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# Searching for the Body: Uncovering the Feminist Literary Project of Embodiment in Virginia Woolf

by

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# Introduction

"What is a woman?" This question is at the center of the writings of numerous feminist theorists. Simone de Beauvoir begins her introduction to *The Second Sex* by asking this question. The first possible answer she gives is the expression, "'tota molier in utero,' says one, 'woman is a womb'"[1]. Yet, the biological does not suffice to fully answer the question – some womb-possessing individuals, she claims, are still accused of not fitting into the category of 'woman'. The distinction she points out here – without using such language – is what is commonly understood as a distinction between sex and gender or between the biological fact of being born with female sex organs and the socially prescribed roles and expectations for women. However, there is something to be said for the original answer – it is true, regardless of whether they meet socially prescribed gender expectations, that some human beings possess female anatomy. As de Beauvoir points out, as of the time of her writing and as of today, though some lines may be more blurred than they were at the time, "humanity is divided into two classes of individuals whose clothes, faces, bodies, smiles, gaits, interests, and occupations are manifestly different. Perhaps these differences are superficial, perhaps they are destined to disappear. What is certain is right now they do most obviously exist"[2]. Women exist, insofar as 'women' simply refers to individuals born with the genitalia to which we attribute the female sex.

The fact of having a female body carries with it certain cultural

meanings and expectations. The perception and treatment of women is manifestly different from that of men. Women, as de Beauvoir argues, have been for most of time placed in the category of 'other,' with men being the norm, and treated as such. With the rise of feminism, women have rebelled against their placement into this category and worked against the forces that seek to place women into a limited category. Literature has provided one means by which women have attempted such a project and to free the female body from the limitations imposed upon them by the patriarchy.

Virginia Woolf has been hailed by some as presenting a feminist agenda and including positive depictions of strong female characters in her novels. However, there are some feminist literary critics who have criticized her work for failing to establish her female characters as women – specifically, for failing to sufficiently address the female body in her work. In a chapter of her book, *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter accuses Woolf of failing to confront her own womanhood and that of her characters and instead 'fleeing' to a certain idealized vision of androgyny. According to Showalter, "[a]ndrogyny was the myth that helped [Woolf] evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition"[3]. In Showalter's argument, this model of androgyny was one that Woolf utilized both in her image of herself and in her portrayal of her female characters. Instead of embracing the womanhood of her female characters, Showalter argued, Woolf failed to sufficiently acknowledge it, instead painting them as androgynous, unsexed individuals. Part of the manner in which she

did so, Showalter argued, was through her failure to confront or acknowledge the bodily realities of womanhood in her characters. Showalter also argued that Woolf "was extremely sensitive to the ways in which female experience had made women weak, but she was much less sensitive to the ways in which it had made them strong"[4]. The body, according to Showalter, acts solely as a hindrance on women in Woolf's work. Thus, by portraying her characters as androgynous rather than female, Showalter claimed that Woolf was evading confrontation with the issue of the lived female experience in general. A large part of Showalter's complaint with regard to Woolf's writing is what she sees as a failure to acknowledge the realities of womanhood, and a portrayal of her characters instead as "disembodied" and thus hardly women at all. "Refined to its essences, abstracted from physicality and anger, denied any action, Woolf's vision of womanhood is as deadly as it is disembodied"[5]. She argued that, by primarily concentrating on the mental state of her characters, the women in Woolf become bodiless and thereby ceased to be truly women at all.

Another feminist writer, Toril Moi, in her book, Sexual/Textual Politics, criticizes Showalter's argument that Woolf uses androgyny as a flee from womanhood, and claims that Woolf, in her writing, "radically undermine[s] the notion of the unitary self, the central concept of Western male humanism, and one crucial to Showalter's feminism"[6]. This concept of the unitary self is a concept Showalter seeks to find in a feminist text, yet one which is absent in Woolf. Moi argues that Woolf (60 years before her time) takes up Julia Kristeva's feminist position by rejecting "the dichotomy

between masculine and feminine as metaphysical"[7]. Thus, according to Moi, the issue that Showalter has with Woolf is that Woolf presents an image of the woman that does not align with her vision of what a woman should look like, but one which, Moi argues, opens up many possibilities for what a woman could be. Instead of limiting women or forcing them to become androgynous as a flee from womanhood, Woolf turns to a vision of androgyny in order to open up numerous new possibilities for what a woman could be. This androgyny is not a flee from womanhood, but a turn toward new possibilities for women. Part of Showalter's argument, however, still stands, even after Moi's counterargument – where is the body in Woolf?

First, however, what does it mean if the body is absent in Woolf? Why should it matter if the body appears in her writing at all? If Moi claims that Woolf's writing introduces a new image of femininity which allows for women to take on both masculine and feminine elements of character rather than limiting their identity, do we need to see the body in order for Woolf's text to complete it's feminist project? Woolf makes some strong statements about women's role in society throughout her works. Much of her literary project relates to thinking and writing about the role of women in fiction and the role of women writers. Her novel, *A Room of One's Own*, makes an argument for the necessity for women writers to have both a literal and figurative space in which to create their work, outside of patriarchally-dominated spaces. Though this discussion focuses on finding a space for women, its concern is primarily on the workings of their mind, rather than the physical realities of women's

existence.[8] Her essay, *Professions for Women*, concentrates on the barriers in place that prevent women from writing freely. Both of these notable feminist works, however, concentrate primarily on the mind, focusing on the barriers to the mental workings of women writers, rather than on the bodily realities of womanhood. What would it mean to confront these bodily realities? What is the value of acknowledging the female body in literature?

To acknowledge the female body means to acknowledge the lived experiences of women. One need not claim an essentialized female experience to claim that women are embodied beings who experience life in and through their bodily difference. Woolf herself contends that, in life, "[a]ll day, all night the body intervenes"[9]. The fact that the body plays such a enormous role in our lives means that to neglect it would be to neglect a tremendous part of our lived experience. By writing about the body, one is able to examine the ways in which the body interacts with the mind, and the ways in which the decisions of the mind are played out on and in the body. By writing about the body in a feminist literature, one also calls attention to the differences in the embodied experiences of men and women. One can make the case that women and men are often treated differently because of their physical differences. Calling attention to the relationship between the body and woman's position and subjectivity is an important part of a feminist project.

I would contend, however, that Showalter is mistaken when she fails to locate the body within Woolf's texts. This essay is devoted to locating the places and manners in which the body appears in Woolf's fiction. It may not

always appear in the form that Showalter expects to find it, but it can be argued that it appears in unexpected ways that suggest both the limitations placed on the body and a means for resisting if not freeing the self from those limitations. More specifically, I will focus on the symptoms or traces of bodily experience that can be found in Woolf's attention to clothing, movement, and illness.

The first chapter of this essay concentrates on the issue of clothing. By calling attention to the way in which we clothe our bodies, Woolf simultaneously calls attention to the manner in which gender roles are constructed within society. She is also able to call attention to the manner in which society demands that we mark these biological differences (both those perceived and not perceived) through our clothing. She shows that, while the mind inside of the body may be the same as that of a man, clothes act to cue members of society as to how they should treat other people. In that way, clothes essentially designate gender. Clothes, then, can represent the social restrictions placed upon women. However, they also present possibilities for freedom from these restrictions. Having the choice of what clothing to adopt means having a choice as to what identity to take up and how you would like others to perceive you. It is an act of self-determination – not allowing oneself to be told who one is by society at large. It is an act that can grant a great deal of agency to women, in possessing the freedom to make that choice, and, more importantly, that can allow women the agency to determine their own character rather than be determined from the outside by society.

Next, this paper will examine bodily movement and the ways in which women's bodily movements are restricted and limited, paralleling the lack of freedom and agency that women have in society. The chapter examines both movement within the body and movement without the body. It looks at movement as varied as a walk across a city, a dog or child running about, or travel across Europe. The ways the body moves and the freedom with which the body moves are of primary concern in this chapter. Like the freedom to adopt the clothing of one's choice, the freedom of movement would mean greater agency for women in society. It would mean leading lives unpoliced by patriarchal society, in which they could go where they chose. Movement, thus, is freedom, yet the women of Woolf, by and large, lead lives of restriction – primarily restriction to a domestic sphere. We look to certain characters in Woolf for hope of what a life free from these constraints might look like and what actions it would require.

The final chapter will concentrate on the ill body and its nourishment. It will examine illness in Woolf and the ways in which illness in Woolf reflects an interaction between both mind and body. The ill mind demonstrates bodily symptoms, and the ill body exhibits mental symptoms. In portraying illness in this way, Woolf is able to call attention to the fact that we, as human beings, are *not* disembodied creatures, and that, in fact, the mind is a part of the body. Woolf also calls attention to the fact that illness places all individuals, both men and women, into a state of dependency. This dependency parallels the state in which women are naturally placed within. Illness, in certain ways,

'feminizes'. From illness, we look to the ways in which we can treat and cure illness and escape from this dependency. We find that, in Woolf, successful treatment of illness comes in an individual listening to one's own body and determining what it is that the body needs as nourishment. With the active choice of how to nourish oneself, an individual is better able to free oneself from their illness and (or at least) its accompanying dependency. Again, it is a matter of taking up the agency to determine one's own needs and making active choices for oneself that allows for this freedom.

All three of these chapters examine the social forces acting on bodies, particularly female bodies, which restrict them in certain ways. Thus, Woolf does call attention to women's bodies and how they impact women's lived experiences. At the same time, Woolf does not limit womanhood to a certain body. She does not define womanhood by the body in a way that would be restrictive in and of itself. Similarly, she refuses to restrict womanhood to a certain mind. Showalter's concerns with Woolf seem to stem from the fact that Woolf's failing to do so seems to make the statement that Woolf is attempting to erase differences between men and women rather than embrace womanhood. Instead, I would argue that Woolf is embracing a more inclusive definition of womanhood, while still calling attention to the real phenomena that are acted out on and in and because of women's bodies – the ways in which bodies perform numerous social functions and the ways in which society often restricts women's bodies in tandem with women's minds. Woolf's characters, rather than disembodied, are embodied but not defined by

their bodies. Women are far more than just bodies, Woolf would have us know. They are, however, often minimized to just body. They are often perceived in society as simply bodies and treated as such. Woolf's characters are consistently more than that. When they are treated as such, it is solely to demonstrate the problems the surround women's treatment within society.

Woolf's feminist literary project is one that she took great troubles to produce, and one which would be a shame to discount. Each of her works tends to say something very important about women's role in society. I have concentrated on the body, something that, arguably, exists in the background of most of Woolf's texts. Nevertheless, it exists and, even there, Woolf makes powerful statements about a woman's role in society and the daily constraints placed upon her. She also makes powerful statements about the need and possibility for escaping these constraints and becoming the individual of your choosing, rather than one defined by society. This, for Woolf, is perhaps the most empowering action that a woman can take up – coming to define herself, rather than allowing herself to be defined. Woolf is, thus, taking up what comes to be de Beauvoir's central answer to the question of what it means to be a woman: "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman"[10]. In other words, there is no such thing as a woman, except for that which society creates. What is means to be a woman is socially constructed. However, with the construct of woman having been deessentialized, a new freedom arises. Women can define for themselves what it means to be a woman, and to be themselves. She can cease to allow society to define her, and begin to conceive of a new

definition for herself – one untethered from biology and wholly self-constituted.

# Clothing the Body

## I. Introduction

Many have criticized Virginia Woolf for the seeming absence of the body in her work. Yet, despite there being little direct reference to the physical body itself, Woolf calls attention to the body by spending a considerable amount of time calling attention to the manners in which the body is clothed. Clothing in many of Woolf's works is of particular importance because it allows Woolf to address the ways in which the body figures socially, the ways in which different bodies are differently perceived, and the manners in which different bodies are marked.

Collette Guillaumin discusses the notion of marking in *Race and Nature: The System of Marks*. Human beings, she claims, are marked and placed into specific social groups based on relationships of power. She writes that "the system of marks has been present for a very long time as the accompaniment of social cleavages. ... The fact that men and women dress differently, with clothes that are not cut the same way ... is an example of marking that continues to be generally recognized"[11]. These clothes work as markers of social relationships between people. They mark the difference between men and women – not the 'natural', biological difference, but the socially constructed difference in terms of the manner in which they are perceived and treated within society.

The question of sex versus gender is one that is extremely pertinent to

the question of the body, and particularly so when we speak of the ways in which the body is presented – through clothing. As the body is often understood to be the physiological basis of who we are, so the term 'sex' "refers to the biological and physiological characteristics" that differentiate men and women, whereas the term 'gender' is used to refer to "socially constructed roles, [behaviors], activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women"[12]. When we say men and women are differentiated by sex, we are referring to their biological differences, such as genitals, hormones, and genes. Gender, on the contrary, generally refers to qualities of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' that are determined by a particular society. The clothing one wears plays a particularly significant role in marking one as male or female. Historically, men and women have been assigned differential clothing based upon their gender. Previously, we mentioned Guillaumin's view that clothing works as a system of marks. Christine Delphy goes even further with this argument, claiming "that *gender* precedes sex: that sex itself simply marks a social division; that it serves to allow social recognition and identification of those who are dominants and those who are dominated"[13]. Our very bodies, then, serve as a system of marks that create certain power dynamics and social relationships between individuals. Sex has, thus, "historically acquired a symbolic value"[14]. If we can accept, then, that men and women are perceived differently, and are assigned different clothing, we can see, then, that their bodies are marked, both according to their biological characteristics and their differential clothing. While the specific

requirements for which clothing a particular gender was assigned to wear have fluctuated over time and across societies, most societies do differentiate between the clothing expected to be worn by men and that expected to be worn by women. Seen in this light, clothing reflects something that society has imposed upon us, as does the construct of gender itself. These marks have tremendous power in terms of designating women and men's roles in society.

Yet, there is a hidden potential to clothing. In some of her works, Woolf uses clothing as a tool for the redefinition of sex and sexuality. By adopting a new set of clothes, an individual can adopt a new way of being, and thereby rebel against the constraining norms and expectations placed upon oneself by socially-prescribed gender roles. Woolf imbues clothing with the potential for self-definition. In Woolf, therefore, a man putting on the clothing of a woman and adopting a woman's identity and all the implications that go along with it demonstrate that the enforcement of gender roles can be subverted and that gender itself cannot suffice to encapsulate a shifting identity. We see this very situation in Woolf's novel, *Orlando,* one of the texts with which this chapter will treat.

In this chapter, I will examine three of Woolf's texts. First, I will look closely at Woolf's short story, *The New Dress*, in which a woman wears a dress to a party and finds herself feeling inadequate because of it. The story demonstrates the manners in which clothing can represent social expectations. There are social pressures related to class and gender placed upon the protagonist of this story, and they bear down on her as she wears her

dress. She is defined from the outside-in by the clothing she wears – her dress marks her class, as well as her gender, in the eyes of others.

The next text I will examine is *Flush: a Biography*, a fictional biography which recounts the story of Elizabeth Barret Browning's dog, Flush. One might wonder how a dog can tell us much about the human body or condition, let alone the status of women. However, in *Flush* we see that dogs' bodies play a central role in determining their identities, and thus Flush, as a dog, can teach us a great deal about the relation between body and identity. Flush's fur plays a role parallel to that which clothing seems to play in the other texts. Furthermore, the dog and issues surrounding him provide a unique perspective on identity in relation to appearance and externality. In doing so, the text brings forth the question of the extent to which our bodies (and our biology) determine who we are. Even a dog, the story shows, has an identity that is malleable, to some extent, and can be molded.

Finally, we discuss Woolf's novel, *Orlando: a Biography*, which is the story of an individual who lives for several hundred years, first as a man, then as a woman. Halfway through his life, Orlando undergoes a transformation from a man to a woman[1]. With this transformation comes some drastic life changes for Orlando, yet we ultimately see that the character remains fundamentally the same in many ways. The most drastic changes experienced by Orlando reflect changes in the manner in which she is treated and

1 For the sake of clarity, throughout this paper, when I refer to the Orlando of the first half of the novel, before his transformation, I will refer to him using the male pronoun. When I am referring to Orlando as a woman, I will use the female pronoun.

perceived as a woman. The relationship between clothing and identity that plays out in the novel begs the narrator to wonder whether it is clothing itself that shapes identity or us who shape our identities through our clothing. The story demonstrates the malleability of identity, as well as provides more evidence for the powerful role of clothing in Woolf. Ultimately, all these texts demonstrate the numerous different ways in which clothing is utilized throughout Woolf's works and the different ways that it can transform an individual, both positively and negatively.

## II. Clothing: Costumes of the Mind

In her article, "Costumes of the Mind", Sandra Gilbert recounts the differential ways in which modernist writers treated the subject of clothing. Gilbert noted that most male modernists wrote of clothing and costume as something false, which disguises one's true identity. She remarked, however, that unlike their male counterparts, female modernists wrote of costume as something far more liberating, tied to the potential for one's self-expression and the destruction of the concept of a unified self. She writes of Woolf in particular, who, in *Orlando*, treated clothing as something that easily shifts along with gender identity. Where male modernists like Yeats wrote of costume as something that disguises identity, particularly gender identity, Gilbert remarks that "Woolf's view of clothing implied that costume is inseparable from identity – indeed, that costume creates identity"[15]. Woolf describes one's personal identity as a project that is shaped in part through

one's decisions about what to wear. In Woolf, clothing offers the potential to select an identity outside of that which is 'given' to you by society in so-called accordance with your sex. Naturally, this gender identity is socially and culturally-bound and relative. What is means to act in accordance with one's sex can vary from person-to-person, as well as from culture-to-culture, but it seems that there are some established norms that are generally adhered to in terms of what is expected of a given sex in a given culture. Clothing, in Woolf, offers an opportunity to move away from these norms and redefine one's gendered identity.

Gilbert suggests that Woolf and her female modernist colleagues and post-modernist descendents treat costume in such a different light from their male counterparts "in part because women's clothing is more closely connected with the pressures and oppressions of gender and in part because women have far more to gain from the identification of costume with self or gender"[16]. Rather than treat it as a concept that restricts the self, these writers, and Woolf in particular, grant costume the power of liberating one's self identity. This allows for tremendous potential in terms of redefining what gender identity comes to mean and granting one the agency to define one's own identity through costume. Because one can reshape one's gendered identity through the choice of a costume, the construct of gender itself and the gendered norms which are socially adhered to are implicitly called into question by Woolf and her colleagues.

The statement that Woolf ultimately makes is one which goes against a

notion of a fixed, singular self. Much of Woolf's project in her writing is to argue against this notion that human beings have one singular and unchanging character. Instead, Woolf seems to see individuals are consistently molding, changing, and being shaped over time. People are constantly in process. Thus, to say that one has a fixed, essential character or identity would, in Woolf's mind, be an enormous mistake. Gilbert claims that "feminist modernist costume imagery ... implies that no one, male or female, can or should be confined to a uni-form, a single form or self"[17]. Through her use of costume as something which thwarts one's given identity and allows for a fluid and changeable self definition, Woolf makes a powerful statement against this concept of a singular self. Clothing serves as an active agent of self-definition. One can put on a costume which allows one to define oneself as male, female or neither. By showing that this is possible, Woolf is stating that a single identity – particularly a single gender identity – is something that people should not – and often *could* not – be constrained to.

Yet the danger of the idea of clothing standing in for some sort of identity, whether or not it be an empowering one, is this notion that *all* that there is to identity (gendered or not) lies in clothing. This would imply that men and women have no identity outside of the clothing which they wear. Clearly, there is more to it than that. Clothing in Woolf is a symbolic construct. It is used in a number of ways. At times, clothing in Woolf represents the manner in which identity can manipulated by outside social pressures and forces. Yet, clothing does allow for the potential to express a

fluid identity, and we see this best expressed in *Orlando*, when clothing seems to allow for the character of Orlando to express her new feminine identity after her shift into womanhood. Clothing allows for a new channel by which one may express identity – in some ways, clothing can serve as the language of identity. One speaks one's gendered identity through clothing. Throughout a number of works, the relationship between clothing and the body seems implicit, and often clothing seems to be standing in for the body itself. Identity, however, is in no way fundamentally tied to either clothing nor the body, nor do I believe that Woolf would claim it to be. The fact that clothing presents the potential for self-definition and a multiplicity of identities within oneself serves solely to express the fact that this potential *exists*. Woolf is not suggesting that it is necessary to change one's clothes in order to change one's gendered identity, but rather is suggesting that one's identity *can* be changed and that clothing may be a medium through which to express this change. Identity in Woolf takes shape as an ongoing exchange with the self which is consistently both resisting and being molded by the forces of society. We see this process played out when we examine clothing in relation to identity in Woolf.

## III. *The New Dress*: Clothing as Restriction

Clothing at times can be seen to stand in for social pressures themselves and the manners in which they can have a strong sway over one's own identity, causing one to lose all agency in the matter of self-definition. As

Woolf points out that "there is much to support the view" that clothes "mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking"[18]. Though written in 1924, four years before the publication of *Orlando*, already in Woolf's short story, *The New Dress,* we see clothing taking on this role of imposing a new identity from the outside. In the story, the central character, Mabel wears a dress to a party, which she had initially perceived to be flattering. Social forces, however, bear down on her and we see the dress undergo a change in her eyes, thereby changing her own sense of self.

Mabel has seemingly put a great deal of thought and effort in the choice of the dress. In her tailor's workroom, she tries on the dress for the first time. Woolf writes, "when Miss Milan put the glass in her hand, and she looked at herself with the dress on, finished, an extraordinary bliss shot through her heart"[19]. In the context of the workroom, the dress transforms her into someone confident and "rid of cares," feeling like "a beautiful woman"[20]. Yet, one is left to wonder why she chooses this dress to begin with and why she feels so good about it at the time, yet not later, when she is in the company of others at the party. This all becomes clear when Mabel explains her reasoning in choosing the dress. Mabel knew that she could not be "fashionable," as "fashion meant cut, meant style, meant thirty guineas at least"[21]. It seems that money factored significantly in the decision of the dress. She had not the means to dress herself in the way that others might have approved of. Thus, she decided, "why not be original? Why not be herself, anyhow?"[22] For these reasons, then, she had modeled her dress after something more old-fashioned

which she had found in a fashion book from her mother's time. Apparently, then, this dress was one which she felt reflected her character and originality. She seems satisfied with her own choice of dress so long as she is in the privacy of her dress designer's workroom, essentially alone. And yet, once she arrives at the party, confronted with judging eyes and certain expectations, she instantly loses all confidence.

Although Mabel arrived at the party in this new dress that she had selected especially for the event, upon her arrival, she is struck by how ugly she perceives the dress and herself in it. She feels that every person at the party was "thinking—"What's Mabel wearing? What a fright she looks! What a hideous new dress!""[23] Suddenly, although Mabel had seemingly chosen the dress in order to express herself and her own identity, she now hates the dress precisely because it does just that. The dress differentiates her from everyone else at the party, and because they do not approve of it, she can not approve of herself in it. Instead of seeing herself through her own eyes, Mabel begins to see herself through the eyes of everyone else at the party, positing her as, in some ways, outside of herself – alien to herself. The moment that Mabel walks into the party, she is struck by "the sense that she had had, ever since she was a child, of being inferior to other people"[24]. Thus, immediately, she is comparing herself to others. Mabel thinks of a woman who compliments her on her dress that she was "dressed in the height of fashion, precisely like everybody else, always"[25]. This line causes one to recall a few paragraphs earlier, when it is noted that Mabel can not afford to wear anything

“fashionable” as it would cost “at least thirty guineas”[26]. It seems clear that, because everyone else who surrounds her is dressed in what is fashionable, Mabel herself loses all confidence in her own appearance. Mabel's dress shapes her self-perception and identity, but rather than shaping her self-perceived identity from the inside – that is, from within Mabel herself, as she had apparently intended it to when she actively chose the dress herself, it shapes her from the outside, as social pressures bear down upon her. This situation also demonstrates how strongly social forces repress individuality and impose constraining expectations as to what it means to be an ideal woman. These expectations can be played out in clothing. The dress causes her to yearn to lose her own identity and adopt that which she perceives to be everyone else's identity – embodied in their fashionable clothing. Mabel feels that the dress “looked so charming in the fashion book, but not on her, not among all these ordinary people”[27]. Yet, in a sense, she seems to yearn to be one of those “ordinary people”[28]. She spends most of the party concerned with the opinions of these people, and losing all the confidence she had gained from the dress whilst trying it on in the workroom. The dress effectively transforms Mabel into a someone completing lacking in confidence, wallowing in her own inadequacies. The dress seems to reveal a self dependent on the opinions and approval of others.

This story has a number of implications for one potential role of clothing in Woolf. Clothing in this story seems to serve as an agent of change, but in an extremely negative way, though in the beginning it does serve to

boost self-confidence. Clothing transforms Mabel from the outside. Though she picked out the dress and felt confident in it when no one else was around, in the context of a busy party, the dress changes her into someone perhaps even less confident than she had been to begin with. Clothing has immense social implications, and one is often seeking the approval of others through clothing. In this way, then, one has less agency in transforming oneself using clothing. Though Mabel attempted to transform herself using the dress, she found that, at the party, social opinions hindered her from doing this. Clothing in this story reveals a self that relies too much on the opinions of others – a weak self, incapable of having confidence in one's identity without the approval of society. It also reveals the problems that arise when one's clothing plays too large a role in defining one's identity. If the perceived negative reception of Mabel's dress was enough to shatter her self-confidence, it is clear that this dress was far too important in defining her identity. It's power over her identity was a destructive one, rather than an empowering one.

Through *The New Dress*, we also see the ways in which clothing might stand in for the body in Woolf. It is clear that, though body is not explicitly addressed, this dress is the mold in which she presents her body to the people at the party. When she is not satisfied with her appearance in it, in some ways she is not satisfied in her own skin. It is noteworthy that when she tries on the dress for the first time and is pleased with it, she remarks that she is "rid of cares and wrinkles"[29]. The fact that the very wrinkles on her face feel as

though they have disappeared with the new dress demonstrates how powerful an impression Mabel feels this dress makes upon her body itself. In Woolf, we see that oftentimes bodies themselves are not directly addressed, yet concepts such as clothing serve to stand in for bodies themselves.

## IV. *Flush*: Fur as Clothing

Like *The New Dress,* we also see something like clothing representing the body itself in Woolf's novel, *Flush*. In the novel, it is the fur of the story's protagonist, a dog, that figures as something in between clothing and body itself. It is hard to call fur clothing, as it is physically a part of the dog. There are aspects of fur about which the dog has no control. And yet, just like clothing, fur can be manipulated and changed. One trims fur, styles fur, and shaves fur. Even more significantly, however, fur seems to have a similar sort of social significance to clothing for dogs. Dogs are valued and evaluated based upon the style of their fur, just as people often are based upon their clothing. For the sake of this particular argument, it is useful to treat fur itself as something parallel to clothing, as it serves many of the same functions as clothing does in other texts and seems to be seen in a very similar manner. In many ways, it seems that Woolf is using the figure of the dog, Flush, to say some important things about women and people in general. One of these messages has to do with identity and whether identity can be located externally or internally. For Flush, fur works in similar ways as clothing does for Woolf's human characters. The character of Flush is anthropomorphized

and often the narrator speaks of him as though he has thoughts and feelings. The role of the dog in this story is one of confinement, in certain ways. A pet is forced to live under certain restrictions, and these restrictions are paralleled throughout the novel with the restrictions under which Flush's owner, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, must live. At the novel's start, Barrett Browning is confined to bed-rest under the roof of her father's house. Her movement is severely limited. Similarly, Flush's freedom is restricted to the confines of the house and to the extent of his leash while on walks. It is important to draw this parallel between Flush and Barrett Browning, because throughout the novel, Woolf uses Flush to stand in for and make statements about Barrett Browning. Thus, many statements Woolf makes about Flush could be said to apply to Barrett Browning herself and even to women in general. The feelings and thoughts expressed by Flush often provide fruitful observations on society and identity; thus, one must suspend one's disbelief in the notion that dogs could, in fact, express such thoughts and feelings in order to look for Woolf's ultimate message in expressing these ideas.

Just as clothing can be shaped and shapes one, fur in *Flush* serves as a way the 'body' of the dog itself can be shaped, and all the while actively shapes identity. Woolf seems to be drawing a very close parallel in her discussion of fur in dogs to the notion of clothing on women. We make the comparison here between dogs and women, because both, it seems, are often judged based upon external appearances – clothing and body for humans, and fur for dogs. Fur in *Flush* determines the status a dog belongs to. Woolf writes, “By that

august body it is plainly laid down what constitute the vices of a spaniel, and what constitute its virtues"[30]. Appearance determines status and reception. How a spaniel ought to be perceived by others is written within his body itself. Much like Mabel's dress, the fur that a dog wears determines how he will be seen, and thereby, the narrator leads us to believe, determines how a dog perceives himself. When Flush is forced to shave off his coat because of fleas, he initially feels upset because he loses something of this status in the eyes of others. Yet, ultimately, he feels more free because of it. Fur, in a way, can be seen as an intersection between body and clothing. Fur can be shaped as clothing can, yet it is physically connected to the dog in a way unlike clothing. Yet, the social implications of fur for dogs seem to be parallel to those of clothing for humans. Thus, as if in some small way debunking these false markers of identity, it is of crucial importance that Flush, later on in the story, thinks to himself, upon looking into a mirror, "what is "oneself"? Is it the thing people see? Or is it the thing one is?"[31] It is clear that fur, as an identity which seems to be wholly imposed by society, is insufficient to completely account for one's identity. Clearly, as a dog has no way of grooming or styling his own fur, it also leaves no room for self-definition through the presentation of a self.

## V. *Orlando*: Clothing and Gender

In Woolf's novel, *Orlando,* there are also times at which women's clothing comes to stand in for the societal pressures and expectations that

befall women. In the story of *Orlando*, the protagonist undergoes a sudden shift from a man to a woman. Yet, the implications of this change do not immediately occur to her once she has become a woman. It is noted that when Orlando first undergoes the change, "she had scarcely given her sex a thought"[32]. To explain this, Woolf remarks that "Perhaps the Turkish trousers, which she had hitherto worn had done something to distract her thoughts and the gipsy women, except in one or two important particulars, differ very little from the gipsy men"[33]. Thus, something about the way that clothing does not distinguish between men and women allows for Orlando to not fully experience or come to realize her womanhood. It is only when she dons traditional Victorian dress that she becomes fully aware of the societal implications of being a woman in Victorian society. Woolf writes that "it was not until she felt the coil of skirts about her legs and the Captain offered, with the greatest politeness, to have an awning spread for her on the dock that she realised, with a start the penalties and the privileges of her position"[34]. It is apparently not her body, which has been changed for some time, but her clothing itself and the manner in which she is treated within Victorian society as a result of her dress and appearance that causes this realization in Orlando. In one particularly striking scene, a man almost falls from a boat's mast-head upon seeing a part of her leg. In response to this occasion, Orlando "fell to thinking what an odd pass we have come to when all a woman's beauty has to be kept covered, lest a sailor may fall from a mast-head"[35]. Woolf here calls attention to the social implications for women which are, in certain ways,

defined wholly through the clothing they are expected to wear. Purity and chastity are tied closely to the necessity for a woman's body to be fully covered. It is significant that upon Orlando's transformation into a woman, the figures of the Ladies of Purity, Chastity, and Modesty appear in an attempt to cloak her naked, newly female body. Woolf is clearly making an important statement here, demonstrating that these 'ideals' are very closely tied to womanhood and particularly to women's bodies. Thus, just as Mabel was transformed from the outside by clothing, at this point in the story, it seems that Orlando, too, is transformed by societal expectations due to her change of clothing. Clothing here is not something that one actively chooses and which expresses a fluid identity, but it is rather something which constrains one's identity to that which society determines it to be, particularly in terms of gender.

Though it does address the ways in which clothing can be socially constraining, Orlando also provides a potential for clothing to have a far more powerful role than either *Flush* or *The New Dress* allow for. At the very start of the novel, Woolf addresses the relationship between clothing and gender identity in the introduction of *Orlando*, writing, "he—for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it"[36]. Some sort of gender ambiguity, then, in terms of clothing itself, at least, becomes attached to Orlando's identity. The fashion of the time for men was far more ambiguous than that for women. It thereby provided some form of potential for a flexible gender identity – perhaps a gender identity less

entrenched in masculinity. As we have seen previously, the clothing assigned to women by society seems to initially provide less such possibility and flexibility. Yet, there is a manner in which Orlando's ultimate transition from a man to a woman and the clothing that she adopts in itself provides the potential for demonstrating even further fluidity of identity and self-presentation.

Clothing in Orlando demonstrates the possibility for a fluid identity when one begins to detach clothing from their socially imposed constraints and begins to see clothing as a tool for expressing one's changeable identity. *Orlando*'s narrator remarked that "Clothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath"[37]. The narrator here seems to be expressing the very manner in which Woolf utilizes clothing as an instrument in her work. Rather than truly determining identity, clothes serve to symbolize identity itself and, in the context of the work at large, symbolize the vast potential for identity. The narrator then goes on to explain of Orlando that "It was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman's dress and of a woman's sex. And perhaps in this she was only expressing rather more openly than usual ... something that happens to most people without being thus plainly expressed"[38]. What is significant here is this open discussion of the fact that Orlando, in her adoption of a feminine identity is not an anomaly, but rather is expressing a vacillation which occurs within most people throughout their lives without their acknowledging or addressing it quite so plainly. Though rarely does a person literally transform in body, behavior and dress from one

sex role to another, Woolf here is attesting that all people *do* adopt and identify with constantly shifting and varying masculine and feminine identities. As Woolf attests soon after, "Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above"[39]. Thus, Woolf is attesting that the body we are born into does not destine us to take on any particular identity. Sandra Gilbert, in *Costumes of the Mind*, addresses the liberating potential of *Orlando* – its showcasing of the unlimited possibilities for identities that women may take on. Gilbert writes that "*Orlando* is first and foremost a costume drama of wish fulfillment, … designed to prove to Everywoman that she can be exactly who or what she wants to be, including Everyman"[40]. *Orlando*, Gilbert attests and as we have seen, makes a statement about the flexible potential for both men and women's identities. She notes that it is particularly telling that Woolf does not focus on the actual physical changes that Orlando undergoes, and instead focuses on the changes in wardrobe. "In fact, as if to emphasize that costume, not anatomy, is destiny, Woolf comically eschews specific descriptions of the bodily changes that mark Orlando's gender metamorphosis"[41] Thus, Woolf is opening doors for the potential for a fluid identity, rather than one deeply engrained in the social expectations for a given gender, in which one's identity is shaped by society from the outside.

Ultimately, Orlando ends the novel in a state of androgynous fluidity,

in which she is able to express her true identity fully – one which melds the masculine and the feminine. Gilbert notes that "though Orlando has outwardly become a woman, 'in every other respect [she] remains precisely as he had been' (p. 138), and this not because sexually defining costumes are false and selves are true but because costumes are selves and thus easily, fluidly, interchangeable"[42]. The ability to change costumes so easily in *Orlando* allows for the ability to shift identities just as easily. Orlando ends the novel having adopted the masculine and feminine elements of her identity which she was never able to so fully express before going through this change. Significantly, Gilbert remarks, "Although Orlando's female costume dis-comfits her at times, it never degrades her ... Orlando, in other words, really is androgynous ... in the sense that she has available to her a sort of wardrobe of male and female selves"[43]. This is an important statement. While it seems that social pressures begin to bear down on Orlando when she first dons her Victorian dress, she is not degraded by the adoption of this feminine identity, and it instead is a powerful tool for Orlando in her journey to become more fully herself. Her femininity gives her power in allowing her to become herself. It is a valuable asset, rather than a burden. Ultimately, Woolf seems to be making the claim that every human being has within him or her a fluid gender identity, combining or shifting between aspects of masculinity and femininity and it is only social constraints that keep these from coming out. Through her use of costume in *Orlando*, Woolf is able to express this potential.

## VI. Conclusion

Ultimately, we come to see that clothing, while often standing in for the restrictions placed upon women, also offers the potential for the adoption of new identities. Through the the role clothing, we see reflected Woolf's notion of the mutability of identity. Though clothing does serve to mark women as such, the meanings of these markers on women and men need not remain stagnant. This is the message that Woolf sends through her portrayal of clothing. While certain images, suppositions, and perceptions may be recalled when most people look upon a woman, we have the power to change these. We also have the power to change our individual identity, in part through clothing. The important thing to ensure is that we do not allow our clothing to change us, as Mabel does in *The New Dress*. Instead, we should use clothing to change the way we see ourselves and the way we allow others to see us.

# Movement of the Body

## I. Introduction

Living bodies move, however imperceptibly and the movements of and in our bodies imbue our lives with numerous possibilities. Yet, restrictions are consistently placed on the ways and spaces in which our bodies are allowed to move – particularly on the ways and spaces in which the female body is allowed to move.

When I speak of movement, I am referring to a variety of actions and interactions that the body performs on a daily basis. The types of movement I address in the texts of Woolf typically fall into one of two categories – movement within the body and movement by the body out and about in the world. The former are the often invisible processes that occur within our bodies and are a facet of life. Yet, by calling attention to them, one calls attention to the body itself. It is important not to forget about this type of movement, which is occurring on a daily basis. In fact, it troubles the very duality between body and mind for thinking itself is embodied. In the texts I will examine, we see limitations and restrictions imposed primarily on these types of movements. There are strict expectations and rules for where and how a woman or man should move about the world and Woolf calls attention to these in her writing.

In her book, *Throwing Like a Girl*, Iris Young discusses the gendered differences often seen in physical movement. She notes that, overall, women's

movement is “frequently characterized … by a failure to make full use of the body’s spatial and lateral potentialities”[44]. She uses the example of the manner in which many women and girls throw a ball without extending their arms as far as they could or utilizing other parts of their body to propel the throw to demonstrate this. Her movement is restricted, and confined into a very limited space. “For many women as they move in sport, a space surrounds us in imagination that we are not free to move beyond; the space available to our movement is constricted space”[45]. This constricted space, Young argues, is the reality in which most women live. However, the reasons for these restrictions of movement are neither innate nor biological, but rather are learned through women's subordination within society.

Young uses the existentialist language of Simone de Beauvoir to discuss women's social subordination. In her book, The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir discusses woman's treatment in society as the 'other' sex. She argues that women are placed in a particular *situation* which is responsible for their socialization – an argument against an essentialist one which would claim that women act and behave in certain manners (and, to some, are, on the whole, inferior) because of their biological makeup. Young uses parts of de Beauvoir's argument in her novel, and makes the argument that “[t]he modalities of female bodily comportment, motility, and spatiality … have their source in the particular *situation* of women as conditioned by their sexist oppression in contemporary society”[46]. The sexist oppression of contemporary society to which Young refers places severe restrictions on the spaces within

which and manners in which women move their bodies.

Orlando provides a solid example of the stark contrast between the movement enacted by and allowed for women as opposed to men. Before his transformation into a woman, Orlando moves about freely both internally and externally. He travels about the world as an ambassador, roaming about the world freely. At the same time, he demonstrates athleticism and the ease and comfort with which he is able to move within the world. In contrast, once Orlando is transformed into a woman, she finds herself restricted in both forms of movement: she immediately feels a desire to cease her traveling and she also feels constricted by the very clothing that she must wear as a woman. Woolf describes the "coil of skirts about her legs," demonstrating the restrictions of movement placed upon women simply by virtue of their clothing[47].

Much like Orlando, the other texts of Woolf demonstrate a stark contrast in movement between men and women. In this chapter, I will examine this gendering of movement in three main texts, To the Lighthouse, Flush, and *Street Haunting*. To the Lighthouse demonstrates the manner in which different forms of movement – particularly movement outside the domestic sphere of the home – enacted by a female body tend to be perceived as unnatural. Through the novel, we see a demonstration of the manner in which womanhood is oftentimes perceived to be closely aligned with inactivity. Flush demonstrates both freedom and restriction in its two main characters, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her dog, Flush. The novel shows

the impact of domestic confinement on the characters and their endeavors to break free of it and enter a more natural state. It could be said to demonstrate the numerous restrictions that conventional society of the time places upon women. Finally, *Street Haunting* depicts a woman taking an evening walk through the city – an apparently daring move that allows for a redefining or rediscovering of oneself. All three texts elucidate the tremendous significance of free movement and its possibilities and whereas in the first text, To The Lighthouse, restrictions on women's self-determination are enacted through restrictions on what they can do and where they can do it, the other two texts demonstrate a possibility for women to escape the defining gaze of patriarchal society and define oneself and one's movements through action.

## II. To the Lighthouse

Virginia Woolf's novel, To the Lighthouse, is a close examination of a family, the Ramsays, over a period of time. The first book of the novel, most important for my discussion here, takes place over the course of one day, during which the family prepares for a journey to a lighthouse. No one truly expects this journey to happen due to the weather, even as the very intention towards movement and the change it can provoke play a large part in the novel in a number of ways. The two female protagonists of the novel, Mrs. Ramsay, a housewife who is characterized by stagnancy, and Lily Briscoe, an artist who seems to yearn for adventure, serve to demonstrate the common perception of woman as inactive. Mrs. Ramsay is seen as lacking motion, and

seems to represent traditional, 'proper' womanhood in the eyes of many characters. Lily, on the other hand, is scoffed at for her desire to move and to venture out into the world and for her scorning of conventions of traditional womanhood, such as marriage. These qualities seem to run counter to what many characters perceive to be proper for women. Woolf attempts to call attention to this prevalent way of thinking by entering the minds and perceptions of her characters, and particularly the opinions her male characters have regarding both Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Furthermore, she deconstructs the binary between active and passive and its gendered associations by incorporating female characters like as Lily Briscoe into the text. Lily defies this binary by striving for a free and active life outside of the domestic realm. Her art can be read as a form of movement that gives her certain freedoms. Throughout, we see Lily striving for a life quite different from the domestic one of Mrs. Ramsay.

The novel itself is centered around the notion of change over time and the nature and movement of time itself. The first chapter of the novel takes place over the course of a single day, yet the second chapter, Time Passes, spans many years, elucidating a sense of a sudden, rapid movement in time. The reader experiences the rapidness of time when immediately upon beginning the second chapter of the novel, years pass by over the course of just a few pages, where in the previous chapter only hours or even minutes would have passed.

Simultaneously alongside this temporal movement, bodily movement

also plays out in the text in interesting manners. Notions of traditional masculinity and femininity are closely intertwined with notions of activity and inactivity, with the feminine sphere being more closely aligned with that of the passive, inactive, and domestic. Women are often seen in and seem to be tied more closely to the household. It is significant that when a few of the characters do finally journey to the lighthouse at the end of the text, none of the female characters accompany them. Iris Young points out in her book that "the space of the 'yonder' exists for feminine existence, but only as that which she is looking into, rather than moving in"[48]. This is the role that the space of the 'yonder' – the lighthouse – seems to play for the women of the novel. It is observed and discussed, but never arrived at. Through this portrayal of women, Woolf is calling attention to the problematic notion that women in society are often confined to a very limited sphere – the domestic.

Throughout the novel, Mrs. Ramsay is characterized by stagnancy. Her character, who is married woman with eight children, is both figuratively and literally constrained in terms of her movement. With the responsibilities of rearing eight children entirely in her hands, she is confined primarily to the house. We see this demonstrated repeatedly throughout the text. It seems that the very nature of being a wife and mother lends itself to a life that lacks action and movement – a stagnant life. Her own daughters express a desire to escape the constraints of this way of life. "Her daughters, Prue, Nancy, Rose … [sported] infidel ideas which they had brewed for themselves of a life different from hers; in Paris, perhaps; a wilder life; not always taking care of some man

or other; for there was in all their minds a mute questioning of deference and chivalry, of the Bank of England and the Indian Empire, of ringed fingers and lace"[49]. This notion of a "wild" life is sharply contrasted with the stagnant, domestic life of their mother. The very notion of marriage ("of ringed fingers") and of masculine and feminine ideals such as "deference and chivalry" seem to be implicitly tied in the minds of the young women of the novel, to a restriction of movement and freedom. It is significant that the life they envision for themselves in opposition to this constrained life is one in which they are able to travel. There is opportunity for both figurative and literal movement in a life unrestricted by marriage and children. Women of a younger generation looking at Mrs. Ramsay's life see the domestic life of homemaking and child-rearing as restrictive and confined.

A lack of physical action and movement characterizes Mrs. Ramsay's life and color the way in which she is perceived by others. In fact, from the perspectives of the other characters, almost as much time is spent throughout the novel commenting on her beauty and appearance as is spent commenting on her actions and inner character. She is presented, in the eyes of the other characters, as an object rather than an active subject. At one point, the character of Mr. Bankes, whilst thinking about his beauty, reminds himself, "if it was her beauty merely that one thought of, one must remember the quivering thing, the living thing … and work it into the picture"[50]. While this does call attention to the fact that, ultimately there *is* a movement and an action with which her character is endowed, it also calls attention to the fact

that this life in her needs to be “worked into the picture” of her, denoting that it is something of an afterthought. It gives the impression of the woman as first an image, statuesque, and only secondarily a “living” and “quivering” human being.

In contrast to Mrs. Ramsay, the children of the novel, both male and female, are characterized by an enormous amount of energy and action. Their presence in the novel nearly always features some form of movement, whether it be playing sports, hiking, or running about, particularly the youngest of the children. At the novel's beginning, James, the youngest, expresses his desire to travel to the nearby lighthouse. He is continually insistent about this desire, despite being told by his father and another adult guest, Charles Tansley, that it will be impossible due to the weather. Later in the story, James appears and “almost knock[s] [Lily Briscoe's] easel over, coming down upon her with his hands waving, shouting out”[51]. The children of the novel seem to be characterized in a manner starkly contrasted with Mrs. Ramsay – one of constant motion. It is rare that they are mentioned in the text without some reference to their action and movement. As Mrs. Ramsay attempts to try some stockings on James, and requests that he “stand still,” James instead “fidgeted purposely” in rebellion[52]. James is not exceptional among his siblings in this aspect of his nature and characterization. Though not as prominently featured in the novel, the other children are also depicted in constant motion. Much like James, Mrs. Ramsay's youngest daughter, Cam, at one point in the story dashes into the room and “grazed the easel by an inch; she would not stop for

Mr. Bankes and Lily Briscoe … She was off like a bird, bullet, or arrow”[53]. This motion that characterizes the children of the novel provides a dramatic contrast from the lack of motion that characterizes Mrs. Ramsay. Furthermore, this sense of action in the children is perceived to be on the whole natural. There is nothing unusual about a child moving about. However, the expectations for the adult women in the novel seem to be markedly different, as we see for Mrs. Ramsay.

Women in the novel who adopt active roles and partake in physical behavior are perceived as incongruent with a typical womanly image. While such behavior seems to be condoned in men, there is something unusual and atypical about a woman performing this role and possessing mobility. This notion becomes clear in the surprise that Andrew expresses something like surprise at Minta's ability to hold her own hiking on the beach. “Minta, Andrew observed, was rather a good walker. She wore more sensible clothes than most women. … She would jump straight into a stream and flounder across”[54]. Immediately after her athletic prowess is described, Andrew notes how unusual and uncharacteristic this quality is in a woman, and how her “sensible clothes” played a part in it, a decision most women apparently did not make. Implicit in these comments is the notion that these characteristics would *not* be unusual for a man. This innate capacity for physical movement and action is one that seems intrinsically connected with the masculine. However, immediately after acknowledging her skill, it is stated that “He liked her rashness, but he saw that it would not do – she would kill herself in some

idiotic way one of these days”[55]. One is lead to wonder whether the same would be said of a young man possessing these qualities. Something about her womanhood seems incongruent with this physicality and boldness of action, and this incongruence, in Andrew's mind, is bound to lead her into harm.

Similarly, Lily Briscoe, the fiercely independent artist who rejects the notion of marriage in favor of her idea of freedom, demonstrates a desire for a similar sort of mobility and action in her life. In many ways, Lily is Mrs. Ramsay's opposite, rejecting a life of domesticity, much like Mrs. Ramsay's daughters desire to do in the future. When Paul, Minta's new fiancé, mentions that he plans to awake at dawn and travel to the beach in search of Minta's missing brooch, Lily expresses the desire to join him. “Lily wanted to protest violently and outrageously her desire to help him, envisaging how in the dawn on the beach she would be the one to pounce on the brooch half-hidden by some stone, and thus herself be included among the sailors and adventurers”[56]. However, this request was met with a scoff and hardly acknowledged, much like Minta's athletic capacities and boldness are diminished by the suggestion that they will lead her to injure herself.

Even Mrs. Ramsay, whose lifestyle is so closely aligned with the domestic and, at least in the eyes of those who perceive her, the passive, expresses an unfulfilled desire for action in her life. Throughout the novel, she expresses some dissatisfaction with the trivialities of her life. Towards the end of part one, in one very telling scene, Mrs. Ramsay feels jealous of the young couple, Minta and Paul, and the many opportunities still ahead for them. On

the evening of their engagement, they go out to the beach to watch the waves. We are told that "Of course it was impossible for [Mrs. Ramsay] to go with them. But she would have liked to go"[57]. This is one of a few times in the novel that Mrs. Ramsay's desire for action, even if in the form of a very simple adventure, is demonstrated. Also, quite tellingly, Mrs. Ramsay expresses the desire for her daughters to have a different life. "They must find a way out of it all. There might be some simpler way, some less laborious way, she sighed"[58]. Here Mrs. Ramsay expresses dissatisfaction with her own domestic, "laborious" way of life, and hopes for "a way out" for her daughters – for a life with more possibilities for them. Overall, Woolf suggests through her female characters that oftentimes men are associated with this active sphere while women are often shunned from it, despite their frequent desires to participate in it.

Ultimately, however, it seems that the examples thus far have precluded a possibility for an active role in the domestic sphere. Is it possible to see ways in which Mrs. Ramsay is not only *wishing* to be active, but actually *is*, in fact, active? It is possible that an argument might be made that this is the case. For she is in motion through much of the first part of the book, whether it be running errands or running after her children. Yet, she still seems to be, in the eyes of the other characters, inextricably trapped in the confines of what could be seen as a domestic stasis. Her daughters and Lily see her marriage and lifestyle as stagnant and confined rather than active and free. However, it is possible that this mindset, too, is one which Woolf

implicitly calls into question. The reader is invited to interrogate whether these modern, independent women are failing to acknowledge the activity essential to the domestic sphere. Woolf seems to take steps in this novel to trouble the binary between masculine and feminine and their relationship with activity and passivity.

**III. Flush**

From the very beginning of Flush, Woolf highlights the importance of bodily movement for physical and mental health. Elizabeth Barrett Browning is a character who is, at the start of the novel, confined to bed-rest. She rarely leaves her bedroom, let alone her house. Her movement is immensely restricted by this confinement. In her confinement, she is much like her dog, Flush, who finds his freedom restricted when he moves in with Barrett Browning. Indeed, Flush's experiences of both freedom and confinement might serve as a lens through which we can examine the notions of bodily freedom and confinement of domesticity.

As a young dog living in the countryside, before he comes into Elizabeth Barrett Browning's ownership, Flush experiences immense freedom of movement. He is able to run freely in the countryside without being confined to a leash. This freedom of movement is paralleled for Flush with a sexual freedom that he experiences in this period of his life. As his sexual behavior is a form of movement, and one which seems to call into question both gender roles and special roles, it is worth taking note of. Woolf writes

that, “Before he was well out of puppy-hood, Flush was a father”[59]. In this stage of his life, as a young male puppy, Flush is completely free, sexually. The narrator comments that “such conduct in a man even, in the year 1842, would have called for some excuse from a biographer; in a woman no excuse could have availed”[60]. Thus, Flush's freedom is one that surpasses even that of a typical man (though it might be excusable in a man) and far surpasses that of any woman (an inexcusable offense for a woman). It is clear here that Flush's position at this point in the novel, both as a dog and as a male one, allows him a great deal of freedom in this stage of his life.

When Flush first comes into Barrett Browning's ownership, he experiences the restriction of the leash while outdoors, a confinement which he has as of yet not encountered.

> he dashed forward to run as he had run in the fields at home. But now a heavy weight jerked at his throat; he was thrown back on his haunches. Were there not trees and grass? he asked. Were these not the signals of freedom? Had he not always leapt forward directly Miss Mitford started on her walk? Why was he a prisoner here?[61]

This restriction of freedom is one that could be paralleled with the restrictions of freedom we see for Barrett Browning in the novel, while she is confined to bed-rest. Unable to freely run and explore the outdoors, is immediately unnatural for an animal such as Flush, and he is confused by his predicament. Society deforms and restricts the free movement of nature. These restrictions placed on dogs are socially constructed ones, restricting their natural behavior, just as the natural behavior of women, Woolf argues, is restricted by social norms.

Parallel and simultaneous to this period of restriction for Flush, Barrett Browning is confined to bed-rest throughout much of the novel. She is depicted as not leaving the couch or bedroom for days, and rarely taking food. While this is a restriction that seems to be the result of or perhaps a prescribed treatment for some form of illness, mental or otherwise, it is a restriction none the less and  runs parallel to the conventional confinement which women, such as Mrs. Ramsay, endure within the household. Barrett Browning could certainly not be called free any more than Flush whilst he is confined to the house and to the leash out of doors. Flush's confinement and Barrett Browning's confinement seem to be parallel to one another. Whilst Barrett Browning is confined to bed-rest, Flush, too, stays confined to the foot of her bed or the sofa. We are told that, aside from his walks, Flush "kept his station on the sofa at Miss Barrett's feet"[62]. Thus, the two are simultaneously confined indoors, their movement severely restricted.

Yet, this situation of confinement seems to cease for both Browning and Flush when they travel to Italy. In Italy, perhaps as a result of her marriage and a new-found happiness, Browning's demeanor improves dramatically. She finds herself without the same restrictions of movement in which she had been in England. Gone are the days of lying on a sofa all day long. Gone, even, are the days of riding a carriage to the park to walk Flush. "Then instead of driving in a barouche landau to Regent's Park she pulled on her thick boots and scrambled over rocks"[63]. This movement is something new for Barrett Browning, and symbolizes a new freedom. Flush experiences a

similar new freedom in Italy. “Now in Florence the last threads of his old fetters fell from him. The moment of liberation came one day in the Cascine. [He] raced over the grass 'like emeralds' with 'the pheasants all alive and flying,'”[64]. It is significant that this “liberation” comes at a time parallel to Barrett Browning's own liberation. Italy is a place of freedom for both Flush and Barrett Browning. The reasons for this are somewhat unclear, but it seems to have to do in part with leaving the patriarchal restrictions under which Barrett Browning had lived in her father's house. For Flush, the lack of British conventions, such as that mandating leashes on dogs, allows for a freedom of movement never before experienced. Similarly, Barrett Browning experiences in Italy some sort of lack of restriction that allows her to move about the world more freely than she ever has before.

Woolf is clearly here elucidating the enormous importance of such natural freedoms. Both Flush and Barrett Browning are happier in a world which allows for their unrestrained motion about it. We have seen before that Flush provides a metaphor for some of the plights that women face. It is possible that the restrictions upon Flush are parallel to those placed upon Barrett Browning because Woolf is attempting to demonstrate the manner in which women are similarly confined and restricted in relation to their body and its movement. The mandates about appropriate dog behavior (“Dogs must be led on chains”[65]) remind one of the conventions and expectations elucidated by the men of To the Lighthouse in relation to women. Women experience similar mandates which could be said to restrict their own

freedom. Barrett Browning herself, whilst in England, may have felt the pressure of such mandates more harshly than while in Italy, due to the restrictions placed upon her lifestyle by her father in England. Ultimately, Woolf is making a clear statement about the naturalness and importance of bodily movement and freedom – and perhaps also about how this natural right is oftentimes denied of women.

## IV. Street Haunting

Virginia Woolf's short story, *Street Haunting*, depicts movement in the form of a walk across the city, and allows for the reader to see the possibilities for which this freedom of movement might allow – the freedom to see the world for oneself and to define one's self for oneself. The story begins when the narrator decides to leave the house to wander about London, under the guise of needing to buy a pencil. The pencil serves for her as "an excuse for walking half across London between tea and dinner"[66]. On this journey, the narrator first finds herself in the position of anonymous observer – itself a novelty and kind of liberation. Having stepped out the door, in fact, Woolf describes the narrator undergoing a metaphorical transformation of body and soul. Woolf writes, "The shell-like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves, to make for themselves a shape distinct from others, is broken, and there is left all these wrinkles and roughness of a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye"[67]. This description describes a change that, while metaphorical, is a bodily one. Through the action of stepping out the

door, the narrator says, “we shed the self our friends know us by and become a part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers”[68]. The self has undergone a significant transformation – initially, this transformation appears to be one of slipping into an anonymous crowd, and shedding the identity society has created for oneself.

The action of stepping outside of one's own door demonstrates an important step for the self – it is a step toward self-determination. By “shed[ding] the self our friends know us by,” we can recover or reinvent the self[69]. This allows for a myriad of possibilities for identity. In this case, the identity of the narrator has transformed temporarily into that of the observer. This shedding of self allows one to let go of a socially created self and allows for a rediscovery of self.

Through this transformation, the narrator's function itself has shifted into one of observation. Observation becomes central to the story from the moment the narrator sets out on her journey. This image of “an enormous eye” illustrates the function which the narrator takes on in her journey[70]. Despite her taking on the active task of “rambling the streets of London,” the narrator remains at first what appears to be an inactive observer[71]. Rather than taking part in action through interaction with the people and things with which she observes, the narrator takes care to remain an outside observer. She notes that “we are only gliding on the surface. The eye is not a miner, not a diver, not seeking after buried treasure. It floats us smoothly down a stream, resting, pausing, the brain sleeps perhaps as it looks”[72]. This 'eye' is tasked

with the job of simply observing, and not speculating, and especially never participating. When the narrator catches herself beginning to wonder and speculate, she catches herself and notes that "we are in danger of digging deeper than the eye approves"[73]. Thus, observation is the primary function which the narrator takes on. However, this freedom to observe is one which is particularly cherished by the narrator, and is tied to the freedom of movement, self-determination, and expression. Woolf here has two voices in her head – that of society telling her that she should not participate and feeling as though she has her own will and way. The two voices struggle, as her instincts to participate in what goes on around her conflict with the social expectation that she, as a woman in the world, should remain in her own sphere without entering into that of others.

Ironically, however, despite her best efforts, the narrator does not remain an impassive observer for her entire walk. Once she reaches the store at which she plans to purchase her pencil, she enters to find a husband and wife, the keepers of the shop, quarreling. She asks the husband, who is manning the front desk, where the pencils are. He cannot find them and is forced to ask for help from his wife, who comes out into the store and proves her indispensability. It is remarked, "How then could he do it without her?"[74] However, the narrator's meddling is not yet complete. In order to keep both husband and wife standing next to each other in the front end of the shop for longer, the narrator takes her time, pretending to fuss over which type of pencil to choose. She finds that, "The longer they stood there, the calmer they

grew; their heat was going down, their anger disappearing"[75]. At last, "the quarrel was over" (ibid). All of this is, of course, thanks to the narrator, who had vowed never to "[dig] deeper than the eye approves"[76]. Thus, there seems to be some irony in this choice – a choice reflecting a strong desire to be heard and to come out of her invisibility. As the self develops and grows throughout this process of walking, the need to assert the self arises in tandem.

This self which has arisen and needs to vocalize itself also goes through a process of becoming self-constituted in the story. The narrator both develops and expresses a newly-shapen identity. As we have seen previously, the ability to step outside allows for a transformation of self. This becomes more evident later on, when, in pondering, the narrator wonders, "is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give the rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves? Circumstances compel unity; for convenience' sake, a man must be whole"[77]. Thus, a new freedom has come from this ability to step outside and wander – the freedom which allows for a wide variety of possibilities for the self, and, paradoxically for self-determination that is not confined to a single shape or identity. The unchanging, constricted self can be a constraining concept – the antithesis of this freedom. Woolf posits the possibility for a self in process, a fluid self that can be continually redefined. There is a connection here between the possibility for physical movement – the movement about a city – and a movement of self – the ability to change and transform one's self.

This freedom of expression brings us back to Woolf's own 'activity': that of writing. It is significant that it is the need to buy a *pencil* – a tool of expression – which draws the narrator out the door on this winter day. Observation, naturally, is a necessity for writing, and if we take the narrator to be a stand in for Woolf herself, we see the process of observation to be a crucial step in the process of writing and creation, as she needed to take this walk before attempting the process of writing "Street Haunting" itself. It is also notable that it is in "second hand bookshops" that "we find anchorage in these thwarting currents of being"[78]. The freedom to express oneself is inextricably tied to the freedom to determine one's identity – to find an "anchor" for one's identity. The process of writing is closely tied to the ability to move freely, and thus to *be* freely.

**V. Conclusion**

Maria DiBattista, in her book, *Imagining Woolf*, stated that "women have been traditionally debarred from adventure because their consciousness has been similarly insulated, not by temperament, but by social and narrative custom"[79]. This phenomenon was one with which Woolf was intimately familiar. The women in novels of the time only rarely set out on adventures and then with difficulty, as we saw in To the Lighthouse, where Woolf depicts the frustrations of confinement through the characters of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Iris Young wrote that "[t]o the extent that a woman lives her body as a thing, she remains rooted in immanence, is inhibited, and retains a

distance from her body as transcending movement and from engagement in the world's possibilities"[80]. This is the experience of Woolf writes for her female characters in To the Lighthouse. They are distanced from their body, unable to fully engage with the possibilities of the world. In a move toward such engagement, Flush demonstrates both the manner in which women's movement is confined, and the possibilities for a freedom that is more natural for both human beings and animals once one escapes the grasp of patriarchal society. "Insofar as we learn to live out our existence in accordance with the definition that patriarchal culture assigns to us, we are physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified"[81]. In England, under the confining watch of her father, Elizabeth Barrett Browning is never able to enjoy freedom, yet as soon as he escapes his grasp and the grasp of the society within which she lives, she immediately experiences tremendous freedom. Finally, *Street Haunting* presents the possibilities that can arise when women finally do step outside into the world, and engage with it – the possibility of self-definition. Women, Woolf argues, are denied this possibility in their daily lives through their restrictions and confinement. However, if and when they do manage to step outside and engage with the world in a less restricted manner, they can shed the constricting identities which society has imposed upon them and begin to create identities of their own.

# Nourishing the Body

## I. The Question of Illness

How we take care of our bodies says a great deal about how we try too shape our identities. The body requires food for sustenance, just as the mind requires forms of psychological nourishment. In order to flourish, we require knowledge and comfort, love and attention. First and foremost, we need to be able to choose and discover for ourselves that which we require and desire. This process of choosing is a crucial part of forming one's identity, and thereby a crucial part of developing one's independence. As children, choices are made for us, but as we come into adulthood, we gain the agency to make the choices about what is right for us for ourselves. In illness, however, one often loses some of this independence, and is forced to become dependent on others for nourishment. It is through the active choice to nourish oneself and regain independence that one can eventually become healthy, psychologically and physically. These images of health and nourishment, and their relationship to self-constitution and independence is one of the primary subjects of this chapter. This chapter will also deal with what the body and mind undergo during illness – the way in which illness is always played out in both the body and mind, demonstrating an intrinsic connection between the two. The way in which these processes play out in Woolf's works will tell us a great deal about the role of the body itself – via the care it is given – in Woolf's texts.

How illness is treated and the body and mind are nourished are central to this chapter. Through Woolf's texts, we will examine nourishment as both a positive and a negative. Luce Irigaray and Hélène Wenzel's *And One Doesn't Stir Without the Other* depicts a relationship of 'forced nourishment' between mother and child, and the need for one to be able to escape this forced nourishment in order to develop one's own identity. The piece is an extended metaphor of a mother nursing daughter, pouring herself and her identity into her without communication between the two. Irigaray and Wenzel are commenting on the status of women and the way in which they are not allowed to develop their own identities, but instead are forced to take on that prescribed for them – ultimately, that of mother. The manner in which the writers describe the status of women and this relationship of forced nourishment and lack of agency bears a stark resemblance to this relationship of dependence established in illness. "With your milk, Mother, I swallowed ice. And here I am now, my insides frozen. And I walk with even more difficulty than you do, and I move even less. You flowed into me, and that hot liquid became poison, paralyzing me"[82]. This forced nourishment does not heal, but rather worsens her condition. The narrator of the piece is "[a]lready full grown and still in the cradle. Still dependent on someone who carries me, who nurses me"[83]. Thus, what Irigaray and Wenzel are attributing to the status of women could also be attributed to the status of the ill – agency is gone, and they are placed in a position of forced dependence. Those upon whom they must depend might mean well, as we would assume a mother does

in relation to her child, but their forced nourishment makes the situation worse by preventing the narrator of *And One Doesn't Stir Without the Other* from achieving agency. In Irigaray and Wenzel's piece, it is when "something inside ... begins to stir" that the potential for a separate self is realized[84]. The narrator begins to see that there can be an individual self apart from the identity of her mother. "I make this move all by myself. No one assists"[85]. This action is a liberating one, a self-constituting one. Through active actions of self-constitution rather than "suffocat[ing]" on a self forced upon one, one can achieve what we might see as optimal psychological health. We see similar processes of nourishment taking place in Woolf's texts.

This forced nourishment recalls a type of treatment that was used on Woolf herself to treat her own mental illness. Elaine Showalter writes about the use of a treatment known as the rest cure in her book, *A Literature of Their Own*. Woolf herself was frequently prescribed this 'cure' by doctors to treat her own psychological illnesses. This treatment involved prescribing excessive rest, confinement and overfeeding in order to treat a wide variety of mental illnesses. According to Showalter, "the rest cure was a sinister parody of idealized Victorian femininity; inertia, privatization, narcissism, dependency. In particular, the weight gain that was considered an essential part of the cure was a kind of pseudo-pregnancy"[86]. In Showalter's analysis, this treatment given to Woolf is one that forces characteristics that parallel "idealized Victorian femininity" upon its patients by enforcing restriction, confining patients to an enclosed space and overfeeding them. This treatment

was forced upon Woolf repeatedly, and she strongly rejected it, finding it entirely ineffective. She goes on to paint this treatment in a negative light in *Mrs. Dalloway* by describing it used, to no avail, on a character in the novel. This type of nourishment – a forced one, then, is not the type that is effective for treating illness. However, Woolf does ultimately offer some possible alternative solutions for the successful treatment of mental illness.

However, before we enter into a discussion of nourishment, we first must look at the role that illness itself has in a literature of the body. In her essay, *On Being Ill*, Woolf makes the argument that illness should play an important role in literature. She writes that literature too often privileges the mind over the body, and ignores illness, which can provide material for literature as fruitful as any of the other popular subjects of literature, such as "love and battle and jealousy"[87]. Ironically, as Woolf herself has been criticized for privileging the mind over the body in her writing, Woolf argues that writers too often ignore the body. "[L]iterature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear, and, save for one or two passions such as desire and greed, is null, and negligible and non-existent"[88]. This image of the body as a "sheet of plain glass" is an evocative one, serving to demonstrate the transparency with which many authors and thinkers treat the body. The body is seen as solely a vessel for the mind and soul. According to Woolf, the fact that illness does not play as central a role in literature is demonstrative of a larger social neglect of the body and privileging of the mind. But the body, as

she demonstrates, is integral to those major events of literature, if not to their effects. "Those great wars which the body wages with the mind a slave to it, in the solitude of the bedroom against the assault of fever or the oncome of melancholia are neglected"[89]. Literature would largely have you believe that the body is barely of consequence and can largely be ignored in our everyday life, but the truth is that, "[a]ll day, all night the body intervenes"[90]. Because of this, moreover, it is important to pay attention to the central role that the body holds in our lives. "There is no record," she tells us, "of all this daily drama" that the body endures[91]. Woolf beckons writers of her time to pay attention to the body and its functioning.

What would Woolf have us believe that attention to illness achieves for literature? Illness is important, because it is in illness that the body comes forth in its materiality, and in how it affects the mind. Illness seems to be symptomatic of what the body endures on a daily basis and how it effects the mind consistently. However, illness serves as a locus at which we can see the effects of the body on the mind perhaps most clearly. After all, the brain itself as an organ, and, rather than a disembodied one, immune to the changes of the body, the brain is consistently growing, developing, and changing in symphony with the body. As we grow, our brain develops, but there are other ways in which the body impacts the mind as well. By calling attention to illness, Woolf is able to demonstrate this. In illness, the manner in which we think changes vastly. In her essay, Woolf points out that when one writes or says, "I am in bed with influenza," the words do not suffice to convey "how the

world has changed its shape" in this state[92]. We begin to think differently. In showing that this phenomenon occurs, by calling attention to illness, a writer can effectively shatter the pretense that there is some vast divide between body and mind, with the latter somehow superior to the former.

## II. Woolf's Own Neglect of the Ill Body

In her criticism of authors guilty of privileging the mind over the body, Woolf may very well have been admitting and pointing out something of which she was also guilty in previous works. *On Being Ill* was published in 1930. Previous to then, Woolf published a few novels which do place a primary emphasis on the mind at the expense of any extensive description of bodily health. *To the Lighthouse*, published in 1927, three years before the publication of *On Being Ill*, serves as a particularly strong example of this practice in Woolf's own writing. In the second chapter of the novel, *Time Passes*, it is mentioned that a number of the characters have become sick or passed away since the previous chapter, but rather than spending time describing these scenes of illness and death, Woolf chooses to mention them only parenthetically. Each time, contained in the space of merely a bracketed sentence or fragment, Woolf briefly mentions that which could (and perhaps should, according to the argument presented in *On Being Ill*) provide fruitful material for lengthier description. Instead, Woolf confines her description to short statements such as, "Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy"[93]. Nothing more is

said of Prue's illness beyond that point. Though Woolf spends hundreds of pages describing the many thoughts that go through the minds of her characters, she spends no time describing this (or any other) illness. Woolf spends even less time describing the death of Mrs. Ramsay, one of the central characters of the previous chapter. Planted right in the middle of another sentence, almost as an afterthought, Woolf writes, "Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before"[94]. Though there is mention of how Mrs. Ramsay's death has impacted the family and characters think a great deal about her memory, there is no other mention of the circumstances surrounding Mrs. Ramsay's death, particularly not her bodily condition or any illnesses that may have occurred up to her death. Thus, Woolf very likely is including herself in the group of writers she criticizes for ignoring illness and privileging writing about the mind over the body. However, though *To the Lighthouse* might not follow the maxim that Woolf sets forward in that essay, we can locate descriptions of illness and nourishment in several of Woolf's later works.

## III. *On Being Ill*: Woolf's First Step Toward a Literature of Illness

*On Being Ill* itself can be read as a work of short fiction as well as essay, and provides what could be read as an example for how one can fruitfully incorporate depictions of illness into writing and the significance that this writing can have. The essay, beginning in a central argument, transforms into prosaic descriptions of the experience of illness. The essay's opening begins

with Woolf arguing a central tenet – that illness does not receive the attention it deserves within literature – but later, the essay transforms to narrative, depicting what the body goes through in illness.

Part of Woolf's central argument revolves around the manner in which illness affects the mind and changes the way we experience the world. She later writes, "there is … a childish outspokenness to illness"[95]. The mind which typically acts as a filter for our language is changed such that we no longer take as much caution with our words. This quote might also suggest that perhaps the ill body itself is able to speak more clearly, without its usual disguises. Perhaps the body, in illness, attempts to communicate with us what it is that it needs. Just as a dry mouth tells us that we need water, so the body gives us many cues for how we should nourish ourselves, if only we listen to it. We will return to this point later when we address forms of nourishment, but it is important to think about the ways in which and the clarity with which the ill body might communicate.

Later in the passage, Woolf transitions into narrative. "Directly the bed is called for … we cease to be soldiers in the army of the upright; we become deserters"[96]. Now Woolf is no longer speaking in the same general manner about illness, but rather pointing toward rather specific actions. This image of leaving behind the "army of the upright" evokes the notion of alienation that comes along with illness – one must leave behind the comfort of the group, become a "deserter". She goes on to describe the specific experiences that, now transitioning smoothly from bodily action to mind and back again, "We

float with the sticks on the stream; helter-skelter with the dead leaves on the lawn ... able, perhaps for the first time for years, to look round"[97]. This "floating" is presumably a description of the fantasies that the mind has of the body. The sense of floating also calls attention to the more relaxed state one is able to take up in illness – the pressures and necessities of self-presentation to the public world fall away in illness. Woolf also calls attention to the manner in which the lines between mind and body are blurred in sickness. Even the process of reading is changed as illness seems to transform the very words on a page. "In illness, words seem to possess a mystic quality"[98]. Again, a behavior that might seem to be wholly located in the mind is modified by the condition of the body. This work of prose enmeshed with essay could be seen as a first step for Woolf toward what a writing about illness and the body might look like. It is important to take note that this writing does not cease to implicate the mind, but rather fosters the reader's awareness that the mind is, in fact, both part of and impacted by the body. Much of writing about illness and the body, for Woolf, has to do with paying attention to the ways in which the body and mind are inextricably connected.

This is not to say there is no distinction between mental and physical illness, both of which are subjects of Woolf's work. However, it seems that Woolf calls attention to the manner in which both mental and physical illness impact *both* body and mind. Physical illness changes the way we think and feel about ourselves and the world. Mental illness can change one's bodily disposition. When Woolf depicts physical illness, such as the influenza she

depicts in *On Being Ill*, she depicts it in relation to its impact on the mind. However, in describing mental illness, a subject which played a critical role in Woolf's life and works, Woolf, in several ways, depicts the relation of mental illness to the body. Neither form of illness, despite what their names might suggest, is relegated solely to either body or mind but rather has a deep impact on both body and mind.

## IV. *Mrs. Dalloway*: When Body and Mind Lack Nourishment

*Mrs. Dalloway* provides a two primary examples of illness – through them, we can see the pains through which the body and mind suffer when either one fails to have its needs met. Throughout the novel, there are consistently vague allusions to a past illness suffered by its main character, Clarissa Dalloway. It is frequently pointed out that she had "grown very white since her illness"[99]. Peter Walsh recalls that Clarissa "has been ill, and the sound expressed languor and suffering. It was her heart, he remembered"[100]. One of the only details we are given regarding Clarissa's illness is the fact that it was related to heart problems. No further details are given about what this illness entailed, but the illness and how it impacted her thereafter is consistently alluded to throughout the story. When she looks at Miss Kilman, her daughter's history teacher, whom she loathes, it is remarked that that "this hatred, which, especially since her illness, had power to make her feel scraped, hurt in her spine; gave her physical pain"[101]. Aside from providing another example of a vague reference to Clarissa's illness, this statement

describes a physical reaction to psychological upset, demonstrating another connection between a form of psychological reaction and physical ailment, again blurring the lines between body and mind. Though the illness has had a very real, observable physical impacts on Clarissa, such as her paleness, it also seems to have impacted her demeanor and way of thinking. Beyond these vague references, however, very little else is said of Clarissa's illness. It is simply acknowledged that it has had a profound impact on her, physically and psychologically.

The character of Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway* suffers from a psychological ailment, which manifests itself with symptoms very much akin to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Upon returning from the war, Septimus manifests symptoms such as hallucinations and depression. He expresses a desire to commit suicide, and this seems to be the point at which his wife, Lucrezia, acknowledges that he may need medical attention. Like that of Clarissa, Septimus' illness is frequently referred to in very vague, often euphemistic, terms, particularly in conversation. His wife and even his doctor seem to be in denial that there is anything concretely the matter with him, despite having acknowledged that he is in need of the attention of a doctor. Lucrezia tells herself, “he was not ill. Dr. Holmes said there was nothing the matter with him”[102]. Because there was not as concrete an understanding of human psychology at the time and Septimus was, by all standards of measurement available at the time, physically healthy, some failed to acknowledge that there was anything the matter with him. Nevertheless, it

was clear that Septimus exhibited symptoms of mental instability that needed to be addressed, including hallucinations, suicidal thoughts, and incomprehensible rambling to himself. These symptoms lead Lucrezia, to seek out doctors for him. Yet, neither Lucrezia nor the doctors truly listen to what it is Septimus is saying – which may have indicated to a listener that war trauma might have caused his mental instability – but rather provide their own diagnoses without much thought as to Septimus' unique, individual situation.

Despite the perception that Septimus was healthy by physical standards, his state of psychological illness placed him in a position of dependence – a condition of illness as of yet not addressed in our discussion. Illness often forces one to depend on others for care. For Septimus, this means that his wife, Lucrezia, must take on the burden of providing him care. She accompanies him wherever he goes, and sees to it that he sees a doctor. In this way, then, Septimus loses his own autonomy. In illness, many individuals are placed in a position of dependence. They become helpless, forced to accept the help of others in order to survive. Septimus is placed in this position. Septimus' illness, moreover, forces others to speak for him. Both Lucrezia and his doctors act as interpreters of his words and actions. Rather than allowing him to speak for himself, it is up to those around him to interpret his actions and words and endow them with meaning, so that Dr. Holmes, based upon the fact that Septimus is depressed and suicidal, concludes that Septimus is "in a funk"[103]. His own actions and words are not allowed to speak for

themselves. Thus, when Dr. Holmes comes to see Septimus for the first time, “he brushed it all aside — headaches, sleeplessness, fears, dreams — nerve symptoms and nothing more”[104]. Even though it seems clear that Septimus' body and mind are exhibiting signs that things are not right, these signs are ignored. Though he is having nightmares about his traumatic experience at war, they are brushed off and ignored as “nothing more” than “nerve symptoms”.

Nor is Septimus allowed to make his own decisions. He must be escorted from place to place by Lucrezia. As she walks with him through the city, taking his hand and guiding him along, she instructs him continually to look at one thing or another. “'Look, look, Septimus!' she cried. For Dr. Holmes had told her to make her husband ... take an interest in things outside himself”[105]. Repeatedly, she instructs Septimus to move along and to look from one mundane object to another. In fact, this is nearly the full extent of her communication with him. When another doctor, Sir William Bradshaw, prescribes bed-rest in the country to cure Septimus' ills, Septimus has no agency in the decision of whether to follow his instructions. “Bradshaw said, he must be taught to rest. Bradshaw said they must be separated”[106]. In response, Septimus demands of Lucrezia, “What right has Bradshaw to say 'must' to me?”[107]. In response, Lucrezia explains to him, “It is because you talked of killing yourself”[108]. With the revelation of his illness comes a complete loss of agency, such that his doctors and his wife can force upon him whatever treatments they see fit to. Woolf seems to be suggesting that what

Septimus needs instead is a different treatment, that will take into account the true root of his problems, which seems to be his experiences. His mind is continually returning to the trauma he underwent at war, particularly the loss of his friend, Evans. This trauma, however, goes unacknowledged and unaddressed. It seems, perhaps, that part of what Septimus needs is simply to be able to communicate this trauma and to be heard.

We have seen that an inability to speak for oneself follows with what can be seen as a form of psychological malnourishment. Septimus loses the ability to speak for himself in his illness. Meanwhile, Septimus' illness caused Lucrezia to suffer psychologically as well. "Her wedding ring slipped — she had grown so thin. It was she who suffered — but she had nobody to tell"[109]. There is an important relationship which turns up here between malnourishment and psychological illness. The two are linked in Lucrezia, demonstrating the connection between nourishment of the body and nourishment of the mind. Lucrezia's loneliness and inability to communicate causes her to become psychologically unwell herself. She is unable to speak to others – much like Septimus – and this causes her to fall into a state of psychological illness as well, albeit one less severe than Septimus. Learning to speak for oneself, then, seems to be an important step toward freeing oneself from the dependent state of illness. Communication is a necessary form of nourishment. Yet, as we see for Septimus, not all nourishment is helpful or necessary.

Nourishment, we posit, can ameliorate and even cure illness – yet, the

nourishment must be taken up actively on the part of the ill. The treatment given to Septimus is a kind of forced nourishing. This is the sort of nourishing we saw in Irigaray and Wenzel's *And One Doesn't Stir Without the Other* – a nourishment forced upon one rather than one taken up by an individual by his or her own choice. One might recall Lucrezia guiding Septimus around on their walk when one hears the narrator in Irigaray and Wenzel tell her mother, "You want me always in your sight in order to protect me"[110]. The work depicts a grown adult infantalized, much as Septimus is infantalized in his treatment by his doctors and Lucrezia. Ultimately, this form of nourishment fails to nourish at all, as we saw in Irigaray and Wenzel's piece. The nourishment has no healing influence, and rather seems damaging to the individual.

Septimus' doctors attempt to cure his illness through this form of forced nourishment, and, unsurprisingly, fail in doing so. Ironically, despite the fact that Septimus' illness is psychologically grounded, his doctors attempts to use physical treatments to cure it. The doctors Lucrezia hires for him insist that his illness can be cured through very simple means. Yet, nourishing the body does not work to cure the mind when the nourishment taken up is one that fails to take into consideration the needs of the individual in question, and when it is not taken up willingly by the individual. Dr. Holmes firmly believes that "health is largely a matter in our own control. Throw yourself into outside interests; take up some hobby"[111]. He holds the opinion that Septimus' health is merely a matter of relaxing and perhaps

finding a new hobby for himself. Similarly, another doctor that Lucrezia consults, Sir William Bradshaw, also advises rest as a treatment for his ailment. This treatment, the rest cure, is the same one discussed in the introduction, which was used on Woolf herself. Bradshaw prescribes this form of treatment for Septimus, and it is suggested that he has suggested it to many other patients. He frequently "order[s] rest in bed; rest in solitude; silence and rest; rest without friends, without books, without messages; six months' rest; until a man who went in weighing seven stone six comes out weighing twelve"[112]. The use of this cure on Septimus can be seen as both restrictive of his personal freedom and emasculating, if we are to view this treatment, as Showalter does in her analysis of it in *A Literature of Their Own*, as one which forces stereotypes of femininity upon an individual – forcing individuals to remain inactive, dependent and cloistered.

There is also an implicit connection suggested between Woolf herself and Septimus. Both have the same restrictive treatments placed upon them, and, through her portrayal of Septimus, Woolf calls attention to the absurdity and futility of such a cure. Dr. Holmes responds to Septimus' severe depression and statement that he wants to kill himself by telling Lucrezia that "It was merely a question of rest, said Sir William; of rest, rest, rest; a long rest in bed. There was a delightful home down in the country where her husband would be perfectly looked after"[113]. This notion of curing a psychological impairment through enforcing rest and overfeeding seems absurd. The problem, however, is not the treatment itself, but the fact that it is

forced upon Septimus rather than taken up by him as an active choice. Nourishment is only beneficial to health when it is accepted as something that one needs, and determined as a result of the examination of the needs of a particular individual. Ultimately, it is a choice that Septimus is never given a chance to make. He lives his ill life having his choices made for him, and having others speak for him, and his only escape from this comes in his ultimate suicide. Septimus spends his last moments trying to escape the doctors who are coming for him. "Holmes would get him. But no; not Holmes; not Bradshaw"[114]. It is to escape their hold on his life that he ultimately decides to commit suicide. Perhaps had he been able to take agency over his own life, then his fate would have been different, and he would have been able to choose his own psychological nourishment and overcome his depression.

## IV. *Flush*: Nourishment as Freedom

There is, however, one character in *Mrs. Dalloway* who elucidates the manner in which nourishment can be psychologically healing. In the following scene, Elizabeth, Clarissa Dalloway's daughter, watches Miss Kilman, her teacher, eating and observes how it is the one pleasure left in her life.

> Elizabeth rather wondered whether Miss Kilman could be hungry. It was her way of eating, eating with intensity, then looking, again and again, at a plate of sugared cakes on the table next them; then, when a lady and a child sat down and the child took the cake, could Miss Kilman really mind it? Yes, Miss Kilman did mind it. She had wanted that cake — the pink one. The pleasure of eating was almost the only pure pleasure left her, and then to be baffled even in that![115]

Nourishment for Miss Kilman is the only satisfaction left in her life, and she

seems to garner whatever happiness she can from it. Though it is not explicitly clear that Miss Kilman is psychologically ill, she seems to have little in her life from which to derive happiness. Food is a comfort for her. She "eat[s] with intensity" in order to gain psychological nourishment. In this case, Miss Kilman makes the choice of nourishing herself rather than having nourishment forced upon her as it was for Septimus. Miss Kilman also finds psychological nourishment through her spirituality. "Bitter and burning, Miss Kilman had turned into a church two years three months ago. She had heard the Rev. Edward Whittaker preach … the hot and turbulent feelings which boiled and surged in her had been assuaged as she sat there, and she had wept copiously … It was the hand of God, he said. The Lord had shown her the way"[116]. The church provides Miss Kilman with spiritual nourishment to meet her most crucial psychological needs. This is the first evidence of some sort of self-nourishing behavior through which we might find a cure for the dependence produced by many forms of illness of mind and body. In this self-nourishment, there is a hope for escaping the dangers of illness.

Woolf's novel, *Flush* is structured around concepts of illness and nourishment, providing hope for a possibility of health through self-nourishment similar to that which we see with Miss Kilman. When we are first introduced to the character of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, she suffers from an illness so severe that she is confined to her bed during most waking hours. While the details of her illness may be unclear as a product of the novel being narrated from the point of view of Barrett Browning's pet dog, it is clear that

she is suffering from some sort of physical or psychological illness that hinders her physical movement and harms her bodily health. During one of the few points in the novel when concrete details of her illness are given, Miss Barrett "coughed. She complained of feeling ill — but not so ill as she usually felt when the wind was in the east"[117]. There is a physical element to her illness, regardless of whether or not it is psychological in origin. This is of significance if one is looking to Woolf for an emphasis on bodily illness. In the early portion of the book, Miss Barrett is described often as pale and sickly in appearance. At one point early on in the story, "Miss Barrett sank back very white, very tired on her pillows"[118]. Here, attention is given to her bodily appearance and disposal. Her bodily health and habits matter and are, in fact, a significant point of interest throughout the story.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's health, in fact, is starkly contrasted with that of her young dog, Flush, when he first enters into her life. Flush is young and energetic in his youth. As a puppy, Flush is described as "very spirited, very inquisitive"[119]. He is often seen "trot[ting]" about[120]. When he first comes into her possession, they are immediately contrasted. "Hers was the pale worn face of an invalid, cut off from air, light, freedom. His was the warm ruddy face of a young animal; instinct with health and energy"[121]. Flush's youth and vigor is greatly contrasted to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's illness and restriction. They are so contrasted that the narrator asks, "could it be that each completed what was dormant in the other? She might have been – all that"[122]. A potential for health, freedom, and energy for Barrett Browning

seems to lie within Flush.

Meanwhile, in her illness, the manner in which she nourishes (or fails to nourish) her body is evocative of the way in which a lack of nourishment, like the lack of nourishment experienced by Septimus, has detrimental psychological effects. In her bedridden state, Miss Barrett refuses food, and instead gives it to Flush to eat so that her father will believe that she has eaten. "Miss Barrett was too tired to eat. She gave a little sigh when she saw the plump mutton chop, or the wing of partridge or chicken that had been sent up for her dinner. … [D]irectly the door was shut and they were alone, she made a sign. She held up her fork. A whole chicken's wing was impaled upon it. Flush advanced. Miss Barrett nodded. … Flush removed the wing; swallowed it down and left no trace behind"[123]. Barrett Browning's father attempts to force nourishment upon her, and she rejects it, symbolically rejecting everything he stands for.

Mr. Barrett takes on a similar role to Septimus' doctors – forcing nourishment upon his daughter without allowing her to act in correspondence with her own agency. Aside from rejecting his food, Barrett Browning first acts out in defiance of the rule of her father by taking it upon herself to rescue Flush when he is kidnapped. Though her father insists that she should not pay the ransom to his kidnappers, she decides to reject his instructions. "She bade her brother to go at once to Mr. Taylor and pay the money. Henry refused and 'talked of Papa.' … She made up her mind. If Henry would not go, she would go herself"[124]. In defiance of the instructions of her father, brother, and even

Robert Browning, she went herself and rescued Flush from his kidnappers.

It is only when Elizabeth Barrett Browning has left her father's house that she becomes more free to make her own decisions, and we see her eating her own food and leaving her bed – finally able to seek out her own nourishment. Barrett Browning, along with Flush and her new husband, Robert Browning, move to Italy, escaping the control of her father and seemingly escaping her illness on the whole. "[T]hey were escaping; they were leaving tyrants and dog-stealers behind them"[125]. This implicit connection made between tyrants (fathers) and dog-stealers is a telling one. The two seem to represent the controlling, and sinister, hold of the patriarchy, and, now in Italy, Flush and Barrett Browning seem to have broken free from this grasp, at least partially, such that they experience a new-found freedom. The first thing that Flush observes as he arrives in Italy is "the most astonishing sight conceivable"[126]. "There was Miss Barrett on a rock in the midst of running waters"[127]. She, who was perceived as too fragile to even leave the house most of the time, had climbed up onto a rock in the middle of a running stream. Flush notes the changes in Miss Barrett (now Mrs. Browning) immediately. "She was a different person altogether. Now, for instance, instead of sipping a thimbleful of port and complaining of a headache, she tossed off a tumbler of Chianti and slept the sounder"[128]. Her condition seems to have been greatly alleviated. Furthermore, "instead of driving in a barouche landau to Regent's Park she pulled on her thick boots and scrambled over rocks"[129]. She ventures out and about in the world in ways which she had

never dared before. She is able to seek out her own nourishment, make her own choices, and escape the dependence upon others. She no longer appears to need taking care of. Though some might read her movement from the house of her father to the house of her new husband as a movement from one patriarchal reign to another, it is clear that Barrett Browning has taken up new, previously unachieved, agency in her life. She is able to make decisions for herself, rather than have them forced upon her. This is the crucial difference in her new stage of life.

Flush himself has an interesting relationship with food. As previously mentioned, he would eat the food that Miss Barrett rejected, symbolizing the strong bonds between the two. He is nourished by her. In fact, "he refused to eat unless she fed him"[130]. Meanwhile, when Robert Browning first comes into the picture, he is jealous and angry with him for intruding on his space and relationship with Miss Barrett. When Browning offers him food in a gesture of peace, Flush rejects it and refuses to eat it. However, eventually he warms up to Browning and eats the food, symbolizing his acceptance of Browning in his life. "He had refused to eat the cakes when they were fresh, because they were offered by an enemy. He would eat them now that they were stale, because they were offered by an enemy turned to friend, because they were symbols of hatred turned to love. Yes, he signified, he would eat them now"[131]. Flush chooses his identity by choosing his food. He makes choices about which nourishment to accept and when, and these choices make powerful statements about his relationships and identity. He establishes relationships

through who nourishes him and whether he allows himself to be nourished. When he is kidnapped, he rejects the dirty water and food that is given to him, and is nearly starving by the time he is rescued. This food seems to serve as a symbol for his kidnappers themselves, and thereby their actions and misdeeds. He rejects them and refuses to allow them to nourish him. This rejection of food, much like Barrett Browning's rejection of food from her father, symbolizes a rejection of that which the food stands for and of those who are attempting to force nourishment upon him.

Illness in Flush coincides with a lack of spiritual or psychological nourishment in one's life. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's starvation coincides with her illness but it also coincides with her unhappiness – she is unsatisfied with her life overall. She lacks psychological nourishment. Flush, meanwhile, also refuses food when he lacks psychological nourishment, such as the psychological nourishment of his relationship with his owner when he is jealous of Browning or his home when he is kidnapped.

Ultimately, *Flush* presents an example of what a successful escape from illness would look like. Escaping from illness is a process of acknowledging one's own needs, articulating one's needs to others, and choosing for oneself how to go about meeting those needs. It is ultimately a process of self-determination, of learning to live one's own life for oneself. Both Flush and Elizabeth Barrett Browning are able to come to terms with themselves and their own needs and meet these needs by the end of the story in a way that Septimus never had the chance to learn.

## VI. Conclusion

In her book, *The Female Malady*, Elaine Showalter argues that women and the female body itself are associated intrinsically with madness and irrationality. She writes that "cultural tradition that represents 'woman' *as* madness and that uses images of the female body ... to stand for irrationality in general"[132]. While not all the characters discussed in this chapter are female, all are feminized in some way. Flush is confined to the domestic sphere and, as an animal, is treated in many ways parallel to women. Septimus receives emasculating treatment through the rest cure. His illness makes him dependent on others, and he is treated as unable to think and choose for himself. The fact that he is made to be more 'feminine' in his madness supports Showalter's notion that women and women's bodies are associated with madness, yet I would go further and posit that, in illness in general, both psychological and physical, men and women receive treatment parallel to that of the mad. They are treated as though they can not make their own choices. In illness, both men and women are treated as unable to take care of themselves. In order to achieve health and happiness, one must escape the dependence upon others and learn to define and articulate one's own needs.

The way in which we nourish our bodies has a tremendous impact on both our psychological and physical health. Making the choice of how and when to nourish our bodies is an important part of shaping one's individual identity. Choosing to feed oneself (as opposed to having food forced upon

oneself) is a formative part of creating an identity for oneself. Beyond choosing the ways we literally nourish ourselves, choosing the ways in which we acquire psychological sustenance is an important part of shaping an identity. Ultimately, one can not lead a happy life without eventually arriving at the point at which one is able to define oneself without allowing others to do so. One must nourish oneself, fill oneself with one's own identity. This is the cure that Septimus was never able to find, and the cure that Woolf herself perhaps never had a chance to discover before her own suicide. Illness forces one into dependence, forces one into a state in which others articulate your needs from the outside. One must ultimately learn to articulate and act upon one's own needs. Sometimes these needs may be articulated through illness itself. We saw this for Septimus when the very symptoms of his illness – nightmares, fears, ramblings about his trauma – all were indicative of the cause of his illness, yet went unacknowledged by all those around him. Perhaps part of what he needed, and what his illness was telling him that he needed, was for his experiences to be acknowledged and to be able to express the severe pain that he had endured. Thus, illness itself can communicate one's needs, if only one is able to listen to it.

# Conclusion

This paper has aimed to locate the body and to examine the manner in which the body functions within Woolf's literary project. In her depictions of clothing, movement, and illness, Woolf makes powerful statements about the body and the relationship between body and identity. Specifically, all three bodily concepts demonstrate the manner in which the body, particularly the female body, is limited or restricted as well as the possibilities for the attainment of greater freedom and agency for women. I have aimed to demonstrate that the characters in Woolf are, in fact, corporeal beings and that, though the mind may appear to play the more significant role in all of Woolf's texts, that does not discount the immense significance of the body.

The very claim that the mind takes precedence over the body in Woolf's works would itself be creating a dichotomy between body and mind which Woolf herself seeks to shatter. By demonstrating the manner in which illness impacts both body and mind, Woolf calls attention not only to the inextricable connection between the two assumingly oppositional categories, but also to the difficulty of distinguishing their effects. Similarly, by demonstrating the manner in which a choice of clothing can be utilized to construct or project an identity, Woolf shows the importance of bodily image for a sense of self. Instead of viewing the two categories as diametrically opposed, Woolf calls attention to the fact that the mind and body are intrinsically linked and that the mind is, in fact, itself embodied.

In her book, *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz discusses this perceived dichotomous relationship between mind and body and its relationship to women's treatment in society. She observes that, in their writing and thinking, many philosophers have associated women and femininity with the bodily. Women are somehow seen as more closely tied to the body than men. Both feminists and misogynists alike have made the mistake of suggesting that women somehow have a closer tie to their bodies. This link denies the fact that men, too, are embodied creatures. With this assumption, as well, comes further assumptions, linking the body to irrationality, nature, and biology. "Feminists and philosophers seem to share a common view of the human subject as a being made up of two dichotomously opposed characteristics: mind and body, thought and extension, reason and passion, psychology and biology"[133]. Yet, Grosz points out, this dichotomous relationship is problematic not just in the fact that it ignores the connections between mind and body, but in the fact that, by nature of creating a dichotomy, it implicitly privileges the mind over the body. "Dichotomous thinking naturally hierarchizes and ranks the two polarized terms so that one becomes the privileged term and the other its suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart"[134]. In speaking of a dichotomy between body and mind, one implicitly privileges the mind. Beyond this, however, the mind is often associated with other characteristics, chief among them masculinity. Woolf and Grosz would agree that these assumed connections need be problematized.

Grosz traces the relationship between different schools of feminism and the body, beginning with a group she calls the "egalitarian feminists" (15). Including such feminists as Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir, this group takes on two opposing views of the body. For one portion of this group, including Simone de Beauvoir, "the specificities of the female body, its particular nature and bodily cycles ... are ... regarded as a limitation on women's access to the rights and privileges patriarchal culture accords to men"[135]. Feminists such as de Beauvoir have viewed the body as a "hindrance" to women. On the other hand, "to some feminist epistemologists and ecofeminists, the body is seen as a unique means of access to knowledge and ways of living"[136]. However, as Grosz is quick to point out, both sides of this argument suffer from the adoption of an essentialist outlook on the female body. "Both sides seem to have accepted patriarchal and misogynist assumptions about the female body as somehow more natural, less detached, more engaged with and directly related to its 'objects' than male bodies"[137]. This is a viewpoint which resonates little with the picture of embodiment we see in Woolf, despite other similarities between Woolf and thinkers such as de Beauvoir.

In my view, Woolf's position is more closely aligned with the social constructionist feminists who no longer see the body as an "obstacle to be overcome" but rather "as a biological object whose representation and functioning is political, socially marking male and female as distinct"[138]. As Grosz explains, for this group, "it is not biology per se but the ways in which

the social system organizes and gives meaning to biology that is oppressive to women"[139]. In other words, the social systems in place that associate women with the body and place women's bodies in a locus of irrationality, nature, and dependance, among other things, are the issue. It is not as an implicit result of their bodies themselves that women are restricted in the ways that they are. Such restrictions are especially visible in Woolf's attention to the manner and spaces of women's movement. No woman ever made it to the lighthouse, for example. Yet, this was not due to their biology (we see that many women have the desire and ability to move freely), but a product of the role in which society places women. For this group of feminists, Grosz tells us, and for Woolf, the body has the potential to take on valuable meanings, should we allow it to be redefined. "[T]he task," Grosz tells us, "is to give [bodies] different meanings and values"[140]. Woolf calls for the same prescription – a redefinition of women's place in society to allow for freedom, and a redefinition of the body such that it is no longer socially constructed as a restrictive force.

It is clear that interpretations of the body are many and varied. There has been a widespread reluctance to deal with the body in previous generations of feminists, with a fear that attention to the body would reinforce notions of a closer association between womanhood and embodiment. Thus, we are left to ask, what should feminist writers and thinkers do with the body? How can we build on the positive aspects of Woolf's feminist project as it relates to the body? And how, in tandem, can we avoid essentialist thinking

when it comes to the body and avoid further defining woman as somehow more closely tied to her body? “Only when the relation between mind and body is adequately retheorized can we understand the contributions of the body to the production of knowledge systems, regimes of representation, cultural production, and socioeconomic exchange”[141]. This retheorization would entail taking great care to avoid certain manners of speaking about the body, and paying close attention to certain aspects of the body. Grosz claims that a feminist philosophy of the body must avoid four things: “[dividing] the subject into the mutually exclusive categories of mind and body,” “[associating] corporeality … with one sex,” “all singular models … based on one type of body as the norm,” and “biologistic or essentialist accounts of the body”[142]. Furthermore, this philosophy would need to “demonstrate some sort of internal or constitutive articulation, or even disarticulation, between the biological and the psychological, between the inside and the outside of the body”[143]. This “articulation” might recall the notion of illness as a manner of bodily communication with the mind – the manner in which we saw, in Woolf's view of illness, one could listen to one's illness in order to ascertain one's needs. Finally, Grosz claims, this feminist philosophy of the body would need to acknowledge that “[t]he body is neither – while also being both – the private or the public, self or other, natural or cultural, psychical or social, instinctive or learned, genetically or environmentally determined”[144]. In essence, this philosophy would need to acknowledge the variety of roles that the body can play, and its many manifestations. It can not and should not be

granted solely one meaning, but rather the full potential of meanings that the body can take on should be brought to the fore and discussed.

This notion of a burgeoning feminist philosophy of the body is one that is closely related to Woolf's project, though Woolf's literature was published about sixty years before Grosz calls for this new philosophy of the body. While I would not and could not argue that Woolf had in mind every aspect of this project, I do believe that many of its central tenets come out in Woolf's writing. Repeatedly throughout Woolf's texts, she brings forth the notions that the body can take on many meanings and that we should question this dichotomous relationship between body and mind and rather look to the connections between the two. Grosz calls upon feminist philosophers, writers and artists to begin a new form of self-representation that takes into consideration this idea of the body. She claims that this "would involve producing new discourses and knowledges, new modes of art and new forms of representational practice outside the patriarchal frameworks which have thus far ensured the impossibility of women's self-representations"[145]. I believe that Woolf's work did possess the beginnings of such a new form of embodied self-representation.

Woolf's embodied woman was one who was not constrained by biology, though she was often constrained by society as a reflection of the struggles of real women in patriarchal society. Her embodied woman was one whose body and mind informed one another, and worked together in very specific manners. Her identity was tied to her body, and her body was tied to her

identity, but she could and should take agency over both. Woolf uses the body to demonstrate the social restrictions placed upon women, but also uses the body to demonstrate the possibilities for women's own self-representation and self-definition. She uses the body to demonstrate the manner in which woman can free herself from these constraints and assume an identity of her own. The project that Woolf takes up in doing so is one that we can only hope will continue to grow and develop in the future. There has largely been a neglect of the body in academic literature – feminists and literary scholars alike are only now turning back to it. I believe both could learn a great deal by looking back to Woolf's literary project and continuing to building upon it. With a close examination of the embodied self in Woolf, one will begin to see the possibility for a new conceptualization of the body, and with it the possibility for a reshaping of feminist perceptions about the body.

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