues in her novel current to readers eighty years later.

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