

Mother Nature (Gaia) and the Androgynous Artist Holism in *To the Lighthouse* and *A Room of One's Own*

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Abstract

With the rising interest in ecocriticism , Woolf's works have become a common subject of ecocritical and ecofeminist analysis. This paper proposes to study the holistic and biocentric life patterns apparent in both the Coleridgean concept of androgyny as a mental state which comprehends the interconnectedness of all life processes, gender equality, and the Gaia hypothesis explored in both *A Room of One's Own*(1929) and in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) . The female characters of Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* are considered models of the two aforementioned concepts, respectively.

As one of the first-wave feminists, Virginia Woolf criticizes atomistic individualism and rationalism of the liberal tradition in the two works studied in this paper. In fact, first-wave feminists have done so by proposing a holistic concept of life which emphasizes collectivity, emotional bonding, and a principle of organic unity among all polarities, either conceived or conceivable such as male / female, humans / nature and subject /object.

Being a holistic value system, ecofeminism views the intrinsic value of nature and all life (spirituality) as an essential element of the required social transformation toward a new perception of reality that takes into consideration the interconnectedness of all life processes. Thereupon, the modern anthropocentric view of life should be replaced by a biocentric view that can understand the interconnectedness of all life processes as proposed by Woolf in the works aforementioned. Finally, the false dualisms at the heart of the conceptual social framework of patriarchy that are based on the male-/female polarity (such as thought versus action, art versus science, and experience versus knowledge) Woolf rejects , should be integrated to form a holistic perception of reality conveyed through the medium of art to humanity at large.

“Who shall measure the heat and violence of a poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body?” Virginia Woolf, (*RO* 40).

Holism is firmly planted in the modernist era and is relevant to in the science of ecology. In fact, holism is proposed as a philosophical alternative to the twentieth-century mechanistic conception of the world. (Merchant 292) In his book *Holism and evolution* (1926), J C Smuts defines the term holism as follows:

Holism is a process of creative synthesis; the resulting wholes are not static, but dynamic, evolutionary, creative.... The explanation of nature can therefore not be purely mechanical; and the mechanistic concept of nature has its place and justification only in the wider setting of holism.(87)

In Smuts's view, there is “a continuum of relationships among parts from simple physical mixture and chemical compounds to organisms and minds in which the unity among parts was affected and changed by the synthesis” (Merchant 292,293).

The Oxford Dictionary offers the following definition of the term holism: “The theory that parts of a whole are in intimate interconnection, such that they cannot exist independently of the whole, or cannot be understood without reference to the whole, which is thus regarded as greater than the sum of its parts. Holism is often applied to mental states, language, and ecology.”

Guided by the previous definitions of holism as a process of creative synthesis characterized by dynamism in which the parts “cannot exist independently of the whole, or cannot be understood without reference to the whole” in living organisms (a characteristic relevant to both nature and humans) , and since one of the origins of the word holism is the word “whole”, the definition gives preeminence to the whole over the parts. Moreover, holism is the opposite of atomism. This connotation supports a similar principle in ecofeminism which is the celebration of organic unity and creativity over fragmentation. As Stephan Ross's puts it: “ecofeminism offers a way of assessing unity versus fragmentation” (222).

As one of the first-wave feminists, Virginia Woolf criticizes atomistic individualism and rationalism of the liberal tradition. In fact, first-wave feminists have done so by proposing a holistic concept of life which emphasizes collectivity, emotional bonding, and a principle of organic unity among all polarities, either conceived or conceivable such as male / female, humans / nature and subject /object. Being a holistic value system, ecofeminism views the intrinsic value of nature and all life (spirituality) as an essential element of the required social transformation toward a new perception of reality that takes into consideration the interconnectedness of all life processes. Thereupon, the modern anthropocentric view of life

should be replaced by a biocentric view that can understand the interconnectedness of all life processes. Finally, the false dualisms at the heart of the conceptual social framework of patriarchy, that are based on the male-/female polarity (such as thought versus action, art versus science, and experience versus knowledge) should be integrated to form a new perception of reality.(Eco19,20)

Basic principles of ecofeminism , such as the previous ones, are summarized by Janis Birkeland in her essay “Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice”. Birkeland calls for necessary “fundamental social transformation” by promoting values of equality, cultural diversity, and participatory nonhierarchical forms of organization, a reverence for “spirituality” or the intrinsic value in nature and life, as well as a rejection of the anthropocentric, androcentric viewpoint and the mechanistic model in favour of a “biocentric view that can comprehend the **interconnectedness of all life processes**” (20).

With the rising interest in ecocriticism , Woolf’s works have become a common subject of ecocritical and ecofeminist analysis. This paper proposes to study the holistic and biocentric life patterns apparent in both the Coleridgean concept of androgyny as a mental state which comprehends the interconnectedness of all life processes, the rejection of anthropocentrism, and equality of the sexes, and the concept of nature as a nurturing mother (Gaia) explored in both *A Room of One’s Own*(1929) and in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) . The female characters of Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* are considered models of the two aforementioned concepts, respectively.

Josephine Donovan, among other scholars, has pointed out Woolf’s attention to the

natural world as a proto-ecofeminist whose work displays an awareness of humanity as part of the natural world that is explicit in ecological thinking, and a rejection of the patriarchal social construct of women which subjugates them and is destructive to both women and nature. Woolf’s text in this ecofeminist analysis is reconceived and treated as a “subject” rather than an “object” of discourse. (Gaard, Murphy 74, 75). As such, the literary text is regarded as an alive, product of creativity. On similar terms, Woolf notes in “*A Room of ones Own*” that it is the same ideology of domination (i.e., patriarchy) which expels women from the sphere of creation and prevents them from becoming contributors to civilization .(36)

Living in a state of equilibrium with nature, enables human creativity. In fact, both Mrs. Ramsay and Lily are capable of various degrees of creativity which unites parts into wholes. While the former is limited by her dual comprehension of gender differences to the mere creation of emotional harmony and settlement of discord in human relationships among her husband, children and friends, the latter eventually creates artistic harmony

in uniting opposite or polar elements in her painting. Both in a sense are creative, however, Lily Briscoe's creativity is capable of reconciling polarities into a whole because of her adoption of androgyny which is a liberating principle that provides the individual with unlimited possibilities necessary for reaching the creative vision Lily, the artist, seeks. Elizabeth Wright maintains that androgyny is a means of liberating women from the restrictions imposed on them by patriarchy. (4) As for the definition of androgyny itself, Carolyn G. Hielbrun writes:

The ideal toward which I believe we should move is best described by the term 'androgyny.' The ancient Greek word- from andro (male) and gyn (female) defines a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes , and the human senses impulses expressed by men and women, are not rigidly assigned. Androgyny suggests a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes...; it suggests a spectrum upon which human beings choose their places without regard to propriety or custom...The unbounded and hence indefinable nature of androgyny is best describedas women-in- man, or man-in-woman, the unlimited personality. (x,xi)

Lily, the artist, starts off with what Woolf calls a split consciousness or a dualistic sense of self. (RO 81) This dualistic sense of self is caused by the polar view of male/female. Nevertheless, she is seen by Mrs. Ramsay as "an independent little creature", who "would urge her own exemption from the universal law, plead for it: she liked to be alone: she liked to be herself: she was not made for that"(THL 13, 36). In other words, Lily is the modern "independent little creature" who defies the Victorian social construct of a woman whose foremost role in life is to be a female nurturer - a mere life-preserver like Mrs. Ramsay. Lily, nonetheless, has the tendency to acquire the holistic, "unlimited personality" characteristic of the androgynous individual. Thereon, toward the end of the novel, she acquires the holistic perspective of life that enables her to become the creative androgynous female artist. In fact, Lily is capable of resolving her artistic problem as she eventually finishes her painting- her artistic creation, and demonstrates the "unlimited personality" of "woman-in-man" or "man-in-woman".

In possessing this divided consciousness of the self, (like her creator) at the beginning of the novel, Lily Briscoe goes through a process of development from a split to a holistic state of consciousness . Reaching the latter state, lily becomes the author's counterpart as she attains her creative vision. In the novel, Charles Tansley tells Lily, "women can't paint, women

can't write"(141). In "*A Room of One's Own*"(1929) , the same split consciousness, characterizing Lily Briscoe at the beginning of *To the Lighthouse*, is analyzed . Woolf explores "the oxymoronic relationship between being 'woman' and 'artist' " in *her essay*. Such oxymoronic relationship is also expressed in Tansely's previous statement.(Ed. Saith xiv). By the gender and social standards of the Victorian time, that oxymoronic relationship exists between women and creativity. As a matter of fact, creativity is, in itself, a dialectic process that synthesizes polarities.

According to Woolf, "if one is a woman one is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness , say in walking down Whitehall , when from being the natural inheritor of that civilization, she becomes , on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical"(*RO* 81) In the previous words as in others in the same work, Woolf is blaming society at large for preventing women from being active participants in civilization. (Froula 26)

In *To the Lighthouse*, Lily tells Mr. Banks "But the picture was not of them, she said. or, not in his sense. There were other senses, too, in which one might reverence them" (*TLH* 38). In fact, Lily's sense of "struggling against terrific odds" results from traditional gender values imposed on her by patriarchy. In spite of the fact that she has the "courage " to say , "But this is what I see", as she begins to paint "her own inadequacy, her insignificance" overwhelm her and "force[ed] themselves upon her other things" (*TLH* 14).

Similarly, in "*A Room of One's Own*", Woolf states that women belonged at the beginning of the twentieth century at home and that making a career was a far-fetched idea for them. Woolf proposes that in order to be a writer one has to have money and "a room of one's own", which have been hard to obtain by women, then. (*RO* 44) Consequently, for women there always have been "that assertion- you cannot do this, you are incapable of doing that- to protest against, to overcome" (*TLH* 56). Woolf also points out that "the mind of an artist, in order to achieve the prodigious effort of freeing whole and entire the work that is in him, must be incandescent . . . There must be no obstacles in it, no foreign matter unconsumed" (*RO* 58). In the light of the previous statement, Tansely's words represent an ideology which falsely asserts that women are incapable of creativity, and it is, therefore, the duty of the former to overcome such false assertion.

Inherent in Tansley's previous words is the idea of the prevention of women from being active participants in civilization, as mentioned previously. Woolf discusses in *A Room of One's Own*. A root cause of such prevention is the patriarchal social order's interrelated domination of both nature and women. Ynestra King also argues that a basic principle of ecofeminism is that "nature is the central category of analysis. An analysis of interrelated dominations of nature-psyche and sexuality, human

oppression, and non-human nature –and the historic position of women in relation to those forms of domination is the starting point of ecofeminism” (117).

In one argument, women are close to nature, and Western industrial civilization is built on an opposition to nature interacting dialectically with, and reinforcing the subjugation of women.(King117) Male domination of both women and nature ,that is to say, the system of patriarchal authority, claims Barbra T. Gates, is mainly enabled through the male’s participation in the act of reproduction.(15-22) He is the one who plants the seed in the ground as he does in the female womb resulting into the reduction of the state of the latter to that of a minority and the former to destruction by both overpopulation and abuse of natural resources (Eco 16).

The "anthropomorphic and stereotypical" labeling "that treats a woman's sexuality as her husband's property" is “equally guilty of perpetuating a system repressive in both women and nature”.(Merchant xxi). In *To the lighthouse*, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are representatives of the duality of male/female inherent in patriarchal ideology. Nonetheless, Mrs. Ramsay, Mother Nature or Gaia, the loving, giving, sympathetic wife and mother is not merely a recipient in the male-dominated act of reproduction. There is no clearer indication of this meaning than the sexual image which describes Mrs. Ramsay as a "fountain" of fecundity" .Into this “ fountain “ of “fecundity”, the "fatal sterility of the male plunges itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare" , and hence , the male’s “sterility” is redeemed by the female’s “fecundity” (*TLH* 31). Indeed, a fountain is associated with water which is, a symbol of femininity. (Maze 89)

Mrs. Ramsay is the nurturing mother who is identified with nature and the natural who is rather more of a Victorian English woman than a modern one. Conversely, she is able to participate in the traditionally male-dominated act of reproduction. The sexual reference in the previous image is to the male as initiator of the act of reproduction. However, it is the female who redeems the male from his “fatal sterility” as his “beak of brass” plunges into the female “fountain” of abundant “fertility” - and thus offering the former reassurance, sympathy and an invigorating sense of life that spreads all over the atmosphere of the Ramsays’ house as well as over all the lives of those in Mrs. Ramsay’s vicinity. In this sense, Woolf is subverting the stereotypical image of the male as a dependable initiator and agent of life, in favour of the female as the actual source of life in the human process of fertilization.

The stereotyping of women necessitates their subjugation (as in Mrs. Ramsay's case). In other words, a woman should be quiet, selfless, and politely subservient to her husband. Her occupation is tending to household

duties, caring for her husband, and steering clear of men's business. In return for her selflessness, she is revered and complemented on her beauty. According to ecofeminism, patriarchal ideology authorizes oppression based on race , class , gender, sexuality ,physical attributes and species (Eco 1,2). Therefore, the oppressed Mrs. Ramsay frequently senses the hostility of nature that seems at certain moments ready to pounce on her in order to annihilate her (*TLH* 52).

Because such ideology promotes gender- based distinctions leading to forms of oppression, ecofeminist studies have shown that “a sense of self as separate is more common in men, while an interconnected sense of self is more common in women” living under this ideology (Eco 2) . Each of these two senses of self is affiliated to two different gender-based ethical systems: the interconnectedness of all life processes characteristic of women, or their sense of feeling at one with others, leads them to make moral decisions based on responsibilities, whereas the separate sense of self in men makes them focus on their rights. Right-based ethics are the result of men's separate sense of self since they exist in a society of individuals who feel the need to be protected from each other as they compete for scarce resources.

As such, men require a formal or abstract mode of thinking. For instance, Mr Ramsay, the philosopher, represents such objective impartial approach to life even in dealing with his wife and children. According to Andrew Ramsay, his father's philosophic work resembles a "scrubbed kitchen table"; Mr. Ramsay is the intellectual, mainly anxious about his professional success as a philosopher, and whether he could reach the "z" in his work or not. In fact, Mr. Ramsay's intellectual masculine qualities isolate him from others as a patriarchal figure whose "fate" was to "stand [s]like a desolate sea-bird, alone" on the land, away from the water (of femininity), merely preoccupied with "the dark of human ignorance" (*TLH* 37,38).

On the other hand, the problem of the responsibility-based ethics of women result from conflicting responsibilities and requires for its resolution "a narrative and contextual" mode of thinking.(Eco2) Interestingly enough, the image that represents Mrs. Ramsay's daily work and domestic interest in life is one from the kitchen as well: the "beof en daub", the dish that she delights in preparing – a communal activity which involves, most likely, small conversations of a domestic type among its participants . Instead of a female as opposed to male ethics, ecofeminism offers a basis for an ecological ethical theory for both women and men which does not operate on the basis of the duality of self/other, but rather on an interconnected sense of life, which in this particular case, involves both female and male mental qualities (Eco2,3). According to Woolf, such state is only possible when "the unity of minds", or androgyny becomes the mental state of a person.

Indeed, the narrative and contextual mode of thinking of Mrs. Ramsay is insufficient because it does not allow her to recognize what she considers as the "ugly academic jargon" Charles Tansley uses (*TLH* 9). However, it is Mrs. Ramsay's feminine mode of thinking or mental qualities that enable her to sympathize with Tansley's poverty and his priggishness. Her narrative and contextual mode of thinking even extends further to encompass an important metaphor of deep ecology from the pre-modern conception of "Mother Earth" and "Mother Gaia", an early Greek earth-mother proposed by the scientist James Lovelock, idealizing nature as a pure, all-giving female who is able to preserve the earth and keep it alive as an organism. (*Eco* 223).

For many ecofeminists, the revival of the female image of earth forms a contrast to the male sky god. (*Eco*251) Bonnie Kine Scott suggests that Woolf "uses nature to assist her fresh approach to epistemology"(5). In rendering elements of nature and the earth in *To the Lighthouse*, "Woolf may disperse the self into them, enter a collective of creatures, deconstruct patriarchal idea of power and domination, and at least briefly defy spiritual defeat and death" (Scott5)

In the novel, images of nature and natural beauty, especially ones related to fields of flowers, the colour green (of vegetation), and blue (of water) are associated with Mrs. Ramsay. Flowers are traditionally regarded as a symbol of the vagina or femininity (Maze 89). In section one of the novel "The Window", Charles Tansley thinks of Mrs. Ramsay in the following terms: "With Stars in her eye, with cyclamen and wild violets stepping through fields of flowers and taking to her breasts buds of flowers that had broken and lambs that had fallen with the stars in her eyes and the wind in her hair-..." (*TLH* 11) . The state of unity with nature Mrs. Ramsay experiences and is associated with indicates a type of holistic or biocentric life pattern recommended and called for by Woolf .

The same holistic life pattern is apparent in the allusions to Mrs. Ramsay as a goddess-like figure which abound in section one, "The Window". William Bankes sees her as: "Greek, blue-eyed, straight-nosed ...The Graces assembling seemed to have joined hands in meadows of asphodel to compose that face" (*THL* 24). Lily also observes Mrs. Ramsay with her husband , and thinks of her in the following terms: "For Mrs. Ramsay was wearing a green shawl, and they were standing close together.... And suddenly the meaning which, ... descends on people, making them symbolical, ..., came upon them, and made them ... standing, looking, the symbols of marriage, husband and wife". (*TLH* 110-111) William Bankes also saw her , "Greek , blue-eyed, straight-nosed" (*THL* 24).

In fact, some critics have argued for the existence of a strong resemblance between Mrs. Ramsay and Demeter, the goddess of the earth and life in Greek mythology. In Joseph L. Blotner's article "Mythic Patterns in *To the Lighthouse*", he claims that "Mrs. Ramsay has many physical attributes of a goddess" (551). Thereupon, Lily ascribes royal attributes to Mrs. Ramsay such as "an august shape" and "royalty of form" (THL 80, 47). In addition, Mr. Bankes "worshipped" Mrs. Ramsay (THL 75). Indeed, the novel abounds with references to Mrs. Ramsay's "green shawl" which associates her with Demeter. When Cam, her daughter cannot sleep because of the "horrid skull" of the boar, Mrs. Ramsay "quickly took her own shawl off and wound it round the skull" (Woolf 172). According to both Blotner and Tina Barr, this action is symbolic of the victory of fertility over death which is reminiscent of Demeter's rescue of her daughter Persephone. (Blotner 558; Barr 137).

As Emery points out, the house (in the third section of the novel) is a feminine symbol, while the tree is a masculine symbol. (229) In this sense, the house is associated with Mrs. Ramsay, the ideal feminine figure according to the dominant patriarchal ideology. In spite of being a life preserver, in the second section, "Time Passes", Mrs. Ramsay is vanquished by spiritual defeat and death, and so is Andrew and Prue Ramsay. Indeed, the ideal feminine figure of Mrs. Ramsay does not realize that she has the potential to subsist on her own without masculine aid. Such potential might only become effective and useful if Mrs. Ramsay amends her dual conception of male/female, and adopts, instead, the androgynous mental principle as Lily Briscoe eventually does. Padoxically, however, the decay of the Ramsay's house is defied by the same principle of fertility of Mrs. Ramsay as it is repaired in the course of the same section of the novel.

It is "the stroke of the lighthouse", a masculine symbol with which Mrs. Ramsay identifies herself. The "stroke" comes now "in the softer light of spring mixed with moonlight gliding gently as if it laid its caress and lingered stealthily". It leans with a "loving caress" on the bed-and hence loosening "another fold of shawl", a feminine symbol. (THL 117) The revival of the house from a state of death to life which is, in a sense, a creative act becomes possible now that a momentary union between the feminine (the shawl), and the masculine (the stroke of the lighthouse) takes place. Nevertheless, such revival happens in the absence of the feminine symbol or ideal, Mrs. Ramsay, because femininity does not subsist on its own. Even the mental states in which feminine and masculine principles are united are only experienced briefly by Mrs. Ramsay. In other words, femininity is only one part, which together with its complementary male part, can create a synthetic whole through the dialectical process involved in artistic creativity characteristic of all life processes.

As the ideal feminine, creative, mother figure, Mrs. Ramsay is a source of inspiration to Lily: "(She) was like a bird for speed, an arrow for

directness".(TLH 42) Nevertheless, when the furniture and walls of the summer house get shabbier and shabbier summer after summer, Mrs. Ramsay wonders: "What was the use of flinging of the green cashmere shawl over the edge of a picture frame?"(TLH 21) In spite of Mrs. Ramsay's feeling of responsibility towards other people and things, her split consciousness , or her dualistic view of herself , like that of Lily at the beginning of the novel, stands as an obstacle in her way of comprehending reality, and hence, her untimely death. In these terms, the ruining of the Ramsay's cherished summer house by the depredations of time stands for Mrs. Ramsay's death.

Because of her love of life, Mrs. Ramsay is an all-giving wife and mother figure, engaging in matchmaking with the belief that everybody should get married(including Lily) in order not to miss the best in life. Nonetheless, Mrs. Ramsay's traditional gender role as a mother and matchmaker is not always a positive role. Although she passes through moments of doubt about her marriage and her happiness as a wife, she persuades Paul Rayle and Minta Doyle to enter into a marriage which turns out to be a failure. Even when she meditates about her own life, her own fifty years of age, she feels something "sinister" about life. Thus, Mrs. Ramsay feels threatened and insecure.(TLH 52)

At moments of triumph, of freedom, rest and peace, and happiness, Mrs. Ramsay identifies herself with the "long steady stroke" of the lighthouse in which she "(loses) personality". These feelings come only momentarily. Thereupon, she returns to a state of split consciousness as she is soon hit by thoughts of her (feminine) responsibility-based ethics towards her children: "Children don't forget, children don't forget" (TLH 55). Thus, Mrs. Ramsay's performance of her female gender role, although a creative one, in the sense that it is essential to her children and her husband, ultimately, proves to be insufficient and in some cases even damaging to her and to others. Consequently, Mrs. Ramsay feels an indispensable need for the male gender in general and her husband in particular because they provide her with "a Heaven of security" (TLH 27). She could even move around blindfolded and trust men to lead her by the hand. However, Mr. Ramsay's gesture of prodding his son's leg reminds her " of the great sea lion at the Zoo tumbling backwards after swallowing his fish" (TLH27) In other words, Mr. Ramsay always represents the male authoritative and often tyrannical father and husband figure to Mrs. Ramsay. Nonetheless, the existence of her husband and male friends compensate for the intellectual powers she lacks and finds in them.

Even though Mrs. Ramsay is a representation of the hypothesis of Gaia, or the primeval goddess of the earth , fertility, and creation , this is

insufficient to protect her from death because it does not challenge “ the underlying structures and attitudes that promote aggression” toward earth.(Eco251) Molly Hite maintains that Shakespeare’ sister dies in without realizing her genius as a poet in *A Room of One’s Own*, mainly because she is caught in the conflict between the socially constructed body of the female and her creative mind. On similar terms, Mrs. Ramsay’s sudden death could be explained. As stated before, the Ramsays’ relationship as well as Mrs. Ramsay’s sense of inferiority as female figure represent the male/female duality inherent in patriarchy.

In book Two of *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf attributes the injustices of patriarchy directed to both women and men, the stereotyping of women as mentally, morally and physically inferior to men, and the dual conception of men/ women, to the prevalent social and cultural system. The conception of the inferiority of women is supported by the ideology of patriarchy Woolf is strongly set against: "Life for both sexes—and I look at them, shouldering their way along the pavement—is arduous, difficult, a perpetual struggle. It calls for gigantic courage and strength. More than anything, perhaps, creatures of illusion that we are, it calls for confidence in oneself"(RO 30). Woolf claims that women have served throughout the ages as a mirror through which men can see enlarged images of themselves. In other words, women have been always used as tools to intensify male “superiority” as opposed to female inferiority.

Mrs. Ramsay, however, oppressed by the patriarchal authority of her husband does not recognize the insufficiency of her female gender role. She is even, in her own way at times, an oppressive figure, especially, when she performs the role of a matchmaker. But more importantly, at times she acts as Lily Briscoe’s oppressor in their often complicated mother-daughter relationship. Mrs. Ramsay, certainly, has a persuasive ability which makes people obey her, and hence, she attempts to shape their lives and actions in accordance with her will.

On the other hand, there is a more everlasting type of creativity than the “fertility” of Mrs. Ramsay, namely that of Lily who is able to create a painting – an art work that encompasses and can convey a comprehensive vision of reality. Indeed, she manages to fuse the male and female mental qualities, pointing to another type of holistic life pattern in which the creative androgynous mind becomes possible as Woolf suggests in *A Room of One’s Own*. Interestingly enough, the androgynous person is neither female nor male, but is rather a total human being whose masculine and feminine mental qualities are in a state of unity. In fact, both Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe are capable of creating and contributing to life exactly like Woolf’s text of which they are part. However, there is a significant difference between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily’s two types of creativity. Whereas the former’s creativity is short lived, the latter’s creativity is eternal.

The state of marital unity of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay is merely an affective one, and the feeling of satisfaction it renders is merely momentary, especially for Mrs. Ramsay. Sympathy is also not reciprocated between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay ; it is only rendered to the male by the female. Thereupon, the state of marital unity is an insufficient one because reifies gender differences and leads to Mrs. Ramsay's death as it entraps her into her female role. On the other hand, the androgynous mental state Lily is able to achieve when she finally finishes her painting, offers her a lasting state of satisfaction resulting from a holistic creative ability of the androgynous mind to achieve an artistic "vision". Toward the end of the novel, she acquires an interconnected sense of self, or attains the androgynous principle Virginia Woolf discusses in *A Room of One's Own*. Indeed, holism and biocentrism are realized in the principle of androgyny. In Book Six of "A Room, Woolf states that :

... the ordinary sight of two people getting into a cab had the power to
to communicate something of their own seeming satisfaction. The sight of
two people coming down the street and meeting at the corner seems to ease
the mind of strain,... Perhaps to think, ..., of one sex as distinct from the other
is an effort. It interferes with the unity of the mind ...
What does one mean by
'the unity of the mind'? I pondered, for clearly the two have no single state of
being. (81)

The "unity of the mind" in Woolf's terms is further explained as an "ideal" of spiritual reconciliation that should be reached by the creative minds; it is a mandatory condition for the mind of women to create. Indeed , androgyny as traced in the character of Lily Briscoe, is the state of unity of the feminine and the masculine minds in a person: "Androgyny suggests a spirit of oscillation between the sexes.... The unbounded and hence indefinable nature of androgyny is best describedas women- in- man,or man-in-woman, the unlimited personality" (Carolyn x,xi).

Cynthia Secor claims that for Woolf, "androgyny is the capacity of a single person of either sex to embody the full range of human character traits, despite cultural attempts to render some exclusively feminine and some exclusively masculine" (68) In fact, Woolf stresses that androgyny is the possession of an "unlimited personality", irrespective of one's gender: "Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is

androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine, I thought.” (RO 82)

The state of natural “fusion” of male and female qualities is what characterizes the “androgynous” mind, or the creative mind in Woolf’s terms. It is also what produces “the unlimited personality” in Hielburn’s words. Eventually, Lily, the artist, is able to embrace this creative, androgynous mind by the end of the novel. Furthermore, Woolf points out that “the mind of an artist, in order to achieve the prodigious effort of freeing whole and entire the work that is in him, must be incandescent . . . There must be no obstacles in it, no foreign matter unconsumed” (RO 58). Mr. Tansley’s statement that “women can’t write women paint” represents the patriarchal ideology which deem women incapable of creativity, and thus, these words represent an obstacle in Lily’s way. At the beginning, she also believes that her femininity is the obstacle that prevents her from finishing her art work- the painting which is alive and supposedly eternal.

Initially, Lily seems to have developed an antipathy toward the ideology that women supposedly possess mere feminine qualities of character and mind. Mrs. Ramsay becomes an embodiment of this ideology which seems strange to her as she considers Mrs. Ramsay’s female achievement, and her character traits standing short of logical reasoning , and preventing her from understanding men’s conversation in politics, economy or philosophy. Therefore, Woolf declares in *A Room of One’s Own* that the confinement within one’s own sex is “fatal” to the act of creation. As she puts it: “[It] is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex... It is fatal... in any way to speak consciously as a woman” (pp. 102-3).

Woolf also writes: “... who shall measure the heat and violence of a poet’s heart when caught and tangled in a woman’s body?” (RO 40) Nevertheless, women’s consciousness is split or divided into male/female. She adds that any woman “is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness... when from being the natural inheritor of that civilization, she becomes, on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical. ” (RO 21). Thus, Lily is only able to escape the boundaries of a split consciousness when she resists Mrs. Ramsay’s desire to push her toward marriage: “And one would have to say to her, It has all gone against your wishes.... I’m happy like this. Life has changed completely... For a moment Lily, standing there, with the sun hot on her back, triumphed over Mrs. Ramsay . . . how she stood here painting, had never married” (TLH 130).

Tori Moi maintains in her essay “I Am not a woman writer’ About women, literature and feminist theory today” that for “Woolf, the writer’s task is to attend to reality with the deepest core of her being”. (13) “Reality”, according to Woolf is to be found in everyday ordinary things of life such as

“a scrap of newspaper” or a “daffodil in the sun”. (RO 113) She asks: “What is meant by “reality”? It would seem to be something very erratic, undependable -now to be found in a dusty road, now a in a scrap of newspaper..., now in a daffodil in the sunIt overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars” (RO 91,92) She adds:” Now the writer...has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of reality. It is business to find it and disclose it and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us” (RO 92).

There is also a difference between the female identity conceptions of both Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Whereas Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay conception represents “the destructive nature of a metaphysical belief in strong, immutably fixed gender identities” since it is a belief in the dual identity of male/female, Lily Briscoe “represents the subject who deconstructs this opposition, perceives its pernicious influence and tries as far as is possible in a still rigidly patriarchal order to live as her own woman” (Moi 13). Living “as her own woman”, Lily is able to attain a profound comprehension of reality, and to communicate it to others in the best possible manner through her painting.

Stretching the proposition a little bit further, one could claim that Lily Briscoe Deconstructs the dualities of masculinity and femininity imposed on her by the patriarchal social order by fusing them (as two polarities) into a third principle- that of androgyny as she realizes her creative vision. Thus, as an artist, Lily is able to find and realize this androgynous “reality” in her painting. At the same time, she resists the patriarchal ideology as an ontology of domination, and creates life in and through her art work .

According to Josephine Donovan’s view in “Reading the Orange”, the use of the words “narrative form” and the “concrete examples” such as the images of “dusty road”, “a scrap of newspaper in the street” and “ a daffodil in the sun” throughout *A Room of One's Own* enables Woolf to criticize “ the epistemology of Western science” which dominates and manipulates nature figuratively in written texts just as it manipulates objects of nature in life. Connected to these manipulated objects of nature is women.(Eco 79). Thus, the absent referents due to the aforementioned mode of domination namely, Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, acquire a new ontological status of the signifier rather than the signified which indicates a holistic vision of women as members of one community of living beings.

In similar terms the novel, the art work acquires an ontological status as an object whose parts are interconnected into a whole. Thus, Lily is able, through attaining both the androgynous principle, and an unlimited personality irrespective of gender, to finish her painting and attain her holistic vision of “reality”. Consequently, her painting acquires agency and

life. Moreover, the ability to create an art work, a painting, is Woolf's way to fight the futility of life and find an otherwise holistic meaning in and through art. John Burt suggests that the "parenthetical passages in 'Time Passes' emphasizing the darkness and incomprehensibility of life" are also found in *A Room of One's Own*. (898) Thereon, it is through a creative holistic vision that Lily and her author are able to resist the annihilating sense of life .

Turning to Mr Carmichael, an artist and a person who is "out of the mainstream of sexual life" like Lily, he answers her perplexing questions and tells her that it is art that lives on and fights the futility of life while she works on her painting., (Burt 898) Consequently , it is artists and art works that can transcend dual concepts of gender, attain androgyny, and realize holistic visions whether of life or of art.

Before Lily begins to paint in the final section of the novel, "The Lighthouse", she goes through a process where she becomes unconscious of her own female personality and the world around her: "Always (it was in her body, or in her sex, she did not know which) before she exchanged the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting she had a few moments of nakedness when she seemed like an unborn soul, a soul reft of body" (*TLH* 140). As a matter of fact, the process of transformation she goes through makes her unconscious of her body. Those "moments of nakedness" or "unconsciousness" Lily goes through are not of her dual view of herself as a mere female. In fact, such moments make her only conscious of her soul as an artist in search for artistic reality, and her perspective of herself as a human being .

The process Lily goes through is further described: "Certainly she was losing consciousness of outer things... and her name and her personality and her appearance" (*TLH* 140). Lily loses consciousness of the world around her, of the "outer things". It is the beginning of a process in which she is only conscious of herself as an androgynous artist possessing an androgynous human character, irrespective of her own sex , which will enable her to "free the work" inside her mind.

Lily, eventually, attains the "creative potential" of " the ideal mental androgyny". Such "creative mental state" is "figured as a heterosexual unity", irrespective of sex or gender. As a matter of fact, it is a process of "romantic fusion" of male and female mental qualities. (Kaivola 236) Furthermore, it is obvious that Lily has to search for a third principle other than that of femininity or masculinity that could bridge the gap between both , and enable her to realize an artistic whole , namely, the holistic principle of androgyny.

Lily experiences detachment from (feminine) objects and places associated with Mrs. Ramsay. "Sitting alone... among the clean cups at the long table . . . [t]he house, the place, the morning, all seemed strangers to her" (*TLH* 109). She does not only feel strange to the house and the garden,

but she also feels distanced from the lighthouse itself where Mr Ramsay, James, and Cam are heading. In order to believe in her own ability to finish her painting, Lily imagines Mrs. Ramsay standing “at the end of the corridor of years” and urging people to marry: And one would have to say to her, It has all gone against your wishes....(TLH130).

The fact that Lily is now convinced that a mere feminine role in life can never satisfy her as an artist, makes her feel triumphant over Mrs. Ramsay's socially constructed feminine example. Nevertheless, the process involved in artistic creation can only be realized through what Mrs. Ramsay calls “a thread of something” which Lily actually possesses, “[t]here was in Lily a thread of something; something of her own which Mrs. Ramsay liked very much indeed, but no man would, she feared” (TLH 75). This thread of something is Lily's “unlimited personality”, her spirit liberated from patriarchal restrictions- a state which she can only reach through the “fusion’ of both female bodily and affective qualities on the one hand, and male mental qualities on the other, resulting into a “fertilized” mind capable of creation. (TLH 82) The “unlimited personality “is therefore, that of a human being, irrespective of either male or female gender.

The next morning Lily has arrived to the Ramsay's house, in the final section of the novel, she feels “as if the link that usually bound things together had been cut” with the absence of Mrs. Ramsay, Prue, and Andrew. (TLH 129) She wonders at breakfast: “Going to the lighthouse? But what does one send to the Lighthouse? ... Alone: The grey-green light on the wall opposite . The empty places. Such were some of the parts, but how bring them together? She asked” (TLH 130). However, she experiences “ a moment of revelation” when she looks at “a little sprig or leaf pattern on the table-cloth” of the breakfast table and she finds a solution to the “problem about a foreground of a picture” by moving “the picture to the middle” (TLH 130).

Lily concentrates on her painting, but she still suffers from a mental block (to borrow the term from writing). She finds “that line there, that mass there. But it was out of the question” (TLH 130). The question which disturbs Lily and prevents the realization of her aesthetic vision since the beginning is “how to connect the mass on the right hand with that on the left” so as to achieve “the unity of the whole” in her painting. She must grope for the answer to her question “among hedges and houses and mothers and children-her picture”(TLH46). Yet, she is still afraid that by doing so”the unity might be broken” (TLH 46) Eventually, Lily, is able to finish her painting:

There it was- her picture. ..It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? She

asked herself, taking up her brush again. ... With a sudden intensity... she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought ...I have had my vision. (*TLH* 154)

As such, the “empty space” is filled up and replaced by the” androgynous space” which provides Lily with the creative ability to realize her aesthetic vision. “[Lily’s] position when she paints in the garden, between the feminized house and the masculinized lighthouse, suggests an androgynous space” (Emery 229). In fact, androgyny is an ultimate value for Woolf in the novel. Lily, the androgynous artist, finally, does not take heed whether her painting will attain critical recognition or not. It is of the utmost importance for both Virginia Woolf and Lily Briscoe to fill the “empty space” since it is the “business” of the female artist to “find”, “disclose”, “collect” and “communicate” her androgynous vision of “reality” to humanity at large. (*RO* 114)

Finally, Lily, the artist, is in a state of reconciliation with nature as Lily creates a harmony between the tree and the house in her painting referring to a similar holistic, creative state of mind where male and female mental qualities exist in a synthesis. In fact, it is the liberating principle of androgyny which enables Lily to achieve her creative, holistic feat, triumph over the patriarchal social system, and defeat the futility of life by existing in a state of harmony with nature. Lily experiences a sense of liberation as she resolves her psychological conflict and finishes her painting.

Whereas Mrs. Ramsay’s creativity is limited to the realm of human relationships and the promotion of love, inspiration and emotional bonding as opposed to conflict, fear and strife, Lily’s creativity is of a holistic, aesthetic type. In addition, Mrs. Ramsay’s creativity suffers limitation due to her subjugation by patriarchy which leaves her vulnerable to the annihilating forces of nature.

Caught in the conflict between the socially constructed body of the female and the creative mind, Judith Shakespeare dies without realizing her genius as a poet, Woolf claims in *A Room of One’s Own*. (Hite “Virginia Woolf’s Two Bodies”)._On much similar terms, Mrs. Ramsay’s sudden death could be explained. Lily, on the other hand, is the artist capable of comprehending and uniting the opposite but complementary mental powers of female and male in an aesthetic whole- the painting. An artist who feels fully human explains Woolf ‘s question: “who shall measure the heat and violence of a poet’s heart when caught and tangled in a woman’s body?” (*RO* 40). Only when Lily transcends the dualities of male/ female, body/mind, she becomes fully human, and a creative artist who can attain a holistic “vision” of life and nature, and face the annihilating forces of nature that have defeated Mrs. Ramsay.

In conclusion, the aesthetic creativity of the androgynous mind is by far an ultimate end of Virginia Woolf, an artist herself. Indeed, Lily, the

artist's embrace of androgyny is more significant to Virginia Woolf than Mrs. Ramsay's dual perspective of life. The latter's abrupt death, in the ten-year - time lapse between section one "the Window" and section two, "Time Passes" of the novel is, therefore, answerable. Although she possesses the ability to fertilize and counteract male sterility, she does not realize her full creative potential as a complete human being, and drains herself out of life, which is, according to the logic of the text, an important cause of her abrupt, parenthetical death.

Both Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe's characters, lives, and achievements are holistic from an ecofeminist perspective. Nonetheless, the creation of an artifact is a more significantly holistic type of creation than the ordinary person's marital life achievements (as in Mrs. Ramsay's case) for Woolf. Indeed, the artist's achievement of a "sublime" whole in creating an artifact, is an act of liberation uniting polar views of human life; such a creative act includes a sense of the oneness of human life and nature.

The art work, therefore, is a product of a biocentric or an organic process, and a holistic perception of life reconciling the polarity of male and female as well as the polarity of nature and man. Only by transcending these polarities, Lily is able to feel like a complete human being – and hence- to create her painting which illustrates her artistic vision of reality. Such vision might eventually be conveyed to humanity as that of her creator, Virginia Woolf.

الطبيعة الأم (جايا) والفنان المخنث
الشمولية في نحو الفنار وحجرة خاصة بي
ناهد عصام عيسى
المستخلص

في ظل الاهتمام المتزايد بالنقد الايكولوجي والنقد النسوي الايكولوجي أضحت الاعمال الروائية للكاتبة الانجليزية فرجينيا وولف موضوعا للدراسات النقدية في هذا المجال، بناء على ذلك تقدم هذه الورقة البحثية محاولة لقراءة كل اشكال الحياة من خلال النظرة الاخلاقية الكلية التي تعطي الاهمية للقيم الجوهرية لتلك الاشكال كما يفسرها مفهوم الخنوثة أو (الأندروجين) كحالة عقلية تشتمل على الترابط بين كل العمليات الحياتية و فرضية جايا في رواية " نحو الفنار " (١٩٢٧) ومقال "حجرة خاصة بي" (١٩٢٩) لفرجينيا وولف، وبخاصة في شخصيتي ليلي بريسكو والسيدة رامزي على التوالي في الرواية سابقة الذكر.

توجه وولف النقد لمفهومي الفردية والعقلانية في التقاليد الليبرالية في العملين سابقين الذكر كواحدة من كتاب الموجة النسوية الأولى، بتقديمها مفهوم شمولية كل أشكال الحياة وتؤكد على أفكار الجماعة والروابط العاطفية ومبدأ الوحدة العضوية بين الثنائيات الموجودة فعليا أو المتصورة و مثل الذكر والأنثى و الطبيعة والانسان و الشخص الفاعل والمفعول به.

بما أن النسوية الايكولوجية تحضع للنظام القيمي الكلي فانها تنظر الى القبة الجوهرية للطبيعة والحياة كعنصر مطلوب من اجل حدوث تحول اجتماعي يعطي أهمية لارتباط كل العمليات الحياتية بعضها ببعض. لذلك توصي وولف باحلال النظرة الاخلاقية الكلية لكل اشكال الحياة محل مفهوم مركزية الانسان كما توصي بذلك وولف في اعمالها الادبية. ،اخيرا وليس آخرا فان وولف ترفض المتناقضات الكاذبة الموجودة في لب النظام الاجتماعي الأبوي و التي تأسست على ثنائية الذكر والأنثى (مثل التفكير والعمل والفن والعلم والتجربة والمعرفة) لصالح تكامل تلك الثنائيات واتجاهها نحو نظرة كلية للواقع ينقلها الفن للانسانية جمعاء.

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