Gender Within Stream of Consciousness: *To the Lighthouse* and *The Sound and the Fury*

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Acknowledgments

I have now spent the better part of a year with two novels, encountering them as often as my roommates and more often than my family. When I remove Woolf and Faulkner from my book bag, my friends ask: “Aren’t you tired of them yet?” I reply that gratefully, magically, I am not. In fact, I have only grown to love these texts and characters more than when I first met them. I also love these authors, and I wish I could thank them for adding their work to our lives. The same feeling goes for gender, as my friends and family also well know. The topic only shines more brightly than it did freshman year, when I sat in my Introduction to Feminisms class and began to open my eyes to the world around me. And now my love for literature and fascination with gender combine in this, a work that helps me join my passions and realize my Self as if I were Lily Briscoe on the shore.

I must first thank Professor Hughes. Without you, I might not have met Lily or been awakened to the beauty of Caddy Compson. I certainly would not have insisted that these characters befriend each other, let alone me. Your mind, your patience, and especially your kindness have made this process surprisingly painless and incredibly rewarding. I always left your office with buoyed confidence, fresh ideas, and an incentive to work. More than this, I would have been grammatically and stylistically lost without you! I hope you continue to take on advisees, as students will be lucky not only to learn from you but to actually work with your generous guidance.

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Gender within Stream of Consciousness: To the Lighthouse and The Sound and the Fury

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Introduction

The phenomenon of gender can be perceived through various lenses, ranging from essentialist and biological assignment of “sex” to the more liberal views of social and environmental construction. The present sociological thoughts posit that one’s gender is fluid, constantly being created by and performed within specific situations and circumstances. Though we see this manifestation of gender in examining real personalities today, one can also witness such performances in fictitious characters created by actual authors of literature. In fact, this perception of a gendered self is heightened by the author’s gift of layered narrative. By using a style such as stream of consciousness, the author is able to offer both a dominant and a suppressed narrative. These layers then interact to provide the reader two variations of self; one that is shown to other characters within the story and one that is only known to the character’s own mind (and, of course, to the reader). Stream of consciousness therefore allows a reader more knowledge of another character than is possible in “real” life, and it consequently presents a fascinating opportunity to study the idea of gender. In order to preface this type of study, it is first necessary to clarify those aspects of gender to be investigated as well as the particular texts chosen for study.

There are several existing stances on gender from the sociological perspective, each including emphasis on an individual’s behavior instead of biological make-up. These theories include focuses on gender roles, gender displays, and sex categories. Such views are re-
evaluated and re-formed, however, in an article entitled “Doing Gender,” in which the authors state their purpose to depict “gender as a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment.” Their title results from the contention that the “‘doing’ of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production.” This is a portrayal of gender which “involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’.”¹ From this type of theory, one can also hypothesize the layers which multiply from “masculine” and “feminine” to bring forth a number of masculinities and femininities. Inherent in these, of course, is the notion of hegemony. In any study of gender, there is an indispensable need to acknowledge the existence of what is dominant and what is subordinate. While the concept of hegemonic masculinity remains elusive in its attainability, it is the dominant ideal which then forms the subordinate masculinities and femininities alike. These concepts, while sociological in origin, are equally important to an understanding of gender construction in literary texts. In an effort to comprehend a literary work through the interaction of its characters, one must allow them to be governed by the same human theories which we believe to govern ourselves.

Though a gendered exploration of literary text would prove to be fruitful with any number of works, the interest is heightened when one adds the dimension of consciousness. As stated, the literary style of stream of consciousness displays free-flowing thoughts from the minds of characters in the narrative. And in this way, it represents an author’s intention to depict consciousness in the most raw and unedited of forms. As one of the modern authors best known

for her devotion to consciousness, Virginia Woolf states her view towards the style which thrives in her work:

> Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small.\(^2\)

These ideas manifest themselves in a number of Woolf novels, specifically underscoring gender in her 1929 work *To the Lighthouse*. Similarly, across the Atlantic, the comparable modernist thoughts were also flourishing in the mind of an American male author. In 1927, William Faulkner used stream of consciousness writing when he penned *The Sound and the Fury*, a novel which also pushes gender to its forefront.

These novels both, as mentioned, present the reader with layered narratives which are laden with gendered consciousnesses. Both stories present varied perspectives and supply expressions of gender both in the dominant, public sphere of each novel as well as the suppressed, private workings of a character’s mind. The gender norms exist primarily within the dominant narrative as the characters co-exist and converse with one another. Although there are pockets of resistance to the gendered traditions within the dominant story-lines, most of the opposition to and confusion with gender emerges within the suppressed narratives. Acknowledging these struggles is vital, but their internalization ensures that gender is continually the “task undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production.” Without the journey into private minds which stream of

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consciousness accentuates, the suppressed narrative would be hidden and therefore grossly under
analyzed.

In looking at these texts for the way in which gender is constructed and communicated by
various consciousnesses, it is perhaps best to first organize the texts by the normative gender
roles of femininities and masculinities. Within both novels, there are interactions which affect
the performance and understanding of gender by each character. In viewing these roles within
the larger image of hegemonic masculinity, one is able to view the way in which some gendered
expectations remain dominant; one can also see that subordinate gender roles act either in
complicity, defiance, or vacillation between the two. In both genders, these roles can be further
broken down into generational differences. For instance, the genders of the fathers and the
mothers in each novel have bearing on the rest of the personalities and consciousnesses. In the
same way, the second generation is both shaped and confused by these tenets of the parental
forces. For the characters which are explicitly given consciousness, this method of organization
proves to be useful in observing the “doing” of gender within the novels.

There are also, however, various complications which emerge in this way of surveying
the novels. There are certain characters written by Faulkner who, while their presence in the
novel is indispensable, are not granted consciousness through a given interior voice. The
paradox of these characters’ centrality to the story with no narrative autonomy makes for a
fascinating moment in gendered characters. Another problem exists within the gendering of non-
human “characters,” and this emerges in the “Time Passes” chapter of To the Lighthouse. These
puzzles offer sites of resistance to our own method of organization, and must therefore be
examined for their own merit.
Finally, the ramifications of the authors’ creations must also be noted. Both authors, and
indeed, both texts have withstood the test of time because of their true greatness in the canon of
modernist literature. Within this, however, the topic of gender shines through both works as the
authors play with consciousness in their individual styles. Additionally, the authors’ remarkable
differences in social location should also be considered when analyzing the creations as
reflective of their own characters. Each author writes from his or her own gendered
consciousness, and this adds another layer of character construction. Because the two authors
wrote as contemporaries, their differences in gender and birthplace provide fascinating
counterpoints during the specific time of modernist literature.

Generational Genders

Femininities

Upon hearing the word “gender,” the mind usually makes an illogical leap towards what
is female and therefore feminine. And yet, the feminine and the various forms of femininities are
constantly being shaped by the dominant hegemonic masculinity. Though the performances of
gender in the works of Faulkner and Woolf may seem obsolete, the interplay of subordination
and resistance is pertinent to any gender theory which holds today. Beyond this, the novels also
show the effect of characters’ interactions on their performances of gender. Because of the
historical setting of these publications, the opportunities in which femininities were given a true
voice were rare. One must note, therefore, that the suppressed narratives are less evenly divided
between the men and women. Because of this, the dominant narrative must be taken as the only
articulation of several female characters. Still, however, the interplay of feminine and masculine
characters becomes evident and the gendered dialogue emerges among all of the major characters. Therefore one can glean meaning from the dissected consciousnesses of characters in comparison to their opposing genders and generations in each novel.

**Mothers, the First Generation**

The matriarchal figures of these novels are powerful, despite their inferior status in the hierarchy of gender roles. As stated, the dominant narratives of the female characters are what manifest themselves explicitly through dialogue or effects on other characters’ consciousnesses. They occur through any sort of interaction and can disclose both resistance and conformity to the expected, conventional femininity. Because of this disclosure, the writing styles of Woolf and Faulkner show a variety of femininities in their female characters. The matriarchal characters of Mrs. Ramsay and Mrs. Compson are grouped because of their generational status, but certainly provide foiling perspectives. This comparison is complicated, however, by the lack of a suppressed narrative for Mrs. Compson. Similarly, the second generation is compiled of varying femininities and consciousnesses but is categorized by a common trait of younger rebellion.

Woolf creates all of her characters within a multi-layered narrative; one must always be ready to float between omniscient and limited perspectives as characters’ consciousnesses are revealed and then hidden again. Because of this, the interactions between genders thrust themselves to the forefront as the reader is privy to many thoughts and voices. To investigate Mrs. Ramsay and her performance of gender, one might archeologically dig into her being from the outside in; progressing from the most conventional aspects of her womanhood to the depth of her character which challenges all construction. Many of the interactions which occur in the
dominant narrative also shed light onto the gender performances of the men, and this will be revisited in the portion dedicated to masculinities.

Mrs. Ramsay displays a contradictory femininity. In many ways, she demonstrates the role which fits snugly under the constraints formed by hegemonic masculinity. She is valued greatly because of her beauty and acknowledges her physical assets. She is both wife and mother and encourages other women to follow this traditional path (despite her periods of unhappiness). Lastly, she continually undertakes the responsibility of indulging the opposite gender with sympathy and support. She is contradictory, however, in that she does have an active mind and the ability to “know” things. The reader realizes, from the glimpses into her consciousness, that she dislikes various aspects of the masculinity she upholds and is therefore resistant at times. However, her overriding desire to form coherence and happiness as well as her submission to masculine intellect relegate her to the realm of traditional femininity under the control of masculinity.

Mrs. Ramsay’s public persona consists of the moments of her being which are freely displayed to the others in the text. This level of consciousness emerges in any reaction to Mrs. Ramsay from other characters’ thoughts. Her protection of the masculine gender shows itself in the thoughts of Charles Tansley as he affirms “it flattered him; snubbed as he had been, it soothed him that Mrs. Ramsay should tell him this. Charles Tansley revived. Insinuating, too, as she did the greatness of man’s intellect, even in its decay, the subjection of all wives…”

Here, regardless of Mrs. Ramsay’s thinking, the result is a pacified young man who is able to reclaim his superior masculinity based upon her words. This reaction in another’s consciousness is an aid to subordinating what is feminine. Though powerful in their necessity, Mrs. Ramsay’s words do nothing for her gender but ensure its inferiority in the minds of men. Similarly,

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femininity appears to be useless in another reaction to her exhibited thoughts. Mr. Ramsay replies to Mrs. Ramsay’s assertions that it might be “fine tomorrow” in a way which scoffs and patronizes all females when he says “The extraordinary irrationality of her remark, the folly of women’s minds enraged him…she flew in the face of facts, made his children hope what was entirely out of the question, in effect, told lies” (31).

The masculine frustration with feminine thinking might be reduced to the conventional categorization of men as the mind and women as the body. This seemingly archaic label continues with the ever-present beauty standard in women, as well as the value of intellect and action in men. Though Mrs. Ramsay’s intelligence is a subject of frustration for Mr. Ramsay and other males in Woolf’s novel, her physical appearance is something with which they have fewer qualms. In a perfect display of Mrs. Ramsay’s effect on another’s consciousness, one only has to look at the episode of the sonnet. As she sits perusing the poetry of Shakespeare, Mr. Ramsay conjures up his personal story of her femaleness and its inherent inability to comprehend:

Go on reading. You don’t look sad now, he thought. And he wondered what she was reading, and exaggerated her ignorance, her simplicity, for he liked to think that she was not clever, not book-learned at all. He wondered if she understood what she was reading. Probably not, he thought. She was astonishingly beautiful. Her beauty seemed to him, if that were possible, to increase… (121)

Though this affects Mr. Ramsay’s mind with no obvious action on Mrs. Ramsay’s part, the reader infers that she is indeed aware of her appearance.

This is not necessarily to say that Mrs. Ramsay intentionally uses her beauty as a façade to mask her ability to understand the sonnet, but that is of course a possible reading. The reader can assume, however, that she is indeed aware of her attractiveness and its effect on other characters. This dominant aspect of Mrs. Ramsay is apparent to everyone in the narrative,
creating a bridge between her own dominant and suppressed levels of consciousness. Woolf tells us that she “bore about with her, she could not help knowing it, the torch of her beauty; she carried it erect into any room that she entered…her beauty was apparent. She had been admired. She had been loved” (41). This image is useful in characterizing Mrs. Ramsay in a myriad of ways. It first allows the reader to know that her beauty is an attribute which is acknowledged by all. Moreover, the beauty acts as a “torch,” or a tool, which enlightens not only a room but also the characters within it. This torch, much like her ability to soothe men with sympathy, is a device with which she empowers herself through traditionally feminine means. Though it creates good feelings in the masculine mind, it essentially disables her mind and reduces her to the body. In this way, it is a patriarchal tool which may help a woman negotiate but simultaneously reinforces the hegemonic structure of gender roles. While some of these notions will continue in her suppressed narrative, Mrs. Ramsay will also challenge her complicity to these notions with her most private thoughts.

Woolf layers Mrs. Ramsay even further in revealing her active thoughts to the reader. Some, as said, seem to reinforce the weakness of the feminine gender while others challenge the traditional role. On several subjects, Mrs. Ramsay seems to vacillate in admitting contradictory opinions to herself. For instance, her thoughts develop on whether or not her mind is valuable in comparison to her husband’s. In some ways, she resents his ruthlessness in defending the truth:

To pursue truth with such astonishing lack of consideration for other people’s feelings, to rend the thin veils of civilization so wantonly, so brutally, was to her so horrible and outrage of human decency that, without replying, dazed and blinded, she bent her head as if to let the pelt of jagged hail, the drench of dirty water, bespatter her unrebuked. There was nothing to be said. (32)

Mrs. Ramsay is angered by her husband’s inability to skew the truth in an effort to protect their son’s feelings. Still, she acknowledges that she cannot defend herself or her son against his
thinking. Similarly, her admiration for her husband and his thinking reveals itself in her innermost thoughts:

…she did not like, even for a second, to feel finer than her husband; and further, could not bear not being entirely sure, when she spoke to him, of the truth of what she said….for then people said he depended on her, when they must know that of the two he was infinitely the more important, and what she gave the world, in comparison with what he gave, negligible. (39)

These thoughts, though not directly affecting other characters’ consciousnesses, nevertheless uphold conventional female subordination. Other thoughts also relegate Mrs. Ramsay’s feminine ideal to the traditional realm, shown by her persistence in maintaining that “an unmarried woman has missed the best of life” or “a great mind like his must be different in every way from ours” (49, 70). Likewise, she recognizes her pacifying effect on men, as Woolf says that “…she had the whole of the other sex under her protection; for reasons she could not explain” (6). Her gratefulness towards the masculine gender role prompts her to reward it with constant shelter and praise, and this is a thought shared with the reader. This meta-layer of her consciousness privately upholds traditional femininity, sustaining the female’s inferior role even though the thoughts are suppressed and therefore less threatening.

And still, Woolf creates yet another layer to her characters which complicates them as well as the implications of gender in the work as a whole. At Mrs. Ramsay’s center are words of resistance and doubt which challenge the conventions thus far normalized by her actions and superficial thoughts. She acknowledges that her compulsion for arranging relationships is truly a force over which she has little control: “…because whatever she might feel about her own transaction, she had had experiences which need not happen to every one (she did not name them to herself); she was driven on, too quickly she knew, almost as if it were an escape for her too, to say that people must marry; people must have children” (60). Even beyond this, when her
children have gone to bed, Mrs. Ramsay muses in ways thus far prevented by the day to day
business of a wife and mother:

For now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself. And that
was what now she often felt the need of—to think; well, not even to think. To be
silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal,
evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-
shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others. (62)

She continues to describe that “Not as oneself did one find rest ever, in her experience…but as a
wedge of darkness. Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir…” (63). Here, Mrs.
Ramsay seems to separate herself from all convention; she creates a world without social
construction, in which her essence is permitted to exist at its barest without any need for
performance or forced masking. She loses “personality,” of which gender is a major component.
In her moments as the “wedge-shaped core of darkness,” Mrs. Ramsay ceases the compulsive
“being and the doing” which creates her femininity. She creates, in fact, a place where no
“doing” of gender must exist at all. This place is the ultimate site of resistance; in shedding
“oneself” and “losing personality,” she rejects the traditional role to which she so dearly clings in
the rest of the novel. Though this realization is unlike the blatant rebellion of younger
generations, Mrs. Ramsay’s wedge of darkness negates all need to perform and releases her from
the “routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment” that is gender. This moment is fleeting,
but its importance emanates throughout the rest of the novel as one considers Mrs. Ramsay’s
significance on each of the characters.

Faulkner creates his central matriarch without granting her the many layers of narrative
which Woolf bestows upon Mrs. Ramsay. Most notable with the creation of this femininity in
*The Sound and the Fury* is the lack of suppressed discourse from the female characters. Of the
four sections, three are given from the perspective of the Compson sons. The fourth narrative
centers upon a female, but still neglects to bestow her with a first person account. For this reason, the analysis of femininities for Faulkner’s work must be built entirely on the dominant narratives in which the females interact. These, of course, include dialogues as well as the effects of the females on character’s consciousnesses. The implication of voiceless females will be discussed further in later sections.

Mrs. Compson exhibits her form of femininity primarily through comments on her family name, the propriety of a lady, and the degeneration of her family. Like Mrs. Ramsay, Mrs. Compson employs a tool of patriarchy with which she manipulates others while ensuring her weakness. Constantly the hypochondriac, she uses her supposed frailty and illness to impose guilt on those around her. As the Southern distressed damsel, she cleverly manipulates the men to fuss over her needs. While this, like the use of beauty, conquers short term battles, her ultimate display of weakness results in an actual debility in regards to her gender. Still, her imposition of remorse on others is so overbearing, it must not go unnoticed: “I know I’m nothing but a burden to you.” Mother said. “But I’ll be gone soon. Then you will be rid of my bothering”, and “You don’t know what it is,” she says. “Thank God you will never know what a mother feels”. These remarks sting her husband and children alike, and therefore complicate her role as a matriarchal power. Because of her shame with the Compson name and those who embody such characteristics, her role as mother is antagonistic and grating towards most of her family.

Similarly, her self-professed weakness detracts from her ability to guide her family from a mother’s position. Often, she is more concerned with the superficiality of propriety than with the affection and supervision most often associated with the nurturing role. She chides Caddy for acting like a mother towards Benjy: “He’s too big for you to carry. You must stop trying.

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You’ll injure your back. All of our women have prided themselves on their carriage. Do you want to look like a washerwoman?” (62). She also attempts, however, to assert authority as the position of matriarchal power: “It’s too early for him to go to bed.” Mother said. “He’ll wake up at daybreak, and I simply cannot bear another day like today” (62). This statement is manipulative; she seeks sympathy and invokes guilt by claiming some maternal instinct and responsibility.

Her role as a mother is only a part of the device with which she manages those around her, with her pride in the Bascomb name and lady-like decorum acting in accordance. Though the southern male is usually judged for his hubris, Mrs. Compson’s pride serves as another factor of her specific femininity. Ironically, she uses her weakness and the strength of her maiden name to upset most of the characters surrounding her. As Quentin’s consciousness drifts in and out of sanity, he recalls specific words from his mother:

only Jason can do no wrong because he is more Bascomb than Compson while your own daughter my little daughter my baby girl she is she is no better than that when I was a girl I was unfortunate I was only a Bascomb I was taught that there is no halfway ground that a woman is either a lady or not but I never dreamed when I held her in my arms that any daughter of mine could let herself… (103)

Mrs. Compson (nee Bascomb) regards herself proudly as the last lady in her family line, as Caddy’s promiscuity places her in diametric opposition to this moniker of status. She continues to assert this status to separate herself from the Compson name as well as her own (Compson) daughter: “‘Yes,” she says. ‘We Bascombs need nobody’s charity. Certainly not that of a fallen woman…””, “‘I’m a lady. You might not believe that from my off-spring, but I am’” (220, 300).
Masculinities

The interplay between genders is already obvious; the men and women affect and shape one another throughout both novels. We remember, however, that all the actions which conform to convention and tradition are in fact operating under the broader scope of hegemony. Patriarchy rules in the hierarchical rankings of gender. The dominant form of masculinity suppresses all other forms of masculinity, as well as anything feminine. This, therefore, is the hegemonic masculinity. Sociologists use this theoretical title to categorize the “currently most honored way of being a man.” This brand of masculinity is elusive; there are not many men who might fit its lofty ideals. Its importance, however, lies in its ability to reign over men and women by establishing the proper way to be one or the other. As we examine the performances of masculinity in these novels, we notice the reversal of inner voices in *The Sound and the Fury*. While the consciousnesses of the female characters are largely suppressed, those of the Compson sons are abundant if confusing. By contrast, Woolf grants sufficient voice to the males of *To the Lighthouse*, though her division of narratives remains relatively equal. These masculine voices and actions, according to the tradition of patriarchy, should be the creating forces which govern the feminine characters in their lives. We find, however, that those who fall short of the ideal masculinity also founder in subordinating the women over whom they feel they should preside.

Fathers, the First Generation

The men and boys, like the women and girls of the novels, are usefully organized into generations. Woolf and Faulkner both create striking fathers who make up the patriarchal first
generation. While both Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Compson have defined masculine natures which affect the other characters in the novels, we are only able to see Mr. Ramsay’s thoughts directly. Like the maternal force in *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner’s patriarch does not disclose an inner monologue. Mr. Compson’s views, however, are revealed through the consciousnesses of his sons’ narrations.

Mr. Ramsay, much like most of the characters with various levels of consciousness, is full of contradictions. His masculinity strives for hegemony in its notions of greatness; his goals and self-worth depend on his ability to think and reason. His lofty form of intelligence, he feels, is a trait which is reserved only for males. For this reason, he looks down on the minds of women. On a different plane of his thoughts, however, he is also completely reliant on their sympathy. He depends on the type of protection that Mrs. Ramsay seeks to give to his entire sex, and in this way proves himself not dominant but helplessly subordinate. There does seem to be a difference, however, in his performance of gender when compared to his wife’s; Mr. Ramsay’s vulnerable and non-traditional characteristics tend to exist in both his dominant and suppressed narratives. His almost pathetic moments of dependence are obvious to the characters around him, as are his moments of intellectual dominance. This differs from Mrs. Ramsay; she successfully hides certain parts of her mind. Because Mr. Ramsay’s narratives blend together, the organization of our analysis will follow from his ability to uphold the hegemonic masculinity to his failure to realize its ideals.

Mr. Ramsay assures his masculinity with his intelligence and his strict attention to factual information. In the opening pages of the novel, Woolf gives the reader a dose of Mr. Ramsay’s realistic perspective when she writes “‘But,’ said his father… ‘it won’t be fine’” (4). This statement, upon which so much of the novel revolves, is void of the compassion necessary for a
feminine white-lie. The narrative continues to expound upon Mr. Ramsay’s thought process, from an unnamed perspective:

What he said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all his own children, who, sprung from his loins… should be aware from childhood that life is difficult; facts uncompromising…

(4)

The characters in the novel are aware of this attitude towards ruthless truth; indeed, it asserts a force, though hateful, of masculine power which overrides all that is inferior. More than this, his affinity for philosophical thought is also impressive to those who cannot conceive of his ideas. His supposedly great intellect contributes to the notion of “men as mind, women as body” which previously placed Mrs. Ramsay’s beauty as her chief attribute. Lily Briscoe’s thoughts show that Mr. Ramsay’s writings are completely beyond her mental capacity. Upon asking Andrew Ramsay “what his father’s books were about…[he says] ‘Subject and object and the nature of reality,’ Andrew had said. And when she said Heavens, she had no notion what that meant. ‘Think of a kitchen table then,’ he had told her, ‘when you’re not there’” (23). His work remains largely unexplained and mysteriously cerebral, creating a category of men who are able to understand and appreciate it.

Along with his erudition, however, Mr. Ramsay also has inner doubts about his ability to reach substantial greatness. He obsesses over the capacity of his mind, hoping to be one of the few men to ever reach the letter Z: “He had not genius; he laid no claim to that: but he had, or might have had, the power to repeat every letter of the alphabet from A to Z accurately in order. Meanwhile, he stuck at Q. On, then, on to R” (34-35). These thoughts plague him, as he returns to the conclusion that “He would never reach R” (35). In one way, he seems to also admit his performance almost as extensively as his wife does. Woolf writes one passage which begins
with Mr. Ramsay “[m]uttering half aloud” and saying “It was a disguise; it was the refuge of a man afraid to own his own feelings, who could not say, This is what I like—this is what I am;” (45). The sentence continues, however, in a different set of consciousnesses “and rather pitiable and distasteful to William Bankes and Lily Briscoe, who wondered why such concealments should be necessary” (45). Woolf does not allow the reader to know how extensive this confession is for Mr. Ramsay, as our view into his consciousness is quickly shifted to others’. We struggle to assign the statement to his character just as he must struggle to profess it himself, and the intricate structure of Woolf’s multi-layered narrative again seems to enact the problematic relations of gender itself. If the statement is indeed Mr. Ramsay’s, one might say it is more cowardly than Mrs. Ramsay’s words on the wedge of darkness. It is perhaps less of a rebellious thought and more of an act of self-pity. Of course, however, resistance to masculinity often carries these negative connotations.

In another contrast to Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay’s chief concerns are located in abstract thought. His subsequent musings on fame and greatness relate to his status in the world as well as the greater, more intangible realm of philosophy in general. They stand in bold opposition to Mrs. Ramsay’s musings, which involve cohesion and the happiness of those around her. His lofty intellectual pursuits and imagined successes fit into his ideal of hegemonic masculinity, all of which is feared to be an unattainable goal. Possible or not, however, it is certainly a goal which governs both Mr. Ramsay as well as his attitudes toward other men and women in his environment.

Mr. Ramsay’s need for sympathy is the last defining aspect to his particular type of masculinity. Similar to his confession of possible failure, this is another trait that does not fit under traditional or hegemonic masculinity. Because the male is supposedly strong, as enforced
by his initial display of uncompromising truth, his submission to Mrs. Ramsay and other women is decidedly resistant. Just as Mrs. Ramsay has “the whole of the other sex under her protection,” so does Mr. Ramsay acknowledge his need to be protected by her. Immediately after his statements on greatness and the possibility of failure, Woolf discloses:

He wanted sympathy. He was a failure, he said… It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life…they must be furnished, they must be filled with life” (37).

More surprising than this, however, is the clarity with which other characters notice this trait in him. Lily Briscoe often makes note of Mr. Ramsay’s ingratiating nature, and in the beginning she compares it to his incredible capacity for knowledge: “It was astonishing that a man of his intellect could stoop so low as he did—but that was too harsh a phrase—could depend so much as he did upon people’s praise” (22-23). Later, after Mrs. Ramsay’s death, the statements are less forgiving. As she remarks upon his demand for sympathy, Lily becomes enraged: “That man, she thought, her anger rising in her, never gave; that man took. She, on the other hand, would be forced to give. Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died—and had left all this” (149). Here, we see the final interesting aspect of Mr. Ramsay’s masculinity. His need for sympathy might not fit under the confines of masculinity, but he still uses it to control the women around him. Mr. Ramsay forces Lily grudgingly to acquiesce to his needs, despite her rebellious nature which might prevent her from doing so: “Here he was, stopped by her side. She would give him what she could” (150).

Faulkner creates a different patriarch completely, though Mr. Compson’s contradictions seem nearly as various as Mr. Ramsay’s. As stated, there is little in _The Sound and the Fury_ which directly discloses the consciousness of the Compson father. His imprints on other
consciousnesses, however, are abundant. Beyond the words which appear in Benjy’s casual account of daily dialogue, Quentin also recounts his father’s speech verbatim during his lengthy stream of consciousness outbursts.

**Faulkner: Sons, the Second Generation**

The best way to characterize the masculinities of Mr. Compson is to look at the chapters devoted to his sons. Faulkner grants voice to Benjy, Quentin, and Jason Compson respectively. Though Benjy’s section is obscured by his lack of speech and inability to think like other characters, Quentin and Jason serve as direct reflections of their father. Beginning with the eldest child, Mr. Compson’s words heavily impact how Quentin believes men and women should be. Faulkner gives Quentin a voice in psychotic wanderings through stream of consciousness style. Quentin’s section parallels Woolf’s writing in that his mind cites other characters’ utterances and creates another sort of layered narrative. Reading Quentin’s section is like turning radio knobs, as the reader drifts among frequencies to different times and voices in an effort to stitch together his whole twisted past.

Though his story is fraught with personal incompetence and obsession, it also highlights the plight of masculinity for a Southern boy. Quentin’s masculinity depends on the codes introduced to him by his father and Southern society. These codes involve the nature of women and the responsibility of men to protect them. They govern Quentin but also confuse him as he attempts to reconcile the thoughts of his father with his own thoughts on men and women. The reader finds it difficult to negotiate the thoughts that are purely Quentin’s with the thoughts of Mr. Compson. This uncertainty is connected to Quentin’s own mental instability and contributes
to his ultimate downfall. Furthermore, the reader is able to see the mutual dependence of masculinity on femininity and vice versa, with femininity being constructed by masculinity.

Like the other characters, Quentin’s section might be divided into what is obvious to everyone and what is only in his mind. The dominant and suppressed narratives get confused, however, by the constant mixing of the two. Actual dialogue from the past mixes with his inner workings, and the reader constantly faces the challenge of keeping hold of reality in the present. In order to construct Quentin’s notion of masculinity, therefore, one might better organize his words into the themes of general philosophy, women, and Caddy.

In generating a view of life itself, Quentin initiates his difficulty with creating a mind of his own. His very first thoughts center upon his watch and its connection to his father’s perception of time. He begins his thoughts with the first of many “father said”s, which echo throughout the rest of the chapter. Mr. Compson believed that Quentin should not “spend all [his] time trying to conquer” time because “no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools” (76). In this way, Faulkner begins to allude to Mr. Compson’s nihilistic view on humankind and the world at large. His cerebral and philosophical statements imprint themselves on Quentin’s consciousness, and he remembers them as though they are a form of higher law. The opening thought of the chapter hints at Quentin’s impending neurosis, as he quotes his father: “I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it’s rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father’s” (76). Mr. Compson’s nihilistic perspective undoubtedly haunts Quentin on the day of his suicide, as he continues to make reference to his father’s quotations. The ghost of his father’s thinking also affects Quentin as a
man. The notions of time and victory, which traditionally establish the masculine bravado of other men (Woolf’s Mr. Ramsay, for example), become confounded in Quentin’s mind because of his father’s sweeping statements. To clarify, while Mr. Compson does value such ideals of success, his nihilistic perspective dictates that defeat is ultimately inevitable.

Mr. Compson’s strongest point of authority over Quentin is his attitude towards women and sex. The notion of protection and masculine strength is foremost in both men’s minds, which Quentin accounts for in saying “Father and I protect women from one another from themselves our women” and “Because women so delicate so mysterious Father said” (96, 128). Both of these statements issue from the stream of consciousness flow which characterizes Quentin’s section. They are also, however, only the tame beginnings of Mr. Compson’s remarks which continue on to paint women in a more negative light. The first quotation continues into the italics which suggest that the words are exactly as Mr. Compson had said them:

Women are like that they don’t acquire knowledge of people we are for that they are just born with a practical fertility of suspicion that makes a crop every so often and usually right they have an affinity for evil for supplying whatever the evil lacks in itself for drawing it about them instinctively as you do bed-clothing in slumber fertilizing the mind for it until the evil has served its purpose whether it ever existed or no. (96)

Here Mr. Compson betrays his view of women which mixes severe criticism with a hint of awe or fear. His statement obviously shows his opinion that women cannot think rationally, and if they are ever correct it is the result of luck. His references to “fertility” and “fertilizing the mind,” however, also allude to the power of women that is historically a subject of fear. The combination of “fertility” with the “affinity for evil” resembles the accusations of witchcraft in women, and thus places female as a strict “other” for Mr. Compson (and subsequently for Quentin).
Mr. Compson’s continuation of his “so delicate so mysterious” comment strikes similarly at the opposite sex. Quentin’s quotation of his father at this point is more disconnected than before, but the words of importance (both to Quentin and to the reader) emerge nonetheless:

Delicate equilibrium of periodical filth between two moons balanced. Moons he said full and yellow as harvest moons her hips thighs. Outside outside of them always but. Yellow. Feet soles with walking like. They know that some man that all those mysterious and imperious concealed. With all that inside of them shapes an outward suavity waiting for a touch to. Liquid putrefaction like drowned things floating like pale rubber flabbily filled getting the odor of honeysuckle all mixed up. (128)

This quotation also combines criticism with unmistakable imagery of fecundity. “Her hips thighs” are likened to “harvest moons,” and yet he continues by saying “with all that inside of them shapes an outward suavity waiting for a touch.” Similarly the “periodical filth between two moons” suggests immoral activity between menses. The mixture here of fertility with sexuality might be a reference to the motif of Caddy’s sexuality, or it might be a statement on women in general. Because this is Quentin’s chapter, one might make the connection to Caddy more quickly than to other women. Continuing in the quotation, the reader also wonders if the narrative voice has developed from Mr. Compson to Quentin completely. The “odor of honeysuckle” is a clear reference to Caddy and to Quentin’s obsession. The “liquid putrefaction like drowned things” is an eerie foreshadowing to Quentin’s suicide, suggesting that femaleness is inseparable with his looming death. In combining both ideas of Caddy and death, one is also reminded of the near suicide which Quentin and Caddy almost committed together. This also bears on Quentin’s masculinity as he continues to cry while Caddy remains in the position of strength: “don’t cry/ Im not crying Caddy/ push it are you going to/ do you want me to/ yes push it/ touch your hand to it/ don’t cry poor Quentin” (152). His eventual suicide might somehow also be connected to this moment of perceived cowardice, where he could not exhibit traits of masculinity as well as his beloved sister.
Because virginity or its loss weighs heavily on Quentin’s masculinity, Mr. Compson’s thoughts on the subject are particularly valuable. In another one of Quentin’s long, semi-verbatim quotations of his father he begins: “In the South you are ashamed of being a virgin. Boys. Men. They lie about it. Because it means less to women, Father said” (128). This is an obvious reference to a Southern tenet which specifically holds true for a hegemonic masculinity.

In working to achieve the ultimate masculinity, boys and men must lose their virginity as soon as possible; or else they must lie about it. The statement that “it means less to women” is perplexing; the status of virgin is clearly still important for women as Caddy (and young Quentin) is judged as un-ladylike and dirty just for hinting at promiscuity. Perhaps, however, he is referring to the fact that Southern girls do not need to broadcast their “lost virginity” in order to become a lady, while this is the case for boys. Or, this might also imply that the woman’s moral code is more tolerant than that of traditional hegemony. The quotation continues with:

He said it was men invented virginity not women. Father said it’s like death: only a state in which the others are left and I said, But to believe it doesn’t matter and he said, That’s what’s so sad about anything: not only virginity and I said, Why couldn’t it have been me and not her who is unvirgin and he said, That’s why that’s sad too; nothing is even worth the changing of it. (128)

Here, Mr. Compson combines his nihilistic views with an opinion that virginity is socially constructed by men. The virgin or unvirgin binary is essential to Quentin’s view of his masculinity. Though his father instills Southern masculine pride, this is one subject on which Mr. Compson’s nihilism counteracts hegemony. The traditional connotation of virginity means nothing to Mr. Compson, and this distinction between father and son is troublesome to Quentin’s consciousness.

Faulkner adds yet another layer of symbolism into the Compson sons’ masculinity by using the idea of castration in various ways. As the ultimate act of emasculation, the constant
threat of castration plagues both Quentin and Jason. The topic first surfaces obliquely in Benjy’s section, as the family decides to have him castrated for the safety of the surrounding young neighbors. Quentin thinks of a story he has heard about a man performing the surgery on himself, “A broken razor flinging them backward over his shoulder the same motion complete the jerked skein of blood backward not looping” (116). His thoughts on castration morph into more musings on his own incestuous desire and virgin brand. This reflection is, of course, heavily supplemented with Mr. Compson’s thoughts as well:

But that’s not it. It’s not not having them. It’s never to have had them then I could say O That That’s Chinese I don’t know Chinese. And Father said it’s because you are a virgin: don’t you see? Women are never virgins. Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. It’s nature is hurting you not Caddy and I said That’s just words and he said So is virginity and I said you don’t know. You cant know and he said Yes. On the instant when we come to realize that tragedy is second hand. (116)

Here, Quentin is speaking of desire. If he were to be castrated, literally or figuratively, the pain of remembered yearning would still be present. Had he never known how to long for someone else, been born without the capacity to desire, he feels he would be in a better place. More than this, his obsession might never have gone down the incestuous path which ultimately ruins him.

Continuing with the subject of Caddy in Quentin’s consciousness, we see that there are many instances in which his mind cannot focus on anything but his sister and her relationship with men. During these times, Quentin’s sanity faces its most brutal challenges. As his mind drifts to Caddy, Quentin vacillates between considering his father’s words and acknowledging his own feelings towards his sister. He is always fixated on her purity, and in justifying her actions he places himself as the male culprit. Believing that his imagined sin of incest reduces Caddy’s sin of promiscuity, Quentin also focuses on the need to confess this hypothetical sin to his father. The mixture of emotions provokes his insanity and produces flowing and convoluted thoughts:
The month of brides, the voice that breathed *She ran right out of the mirror, out of the banked scent. Roses. Roses. Mr and Mrs Jason Richmond Compson announce the marriage of.* Roses. Not virgins like dogwood, milkweed. I said I have committed incest, Father I said. Roses. Cunning and serene. If you attend Harvard one year, but don’t see the boat-race, there should be a refund. Let Jason have it. Give Jason a year at Harvard. (77)

This portion of text reflects Quentin’s thoughts on Caddy’s marriage. The smell of roses instead of dogwood or milkweed betrays her lost virginity, and this quickly blends into Quentin’s desire to confess to his father. From there his mind jumps to his schooling at Harvard, a privilege for which he regularly feels guilty. Each piece that makes up his thought is something that would traditionally contribute to masculinity: the protection of his younger sister, the loss of his virginity, and a Harvard education. They are all, however, tainted by the concerns for his deteriorating Southern family as well as his obsession with his sister. His love becomes incestuous, his protection proves ineffectual, and his education becomes a waste. Although Quentin’s demise is not entirely based on his inability to achieve a desired masculinity, his powerlessness as a brother and as a Southern man certainly contributes to his suicide rationale.

In progressing on to the section based upon Jason Compson’s consciousness, one begins to see the split once again between the dominant and suppressed narratives. Among other characters, Jason’s masculinity is unabashedly misogynistic and working desperately towards hegemony. Though his attitude towards the world and humanity is nihilistic, he does not share the philosophical mind with his brother and his father. His personal viewpoint centers more on cynicism than actual meditative thought, and his chapter is therefore less cerebral than Quentin’s. Again, however, there are brief instances in which Jason’s narrative delves further into his consciousness than the other characters might perceive. The style of Faulkner’s novel allows the reader to see these moments of resistance. Jason’s various levels of thought add depth to his
character as well as to his masculinity. In the end, however, his effort to remain the chief force of authority and masculinity in the fallen Compson household results in his demise.

The most common assertions of Jason’s masculinity emerge in his disparaging remarks towards women. As a man trying to achieve honor and respect as head of his household, he most often aims comments at the product of his sister’s sins. His niece Quentin is the ever-present reminder of the crumbling Compson name. As she seemingly enacts a lifestyle worse than her mother’s, Jason continues to slur both relatives as well as the rest of their female counterparts. His outward remarks consist of stereotypes to degrade the entire sex, such as his reaction to a check for Quentin from Caddy: “Just like a woman. Six days late. Yet they try to make men believe that they’re capable of conducting a business. How long would a man that thought the first of the month came on the sixth last in business” (190). He generalizes Caddy’s shortcomings to the broader population of women, establishing his position in strict antithesis to them. He continues to make comments throughout the rest of his chapter which insult women and separate them clearly from his gender, such as he does when he says, simply, “Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say” (180). Or later, commenting on Caddy’s letter, he says: “I tore it up and burned it over the spittoon. I make it a rule never to keep a scrap of paper bearing a woman’s hand, and I never write them at all” (193). These remarks sound almost as if femaleness is an innate disease, and this furthers the binary thinking of gender traditionalists. His cynicism also shines through when he speaks about the women in his family. Rather than maintain a sort of Southern decorum, Jason slanders both Caddy and Quentin to the point of upsetting his mother. Though Mrs. Compson, herself, has little use for women who do not act like ladies, even Jason’s frankness is startling to her. As he says to his mother in attempting to discipline Quentin, “‘It’s your grandchild, which is more than any other grandparents it’s got can
say for certain”’ (196). And to Caddy, he suggests that promiscuity is not only lucrative, it is also hereditary: “And I know how you’ll get it,’ I says. ‘You’ll get it the same way you got her. And when she gets big enough…” (209). Jason’s nihilism shows a complete lack of faith in his entire family, but it centers upon the females who have aided in the family’s demise.

In another telling aspect of Jason’s masculinity, his consciousness and interactions with others show his need to be in control of money. Because he is the last man of the Compson household, he feels his business sense is indispensable to demanding respect. The hubris that affects so many Southern white men bears heavily on Jason, especially because his pride has been wounded through the many faults of his dysfunctional family. His attempts to appear a savvy and clever businessman tend to be asserted again and again, almost as if such a proof must be made first to Jason himself. “I says I reckon you’ll think twice before you deprive me of a job that was promised me. I was a kid then. I believed folks when they said they’d do things. I’ve learned better since. Besides, like I say I guess I don’t need any man’s help to get along I can stand on my own feet I always have” (206). This quotation speaks to the pride that has replaced Jason’s childish naïveté; the workings of the world on the Compson family have taught him never again to be optimistic. Similarly, they have taught him to rely on no one but himself. He asserts this again when talking about future business endeavors: “‘I reckon you’ll never be a slave to any business,’ he says. ‘Not unless it’s Jason Compson’s business,’ I says (210). Lastly, his ability to earn money is an essential piece to distinguishing himself from the other inhabitants of the Compson home, as he reminds his family that he is “man enough to keep that flour barrel full” (208). The independent pride in bread-winning establishes a great part of Jason’s masculinity as he attempts to pull himself up by the bootstraps from his sorry-looking household.
As stated, however, there is yet another layer to Jason Compson which acknowledges emotion and, ultimately, weakness. The confessions are drawn gradually, as though Jason is not able to admit the existence of his soul all at one time. Nevertheless, the reader glimpses into the heart of this beautifully crafted villain because of Faulkner’s gift of consciousness. First, Jason’s allusions to the prostitute Lorraine suggest that his blanket statements on women might not, in fact, include all women. He concedes that a relationship with a woman might be possible in saying, “I’d like to see the color of the man’s eyes that would speak disrespectful of any woman that was my friend it’s these dam good women that do it I’d like to see the good, church-going woman that’s half as square as Lorraine, whore or no whore” (246). His cynicism again emerges in talking about the façade of female propriety, and his kind words are betrayed by his foul language; however, one might call this a kernel of a compliment for Lorraine. And since she is a woman, if not a lady, we might accept this remark as evidence in the archeological dig for Jason Compson’s soul.

Later in the final section, Faulkner digs even deeper to revealing the innermost thoughts of this man’s consciousness. Here, as in the vulnerable cores of the other male characters, Jason portrays himself as weak and in need. Moreover, he seems to be conceding that women are the only ones who might both ultimately save or conquer him:

…he thought about Lorraine. He imagined himself in bed with her, only he was just lying beside her, pleading with her to help him, then he thought of the money again, and that he had been outwitted by a woman, a girl. If he could just believe it was the man who had robbed him. But to have been robbed of that which was to have compensated him for the lost job, which he had acquired through so much effort and risk, by the very symbol of the lost job itself, and worst of all, by a bitch of a girl. (307)

Here, Jason must admit first that young Quentin has outsmarted him and second, that he cannot help but wish he were in bed with Lorraine, the prostitute, who might help him. Out of this
comment, the reader might tease a number of ideas. First, in all of Jason’s speech about
Lorraine, he talks neither about love nor the act of making love. Caddy stains sex so horribly
that it cannot redeem itself, regardless of circumstances, in the minds of the Compson boys.

Secondly, the reader once again notices a continuation of the castration thread. Though
the words are not as graphic and literal as Quentin’s, this passage quite clearly speaks of Jason’s
loss of manhood. Upon reading the words “worst of all,” we understand that Jason has reached
an absolute low. Jason had previously alluded to the literal operation when reminiscing about
Benjy. “And what he’d think when they’d be undressing him and he’d happen to take a look at
himself and begin to cry like he’d do. But like I say they never did enough of that. I says I know
what you need you need what they did to Ben then you’d behave. And if you don’t know what
that was I says, ask Dilsey to tell you” (253). Here he is suggesting that more sterilization should
have taken place in his family, as it would have prevented the sexual wrongs which he and his
mother hold to be the root of the Compson demise. In essence, however, it shows another
connection between sex and violence for Jason. And in ultimately expressing his actual fear of
emasculcation, it shows that this statement of masculine bravado and aggression is simply a
façade for his fear. For all the ridicule of his brothers, Jason’s hubris and masculinity prove to be
just as vulnerable as those of an idiot and a neurotic.

In the end, however, Faulkner allows Jason to remain a villain. Though he has stripped
him of his pride, he does not rob him of his will to regain what is lost. Jason’s mind, though
weary, continues to work towards covering up the tracks that lead to his public humiliation.
Though Faulkner grants Jason a certain amount of susceptibility, he quickly turns him back into
a clever man who remembers the constant goal of dominance over women. After the brief lapse
into compassion for women, Jason quickly shifts to plotting “And more than that: he must see
them first, get the money back, then what they did would be of no importance to him, while otherwise the whole world would know that he, Jason Compson, had been robbed by Quentin, his niece, a bitch” (309). These words are very near the end of the novel as a whole, occurring in the last section which is not wholly attributed to any character’s singular consciousness. We are still privy to his thoughts, however, and all of his thinking and his actions point to his belief that there is nothing above the material world. Jason’s extreme form of Mr. Compson’s nihilism gains him little sympathy and keeps him aligned with infamy as the novel’s most detestable character.

There is, of course, a third Compson son. Maury, renamed Benjamin and called Benjy, tells his story through his distinctive consciousness in the first section. Because of the nature of the narrative, as well as the peculiarity of Benjy’s gendered consciousness, we will examine this section in a later portion of the paper.

Woolf: The Second Generation

As Faulkner creates sons who have been affected by the masculinity of their father, Woolf also draws direct connections between Mr. Ramsay and the young men in the novel. The sons (James and Andrew) and the apprentice figure (Charles Tansley) must negotiate and attempt to reconcile their masculinities with notions of childhood and the force of Mr. Ramsay. James as a child is filled with equal parts of extreme love towards his mother and extreme hatred towards his father. As he grows, however, he begins to recognize the separation between his father and the supposed tyrant whom he imagines incessantly to kill. Similarly, Charles Tansley displays the characteristics of Mr. Ramsay as he attempts to assert himself while simultaneously aching
for Mrs. Ramsay’s affection and praise. His masculinity also continues to interact with Lily Briscoe’s notions of gender, providing for a continuous dance of consciousness throughout the final chapters of the novel. Lastly, the young men tend to ascribe to the ideology of “men as mind, women as body;” they believe their worth lies in their intellectual and active work while the women’s worth lies in their beauty.

Of the Ramsays’ eight children, the number is evenly divided between boys and girls. Though Woolf offers descriptions of each child, only a few have recurring voices which offer insight to the gender constructions in the novel. For the sons, both the oldest and the youngest shed light onto the masculinities of their generation as well as the effect of their father on their thoughts and actions. Similarly, Charles Tansley acts as a member of the younger generation because of his position as Mr. Ramsay’s pupil.

In characterizing the oldest Ramsay son, Woolf ascribes attributes of intelligence and action to young Andrew. He is often pictured as the younger version of Mr. Ramsay, as the other characters constantly allude to his mental capacities. In Mr. Bankes’ mind, Andrew is the Ramsay child who has “brains.” He is the agent of explanation for Lily Briscoe in attempting to decipher the meaning of Mr. Ramsay’s books, as he uses idea of an empty kitchen table to explain “‘subject and object and the nature of reality’” (23). In his parents’ minds, Andrew is the subject of debate and is usually foiled against the beautiful daughter Prue:

He wished Andrew could be induced to work harder. He would lose every chance of a scholarship if he didn’t. ‘Oh, scholarships!’ she said. Mr. Ramsay thought her foolish for saying that about a serious thing like a scholarship. He should be very proud of Andrew if he got a scholarship, he said. She would be just as proud of him if he didn’t, she answered. (67)

In discussions such as this, Mr. Ramsay advocates the intelligence of his son while Mrs. Ramsay ensures her husband that Prue will surpass her beauty. In doing so, they ensure the worth of their
children to be based upon the notion of “men as mind, women as body.” Similarly, Woolf adds that “She liked him to believe in scholarships, and he liked her to be proud of Andrew whatever he did” (67). This, too, shows the gender constructions of the sympathetic mother and the assertive father. Mr. Ramsay is obviously concerned with the actions of his son, while Mrs. Ramsay is the blindly proud of whatever Andrew might achieve. Each, however, is satisfied with the other’s view and recognizes the interdependence of their roles.

Moving into Andrew’s mind, the reader catches only glimpses of thought. During the walk to the beach, Woolf grants voice to Andrew’s musings. In these thoughts, Andrew shows himself to have masculine prejudices towards women as well as some ideas that might defy tradition. In observing Minta Doyle, he shows a bit of both sides: “He liked her rashness, but he saw that it would not do—she would kill herself in some idiotic way one of these days” (74). He admits an attraction to this girl who “was rather a good walker…wore more sensible clothes than most women…very short skirts and black knickerbockers,” and thereby helps to go against traditional femininity. He adds, however, that this type of woman “would not do” and thereby reasserts the hegemonic masculinity which subordinates all other notions of gender. He also notes after she has lost her brooch that “she had no control over her emotion…Women hadn’t” (77). Andrew’s thoughts are also mixed with the courtship of Minta and Paul, and therefore must be considered against the tricky background of romantic love. Like many male characters, Andrew seems torn at times between repulsion and fascination with the opposite gender. This might also be a reflection of his father, as Mr. Ramsay likewise displays a vacillating position towards women in his life.

The foremost aspect of Andrew’s masculinity, however, is his intelligence in his youth and his action as an adult. During the “Time Passes,” Woolf gives us this piece of information in
brackets: “[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous]” (133). Having perhaps moved on from a scholarship hopeful to a sacrificed soldier, Andrew Ramsay might have embodied both notions of his father’s goal of hegemonic masculinity. Though we as readers have little more evidence that his actions were dictated by his father, there seems to be a direct line between the two men.

If Mr. Ramsay’s effect on Andrew is questionable, the impact on his youngest son is unmistakably obvious. From the onset of the novel when James Ramsay is only six years old, his response to his mother’s love and his father’s dominance provokes violent thoughts which carry on throughout his young life. (The feelings between Mrs. Ramsay and James are mutual, she calls him “the most gifted, the most sensitive of her children” (58).) The plot of the novel itself revolves around the possibility of sailing to the Lighthouse. When Mrs. Ramsay responds to James’ question with words of optimism, his thoughts show his excitement: “To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy, as if it were settled, the expedition were bound to take place, and the wonder to which he had looked forward, for years and years it seemed, was, after a night’s darkness and a day’s sail, within touch” (3). When Mr. Ramsay enters the discussion, however, his obligation to truth and reason shatters the dreams of his young son and provokes particularly violent thoughts: “Had there been an axe handy, or a poker, any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father’s breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it” (4). Along with the murderous thoughts of his father, young James also includes a blank comparison of his parents that Mrs. Ramsay is “ten thousand times better in every way than” her husband (4). Though these extreme emotions from such a young boy might immediately point to Freudian readings, James’ emotions are generalized to the other Ramsay children and also
continue to develop with rational and justifying reasons. Woolf writes that “Such were the extremes of emotion that Mr. Ramsay excited in his children’s breasts by his mere presence,” indicating that all of the eight thought similarly if not as actively as James (4). The notions of hate continue throughout the rest of the first chapter, and James seems to detest all that creates Mr. Ramsay’s masculinity:

…he hated him for interrupting them; he hated him for the exaltation and sublimity of his gestures; for the magnificence of his head; for his exactingness and egotism (for there he stood, commanding them to attend to him); but most of all he hated the twang and twitter of his father’s emotion which, vibrating round them, disturbed the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relations with his mother. (36)

Here, also, the layers of narrative become obvious as Woolf creates James’ consciousness. Though this reasoning for James’ abhorrence of his father might be completely fitting with the six year old mind, the language and style are not. Regardless, this is certainly a portion of James’ thoughts that is kept in private.

When James finally succeeds in visiting the Lighthouse, the ten additional years have ironically both hardened his resolve and morphed him into another version of Mr. Ramsay’s masculinity. He and his sister Cam, having been forced to sail with their father as Lily is forced to sympathize, silently vow “to stand by each other and carry out the great compact –to resist tyranny to the death” (163). They wish for Mr. Ramsay’s wishes to be thwarted, just as he had so carelessly ruined James’ dreams by saying “It won’t be fine” (4). It seems, in fact, that a successful trip to the Lighthouse would bruise James’ newly masculine ego equally to that experience of childish frustration. And in this, we observe, the similarities between father and son begin to emerge.

In moving towards the Lighthouse, James aims to steer the tenacity of their compact as firmly as he guides the boat. As Mr. Ramsay questions Cam and begins conversation, James
worries that “She’ll give way” (168). Indeed, her mind is wavering more freely than her broth er’s, but he decides in the end that “she won’t give way…she’s different” (169). Cam’s 
thoughts themselves shed light on the forces she feels from both Mr. Ramsay and James,
suggesting a likeness between those whom James would staunchly call opposites.

…James the lawgiver, with the tablets of eternal wisdom laid open on his knee (his 
hand on the tiller had become symbolical to her), said, Resist him. Fight him. He said 
so rightly; justly. For they must fight tyranny to the death, she thought. Of all human 
qualities she reverenced justice most. Her brother was most god-like, her father most 
suppliant. And to which did she yield, she thought, sitting between them… (168).

Despite James’ attempts to ally himself with his sister, her femininity becomes subordinate to the 
masculinity shared by father and son. Both men are begging support from her, regardless of their 
angles and of whether or not they realize it.

James does come to awareness, however, as his mind once more prepares to “take a knife 
and strike him to the heart” (184). The feelings of jealous love for his mother and hatred towards 
his father’s sharp speech culminate near the end of the finally realized voyage. Woolf again 
shows his inner workings by stating:

Only now, as he grew older, and sat staring at his father in an impotent rage, it was not 
him, that old man reading, whom he wanted to kill, but it was the thing that descended 
on him—without his knowing it perhaps: that fierce sudden black-winged harpy, with 
its talons and its beak all cold and hard, that struck and struck at you… and then made 
off, and there he was again, an old man, very sad, reading his book (184).

Here, for the first time, it seems as if James acknowledges that his hatred is not directed towards 
his father’s nature but to the external force which forms his father. He is also admitting that his 
father might not even be aware of such a force, and is therefore a victim himself. Keeping with 
the established argument of gender, perhaps James is conceding to the notion that his father’s 
masculinity is constructed and is doomed to a perpetual reach towards hegemony. It is, of 
course, a violent metaphor which characterizes societal pressures as a “black-winged harpy.”
This is fitting, however, as a descriptor from James the “Ruthless” or the “Sullen,” a victim of hegemony himself (22, 148).

Continuing on in James’ soliloquy, he drifts closer and closer to the truth until he finally arrives at the perception that he and his father are not as unalike as he would prefer to think. He muses that there “was a waste of snow and rock very lonely and austere; and there he had come to feel, quite often lately, when his father said something or did something which surprised the others, there were two pairs of footprints only; his own and his father’s. They alone knew each other” (185). This statement solidifies James’ introspection, and signifies a moment at which he has also found a “core.” It is a central, personal place in his consciousness which has certainly been suppressed until this moment in his life.

Aligning this instance with the other suppressed narratives is difficult, however, as James’ use of concealed opposition differs from other males. Though his character has always shown resistance, it has been directly aimed at his father and not necessarily at masculinity. While he viewed his actions as being antagonistic towards Mr. Ramsay, others could view him as his father’s shadow. In thinking that “his father never praised him,” James is desperately wishing for the same sympathy that negatively characterizes Mr. Ramsay. And though his acknowledgement is ambiguous, Cam believes he is finally soothed when Mr. Ramsay “said, triumphantly: ‘Well done!’ James had steered them like a born sailor” (206). In this, he lays down his defiance and falls more easily in line with his own nature, even if it might be a version of his father.

Aside from Mr. Ramsay’s direct relations, his masculinity also has an effect on “the atheist” Charles Tansley. As seen in previous allusions, Charles Tansley’s interactions with Mrs. Ramsay are somewhat similar to the moments when she sympathizes with her husband. Just as
this triangle demonstrates the dependence of gender construction on interaction, so will
Tansley’s character have a significant impact on Lily Briscoe.

In contrast to James, Charles Tansley is perhaps Mr. Ramsay’s most willing protégé. As
stated, the sympathy which he seeks and receives from Mrs. Ramsay bolsters and heals him
when he proves to be disagreeable to the children. As with their reaction to Mr. Ramsay, they
did not like Charles Tansley because of his nature, which might also be characterized as
“tyrannical:”

It was him – his point of view. When they talked about something interesting, people,
music, history, anything, even said it was a fine evening so why not sit out of doors,
then what they complained of about Charles Tansley was that until he had turned the
whole thing round and made it somehow reflect himself and disparage them – he was
not satisfied. (8)

When Mr. Ramsay had said “‘It won’t be fine,’” and irrevocably damaged his son’s optimism,
Tansley dug in deeper with “‘It’s due west’…That is to say, the wind blew from the worst
possible direction for landing at the Lighthouse” (5). His mind works similarly to Mr. Ramsay,
but he lacks the “masculine insurance” of a beautiful wife, a large family, and the social wisdom
which comes with age.5 Therefore, Charles Tansley’s insistence on displaying his masculine
intelligence and affinity for truth is asserted to the point of obnoxiousness.

More than his general social inefficacy, Tansley’s attitudes towards women are similarly
odious and perhaps even less subtle than Mr. Ramsay’s. Though it will be discussed in greater
detail during the analysis of Lily Briscoe, Charles Tansley’s most resounding quotation is his
snide “‘whispering in [Lily’s] ear, ‘Women can’t paint, women can’t write…”’ (48). The reader
becomes unsure when this remark was actually uttered, but its power carries on with Lily
throughout the rest of the novel. Woolf also shows his suppressed narrative at the dinner table,

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during the meal at which many consciousnesses are dancing with each other: “They did nothing but talk, talk, talk, eat, eat, eat. It was the women’s fault. Women made civilization impossible with all their ‘charm,’ all their silliness” (85). Ironically, one of the characteristics which draws Mr. Ramsay to women is this very “extraordinary charm” which Tansley detests (167).

Attempting to follow Mr. Ramsay’s large philosophical footprints with little grace or maturity, Charles Tansley becomes intolerable to most of the characters around him. Obvious to everyone but him, his obnoxious behavior is truly a symptom of a well-rooted inferiority complex. As he strives to achieve any sort of dominant masculinity, he must figuratively put down and climb onto anyone who might challenge his way. And given his loathsome and sycophantic nature, there are many challengers among his acquaintances.

The Ramsay daughters also have carefully shaped femininities and owe much of this construction to their mother. As young girls, it seems as though the attitude towards strict gender roles is looser in the Ramsay household. In Mrs. Ramsay’s mind, Cam and James are paired together as “demons of wickedness, angels of delight” whom “she would have liked to keep for ever just as they were” (58). Mr. Bankes also observes, “She was wild and fierce. She would not “give a flower to the gentleman” as the nursemaid told her. No! no! no! she would not! She clenched her fist. She stamped. And Mr. Bankes felt aged and saddened and somehow put into the wrong by her about his friendship” (21). Similarly, Nancy is paired with her brother Roger as “wild creatures…scampering about over the country all day long” (58). During their walk on the beach, Nancy entertains herself by acting “like God himself” (75). She “cast vast clouds over this tiny world by holding her hand against the sun, and so brought darkness and desolation…to millions of ignorant and innocent creatures, and then took her hand away suddenly and let the
sun stream down” (75). Aside from the boyish connotations attached to playing with creatures, Nancy’s assumption of power in this section is anything but traditional femininity.

As they advance in age, however, one might say that the reigns of Mrs. Ramsay (as well as society, at large) tighten on the girls as to how they should form their femininity. Even in their youth, the emphasis for Prue and Rose is placed on their beauty or lack thereof. “Prue the fair” is “a perfect angel with the others, and sometimes now, at night especially, she took one’s breath away with her beauty” (22, 58). And in the same discussion of Andrew’s scholarship potential, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay discuss Prue’s prettiness: “Prue was going to be far more beautiful than she was, said Mrs. Ramsay. He saw no trace of it, said Mr. Ramsay. ‘Well, then, look tonight,’ said Mrs. Ramsay. They paused” (67). As stated, this pairing suggests that Prue’s aptitude lies in her physical appearance while Andrew might depend on his mind. Similarly, in her long description of all the children, Mrs. Ramsay must excuse Rose for a physical flaw: “As for Rose, her mouth was too big, but she had a wonderful gift with her hands. If they had charades, Rose made the dresses; made everything; liked best arranging tables, flowers, anything” (58). This aptitude for creating loveliness and cohesion is also traditionally feminine, and speaks to Mrs. Ramsay’s similar capabilities. Still, it must be noted that Rose’s mouth takes her away from conventional beauty and she is therefore not remarked upon nearly as often.

The girls do have a suppressed effort to resist, even though their inner narratives as a group are less featured. In one instance, the minds of the three older girls combine to share defiant thoughts against the femininity of their mother:

She was now formidable to behold, and it was only in silence, looking up from their plates, after she had spoken so severely about Charles Tansley, that her daughters, Prue, Nancy, Rose—could sport with infidel ideas which they had brewed for themselves of a life different from hers; in Paris, perhaps; a wilder life; not always taking care of some man or other; for there was in all their minds a mute questioning of deference and chivalry… (6)
Here, they reject Mrs. Ramsay’s protection of the opposite sex and dream of creating different futures for themselves. Of course, some of their prospects have come to fruition by the novel’s close and the reader might weigh these resistant thoughts against actuality. Sadly, in “Time Passes” we learn another development from Woolf’s bracketed prose: “[Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said, everything, they said, had promised so well]” (132). Therefore, the two children with the most gendered potential have fallen victim to similarly gendered deaths: gifted Andrew to masculine war and beautiful Prue to feminine childbirth. This maneuver is perhaps a piece of Woolf’s own suppressed narrative showing through to pass judgment on convention. Or, it might also be an attempt to show that death and transience completely efface the temporary social construct of gender. Masculinity and femininity, like life, are fleeting in the grand scheme. In this reading, Nature’s power moves to the forefront; this is an aspect of Woolf’s writing which we will examine more thoroughly later.

After ten years, the reader might also detect changes in Cam and Nancy. Always the wild adventurer, Nancy’s prime role in the final chapter is to gather the parcels to be sent to the Lighthouse. After forgetting to order sandwiches and suffering the frustration of Mr. Ramsay, Woolf writes that “Now Nancy burst in, and asked, looking round the room, in a queer half dazed, half desperate way, ‘What does one send to the Lighthouse?’ as if she were forcing herself to do what she despaired of ever being able to do” (146). Here, Woolf implicitly shows the impact of Mrs. Ramsay’s absence. The need for domestic leadership eclipses Nancy’s daring nature as she attempts to think and act as her mother would have. Despite her best efforts, Cam also appears to have grown up into a young woman who is susceptible to Mr. Ramsay’s sympathy. Though she and James have formed an alliance against tyranny, Cam’s thoughts
while in the boat tend to drift toward Mr. Ramsay in a positive attitude: “…and Cam thought, feeling proud of him without knowing quite why, had he been there he would have launched the lifeboat, he would have reached the wreck, Cam thought. He was so brave, he was so adventurous, Cam thought. But she remembered. There was the compact…” (165). As stated, Cam might blame her precarious position entirely on her sex. She has outgrown the period of childhood where androgynous traits were acceptable, and she is obliged to embody femininity and the reconciliatory ghost of her mother. Being a young woman, she must “yield” to one of the men. How different this character is from the young girl who “clenched her fist” and “stamped” her feet in defiance of pleasing the opposite sex.

Lastly, Lily Briscoe also acts as a member of the second generation in the shadow of Mrs. Ramsay. Because she is not directly related to the Ramsays, Lily has a particular perspective on the family as a whole. She is perhaps the most aware character with respect to gender, as her mind constantly muses on the contradictions and disparities in the relationships of those around her. Like others in the novel, Lily displays various levels of consciousness which battle against one another in an effort to achieve a cohesive essence. She respects Mrs. Ramsay’s beauty and femininity but also rejects the traditional conventions which govern women. She asserts herself creatively as an artist but is also dissuaded by the misogynistic taunts of Charles Tansley. And yet, in the end, Lily’s realization of both her self and her work forms her into the truest and most perceptive character in the novel. Though her transformation should be considered in the greater scope of character personality, her own attention to gender must also be acknowledged. Therefore, Lily Briscoe’s femininity is established ultimately as individual and unconventional; and most importantly, she comes to be satisfied with herself.
We must first begin with Lily’s respect and admiration for Mrs. Ramsay. Though there are obvious qualms which arise throughout the first chapter, Lily’s warm feelings towards Mrs. Ramsay are all-important to much of her inner conflict. Because of her age, Lily constitutes the nether generation between Mrs. Ramsay and her children. She is single and in her mid-thirties at the opening of the novel, and Mrs. Ramsay describes her while sitting as Lily’s portrait subject: “With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face, she would never marry; one could not take her painting very seriously; she was an independent little creature, and Mrs. Ramsay liked her for it” (17). Lily’s feelings toward Mrs. Ramsay are even more complimentary; she admires Mrs. Ramsay’s presence as well as her ability to create an atmosphere of beauty for all the children and guests. Her reverence of Mrs. Ramsay only increases while she struggles with her own imagination, and she must “control her impulse to fling herself (thank Heaven she has always resisted so far) at Mrs. Ramsay’s knee and say to her—but what could one say to her? ‘I’m in love with you?’ No, that was not true. ‘I’m in love with this all,’ waving her hand at the hedge, at the house, at the children” (19). Lily’s use of the word “love” in this instance is notable because of its sparing usage by the other characters in the novel. At times, she truly adopts Mrs. Ramsay as a mother-figure as well as an exemplary woman. This esteem, along with a genuine adoration for “this all,” confuse her course towards independence and originality.

In another formation of conflict, Lily must also combat various forces in an effort to establish herself as an artist. In this aspect of her mind, Lily feels hindered by the notions of femininity to which Mrs. Ramsay ascribes. As stated, despite her actual age, Lily is depicted as a member of the second generation. Though she is thirty-four at the opening of the novel, Woolf likens her to another of Mrs. Ramsay’s daughters. Mrs. Ramsay acknowledges Lily’s quirks but ultimately wishes for her to also lead a traditional life. Because she ascribes to conventional
femininity in her child rearing, Mrs. Ramsay perceives Lily’s painting as a liminal threat—
innocuous only because “one could not take [it] very seriously” (17). Though Mrs. Ramsay has
a taste and an eye for aesthetic creation, she would not be so modern as to call herself an “artist.”
Lily, however, yearns to bear this label as an original and consequential being; this, therefore, is
an act of resistance.

Lily also lacks a confidence in herself, a fact which might also be related to the subtle
pressures of Mrs. Ramsay. She notes that there is a moment between conception and
accomplishment where her ideas become muddled and confused: “She could see it so clearly, so
commandingly, when she looked: it was when she took her brush in hand that the whole thing
changed. It was in that moment’s flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set
on her who often brought her to the verge of tears and made this passage...as dreadful as any
down a dark passage for a child” (19). This thought certainly speaks to femininity because of its
birth imagery. Woolf insinuates that Lily’s work is her progeny; it is the veritable offspring of a
single woman, and this negates Mrs. Ramsay’s opinion that “an unmarried woman has missed
the best of life” (49). Beyond this, one might also say that the conception is likened to Mrs.
Ramsay’s core, as it is protected by its invisibility. Once Lily attempts to show this core on
canvas, she is perhaps frightened by the repercussions of exposing the inner-most self which we
as readers are privy to see in her stream of consciousness. This is an important distinction
between Lily and Mrs. Ramsay; despite both women’s apprehensions about the revelations of
their individual cores, Lily yearns to bring light into her wedge of darkness in the form of active
creation. Still, the forces of convention as well as possible criticism force Lily back into
meekness as she attempts to ford her way into a durable autonomy: “…as she began to
paint…there forced themselves upon her other things, her own inadequacy, her insignificance...”
Though there is never an actual dialogue between consciousnesses, Woolf shows that Lily is in fact quite aware of Mrs. Ramsay’s thoughts that her work would not be taken seriously. Woolf therefore exhibits the communication of attitude and its weighty effects by simply showing her readers the workings of two minds. Without stream of consciousness and Woolf’s various narrative levels, one could not see the inner turmoil caused in Lily by Mrs. Ramsay’s seemingly off-handed thought. This proves that it is not only hegemonic masculinity which shapes all subordinated gender categories, but that intra-gender demands are equally influential among femininities as well.

There is certainly an aspect of this hindering force which does, however, include interaction with masculinity. We have already noted the insidious nature of Charles Tansley, who employs hegemonic attitudes in an effort to manufacture a superior masculinity. Because of the multiple narratives, we as readers suspect Tansley’s motives to be guided by a specific inferiority complex. In the course of the dominant narrative, however, it appears more likely that he is simply hateful. During a particular crisis in Lily’s mind, she cites a quotation from Charles Tansley: “And it would never be seen, never be hung even, and there was Mr. Tansley whispering in her ear, ‘Women can’t paint, women can’t write…’” (48). As stated, there is not an explicit reference to the timing or actual occurrence of the original insult. For all we know, Tansley may not have even uttered the words out loud. Nevertheless, the quotation’s uncertain genesis highlights its power to haunt Lily Briscoe; it is doubtful in this setting that Tansley would be allowed to hiss such slander into her ear, but it is a powerful portrayal of a sort of demon on Lily’s shoulder. Tansley’s comment is the epitome of hegemonic misogyny, denouncing women’s minds and mental faculties. Though we have clearly seen this attitude manifested by both Tansley and Mr. Ramsay, the effect on Lily seems to have the most
damaging impact. It works as a motif in Lily’s mind, surfacing at her most vulnerable times and fueling her continuous struggle with her vision.

Finally, the notion of independence is another area with which Lily and Mrs. Ramsay disagree. Though she may admire the aspects of Mrs. Ramsay’s femininity which comfort the mood of the summer house, she tends to oppose the matriarch’s opinions on men and women. Still in the opening chapter, Lily’s mind repeats the words of Mrs. Ramsay:

…that she must, Minta must, they all must marry, since in the whole world whatever laurels might be tossed to her (but Mrs. Ramsay cared not a fig for her painting), or triumphs won by her (probably Mrs. Ramsay had had her share of those), and here she saddened, darkened, and came back to her chair, there could be no disputing this: an unmarried woman (she lightly took her hand for a moment), an unmarried woman has missed the best of life. (49)

We as readers are only aware of this conversation as it occurs in Lily’s mind, unsure of its actual existence. Even Lily’s reaction has no evidence of actual utterance: “Oh, but, Lily would say, there was her father; her home; even, had she dared to say it, her painting. But all this seemed so little, so virginal, against the other” (50). Lily’s immediate response to Mrs. Ramsay’s ideas on marriage is decidedly resistant, but it lacks the confidence of actual independence. Aside from this, there is also an interesting moment wherein Lily defines marriage by her singular view of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. While speaking with Mr. Bankes, she notices the couple observing their children and thinks, “So that is marriage, Lily thought, a man and a woman looking at a girl throwing a ball. That is what Mrs. Ramsay tried to tell me the other night, she thought” (72). The view, for Lily, succeeds in “making them symbolical, making them representative…made them in the dusk standing…the symbols of marriage, husband and wife” (72). Here, one might pause and notice the trait in Lily which invests such a still-life with incredible weight of meaning; to some, this is the inherent characteristic of an artist and speaks to her actual abilities. Just after this, however, she feels “a sense of things having been blown apart, of space, of
irresponsibility…(for it seemed as if solidity had vanished altogether)” (73). This is not only salient because of its comparison to her previous losses of vision, and it also establishes a precarious view of marriage in her mind. The Ramsays, to her, are the definitions of marriage; yet even this example holds connotations which are vulnerable to destruction.

Later at the dinner party, Lily’s mind is also concerned with the femininity which Mrs. Ramsay embodies. She first comments silently on Mrs. Ramsay’s sympathetic leanings toward Charles Tansley, “for that was true of Mrs. Ramsay—she pitied men always as if they lacked something—women never, as if they had something” (85). Implicitly, the reader understands that this is not a notion with which Lily agrees. The pity also becomes translated into a “code” for Lily:

There is a code of behaviour, she knew, whose seventh article (it may be) says that on occasions of this sort it behooves the woman, whatever her own occupation may be, to go to the help of the young man opposite so that he may expose and relieve the thigh bones, the ribs, of his vanity, of his urgent desire to assert himself; as indeed it is their duty, she reflected, in her old maidenly fairness, to help us, suppose the Tube were to burst into flames. (91)

While the dinner party presents Lily with an opportunity to perform such an ironic rescue, her previous history with Charles Tansley and her independent mind prompt her to act differently. She is coerced, however, by Mrs. Ramsay’s warning eyes alone, and “…of course for the hundred and fiftieth time Lily Briscoe had to renounce the experiment—what happens if one is not nice to that young man there—and be nice” (92). Again, the interaction between Lily and Mrs. Ramsay proves to have as much (if not more) impact on Lily’s femininity as the exchanges with Charles Tansley. This, once again, emphasizes the trickle-down effect of hegemony from dominant to subjugated, even within femininity.

Just after this episode at the dinner party, Lily thinks critically about personal connections and the meaning among them. Woolf endows Lily with an earnest voice, burdening her with the
responsibility of dissecting relationships and womanly desire. On desire, Lily states the following: “…if you asked nine people out of ten they would say they wanted nothing but this—love; while the women, judging from her own experience, would all the time be feeling, This is not what we want; there is nothing more tedious, puerile, and inhumane than this; yet it is also beautiful and necessary” (103). This perfect paradox is prefaced with a short statement on the continuation of her inner conflicts, a characteristic to which she feels personally vulnerable. She thinks, “Such was the complexity of things. For what happened to her, especially staying with the Ramsays, was to be made to feel violently two opposite things at the same time” (102). The opposing thoughts seem to live simultaneously, if not convivially, in Lily’s mind. She agrees and disagrees with both attitudes of women towards love, and at this point in her life she is not able to hierarchize them. Still, the amount of thought dedicated to the subject is notable, as are her inner pleas for enlightenment. Many other characters are simply self-absorbed, or in Mrs. Ramsay’s case, concerned with the result of cohesion without considering its detailed and complicated workings. This is not to say that Mrs. Ramsay’s task is idle in comparison to Lily’s; it only shows their different levels of maturation as well as the particular type of realism which haunts women less beautiful than Mrs. Ramsay.

Returning to the subject of interpersonal ties, Lily contemplates that “She would never know him. He would never know her. Human relations were all like that, she thought, and the worst (if it had not been for Mr. Bankes) were between men and women. Inevitably these were extremely insincere, she thought’” (92). She is speaking about Charles Tansley with perhaps particular sourness, but the thought is nonetheless significant. Though bleak, it certainly speaks to her independence. It also rings with meaning in the larger context of Woolf’s style. So much of our emphasis on the suppressed narratives provided by stream of consciousness is to assert the
interactions of genders; yet, if none of these cores were even somewhat revealed, one would agree with Lily at the extreme insincerity of all relations. One would hope that this is not Woolf’s intended message, and we might therefore assume that her stream of consciousness style does allow for the mixing of narratives much like life itself. Though Mrs. Ramsay’s core of darkness is invisible to her husband, there might yet be hope for the appreciation of Lily’s developing essence.

After viewing this struggling character throughout the first chapter, we are re-acquainted with Lily at age forty-four in the final segment of the novel. Though she eventually comes to peace with her vision and with her self, there continue to be shadows of torment in her mind. Again, the same subjects of gender, art, and Mrs. Ramsay come to the forefront of Lily’s consciousness in “The Lighthouse.” Though Mrs. Ramsay has passed away, her absence creates a force nearly as strong as when she was alive. Earlier, we noted that Lily becomes angry at herself and at Mr. Ramsay for forcing her into the sympathetic female role. She also, however, acknowledges a third source of rage:

Really, she was angry with Mrs. Ramsay. With the brush slightly trembling in her fingers she looked at the hedge, the step, the wall. It was all Mrs. Ramsay’s doing. She was dead. Here was Lily, at forty-four, wasting her time, unable to do a thing, standing there, playing at painting, playing at the one thing one did not play at, and it was all Mrs. Ramsay’s fault. She was dead. The step where she used to sit was empty. She was dead. (149)

Perhaps this is Lily’s grief, showing itself in irritation at Mrs. Ramsay’s obvious absence from their life at the summer home. She may be annoyed that she is the new source of feminine sympathy for the widower, as she has thus far refused to gain any experiential knowledge on the subject. Or perhaps she is in angst simply because she has not achieved, at forty-four, all that she had aimed for herself. More than that, she was never able to show a self-perceived vision of success to the woman she both praised and resented. In sum, the sadness for Lily here is
overarching and tragic; and yet, though trembling, she continues to hold the brush in her hand. This moment of anguish is still hopeful, and Lily will reach her realization in spite of the grief she feels now.

As Lily returns to her painting in this final chapter, her consciousness shows trace similarities to Mrs. Ramsay’s thoughts on the wedge-shaped core of darkness. Once again confronting the frightening limbo between Lily’s conception and her work, Woolf tells us that “before she exchanged the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting she had a few moments of nakedness when she seemed like an unborn soul, a soul reft of body, hesitating on some windy pinnacle and exposed without protection to all the blasts of doubt” (158). Certainly, this is more violent than “resting on a platform of stability,” as Mrs. Ramsay does as the wedge-shaped core (63). Both share, however, a being which is separated from the greater surroundings. Whether stripped of “all the being and the doing” or “personality” or a “body,” each woman is the essential form of herself (63, 158). To Mrs. Ramsay, this is comforting; to Lily Briscoe, a source of terror. Yet, she continues painting, “as if some juice necessary for the lubrication of her faculties were spontaneously squirted”:

Certainly she was losing consciousness of outer things. And as she lost consciousness of outer things, and her name and her personality and her appearance, and whether Mr. Carmichael was there or not, her mind kept throwing up from its depths, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space, while she modeled it with greens and blues. (159)

Here, the nakedness takes on a more positive notion of self. She pares herself down only to her conception, and without the “outer things,” she no longer senses the combative forces with which she had fought for so long. Lily’s core, like that of Mrs. Ramsay, becomes more of a location of “summoning together” than of a “dark passage” (63, 19). And in that way, perhaps her femininity is also coming into its own. She has resisted with trepidation thus far, and now she is
progressing regardless of the conventional constraints which have worked to keep her on the traditional path. Similarly, this imagery is noticeably connected to the gendered symbol of a fountain which was previously used to describe Mrs. Ramsay. Just before Mr. Ramsay arrives to demand sympathy from his wife, Woolf describes the woman as:

…a rain of energy, a column of spray, looking at the same time animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating (quietly though she sat, taking up her stocking again), and into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare. (37)

Here, Woolf feminizes creativity by equating it with fertility. At the same time, she places masculinity in a contrasting position when she symbolically rapes the imagery with “the fatal sterility of the male.” Sexually, this is provocative: a fertile femininity cannot conceive when confronted with a “barren and bare” masculinity. We have already noted a similar challenge, as Lily attempts to give birth to her creativity as a single woman. Therefore, Lily must negotiate these paradoxes by somehow engaging both genders to fully realize her creation. This implication of androgyny will also become more substantial in viewing Woolf herself as a creative force.

Along with these obstacles, Lily also continues to have fears. Even if she succeeds in finishing the ten-year-old painting, what will become of it? If it is not museum-worthy, what is the point in creating it? She asks, “Why then did she do it? She looked at the canvas, lightly scored with running lines. It would be hung in the servants’ bedrooms. It would be rolled up and stuffed under a sofa” (158). This fear of mediocrity seems comparable to her previous statement about being near the Ramsays; she has been so impressed with the greatness of this family that she cannot bear to be average. Again, she feels affected by the statements of the past: “What was the good of doing it then, and she heard some voice saying she couldn’t paint, saying
she couldn’t create, as if she were caught up in one of those habitual currents in which after a certain time experience forms in the mind, so that one repeats words without being aware any longer who originally spoke them” (158). She forgets Tansley and even his original comment, but the sting is obviously still there. Her memory of indistinct “voices” and the altering of “women can’t write” to “she couldn’t create” suggest that Tansley is no longer the significant voice in her head. Therefore, one might say that Lily’s efforts to reconcile her thoughts on Mrs. Ramsay will help establish her acceptance. She seems to accomplish this as she looks at the failed couple which Mrs. Ramsay had so delighted in matching:

Mrs. Ramsay has faded and gone, she thought. We can over-ride her wishes, improve away her limited, old-fashioned ideas. She recedes further and further from us. Mockingly she seemed to see her there at the end of the corridor of years saying, of all incongruous things, “Marry, marry!” (sitting very upright in the morning with the birds beginning to cheep in the garden outside). And one would have to say to her, It has all gone against your wishes. They’re happy like that; I’m happy like this. Life has changed completely… Lily, standing there…triumphed over Mrs. Ramsay. (175)

Lily’s attitude on Mrs. Ramsay’s absence has therefore shifted from grief to a sort of release. She understands that time not only brings healing, it also brings progress; she is now comfortable in labeling Mrs. Ramsay’s ways as “limited, old-fashioned.” More than this, she sees someone (is it herself? We do not know) standing up to these conventions and saying, simply: No. This moment of clarity does not absolutely efface the years in which Lily stood in awe of Mrs. Ramsay; on the contrary, we must continue to consider the two impressions together. Now, however, Lily can look back at the past and say: that was then, this is now, and this will be the future. Her thoughts on Mrs. Ramsay have become organized as she asserts her own opinions to the woman’s ghost as well as to herself. And finally, the sites of resistance which had formerly been hesitant and meek are now potent and visible.
The final chapter shows a clear development for Lily Briscoe in each of the aspects of her mind which had troubled her in the first chapter. She has overcome the obstacle which Mrs. Ramsay had presented both in person and in memory. She has stripped herself of the constructs which muddled her vision between its conception and its creation. One might even say that she has broached the topic of philosophy as she has grown up in the past ten years: “the general question which was apt to particularise itself at such moments as these, when she released faculties that had been on the strain, stood over her, paused over her, darkened over her. What is the meaning of life?” (161). Though she certainly does not “reach Z” after asking this question, she proves to herself that not only can women paint, they can also think. This is especially noteworthy as she has broached the boundary of masculine thought, forging the androgynous creativity which we had previously established as necessary for her ability to create. Lastly, she completes her work and her realization with a final brush-stroke and an acceptance of her painting’s worth. While watching the remaining Ramsays finally reach the Lighthouse, she makes her mark:

Quickly, as if she were recalled by something over there, she turned to her canvas. There it was—her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? She asked herself, taking up her brush again. She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (208)

Just as Mr. Ramsay reaches one version of “R” or “Z” upon landing at the lighthouse, so Lily seems to meld the fountain and brass imagery together. Both male and female reach climax separately, keeping with the notion that fertile creativity might actually sprout from the individual genders. She ends with satisfaction, acknowledging that her painting is not “great” by any standards but her own. The fatigue and the clarity of vision also signify a moment beyond
the painting’s completion, as she has truly finished the creation of her Self. The new-found confidence and pleasure in her being and her vision are the most momentous accomplishments here, as she has acknowledged and defied all the forces which have caused her to doubt her vision. Lily’s femininity, therefore, is also an original masterpiece.

Beyond the passages which characterize Lily in her quest for an independent vision, much of her suppressed narrative also alludes to the use of Woolf’s style in achieving a singular effect. Though we are, of course, reading her thoughts with specific intentions, many of Lily’s words highlight the benefits of stream of consciousness in perceiving the workings of gender both in literature and in these novels. As she looks at the Ramsays while they sail, she muses: “so much depends, she thought, upon distance: whether people are near us or far from us; for her feeling for Mr. Ramsay changed as he sailed further and further across the bay. It seemed to be elongated, stretched out; he seemed to become more and more remote” (191). Though relatively oblique, one might use this to describe the interactions of characters and the bearing which this interaction has on gender. The distance seems to ease the difficulty of human relations for Lily, both in its physical manifestation and in its theoretical counterpart: time. The force of each interaction becomes diluted with an added amount of distance, and this seems relevant to each of the characters mentioned. Proximity, therefore, must be accounted for when considering the consciousnesses of the characters with respect to each other. Again, it is somewhat elusive, but this proximity seems to be something which both Woolf and Lily ask us as readers to keep in mind.

Lily again supports our view that the multiple narrative layers assist us in understanding characters to the fullest. In developing our theories on each character’s construction, we have used the forces shown in various consciousnesses to create composite views of masculinity and
femininity. Lily echoes this sentiment when describing the desperate need for perspective when attempting to understand a person. Specifically, she wishes for a number of views on Mrs. Ramsay, as this might be the only way to appreciate the woman fully: “One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought. Among them, must be one that was stone blind to her beauty” (198). Though it is impossible for Lily to attain this omniscience, we as readers can best understand Mrs. Ramsay because we have seen something which is “invisible to others” (62). Of course, we have not even seen Mrs. Ramsay (nor anyone else in the novel) through fifty pairs of eyes, but the reference works well just the same.

Lastly, Lily also offers us proof that our previous hypothesis might be true: despite the variety of suppressed and dominant narratives, there is hope that characters might truly know each other through sincere communication of consciousness. Earlier in the novel, we saw one such instance of transmission between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. The couple is caught in a silent tug-of-war, wherein Mr. Ramsay desperately needs to hear that his wife loves him. Instead, Mrs. Ramsay concedes to agreement with his bleak forecast for tomorrow: “‘Yes, you were right. It’s going to be wet tomorrow. You won’t be able to go.’ And she looked at him smiling. For she had triumphed again. She had not said it: yet he knew” (124). Here, Woolf allows for characters to speak to each other silently, giving them the ability to slip through the cracks of the separate narratives. Here, however, Mrs. Ramsay is saying one thing while meaning another. And, Woolf writes, “she had triumphed.” This suggests that the power dynamic is competitive in this type of communication, continuing the pressure in the consciousness with which Mr. Ramsay begs sympathy of his wife. Though the Ramsays are married, their silent communication implies a condition which is always unequal. In this, the reader gleans little hope and might agree with
Lily Briscoe’s former comment that “human relations are all like that” and people can never actually know one another. During the same moment at which Lily realizes her vision, she and Mr. Carmichael are staring toward the Lighthouse. Both believe that the Ramsays have landed, and Lily notes: “They had not needed to speak. They had been thinking the same things and he had answered her without her asking him anything” (208). Though it seems less substantive than the Ramsays’ interaction, it occurs in the pivotal last pages of the novel. Also, because this is Lily’s consciousness, one might say that she is now in disagreement with her previous statement on the insincerity of human relations. Lily not only understands another human by means of an unspoken exchange, she also understands a man. Woolf, therefore, invests meaning in this seemingly marginal detail.

Complications

As seen, not all of the characters in these novels fit into the arrangement of gendered consciousness. Indeed, several pivotal characters have thus far been excluded. Similarly, one of Woolf’s chapters has also been ignored up until this point; it, too, serves as an unorthodox perspective on gender and our social reality. This paper obviously champions the modes of resistance within hegemonic hierarchies, and it would therefore be incongruous to omit characters who lack conscious voices. Similarly, sociology holds environment accountable for many of our constructs; so again, it is necessary to consider gender in an unpopulated setting. Though we avoid attempting to reach “Z,” this section will endeavor to view those subjects who are chiefly objects in one novel’s reality, as well as the kitchen table when no one is there.
Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* pivots around young Candace Compson. On the surface, she seems to be at fault for the family’s slow and agonizing demise. Because she indispensable to the plot, each narrative focuses upon her as an object; Caddy is spoken *about*, and at length. Caddy is responsible for her brothers’ various needs: she is Benjy’s mother, Quentin’s love, and Jason’s scapegoat. There is, of course, dialogue in which Caddy’s voice is recounted for the reader. She is not, however, granted a consciousness of her own with which she might establish herself as an autonomous subject. Ironically, Caddy is also the most accountable character in the novel. She is truthful and forthright about her forms of resistance, and bears each of her responsibilities without excuses. Similarly, she acknowledges any sort of wrong as hers alone. From the pieces of conversation that we can glean out of other narratives, Caddy’s femininity is as significant as her presence in the story. Like Lily Briscoe, Caddy enacts resistance; like Mrs. Ramsay, she thrives on familial affection. By combining these traits and ignoring her actual voice, Faulkner creates a spectacular character who is possibly the most likable in the novel.

Though there is no section devoted to Caddy’s consciousness, one might say each section is devoted to Caddy herself. Caddy’s effect on her brothers’ masculinities has already been established. And yet, there is obviously a great deal of familial love and conscientiousness which might be attributed to Caddy. She establishes herself in the parental role often: “‘Let them mind me tonight, Father.’ Caddy said. ‘I wont.’ Jason said. ‘I’m going to mind Dilsey.’ ‘You’ll have to, if Father says so.’ Caddy said. ‘Let them mind me, Father.’ ‘I wont.’ Jason said. ‘I wont mind you.’ ‘Hush.’ Father said. ‘You all mind Caddy, then. When they are done, bring them up the back stairs, Dilsey.’” (24). One might say that this is just as much an act of resistance as a conformation to traditionally maternal femininity, as Caddy likes to wield power
over her brothers. Still, she asks for the duty to care for all of them and Mr. Compson allows it with consideration.

We see more of her maternal instinct in her interactions with Benjy. Caddy constantly sees to Benjy’s needs despite their mother’s wishes. She attempts to carry her brother despite her mother admonishing that she’ll end up looking like a “washerwoman” (63). Mrs. Compson also says that Caddy spoils Benjy with her care, to which Caddy responds, “‘You don’t need to bother with him.’ Caddy said. ‘I like to take care of him. Don’t I. Benjy’” (63). Aside from giving Benjy attention, Caddy also attempts to keep him pacified by moderating her appearance. Because Benjy does not take kindly to change, he is constantly upset by Caddy’s maturation process. In one instance, Benjy cries because of the alteration to Caddy’s scent, which usually reminds him of rain: “‘Oh.’ She said. She put the bottle down and came and put her arms around me. ‘So that was it. And you were trying to tell Caddy and you couldn’t tell her. You wanted to, but you couldn’t, could you. Of course Caddy won’t. Of course Caddy won’t’” (42). She makes another adaptation when Jason calls attention to an outfit that may be beyond Caddy’s fourteen years: “‘He don’t like that prissy dress.’ Jason said. ‘You think you’re grown up, don’t you. You think you’re better than anybody else, don’t you. Prissy’” (40). Because of his helplessness, Caddy continues to be tender with Benjy. Benjy becomes a responsibility which dictates some of her actions, and she refines her femininity because of him in these cases.

Caddy’s femininity cannot be fully discussed without examining her sexuality. Even while considering her maternal instinct, it is impossible to pass over the perfume and the clothing as mere changes to her childish body. Though we are unsure about Benjy’s understanding, both episodes allude to Caddy growing up too quickly. And in Caddy’s case, promiscuity is no far cry from precocity. Because sex becomes crucial in each of the Compson boys’ narratives,
Faulkner shows the reader a critical moment which affects their childhood and subsequent lives. By Benjy’s recollection of the scene at the branch, we are able to view the moment which brands itself onto their sexual memories: “Caddy was all wet and muddy behind, and I started to cry and she came and squatted in the water” (19). Benjy and his brothers continue to fixate upon the sin of Caddy being wet and dirty. This moment signifies Caddy’s loss of purity and a general loss of innocence for the Compson children. This affects Caddy’s femininity tremendously. In one sense, after losing her purity at such a young age, what would be the purpose in trying to regain it? This is one explanation for Caddy’s promiscuity later in life. Similarly, she can no longer represent anything for her brothers except that which has become tainted. Her stained bottom corresponds with their stained family name, a downfall which haunts each narrative as well.

In speaking of Caddy’s promiscuity, we must also acknowledge her strength and her defiance. These attributes, along with her sense of accountability, also contribute to her complicated femininity. Benjy shows this side of Caddy to the reader just after she muddies her drawers. Though Quentin hopes to avoid chastisement, Caddy is not afraid: “‘If we go slow, it’ll be dark when we get there.’ Quentin said. ‘I’m not going slow.’ Caddy said” (20). First, one notes that it is Caddy and not her older brother who takes on the masculine role of bravado. Second, Caddy’s remark seems to be indicative of her future decisions: whether there are repercussions or not, Caddy refuses to slow down. She might be considered reckless, but she seems to acknowledge the prospect of punishment and can therefore be held accountable at all times. One of Quentin’s memories also alludes to Caddy’s bold nature. Aside from all of his confusing desires, Quentin tells the reader about Caddy as a child: “When I was little there was a picture in one of our books, a dark place into which a single weak ray of light came slanting upon two faces lifted out of the shadow. You know what I’d do if I were King? she never was a
queen or a fairy she was always a king or a giant or a general. *I'd break that place open and drag them out and I'd whip them good*” (173). Caddy rejects the stereotypically feminine personas of queen and fairy and embraces the powerful and violent king. She takes on the characteristics of both a disciplinarian and a caretaker for her brothers, most visibly in moments when both of their parents proved incompetent.

The aspect of power and autonomy in Caddy’s femininity is especially salient, as she proves that her formation of gender is solely her burden to bear. While there are certainly interactions which contribute to her ensuing life choices, we as readers cannot see her various thought processes. We have no way of knowing which conversations arise in her mind to inspire or dissuade other musings; in this way, Faulkner purposefully obfuscates Caddy’s character in his readers’ minds. Still, as stated, he invests her with an incredible answerability. In Quentin’s fast-paced stream of consciousness memory, he recounts the conversation in which he and Caddy discuss suicide. In one of their volleys of words, Caddy tells her brother: “I am dont cry Im bad anyway you cant help it,” and he replies, “theres a curse on us its not our fault is it our fault” (158). Once again, Caddy shoulders the responsibility while Quentin aims to exculpate himself and his sister for all of their wrongs. Caddy’s statement stands in stark contrast to our theory of construction through interaction, providing another complicating factor in her femininity. Although, one could also argue that her traits are developed as staunch reactions to her mother’s femininity. In this case, the intra-gender influence would be prevalent here as well.

We can also contrast this quotation to that of another character, an extension of Caddy’s femininity, her daughter Quentin. Young Quentin is superficially just as scandalous as her mother had been, perhaps with less subtlety in her uncle’s house. After Jason yells at the girl for her misbehavior, she tells him: “‘Whatever I do, it’s your fault,’ she says. ‘If I’m bad, it’s
because I had to be. You made me. I wish I was dead. I wish we were all dead””(260).

Evoking the tone of her namesake, Quentin throws the blame off of nature and onto nurture.

Mrs. Compson notes the combination of characteristics in her granddaughter, saying that “‘she has inherited all of the headstrong traits. Quentin’s too. I thought at the time, with the heritage she would already have, to give her that name, too. Sometimes I think she is the judgment of both of them upon me” (260-261). Mrs. Compson also raises the issue of genetics and biology in Quentin’s femininity. Although Quentin has not been raised by her true mother, Mrs. Compson says that she has inherited all of the aspects of her mother and uncle without having been socialized by them. Specifically, Mrs. Compson also hopes that Quentin could never be influenced by Caddy: “‘If she could grow up never to know that she had a mother, I would thank God’” (199).

One would assume, of course, that raising Quentin in the same home and by the same mother as Caddy would lead to another rebellious young woman in Mrs. Compson’s eyes. Additionally, adding Jason to the young girl’s rearing only provides more potential for damage. In reality, however, Quentin is born as an extension of Caddy; therefore, she never has the opportunity to establish herself as anything but impure. In a sense, Quentin’s drawers are muddy from her birth; therefore, it is even more futile for her to attempt chastity than it was for Caddy. Moreover, Quentin’s sexuality also differs from Caddy’s because of the new availability of birth control. Without the visible proof of pregnancy or motherhood, Quentin has even less reason to accept the blame which Caddy so readily shoulders. She is both an extension of Caddy and a clear distinction from the goodness of her mother, and in this way becomes another complication of femininity.
The final female complication in Faulkner’s novel is Dilsey, the Compson’s black servant. Race is an important component of Faulkner’s work, and it has thus far been unexamined in this paper. Each of the characters up until now has been white and of the middle-to upper-class. Though wealth and class are certainly issues in both novels, the majority of the characters are educated and in the upper echelons of society. Therefore, the women have been the only representations of a group that might be labeled systematically oppressed. Gender studies today tend to group race together with gender, class, and sometimes sexuality as inseparable facets of a person’s social location. Because these characteristics bear heavily on one another, as well as the person’s privilege or lack of privilege, we should certainly be looking at Dilsey with unique interest.

Most importantly, Dilsey exists within The Sound and the Fury as the truest and most effective maternal force in the novel. Between Mrs. Compson’s hypochondria and self-pity and Mr. Compson’s nihilism and alcoholism, the Compson children have little structure imposed on their lives from their actual parents. Similarly, their Uncle Maury is parasitical and adulterous, thereby rendering him ineffective as a positive role model in their lives. Dilsey therefore speaks correctly when she notes that “I raised all of them and I reckon I can raise one more” (31). Here, Dilsey is speaking about Miss Quentin and the instructions to keep her from learning Caddy’s name. Truthfully, Dilsey has raised all of the children along with three of her own. And when Caddy and Dilsey’s daughter Frony have children of their own, Dilsey is just as strong of a mother to Quentin and Luster as well. More than this, Dilsey also serves as a caretaker to Mrs. Compson. In the final chapter, Faulkner uses an omniscient narrator instead of an individual character’s voice. This section highlights the frustrating routine of Dilsey’s life, in which she must constantly make up for Mrs. Compson’s shortcomings as a mother while
maintaining the entire household as well. Irritatingly, she must also cater to Mrs. Compson’s incessant needs and horrid moods. Though Dilsey struggles with her own aches and pains, she tries to keep Mrs. Compson pacified even when her employer is obnoxiously rude: “‘I’ve been lying there for an hour, at least,’ Mrs. Compson said. ‘I thought maybe you were waiting for me to come down and start the fire’” (268). Though Dilsey sometimes gives sharp retorts to Mrs. Compson’s comments, she usually complies calmly. We should note that Dilsey has few other options; chiefly because of her race and her Southern location, she has little hope in forming a better life for herself or her family. She cannot upwardly move through the social hierarchies and must, therefore, simply bear it. One might also say that this feeling of futility works as a helpful tool for Dilsey, keeping her and her family pure from the forces which cause the Compsons to decline. Without the notions of society, education, or wealth, Dilsey and her family members worry solely about one another and the welfare of the Compson children. Dilsey therefore establishes a moral basis in the novel, ensuring that proper punishment and religion are inserted somehow into the foundering household.

Dilsey’s femininity is also marked by her skin color and the resistance which it enacts. Just as the black family is excused from society and its sullying effects, so is Dilsey immune to the various constraints of white femininity. Dilsey unabashedly displays strength, a trait which is commonly held as masculine. Similarly, she never has to worry about looking like a “washerwoman,” as she is obviously already in that position. She has already found a mate in Roskus, and though their love is not described at length, the reader assumes the two have a healthier bond than the Compsons. In the last chapter, Faulkner devotes some time to Dilsey’s physical appearance, something he rarely does for the other characters:

She had been a big woman once but now her skeleton rose, draped loosely in unpadded skin that tightened again upon a paunch almost dropsical, as though muscle
and tissue had been courage or fortitude which the days or the years had consumed
until only the indomitable skeleton was left rising like a ruin or a landmark above the
somnolent and impervious guts, and above that the collapsed face that gave the
impression of the bones themselves being outside the flesh… (266)

Faulkner’s illustration of this woman is hardly flattering; rather, he emphasizes that Dilsey’s
femininity is formed more by purpose than by preference. In this description, Faulkner likens
Dilsey to a “ruin” or a “landmark” to show her stalwart efforts to continue in her life of persistent
aid. Similarly, he stresses the wear on her body to show her humanness and the effects of such a
toilsome life. Dilsey, like all of those who are oppressed, does not have the privilege of choice.
She works because she must, unlike Mrs. Compson who can afford to exaggerate minor aches
and pains. This description might be compared, in fact, to one of Quentin’s streaming memories
of his mother. He recalls that Mrs. Compson was flirtatious with Caddy’s future husband,
Sydney Herbert Head. Herbert, as he is called, tells her, “Nonsense you look like a girl you are
lots younger than Candace color in your cheeks like a girl” (95). This provides a contrast
between Mrs. Compson and Dilsey. Though the two might be of similar ages, Faulkner’s
description of Dilsey’s body and face implies that no one would be doing such flirting with her
aged and overworked appearance. Neither would society provide a situation where such
frivolities would occur in the Southern black community. As stated, courtship and attention to
one’s appearance would be luxuries unaffordable to Dilsey and her family, as well as to other
black women. Therefore, though Dilsey might be exempt from the pressures associated with the
white woman’s “cult of true womanhood,” she certainly remains a slave to a myriad of other
restrictive codes.

The last complication in Faulkner’s work is the man-child, the youngest son Benjamin.
Though his narrative has been quoted at length, we have not yet discussed the impact which
Benjy has on the novel as a whole. We must also, as stated, consider the implications of Benjy
and his perspective on gender. Essentially, Benjy’s section is comprised of his memories up until April Seventh, 1928. Because of his mental capacities, he cannot distinguish chronological time. Instead, all of his memories are mixed together into a non-linear narrative of the Compson family’s decline. In the same way, Benjy cannot understand what is good or bad; he only knows what causes disruption to his daily routine. He certainly fixates upon Caddy, as we understand that he is upset by her various changes. He is usually under the care of Dilsey’s sons or grandson, though he obviously prefers to be with Caddy. Faulkner makes us understand that despite Benjy’s lengthy narrative, he is non-verbal and communicates solely through crying and moaning. Because there is no risk for unwanted repetition, Benjy hears and witnesses various incidents that might have been secrets from other characters. As he ages, his behavior becomes more difficult for the Compsons to tolerate, and he seems to be a source of embarrassment for Jason and Mrs. Compson.

Because of his distinct position and exceptional perspective, Benjy offers us a view devoid of social construction. His section is most comparable to Woolf’s unique “Time Passes” chapter, and we will examine this connection more thoroughly in a later section. Though many characters seem unconscious of the social pressures which contribute to their masculinity or femininity, Benjy is literally unconscious that any of these phenomena exist. In this way, Benjy and his consciousness might be regarded as genderless. He cannot understand any of the pressures placed upon him to conform, and therefore he does not acknowledge them. Similarly, he cannot make any statements against others who do or do not resist their gender roles. In comparison to other characters, Benjy’s narratives also have less bearing on his place in gender. Though we have stressed the importance of interaction and multiple layers of narration for various characters, Benjy’s dominant and suppressed voice is one and the same. He cannot
partake actively in the dominant layer of story-telling because he has no voice, and therefore his entire chapter is technically part of his suppressed story. And yet, even this voice-less character is afforded more perspective than Caddy, the object of everyone’s obsession.

Although attempts at gendering are lost on Benjy, there is still evidence that characters try to instill some normalcy into his character. Dilsey, the constant maternal force, tries to quiet his crying with gendered comments: “‘Aint you going to be a good boy and hush,’” she asks him (44). And in a different tack, she attempts to appeal to his pride: “‘Come on, now.’ Dilsey said. ‘You too big to sleep with folks. You a big boy now. Thirteen years old. Big enough to sleep by yourself in Uncle Maury’s room’” (43). Similarly, T.P. subtly genders Benjy when he remarks about Caddy’s absence. Insinuating that Caddy cannot love more than one man, he tells Benjy: “You cant do no good looking through the gate, T.P. said. Miss Caddy done gone long ways away. Done got married and left you. You cant do no good, holding to the gate and crying. She cant hear you” (51). As mentioned, these comments are not nearly as strong as the attempts to mold Jason or Quentin into young men. Still, to a person with little or no understanding of such things, the attempts at social construction are nonetheless present.

The final point of discussion for Benjy’s gender is the common theme which runs through each of the Compson boys’ minds, and Benjy is perhaps the reasoning behind all of it. Though Quentin and Jason only think of castration in its figurative and hypothetical sense, it is all too real for Benjy. The Compson family decides that Benjy may be a danger to the young girls in town after he mistakes one of them for Caddy and tries to embrace her. He describes the situation as his mind remembers it: “They came on. I opened the gate and they stopped, turning. I was trying to say, and I caught her, trying to say, and she screamed and I was trying to say and trying and the bright shapes began to stop and I tried to get out. I tried to get it off of my face,
but the bright shapes were going again” (53). He continues, saying that “when I breathed in, I couldn’t breathe out again to cry,” and we assume that he must be referring to the process of anesthetization (53). It is clear through this tragic occurrence that Benjy is believed to be not only gendered but extremely sexual. In fact, one might say that he has been treated like a beast in this instance, as the process of sterilization is not uncommon among aggressive animals. This sort of dehumanization speaks more to his sex than his gender, though both are obviously significantly connected.

As with other significant moments, the reader is unsure of whether or not Benjy recognizes the significance of the operation. He hints at the process once again as a later memory, in which he is changing in front of the mirror: “I got undressed and looked at myself, and I began to cry. Hush, Luster said. Looking for them aint going to do no good. They’re gone. You keep on like this, and we aint going have you no more birthday” (73). In this, Faulkner suggests that there is some comprehension about Benjy’s loss. It may be, however, that he is simply upset by the disruption of his customary appearance. Regardless, the castration frees Benjy from any of the other threats of emasculation which constantly haunt his brothers. His manhood has been deleted, but we are unclear about whether or not it had ever been self-acknowledged. If Benjy has never known, then Quentin envies him, as we have already discussed his thought that: “But that’s not it. It’s not not having them. It’s never to have had them then I could say O That That’s Chinese I don’t know Chinese” (116). The irony, of course, is that Benjy might be a character to inspire jealousy. In the quickly declining Compson household, might one be happier in Benjy’s place? Though we understand that he is not completely oblivious, the comparison among the Compson boys is thought provoking. Anyone would be hard-pressed to rank the sons in the order of their stability.
Benjy’s castration is also undeniably connected to Caddy’s muddy drawers. Because the novel’s ultimate focus is the decline of the Compson family name, the notions of sterility and promiscuity must be tied together. Just as the emasculation of the Compson boys (both actual and symbolic) ends the family line, so does Caddy’s impurity sully the Compson reputation and name. One might argue that it is not Caddy’s fault alone, as the Compson family is riddled with alcoholism, adultery, mental retardation and instability, and hubristic cynicism. However, Caddy’s sexual purity seems to be the redemption of the family’s status; and once it is gone, there is nothing left to raise them back into their former standing. To once again establish a connection to gender, we are reminded that Caddy’s dirty drawers are the result of her complicated femininity. In an effort to preserve her dress, she takes it off before playing in the stream. Quentin, both angered and stirred into his protective role, slaps Caddy and a splashing fight ensues. The episode ends with Caddy stating that she’ll “run away and never come back” (19). The entire scene shows not only Caddy’s defiance to hegemonic authority, but also her intelligent and autonomous nature. When her plan to “run away” upsets Benjy, she changes her mind and again transforms into a maternal character. We therefore witness the resistance and adherence to feminine roles which make her femininity so complicated. Benjy’s sterilization is the unfortunate result of his victimization by social convention, and Caddy becomes a scapegoat in the same way. It is both Southern propriety and hegemonic gender structures which place Benjy and Caddy in similar situations as to their responsibilities in smearing the Compson name.

Finally, we take a turn once again from the complications of characters to the added confusion of their absence. We have already mentioned that there is an entire chapter in Woolf’s novel that has gone unexamined at this point. Woolf splits *To the Lighthouse* into two distinct time periods: “The Window,” which is set before the Great War, and “The Lighthouse,” which is
ten years after. These chapters are traditional (if such a word might ever be applied to Woolf), in that they contain characters, action, and a setting. Woolf does not, however, jump the ten years without thought. On the contrary, the second chapter is aptly titled “Time Passes,” and it contains the action which occurs in between the two time periods. Stylistically fascinating, “Time Passes” shows the Ramsay’s home on the Hebrides. Usually dwarfed by the complicated consciousnesses of its inhabitants, the house has previously gone relatively unnoticed throughout the long opening chapter. In “Time Passes,” however, Woolf brings the setting to the forefront by describing its aging and emptiness. Though there are significant developments to the plot of the characters, these are entered as if they were after-thoughts and certainly secondary to the development of the house. In an effort to connect this change to previous plot occurrences, one might say that this chapter is representative of Mr. Ramsay’s work, which has also been only skimmed. Truly, “Time Passes” takes on the challenge of thinking of a kitchen table when no one is there. This chapter might allow us to expound upon the notions of “subject and object and the nature of reality,” especially with respect to gender (23). Indeed, “Time Passes” presents a curious question: does gender exist without characters present to foster socialization? Though this question may ultimately be unanswerable, Woolf’s transitional chapter offers valuable clues on gender in the absence of people. And, like Faulkner does with Dilsey, Woolf introduces another character who also complicates the previously homogenous pool of people.

The section opens as the characters are heading to bed after the long day. As each of them extinguish their lamps, Woolf writes of a somewhat magical flood, a “profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds, came into bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin, there a bowl of red and yellow dahlias…” (126). More than simply nighttime, this darkness seems to erase any sort of difference which might
establish borders in the daytime. Woolf continues, “Not only was furniture confounded; there was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say, ‘This is he’ or ‘This is she’” (126). Body and mind have been erased, obliterating even the distinctions between men and women. In this magical darkness, one might believe that a world free of construct might exist as well as show us its ways. This is similar, in fact, to Benjy’s world of shapes and colors devoid of societal pressure and programming. Some of the descriptions here even evoke Benjy’s rolling commentary, “The hand dwindles in his hand; the voice bellows in his ear. Almost it would appear that it is useless in such confusion to ask the night those questions as to what, and why, and wherefore, which tempt the sleeper from his bed to seek an answer” (128). The imagery of bellowing voices and leading someone by the hand bring forth pictures of Benjy and his reality.

There is, however, a difference in perspectives: while there is only Benjy who can view Benjy’s world, anyone might partake in this confused reality of Woolf’s imagination. In Woolf’s darkness, we begin to believe that no constructs or gender roles are necessary as difference cannot be seen. This again reminds us of Benjy’s narrative, where social norms bear less significance than natural stimuli. In essence, both “Time Passes” and Benjy’s consciousness help us to view the world in a previously unimagined way: through an ungendered lens. This perspective, though temporary, challenges the reader and provokes thought on what might be important if our femininities and masculinities are not. Just as Benjy’s section is only one chapter, however, we remember that light and difference will return to Woolf’s narrative just as gender will regain its priority.

When Woolf introduces seasons to the chapter, gender certainly is reintroduced. Just before a notification about Prue Ramsay’s marriage, Woolf tells the reader a bit about spring: “The spring without a leaf to toss, bare and bright like a virgin fierce in her chastity, scornful in
her purity, was laid out on fields wide-eyed and watchful and entirely careless of what was done or thought by the beholders” (131). Woolf juxtaposes this illustration with some bracketed information on young, beautiful Prue: “[Prue Ramsay, leaning on her father’s arm, was given in marriage. What, people said, could have been more fitting? And, they added, how beautiful she looked!]” (131). Because we are already aware of Prue Ramsay’s unfortunate fate, this moment of joy is even more significant. Woolf certainly characterizes spring as a feminine force, and a “fierce” one at that. In fact, one might say that “spring” is as decidedly resistant as the young Ramsay girls with their short-lived infidel thoughts against their mother. Most importantly, “spring” is “entirely careless of what was done or thought by the beholders;” whereas for Prue, the people’s thoughts seem to be the only attributed to her being. Like Mrs. Ramsay, Prue becomes her beauty and her femininity; there is nothing “more fitting” than for her to be married and to be beautiful while doing so. Woolf conforms the girl even further by taking away any trace of strength she might have previously had, describing her as “leaning on her father’s arm.” Lastly, there is specifically a comparison to be made between “spring” and her staunch purity and Lily Briscoe, the last single-woman. Though Lily at this point is entirely mindful of “ beholders,” Woolf seems to offer an example for the artist in this personification of spring. Though it is an example of how gender is introduced when no one is there, Woolf marks this characterization by a defiant and durable force. In this example, gender without human consciousness exists as it might in a resistant world of fantasy.

Woolf continues to gender natural forces, feminizing not only spring but the larger Nature itself. After alerting the reader to Prue’s and Andrew’s deaths, Woolf’s narration muses on the reflective effects of walking by the sea, to “marvel how beauty outside mirrored beauty within” (134). In the wake of speaking about war, however, this beauty becomes challenged:
Did Nature supplement what man advanced? Did she complete what he began? With equal complacence she saw his misery, his meanness, and his torture. That dream, of sharing, completing, of finding in solitude on the beach an answer, was then but a reflection in a mirror, and the mirror itself was but the surface glassiness which forms in quiescence when the nobler powers sleep beneath? Impatient, despairing yet loth to go (for beauty offers her lures, has her consolations), to pace the beach was impossible; contemplation was unendurable; the mirror was broken. (134)

Here, Woolf creates not only a gender for nature, but also offers a gender binary which fits into the previously established fantasy of this peculiar chapter. Though there are “characters” in this questioning thought, they are not specified as any whom we have already met. In fact, they are broadly labeled “man” in opposition to the “she” of Nature. In traditional form, Nature is beautiful; she “offers her lures, has her consolations.” In this way, she might even be considered an ultra-feminine siren or temptress. Still, the notion of challenge is also tangible, as Nature is posited as the opposing force to traditional hegemonic masculinity. While man might advance or begin, Nature might be able to “supplement” and “complete” his humble tasks. She can mete out punishment as justly as man can supply war, and this notion of vengeance challenges the preceding idea that Nature might passively reflect the beauty of man’s progress. The idea continues in a later question, “What power could now prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature?” (138). This is certainly less flattering to the feminine force, but it continues to assert the brute strength and relentlessness of nature. Though this gendering is perhaps vague, Woolf has certainly made another statement about a gendered binary without imposing it onto her established characters. And in both cases, the feminine power disposes of her meek and passive stereotypes to offer an equally heavy counterweight to the previously favored balance of male hegemony.

Lastly, “Time Passes” introduces one character who is absent from the majority of the novel. Like Faulkner’s Dilsey, Woolf creates a woman who does not fit into the social location
of the Ramsays or their guests. Mrs. McNab, a care-taker, cannot afford to summer in relaxation. Instead, she works as she has worked all of her life. She is not beautiful or feminine, but like Dilsey, she has no choice but to be practical. Woolf describes her first as a singular human presence in the empty house: “…she lurched (for she rolled like a ship at sea) and leered (for her eyes fell on nothing directly, but with a sidelong glance that deprecated the scorn and anger of the world—she was witless, she knew it), as she clutched the banisters and hauled herself upstairs and rolled from room to room, she sang” (130). This description is certainly less flattering than of any other woman in the novel, but she implies that Mrs. McNab does not have the spare moment to care. Indeed, Woolf states that this woman acknowledges the difficulty of her life:

…so that as she lurched, dusting, wiping, she seemed to say how it was one long sorrow and trouble, how it was getting up and going to bed again, and bringing things out and putting them away again. It was not easy or snug this world she had known for close on seventy years. Bowed down she was with weariness. How long, she asked, creaking and groaning on her knees under the bed, dusting the boards, how long shall it endure? (131).

This portrait of a life without luxury or relaxation somewhat trivializes the notion of choosing to resist or conform to hegemonic constraints. If one cannot afford to choose, one’s femininity or masculinity becomes simply an extension of the most efficient way to make a living. For the characters with a different racial or classed background, the opportunity to resist would never arise. Lily’s inner turmoil and Quentin’s psychosis might be ridiculed, as their trials are nothing when compared to a life of systematic hardship. Though we understand the relevance of the primary characters of both Woolf and Faulkner to their intended readers, one cannot overlook the tension which exists when characters such as Mrs. McNab and Dilsey are also discussed. They, too, fit into the complicated web of oppression which subjugates race and class as well as gender.
And for exactly this reason, their perseverance and aged strength become all the more astonishing.

These complications help us arrive at a number of salient, inter-textual analyses which help us to conclude the entire investigation of gender. First, both authors provide characters who might be sites of envy regardless of their subjugated positions. As stated, both Dilsey and Mrs. McNab have the luxury of avoiding feminine constructs; because they are too lowly to be conformed, both women might be envied their freedom by other privileged characters. For instance, Caddy might be jealous of Dilsey because the black woman does not have to constantly monitor her posture; it has already taken the shape of a washerwoman. Similarly, Quentin envies the emasculated Benjy because of the lack of desire which castration provides. When else would such dominated characters be viewed as liberated? This is perhaps one of Faulkner’s implied criticisms on the backwards values of the South, as it is only during this decline that such a paradox might exist.

In another point of interest, the notion of Nature must be expanded to show its connection to both novels. As stated, Woolf elaborates on the traditionally feminine gender of Nature. While masculinity often has power over Nature because of its ability to reason, Woolf reminds us that such social products have little importance if they are so easily swept away by Natural forces. The feminine Nature is further explicated in its connection to the surviving females of To the Lighthouse. Though Mrs. Ramsay and Prue have already passed, Woolf does not allow the whirlwind of Nature to eliminate the other daughters in “Time Passes.” Similarly, she couples Nature’s power with the strengthened female characters of Mrs. McNab and Lily Briscoe. These non-traditional women are comparable to Woolf’s depiction of “Spring,” as they ultimately display defiance in the face of hegemonic constructs. Likewise, the fierceness and audacity of
“Spring” suggests the traits of a female child before she has been formed by culture. The Ramsay daughters, Lily Briscoe, and Caddy Compson all corroborate this notion as each shows resistance in her youth. For most, however, this resistance is worn away like Nature under the hand of man. In another tragic comparison, the destructive Natural power might also be associated with Caddy Compson. The ways which Nature devastates man in “Time Passes” might be likened to Caddy’s destructive power on her family’s name. Though there are certainly a number of man-made (literally, masculine) forces set against the Compson household, her fatal feminine flaw is the critical cause for her family’s collapse. This flaw, however, must also be viewed as the product of social construction and Southern values. Caddy’s social victimization and subsequently damaged femininity therefore serve as the Natural storm which obliterates both the good and the bad of the surviving Compson reputation. Like Mother Nature, therefore, Caddy’s original power is demonized by the mind and reason of man.

Conclusion.

In an effort to draw meaning from the differences between the novels, one must look at the implications of gendered consciousness on each story’s whole. Woolf uses stream of consciousness as a flowing tool, connecting various thoughts and layers to form a unified novel of consciousness which speaks to the feminine talents of Mrs. Ramsay. In a different style, Faulkner uses stream of consciousness to create distinct characters with separate narrative voices. His style works to separate and distinguish characters in a way which connects closely with Lily Briscoe’s negative feelings on human relations: no one ever really knows any one else.
Both Woolf and Faulkner must also be examined as gendered beings themselves, as their styles might lead to inferences on their own places within hegemony.

Much has been written about Virginia Woolf and her notions of gender. It is not surprising, therefore, to reflect on her creations in this novel with a conclusion which is non-traditional. She, as a female writer, has a complicated relationship with femininity. As she writes in *A Room of One’s Own*, “it is fatal for any one who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly”.\(^6\) For this reason, it is problematic to agree wholly with those who label *To the Lighthouse* as a novel written in “feminine consciousness”.\(^7\) Instead, the novel is more likely an “equivocal androgynous rhythm of style, beyond or combining the contradictory penchants of sexual difference”.\(^8\) In this way, Woolf refuses to fall back into the hierarchies against which she must constantly strive as a female writer. She describes consciousnesses from the vantage point of an anonymous narrator, whose gender is completely unknown. As stated, the consciousnesses and layers of narrative have always been tied to one another; indeed, it is often difficult to separate strands of thought from one character to the next. This may be attributed to this eerie omniscience which seems to know nothing of tradition or convention except for what the characters assert for themselves. Because of this elusive, yet common, narrator, Woolf’s novel produces a unifying effect of transcendence through the non-traditional use of “indirect discourse” (Miller 156) Ultimately, as Miller also notes, Woolf combines tradition with her particular brand of modernism to create “a masterwork of the creation of the imaginary

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consciousness of others” which is neither wholly feminine nor masculine (Miller 156). It is, however, critically renowned, and in this way establishes a non-traditional place for female (if not feminine) authorship in a canon dominated by hegemony.

Faulkner’s use of stream of consciousness differs from Woolf’s entirely. His narrative style uses free-flowing thought, but each of the accounts creates a distinct character with distinct intentions. The declining Compson family might owe its downfall, in part, to the isolating effects of these interior monologues. While the characters certainly have an effect on each other in their formation of gendered selves, the unspoken communication which is so beautifully woven into To the Lighthouse does not seem to exist in The Sound and the Fury. The result is, therefore, a variety of characters bearing pain by themselves. The stream of consciousness style allows each of these characters to express all of his thoughts to the reader, these narratives are fully suppressed and vehemently guarded: Benjy by his mental capacity, Quentin by his confused psychosis and shame, and Jason by his bitter and hubristic masculinity. Though this isolation might speak more to masculinity because of its manifestations, one might better connect it to the difficulty of human relations and interaction which have also been stressed thus far. As stated, Lily Briscoe’s bleak vision of relational connections proved to be basically untrue in To the Lighthouse; the transcendence of consciousness created a porous effect, allowing the various meanings to seep through each character to create a broader meaning for the entire novel. Faulkner, however, does not seek redemption through a similar path. Instead, he ironically inspires hope with his marginal characters as well as the silenced female voices. Dilsey, as stated, offers the ideal of purity to the corrupt state of Southern gentility contributing to the Compsons’ demise. Similarly, Caddy’s strength and complicated femininity both manage to shine through despite the biased characterizations which Faulkner offers his readers. Though
Faulkner has been lauded for his inclusion of resistant femininities and marginalized heroes, one wonders whether or not he is praised for lending such characters the protection of a white, Southern man. More clearly, is it easier for Faulkner to delve into such resistance because of his clearly established masculine insurance? Perhaps. It may be that Faulkner is not so aware of his gendered voice when writing as Woolf is of her own; however, the intentions make it no less salient as a novel worth investigation.

Then again, one hesitates to sell Faulkner short. As a product of Southern tradition himself, Faulkner is certainly capable of using his masculinity to expose the tragedy of Southern values on femininity. While Caddy does not have an explicit voice of consciousness, this stylistic maneuver also allows the reader to view her as the strongest, most beautiful, and ironically purest character in the novel (perhaps rivaling Dilsey). As a male himself, Faulkner’s enactment of masculine narratives shows his ability to counteract the hegemonic tradition with seemingly patriarchal tools. In fact, this itself is a polemic which feminists continue to debate, with one side being that we must “destroy the mythical and mystifying constructions of patriarchy by using its own weapons. We have no others”. One might argue, therefore, that Faulkner is another defiant author working in resistance to the tradition. By allowing us to see the suppressed narratives of masculinities, he shows his readers the sites of permeability within the dominant narrative of hegemonic masculinity. He uses stream of consciousness specifically to expose the socially constructed foundations of masculine tradition, and he therefore reveals the larger tragedy of men’s place in gender. And in this respect, Faulkner’s writing style helps to

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show the validity of masculine presence in the larger scope of achieving gender equality through feminist learning.

Finally, both novels perform as we had originally hoped, though there are certainly differences in their execution. Both Woolf and Faulkner provide us with an imaginary world of consciousnesses through which we are able to examine the interaction of humans and the implications of such on gender. Keeping in mind that gender is fluid and constantly noted as a performance, Woolf and Faulkner allow us to view the inner workings of a gendered mind as it strives to conform or resist the boundaries laid out by hegemonic tradition. Through the combination of words which are dominant and expressly audible to everyone as well as those which are privately disclosed to the reader, we are able to view men and women as they form their particular masculinities or femininities. And whether one is writing with the purpose of androgyny or the unabashed pen of a man, the issue of gender must always come to the forefront as it is indispensable to each of our personal relationships.

Ultimately, we as readers must understand the significance in looking at the constructions which these texts and these authors specifically set forth. As shown by the organizational premise, there is much to be said about the generational effects of mothers and fathers on their children and other dependents. Though both novels center upon familial interactions, the authors seem to have distinct aims in displaying the implications of the generational effects. As stated, Woolf certainly writes from a gender-conscious perspective. Because of this, her aim seems to center upon a marriage and its subsequent results of multiplied consciousness in the production of a family. In a different approach, Faulkner’s focus lies in making a statement upon Southern values and their particularly negative effects on a voiceless, female character. In both novels, we witness the strength of hegemony as it works in a patriarchal fashion. The female characters
must deal with their subjugated roles either by conforming or resisting this traditional construct. More importantly, however, we also view the significance of intra-gender influence as the sons and daughters are wholly impacted by the genders performed by their parents. The sons in *The Sound and the Fury* seem to have faults which are individual exacerbations of their father’s flaws. The evidence that we have of Mr. Compson shows that he is a thoughtful, nihilistic, patriarchal alcoholic; though none of these traits is particularly positive, he is ultimately a gentle character. His traits manifest themselves differently in his sons, however, as Quentin is psychotically thoughtful and Jason is materialistically nihilistic. The children in *To the Lighthouse* are also affected by their parents, but Woolf’s style allows for more interplay between the dominant and suppressed narratives than in Faulkner’s novel. This results in more volleying and fluidity in influence than the static and final effects that we see in *The Sound and the Fury*. The generational impact is helpfully elucidated by once again establishing the redeeming characters in both novels. Faulkner invests Dilsey and Caddy with the most strength and beauty, while also creating them to be the characters most easily shunned by the larger Southern society, which Mrs. Compson symbolizes. Similarly, Woolf creates Lily Briscoe to stand in defiance to all of the superficial constructs of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay by endowing her with a satisfied core which is visible to others.

This gendered and generational organization is certainly useful in viewing the larger schema of both novels. We have noted, however, that there are aspects of both texts which separate themselves from the world of social construction. Returning again to the comparison of Faulkner’s Benjy section to Woolf’s “Time Passes,” one must retain the significance of these particular narratives. While the examination of social impact is essential to this study of both novels, the authors have also provided Benjy and “Time Passes” as literary hiatuses from a
strictly constructed world. Through Benjy’s perspective and Woolf’s transitional chapter, the reader momentarily glimpses a simpler world with fewer gendered forces. Only in literature of consciousness might a reader be able to visit such a realm. While both of these worlds are temporary, they provide foils for the generational and gendered structure to which most characters (and ultimately, most readers) must return.

Finally, in returning to the notion of the core, we again note a generational impact as well as the implications for the novels themselves. Faulkner denies true cores to any of his conscious characters, alluding only to their weaknesses in the most suppressed of narratives. On top of this, Faulkner denies insight into the parental consciousness as well as into a transcendent consciousness for the entire story. This results in reactionary connections between parent and child, but *The Sound and the Fury* lacks any sort of internally recognized Self. By manipulating the consciousnesses as he does, Faulkner provides Dilsey and Caddy as characters with the nearest realization of cores. Again, by denying these women their own voices, Faulkner prevents us from viewing their construction-less Selves internally. We, as conscious readers, must create a transcendence for ourselves in order to glean the redemptive qualities from both of these incredible women. And as stated, this was most likely the purpose of Faulkner’s personal stream of consciousness style; in this way, his novel implies the decline of interpersonal and moral values in a specific time and location. Woolf, conversely, establishes a variety of cores. Beginning with Mrs. Ramsay, she shows a transitional realization which serves as an example to the younger characters in the novel. Though Mrs. Ramsay recognizes her wedge of darkness, she is ultimately cautious in disclosing this Self to the other characters. Eventually, however, we arrive at Lily Briscoe and her external recognition of her vision and core of being. This evolution might be the result of transcendent consciousness or of the natural generational change.
Either way, it also establishes the implication of Woolf’s novel that the interaction of gender and values is pertinent to the ultimate comprehension of Self. Ultimately, therefore, the authors use their distinct stream of consciousness styles to show the inter-generational and intra-gender impacts of a social construction. Woolf shows the cores while Faulkner chooses to keep them even further suppressed than his characters’ various shames, and both of these choices show us implications on the novels’ greater meanings. Regardless, both authors use their styles to establish two novels of great critical standing which profoundly affect our view of gender construction.
Bibliography


Cover Art

Vanessa Bell Painting, by Duncan Grant. 1915.

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