

THE PROBLEM OF ANDROGYNY IN  
VIRGINIA WOOLF'S A ROOM  
OF ONE'S OWN

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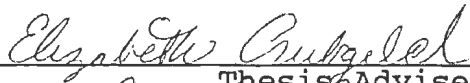
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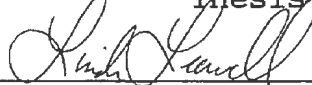
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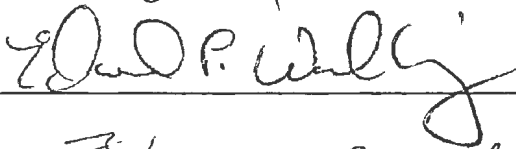
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## INTRODUCTION

### NARRATIVE FRAMES AS RHETORICAL STRATEGY:

#### THE ARGUMENT AND RELEVANT SCHOLARSHIP

My project in this thesis is to dispute the widely held belief that in A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf advocates the development of an androgynous perspective as necessary for women writers to produce literature. My endeavor is occasioned by the nature of the misreadings following from that premise: on one hand, those that see Woolf's feminism as compromised by her perceived endorsement of "androgyny"; on the other, those that embrace "androgyny" as a viable approach to female authority. In particular, I take issue with the obviation of the narrative frames of A Room of One's Own required to sustain such readings. My own reading of A Room of One's Own valorizes the narrative distinction that Virginia Woolf draws between herself and the persona Mary Beton, and demonstrates how this distinction serves to elevate "a room of one's own"<sup>1</sup> over "androgyny" as an approach to female authority. In addition, I contend that throughout the first five chapters, Mary Beton subtly undermines her own proposal of "androgyny" in the final chapter by

establishing contexts that preclude the viability of "androgyny" as a means for women to effect authority.

From the very first sentence of Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own--"But, you may say, we asked you to speak on Women and Fiction; what has a room of one's own to do with that?" (4)--we are encouraged to be discriminating, to demand an explanation when the parameters of the discussion change, as they so often do in that amalgamation of social critique, literary history, and feminist theory. Not only the parameters of the topic shift, but the speakers do as well, for the lecture/essay begins in Virginia Woolf's voice, turns to the narration of the presumably autobiographical "Mary Beton," and ends with a conclusion and peroration by Woolf. These alternations too require explanation. One purpose of this thesis is to examine how these shifts of narrative frame impact our understanding of women's authority ("Women and Fiction") as it is differently delineated by Woolf and Beton. As a provisional definition, I mean by "authority" the ability to convey meaning through literary writing. Later, in chapter one of this thesis, I will address some of the considerations that complicate this definition; I will also discuss how female authority may be differentiated from male authority.

In the first chapter, Woolf conjures up Mary Beton as her objectified double, ostensibly to demonstrate how, in

the two days prior to her lecture, Woolf arrived at the conclusion, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (4). True to her purpose, in the first five chapters Beton chronicles the experiences, research, and contemplation that would lead to Woolf's assertion. In fact, at the close of chapter five, Beton reiterates Woolf's claim, applying it to "an unknown girl writing her first novel in a bed-sitting-room":

Give her another hundred years, I concluded, reading the last chapter... give her a room of her own and five hundred a year, let her speak her mind and leave out half what she now puts in, and she will write a better book one of these days. She will be a poet, I said, putting Life's Adventure, by Mary Carmichael, at the end of the shelf, in another hundred years' time.

(164, emphasis added)

At that juncture the narration comes full circle--Beton has accomplished what Woolf proposed she should, and arrived at the same conclusion. If Woolf were to resume the narration at this point, moving right into the peroration, we would have a continuous and coherent argument that "Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor...that is why I have laid so much stress on money and

a room of one's own" (188). Instead, Mary Beton begins the final chapter with a new argument.

Done with her research, and at the point of actually writing the paper that will be delivered to an audience of college women, Mary Beton asserts that an author must develop an androgynous perspective to overcome the sex-consciousness that impedes authority. She first hypothesizes "androgyny" as "two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body," that "must have intercourse" (170). Then, after a brief review of modern male writing, Beton becomes more insistent, advocating "androgyny" as a "marriage of opposites" that "must be consummated" "before the act of creation can be accomplished" (181).

Any critical reading of A Room of One's Own must come to terms with this abrupt change of focus, and address its relationship to the original argument. I contend that because "a room of one's own" represents not only women's economic freedom from men, but also their intellectual and sexual autonomy, "androgyny" figured as a sexual imperative is an insupportable conclusion, a non-sequitur.

We must keep in mind that Mary Beton is a character, fictionally re-enacting the considerations that led Woolf to hold the opinion that women need money and "rooms of their own" to write fiction. Foremost among such considerations is the disempowerment of women due to their

socially-enforced dependence on men, which leads Beton, like Woolf, to suggest the converse as a solution: women's independence from men, symbolized as "a room of one's own." Beton has noted the social reform that makes such an assertion plausible--women's recently acquired rights to own property, enter the professions, and vote. Still, there are other considerations that threaten such advances: in particular, how men will react to women with "rooms of their own." That is the concern that emerges as Beton reviews contemporary male writing in the final chapter. What she finds in that survey is overt misogyny, more purposeful than before, and foreboding "an age to come of pure, of self-assertive virility" akin to the "unmitigated masculinity," already manifest in Fascist Italy. I suggest that in the final chapter, Beton attempts to defuse such anger, deferring the provocative idea of "a room of one's own" to espouse the conciliatory concept of "androgyny" instead.

Again, the rhetorical strategy of A Room of One's Own dictates that these considerations and Beton's responses be qualified with reference to Woolf's conclusion. While Woolf may indeed have experienced the misgivings represented by Beton, even likewise succumbing to them at some point, she ultimately decides to advocate women's pursuit of "rooms of their own," despite the threat of male intolerance. When speaking in her own person, Woolf makes



no mention of "androgyny," either in the introduction or the conclusion that bound Beton's narration. Instead, Woolf's thesis, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction," is reiterated in the conclusion as a prophecy:

For my belief is that if we live another century or so...and have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own; if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality...if we face the fact, for it is a fact, that there is no arm to cling to, but that we go alone and that our relation is to the world of reality and not only the world of men and women, then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down. Drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners, as her brother did before her, she will be born. (199)

Many critics do not acknowledge the narrative distinction between Woolf and Beton, and those who do generally minimize its significance. Elaine Showalter, for example, argues in her oft-cited "Virginia Woolf and

the Flight into Androgyny," that the frame surrounding Mary Beton is negligible, a defensive attempt at impersonality, and that "androgyny" and "a room of one's own" are contiguous: "androgyny is the psychological and theoretical extension of the material reform implied in the private room" (285). She claims further that both models for authority are ineffective and dangerous for women to adopt, for they promote asexuality, withdrawal, even suicide.

Marilyn Farwell also perceives the distinction between Woolf and Beton to be insubstantial, "not enough to negate the strong monistic definition of androgyny." Like Showalter, she sees Woolf's disclaimer--"'I' is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being" (5)--as a weak gesture toward anonymity that "has never been enough to separate Woolf from the "I" of this essay" (451).

Farwell's excellent essay, "Virginia Woolf and Androgyny," provides a historical review of androgyny that distinguishes between androgyny defined (within Eastern tradition) as a "balance" between equally-valued male and female characteristics, and androgyny defined (within Western tradition) as a monistic "fusion," wherein the lesser-valued characteristics of the Other (female) are purified and assimilated into the One (male). She argues that while Beton's first, tentative image of androgyny is aligned with "balance," which would allow for women to write in an identifiably feminine manner, Beton's second

and definitive version is a model for "fusion" that "asks women to write like men" and therefore undermines female authority.

Jane Marcus also denies the feasibility of androgyny as a model for female authority, and objects vehemently in Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy<sup>2</sup> that Woolf never sincerely advocated androgyny as Beton envisions it. However, Marcus does not, as I do, exclude such androgyny from Woolf's provisions for female authority on the basis of the narrative distinction between Woolf and Beton.<sup>3</sup> Marcus argues instead that the "androgyny" metaphor is set off from the rest of the discourse by its tone and imagery. Citing the image that prompts Beton to construe the "union of man and woman" as a metaphor for androgynous mind, the image of a single leaf falling, "like a signal falling, a signal pointing to a force in things which one had overlooked," Marcus associates that leaf with the voice of "the mother." This connection between leaf and mother, she argues, is first established in To the Lighthouse, and reinforced in A Room of One's Own by the reminder, directly following the leaf image, that "a woman writing thinks back through her mothers." Marcus avers:

Interleaving the woman's story in the male book of history is the project of A Room of One's Own. One of the leaves in the woman's book, its most problematic page, is the single leaf speaking in

the mother's voice, of the dangers of separating oneself off from patriarchy. Women readers share the writer's anxiety at the return of the repressed maternal imperative and join the narrator in struggling with her ghost. (161-62)

In the foregoing paragraphs, I have noted how some women readers have come to terms with Beton's metaphor of androgyny, that "most problematic page" in the text of A Room of One's Own. While I agree with Showalter, Farwell, and Marcus that androgyny, as such, would diminish women's authority, I do not concur with their ellision of the narrative distinction between Woolf and Beton. By circumscribing Mary Beton and her metaphor for androgyny within a narrative frame, Woolf allows herself a critical margin, from which she can either corroborate or qualify Beton's inferences.

I disagree with Showalter's reading because it dismisses "a room of one's own" along with "androgyny" as if the same rationale and impetus informed both. And, while Farwell's exegesis of two disparate traditions of definition--androgyny as "balance" and androgyny as "fusion"--is useful, and her warning that an androgynous "fusion" actually elevates masculinity to universality is well-taken, I believe she is mistaken in identifying Beton's first depiction of androgyny with "balance," and Beton's second, more polemical version with "fusion";

instead, both versions encourage a "fusion," figured as heterosexual intercourse. This clarification is important, for it admits of the contrast--marked in the text by the shift from the fifth to the final chapter--between "a room of one's own" and "androgyny"; between women's authority as a topic of conversation and contemplation, and women's authority as the subject of a paper written to be delivered in public, then published in book form.

As a published work, A Room of One's Own would no longer have an exclusively female audience, and would therefore be subject to male censure and reprisal. As Mary Beton actually comes to the point of writing the lecture, her fear of such repercussions surfaces, and she abdicates her argument for "a room of one's own" to espouse "androgyny" instead. By creating Beton as a double who embodies her "limitations, prejudices, and idiosyncrasies," Woolf shows how compelling the compromise and self-censorship that patriarchy inculcates in women can be, even to a woman as intelligent and as advantaged as herself. However, by separating herself from those views by a narrative frame, Woolf rejects that compromise in her own person. In effect, she triumphs in spite of herself, in spite of her indoctrination as what she later terms "an educated man's daughter" (3Gs 5).<sup>4</sup>

To reject the prejudices of that background is the radical and necessary first step toward "the development by

the average woman of a prose style completely expressive of her mind" (ROO 165). There will be no exemplar of female genius, no Judith Shakespeare, nor even a Mary Carmichael, unless some modern woman can renounce the biases and fear used to oppress her. That is precisely what Woolf accomplishes through the ingenious rhetorical strategy of A Room of One's Own.

My understanding of Woolf's intent is most closely aligned with Jane Marcus's in that we both consider "androgyny" and the heterosexual mandate of its metaphor to be the exception rather than the rule within the feminist theory of A Room of One's Own. Marcus asserts that Woolf elevates the provisions for authority particular to women and women's experience ("a room of one's own") above "androgyny" on the basis of feminist privilege:

In trying to deal with the maternal imperative, the definition of the feminine as opposite of the masculine, the imaginary "cooperation of the sexes," Woolf hits on a temporary solution in the idea of androgyny: "Ought not education to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities? For we have too much likeness as it is." Androgyny means erasure of difference. How can she hold both views at once? Androgyny, it becomes clear, is a good idea for overly masculine writers to try, though the opposite

does not hold true. That is, the arguments are not logical. She is biased in favor of women.

(174)

There is much evidence in A Room of One's Own to support this conclusion, and it is consistent with my contention that Beton's precipitate support of "androgyny" comes after her survey of "overly masculine writers" indicates the disastrous social circumstances these men might effect with their misogynist rhetoric. However, the interplay between narrative frames is another rationale for excluding "androgyny" from the provisions for female authority that Woolf endorses in A Room of One's Own, a rationale that supercedes both the "falling leaf" portent and the indications of feminist bias that Marcus cites.

I join Marcus in protesting the disproportionate emphasis that many critics place upon the "androgyny" model, an emphasis that serves male interests and the status quo rather than illuminating Woolf's more radical proposals for women's authority. However, such readings are not relegated strictly to male critics, as Marcus implies in her criticism of interpretations by Geoffrey Hartmann and J. Hillis Miller:

Both men see this passage as descriptive of the source of Woolf's creativity, a recognition of a "force" in nature. Frankly, every woman reader I know sees this passage as Woolf's mnemonic device

to force herself out of her feminist and lesbian fantasy world, back to a realization that "heterosexuality makes the world go round." That couple is Woolf's rude reminder to herself that women are not part of a woman's community but are isolated from each other in relation to individual men. It is a reminder to herself that the male reader is out there, and she placates him with this mysterious heterosexual romance.

(159)

There are women readers too who understand "androgyny" as the central tenet of Woolf's feminist theory. Yet, like Showalter and Farwell, they are more likely than male critics to reject "androgyny" as a viable approach to female authority. Although Farwell at least acknowledges a radical subtext and a "whispered rebuttal" to "androgyny" in A Room of One's Own, Showalter repudiates Woolf's conjectures in their entirety. My concern in this thesis is that we not dismiss Virginia Woolf's feminist theory in A Room of One's Own on the basis of her protagonist/narrator's metaphor for androgyny.

More disconcerting than the critics who interpret "androgyny" as the prevailing message of A Room of One's Own are the women readers who consequently affirm "androgyny" as a perspective women writers should emulate, and as the theory that informs Woolf's own writing,



particularly To the Lighthouse. Carolyn Heilbrun, for example, suggests in Toward a Recognition of Androgyny that the androgynous perspective allows persons of both sexes to exhibit characteristics traditionally restricted to one sex or the other.<sup>5</sup> However, her reading of To the Lighthouse, "Woolf's best novel of androgyny," excoriates Mrs. Ramsay's "femininity"--it is "devouring," "ensnaring," "seductive," and "fatal"--while at the same time exonerating Mr. Ramsay's "masculinity" from its implications of "tyranny" and "sterility," leaving us in no doubt as to the respective desirability of masculine and feminine traits as they comprise the androgynous "range of human possibility." In reading the Ramsay family romance as a parable of androgyny, Heilbrun regards the offspring of this "marriage of opposites" as representing androgynous perspective. Yet the instances she designates as James's and Cam's "androgynous visions" are moments when each affirms Mr. Ramsay and the masculine perspective, leaving behind their affinity with Mrs. Ramsay. Indeed, the "feminine" influence on their androgyny is questionably necessary at all: "Readers have seldom been clear as to whether her son and daughter reach the lighthouse because her spirit survived her death, or because her death has liberated her children" (75). The lighthouse that Heilbrun identifies as a symbol of androgyny is more precisely a phallic symbol of masculinity, just as the island that Cam and James leave

behind on their excursion to the lighthouse is a symbol of the feminine, depicted in vaginal imagery.

Although To the Lighthouse is useful as a reference to the dynamics of patriarchal marriage and compulsory heterosexuality that inform Mary Beton's metaphor of androgynous mind, I contend that such reference in no way supports the viability of "androgyny" as a model for female authority. Rather, equivocation of masculinity and androgyny and a corresponding denigration of the feminine are implicit within Beton's metaphor for androgyny and are inevitably promulgated by readings that utilize "Woolf's" concept of "androgyny" as an interpretive construct. Ellen Tremper's recent article, "In Her Father's House: To the Lighthouse as a Record of Virginia Woolf's Literary Patrimony," is the legacy of such readings, and consciously endorses the male-identification that Heilbrun understood and represented as "androgyny." Tremper's reading of To the Lighthouse attests to the centrality of masculine heroic rhetoric and convention (as propounded by Leslie Stephen and Mr. Ramsay) in the making of both the woman writer (Virginia Woolf) and the woman artist (Lily Briscoe). While it offers essentially the same exoneration of Mr. Ramsay and the same condemnation of Mrs. Ramsay that Heilbrun's reading does, Tremper adds the contingent and incendiary claim that Woolf (and Lily) adopt an aesthetic that in effect countenances the rape of the woman artist:

although Woolf, not surprisingly and especially in light of her own unfortunate and entirely unmetaphorical sexual history, recognized a pattern of social and cultural "rape" of women, her writings acknowledge that women have nevertheless also gained from their intellectual contact with their oppressors.

To the Lighthouse is about a woman's development and her intellectual and emotional debt to a man. (2)

The quotation marks that set off the word "rape" minimize such occurrence, and denote a compartmentalization so complete that within the space of a sentence, Tremper transposes "a woman's" acknowledgement of male influence into a "debt," which we must surmise that "a woman" has incurred from being "raped." Yet Tremper does not put what women have "gained from their intellectual contact with men" into perspective against what women have been deprived of by that oppression--the freedom and opportunity to develop their own intellectual capacities and to determine the kind of "contact" they have with men. In this thesis, I suggest that such freedom and opportunity are metaphorized by Woolf as "a room of one's own."

Although Tremper characterizes Mr. Ramsay's demands upon Mrs. Ramsay as "male aggression" (25), and recognizes Lily's "sexual terror" (19) when he makes similar demands

of her, she rationalizes that terror as the virgin's fear of her own attraction (20), a "sexual confusion" to be rectified by attaining "the ability first to copy Mrs. Ramsay's well-practiced strategy for meeting her husband's demand for sympathy, and then, by so doing, really feel it" (18). By neglecting to delineate Woolf's depiction of the "social and cultural 'rape' of women" in its specific manifestations, Tremper glosses this "rape" as a rite of passage, a "created and 'creative' communion between Lily and Mr. Ramsay" (4), and a "human and creative solution" (10) to be celebrated rather than reviled. Tremper asserts that for Lily this moment of revelation is the result of her adaptation of "the masculine principle," "making her experience possible through a sort of inclusive creative 'androgyny'" (6). In Tremper's reading, the equivocation between masculinity and androgyny implicit in Beton's metaphor becomes explicit.

The following chapters substantiate the claims outlined in this introduction, although not strictly in the order listed, because the proofs overlap. First, that the narrative frame that distinguishes the lecturer, Virginia Woolf, from the persona, Mary Beton, also establishes "a room of one's own" as Woolf's considered response to the question of how women can effect authority; Beton's "androgyny" simply represents the final consideration Woolf came to terms with in drawing her conclusion. Second, that

the imagery and implications of "a room of one's own" that Beton develops in the first five chapters create a context that discredits "androgyny" as a state of mind that women should cultivate; in fact, the patriarchal ideology that Beton incorporates into her metaphor for "androgyny" would in effect compromise women's literary authority.

Before undertaking these proofs, however, I will review Woolf's concept of authority and the factors that she claims enable or impede a writer's ability to effect such authority. I will also note how these considerations are particularized for women and for men.

## CHAPTER I

### MODERN AUTHORITY AND WOMEN'S AUTHORITY: ESSAYS 1918-1925

Virginia Woolf's general concept of narrative authority is most clearly defined and developed in her essays regarding the ability of two particular groups to produce literature: modern writers and women writers. In the decade prior to the publication of A Room of One's Own, Woolf wrote three essays--"Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (B&Br), "Modern Fiction" (MF), and "How it Strikes a Contemporary" (HSC),<sup>6</sup> that together comprise an apology for Modern writing. In that same time, she wrote two reviews--"Women Novelists" (WN) and "Men and Women" (MW), and a letter of rebuttal--"The Intellectual Status of Women" (ISW), that form the genesis of her apology for women's writing, more thoroughly developed in A Room of One's Own. While defending both modern and women writers against the disparaging judgements of contemporary critics, Woolf has occasion to remark the characteristics that confer authority to a written work, that establish it as a "masterpiece."

Above all, Woolf insists, a masterpiece must depict "things in themselves"; it must have no ulterior purpose, such as to proselytize or provide a forum for the author's

personal grievances. Accordingly, the author of a masterpiece must be free from any self-consciousness that may detract from his or her ability to represent "things in themselves." In addition, a masterpiece must convey a conviction of truth compelling enough to supersede the reader's personal experience. This conviction of truth, (what Mary Beton describes in A Room of One's Own as "integrity") depends upon the author's implicit belief "that life is of a certain quality" (HSC 358), as determined by a stable social code. Readers, conditioned by literature to recognize certain narrative conventions as indicative of a "reality" that conforms to that social code, then accept the author's conviction as constituting "truth." Finally, a masterpiece must be a coherent whole, forming "that complete statement which is literature" (HSC 358).

Woolf observes that although such authority manifests itself readily in the time between the Elizabethan and Victorian eras, it has been inconstant, if not altogether absent, since; moreover, it has been lacking throughout the history of women's writing, excepting a few works by Jane Austen and Emily Bronte.

For the Moderns, this difficulty in effecting authority results from a change in human nature, a shift in sensibility that has alienated them from the past and its literary conventions. Their interest lies in "the dark

places of psychology" (MF 156) rather than with broad social commentary. Woolf is rather vague as to the cause of this change, simply pronouncing its occurrence--"On or around December, 1910,<sup>7</sup> human nature changed" (B&Br 194), or explaining briefly: "a shift in the scale--the war, the sudden slip of masses held in position for ages--has shaken the fabric top to bottom" (HSC 357). Still, its impact on literature is clear: "Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing has moved off or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestements as we provide" (MF 287). While the Edwardians--Wells, Galsworthy, and particularly Arnold Bennett--still maintain that "house property" and other material circumstances constitute "reality," and have conditioned the public to believe that it is so, the Moderns, without a tradition or conventions to help them, must attempt to convey to that same public a psychological concept of reality (B&Br 208-09). These are the circumstances that cause their writing to be self-conscious.

Notably, when Woolf discusses Modern writing, she refers exclusively to male writers--Forster, Lawrence, Joyce, Strachey, and Eliot. Although women, including Woolf, wrote prolifically during the Modern period, Woolf chooses to consider women writers of that era as a continuation of a woman's tradition, rather than as part of



the Modern movement--an alienated, but nonetheless legitimate descendant of the patriarchal literary tradition which has always excluded women writers.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike Modern [male] writers, women have not suddenly become self-conscious, but have suffered for centuries from trying to write seriously within a patriarchy that enforces their dependence, subservience, and "moral purity"<sup>9</sup> (WN 70). As a result, women's writing is conciliatory or defiant; in either case, it loses its focus on the subject in its reaction to external criticism (WN 70). Although there is hope for the future in that "the seventeenth century produced more remarkable women than the sixteenth, the eighteenth than the seventeenth, and the nineteenth than all three put together" (ISW 55), Woolf asserts, "the effect of these repressions is still clearly to be traced in women's writing, and the effect is wholly to the bad" (WN 69).

Woolf's defense of Modern and women writers consists largely of pointing out the circumstances that cause their self-consciousness, and recontextualizing assessments of the value of their writing in terms of what it portends for the future, rather than what it lacks in comparison to the past.<sup>10</sup>

According to Woolf, the primary virtue of Modern writing is its sincerity. She explains: "They attempt to come closer to life, and to preserve more sincerely and

exactly what interests and moves them, even if to do so they must discard most of the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelist" (MF 155). Citing James Joyce as Modernism's most representative writer, Woolf elaborates:

In contrast with those whom we have called materialists [Bennett, Wells, and Galsworthy] Mr. Joyce is spiritual; he is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain, and in order to preserve it he disregards with complete courage whatever seems to him adventitious, whether it be probability, or coherence or any other of these signposts which for generations have served to support the imagination of a reader when called upon to imagine what he can neither touch nor see...If we want life itself, here [in Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man], surely we have it. (MF 155)

Woolf's commendation is qualified by her awareness that Modern writing is still self-conscious--Joyce's "indecenty" is "conscious and calculated," Eliot's "obscurity" arises from "intolerance," and Strachey's "discreet code of manners" conceals subject matter that would otherwise be censored (B&Br 210-211). It is due to such efforts of "concealment and conversion," claims Woolf, that "truth"

comes to the reader only in fragments (B&Br 211). Woolf also criticizes the inability of such writing to generalize, to "embrace or create what is outside itself and beyond" (MF 156). Yet rather than dismissing Modern writing because of these limitations, Woolf insists that for the present, conventions must be sacrificed and fragments tolerated if we are ever to get a true version of the "unlimited capacity and infinite variety" of "life itself" (B&Br 212) as it is in the present. Thus, she suggests that in place of conventions (determined by the age and a particular culture), we approach fiction aware of "the infinite possibilities of the art" and cognizant that "there is no limit to the horizon, and that nothing--no 'method,' no experiment, even of the wildest--is forbidden, but only falsity and pretence. 'The proper stuff of fiction' does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction" (MF 158). Woolf also suggests that both writers and readers change their expectations regarding the coherence of a work:

It is true that the writer of the present day must renounce his hope of making that complete statement which we call a masterpiece. He must be content to be a taker of notes. But if notebooks are perishable volumes, he may reflect that they are, after all, the stuff from which the masterpieces of the future are made. Truth,

again to speak in the manner of the myth-makers, has always been thus volatile, sometimes coming quietly into the open and suffering herself to be looked at, at others flying averted and obscured. But if she is the truth then we do well to watch for her most brief apparitions; and the sight of her will convince us that she is always the same, from Chaucer even to Mr. Conrad. The difference is on the surface; the continuity in the depths. (HSC 359)

In the early 1920's, Woolf had a good deal of confidence in the future of Modern fiction; she believed that it would not only continue the tradition that has persisted from Chaucer to Conrad, but also that it would be an exceptional era amongst them. In fact, in 1924 she made the "surpassingly rash prediction" that "we are trembling on the verge of one of the great ages of English literature" (B&Br 212).

At the same time, Woolf's prognosis for women's writing was more reserved, despite the progress shown in the past four centuries (ISW 55), and despite the social 'evolution'<sup>11</sup> that enabled some women to be 'emancipated' from their dependence on men, and from the servility that dependence exacted. In 1920 she wrote:

Granted that the woman of the middle class has now some leisure, some education, and some

liberty to investigate the world in which she lives, it will not be in this generation or in the next that she will have adjusted her position or given a clear account of her powers. (MW 67)

Woolf's hesitancy regarding the future of women's authority was based on the following concerns: that the language and forms of fiction in use during the modern age were over-determined by male concerns, and women had yet to develop new ones; that women would have to find ways to integrate their proclivity for fiction writing with faculties they developed within the strictures of patriarchy; and that it was unclear whether men would accommodate such changes.

These same concerns are addressed more thoroughly in A Room of One's Own, but with the explicit intent of encouraging women to write. Thus Woolf not only sets forth the material circumstances and freedom from the constraints of "respectability" that women require in order to write, but she also excavates a women's tradition of writing, critiquing it as she does so, in order to show women a direction for the future. Woolf asserts that in the future, women must develop a language, style, and genre specific to their experience. In addition, she indicates that women should incorporate into their writing the "unconventionality," "subtlety," and lack of egotism ("anonymity") they have already developed in response to patriarchy. By the end of her argument, Woolf proclaims

that despite the poverty and obscurity women continue to write in, it is coming within their power to bring into being a woman who will redeem the potential of women's writing, a Judith Shakespeare [or Mary Carmichael] who will display such irrefutable authority that her example will justify the aspirations of other women to write (197-99).

As she did with regard to the Moderns in essays such as "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," "Modern Fiction," and "How it Strikes a Contemporary," in A Room of One's Own, Woolf recontextualizes the criticisms against women's writing to show hope for the future. However, this apology for women's writing is disrupted by Mary Beton's consideration of "a force in things which one had overlooked" (167). That force (to be reckoned with) is the sex-consciousness of Modern men.

Although Woolf had previously addressed the concerns of women and Modern [male] writers separately, as derived from different social circumstances and continuing different literary traditions, in A Room of One's Own she confronts the possibility that the future of women's fiction may depend upon the extent to which men will accommodate the changes necessary for women to effect authority. Because literature not only reflects but informs social values, the writing of modern men is a strong indication of what women may expect in the future.

Woolf had alluded to this contingency in 1920, when she wrote, regarding the future of women's authority: "To pour such surplus [creative energy] as there may be into new forms without wasting a drop is the difficult problem which can only be solved by the simultaneous evolution and emancipation of man" (MW 67). And, according to her concurrent essays on Modern [male] writing, there seemed to be hope that such change would occur.<sup>12</sup> In fact, in 1924, Woolf wrote of the social upheaval that shaped Modern writing:

Do you ask for more solemn instances of the power of the human race to change? Read the Agamemnon, and see whether, in process of time, your sympathies are not almost entirely with Clytemnestra. Or, consider the married life of the Carlyles and bewail the waste, the futility, for him and for her, of the horrible domestic tradition which made it seemly for a woman of genius to spend her time chasing beetles, scouring saucepans, instead of writing books. All human relations have shifted--those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature. (B&Br 219)

These changes seemed to indicate more respect and greater freedom for women. In addition, women would clearly benefit from the challenge that Modern writers posed to the conventional notions of "respectability" and "propriety"-- social expectations that had hampered women writers even more than men. However, by the time Woolf finished A Room of One's Own in 1929, politics and literature alike were threatening a return to the oppressions of the past.<sup>13</sup>

Allusions to the misogynist sensibility of Fascist Italy<sup>14</sup> and to the obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness<sup>15</sup> (banned in England because of its lesbian content) establish the backdrop against which Woolf, or rather Mary Beton, reconsiders the writing of Modern [male] authors as indicative of men's receptiveness to women's increased independence. Beton's survey of "books by living writers" (172), Edwardians and Modern alike, suggest that "the simultaneous emancipation and evolution of man," which Woolf had claimed was necessary for women to gain authority, has not occurred. The writing of Edwardians, such as Kipling and Galsworthy, totally excludes women:

Do what she will a woman cannot find in them that fountain of perpetual life which the critics assure her is there. It is not only that they celebrate male virtues, enforce male values and describe the world of men; it is that the emotion



with which these books are permeated is to a woman incomprehensible. (177)

Likewise, the writing of the hypothetical Modern writer, Mr. A,<sup>16</sup> "in the prime of life and very well thought of, apparently, by the reviewers," is dominated by the "I" of a male narrator, some Alan obliterating a Phoebe "in the flood of his views" (174). Through his writing "he is protesting against the equality of the other sex by asserting his own superiority" (175) as innumerable "professors"--"with no qualification save they are not women" (28)--have done before him. The cumulative effect of such chauvinist sentiment causes Beton to envision:

an age to come of pure, of self-assertive virility, such as the letters of professors (take Sir Walter Raleigh's letters for instance) seem to forebode,<sup>17</sup> and the rulers of Italy have already brought into being. For one can hardly fail to be impressed in Rome by the sense of unmitigated masculinity; and whatever the value of unmitigated masculinity upon the state, one may question the effect of it upon poetry. (178-79)

This is the context that leads to Mary Beton's insistence that Modern writers should adopt an androgynous perspective.

As the self-consciousness that Modern [male] writers experienced as a generation manifests itself more specifically as sex-consciousness,<sup>18</sup> it became clear to Woolf that such sex-consciousness threatened the recent social reforms--women's rights to own property (1880), enter the professions (1918), and vote (1919)--that afforded contemporary women a greater degree of the intellectual freedom necessary to write literature.

Although Mary Beton proposes "androgyny" as a remedy for the sex-consciousness of both men and women--"It is fatal to be a man or a woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly" (181)--her concern is clearly male sex-consciousness; indeed, her analysis (in the previous chapter) of Mary Carmichael's novel as representative of contemporary women's writing remarks in particular its lack of sex-consciousness (160-162). Beton's general argument for "androgyny" is a pretext for a more specific cause: the attenuation of the "self-conscious virility" and misogyny that flaws the writing of modern men and impinges upon women writers' prospects for authority.

The duplicity of Beton's argument is underscored by her condemnation of the suffragists for causing men to be sex-conscious, and by her idealization of an all-male tradition of "androgynous" writers. Beton avers:

All seducers and reformers are responsible...

All who have brought about a state of sex-

consciousness are to blame, and it is they who drive me, when I want to stretch my faculties on a book, to seek it in that happy age, before Miss Davies and Miss Clough were born, when the writer used both sides of his mind equally. (179-80)

Beton then proceeds to name Shakespeare, Keats, Sterne, Cowper, Lamb, Coleridge, Proust, and to a lesser extent, Shelley, Milton, Jonson, Wordsworth, and Tolstoy (180) as exemplars of the "androgyny" that Modern writers would do well to emulate.

However, in the previous chapters, Beton has clearly noted the repressive circumstances that women endured in "that happy age" before the suffrage movement and the first world war altered their status: forced marriages, wife-beating, the bearing and raising of too many children, poverty, and a lack of privacy. She has likewise clearly explained that the reason men did not experience sex-consciousness then, was because male superiority was taken for granted. When Beton concludes, "Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the act of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated" (181), the audience of college women would be well aware of the incongruity of that conclusion--with the exclusively female means of empowerment she had supported up to that point. They would also recognize the compromise by women implicit

in the "androgyny" Beton espouses, particularly in its images of traditional marriage and intercourse. While they would acknowledge that the Suffragists raised men's sex-consciousness, and that men's sex-consciousness is cause for concern, they would also surely affirm that their circumstances would be worse if it were not for the efforts of women like Miss Davies and Miss Clough.

However, college women were not the only audience, and it is the threat of censorship--a Sir Chartres Biron hiding behind the curtains (141), or a Sir Archibald Bodkin concealed in the cupboard (194)--and the threat of male reprisal that motivate the duplicity of both Woolf's and Beton's discourse. Woolf's discourse is duplicitous in its use of two narrative frames. Beton's discourse is duplicitous in its use of a non-gender-specific proposal ("androgyny") to promote a gender-specific change (the alleviation of male sex-consciousness). Before advocating "androgyny" for both men and women, Beton establishes contexts that discredit "androgyny" as an option women should pursue.

"Androgyny" is best understood as tangential to the provisions for women's authority set forth in the main argument of A Room of One's Own. Thus, while the first five chapters address ways in which women can empower themselves to write literature, (beginning by obtaining "rooms of their own"), "androgyny" is contrived as a remedy

for the male sex-consciousness of men that impinges upon women's prospects for authority. "Androgyny" is not, in context, a sensibility that women could reasonably be expected to adopt; it is intended exclusively for men. In this way, Woolf maintains the distinction between modern [male] authority and women's authority that she had developed throughout the decade prior to the publication of A Room of One's Own.

In this chapter, I have explicated Woolf's concept of authority in terms of the qualities she has indicated that elevate writing to literature and make for masterpieces: the depiction of "things in themselves"; the use of generally acknowledged conventions to evoke a conviction of "truth"; and the wholeness and coherence of a work. I have also explained that according to Woolf, the self-, or more specifically, sex-consciousness that inhibits literary authority results from different circumstances for men than for women. "Androgyny" and "a room of one's own" reflect that distinction, and are intended, respectively, as means for resolving men's sex-consciousness and women's sex-consciousness.

## CHAPTER II

### "A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN" AND "ANDROGYNY": TWO PRESCRIPTIONS FOR WOMEN'S AUTHORITY IN A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

In A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf creates a depersonalized but distinctly gendered narrator, "I<sup>19</sup> (call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please--it is not a matter of any importance)" (6), to mediate an investigation of women's authority titled "Women and Fiction." The project is shaped by a number of issues stemming from three interrelated queries: "what [material] conditions are necessary for the creation of works of art?" (42), "what is the state of mind most propitious to the act of creation?" (88), and "would the fact of her sex in any way interfere with the integrity of a woman novelist?" (127).

Mary Beton proves herself to be a resourceful, incisive, and highly analytic investigator, interpreting history where she finds it (in the Times, on the shelves of the British Museum, in her scrapbook of misogynistic quotations called "Cock-a-doodle-dum") and construing herstory where she does not (the hypothetical biography of Judith Shakespeare and the hypothetical novel of Mary Carmichael, for instance), to defuse the masculine

indictment against women's authority--typified by the claim that women have produced no Shakespeare; to excavate a female literary tradition as the foundation of such authority; and to prescribe the circumstances that will facilitate women's authority in the future--beginning with "a room of one's own" and the freedoms it implies. However, in the final chapter, Beton shifts her focus to "a force in things which one had overlooked" (167) and asserts that writers of both sexes should adopt an androgynous sensibility--an argument seemingly at cross-purposes with the exclusively female sources of empowerment she advocated in the first five chapters. Perhaps the most important result of her narrative is the discourse it initiates by women about women, a discourse distinct from the overwhelming body of male opinion she herself finds during her research, and demonstrated by the sustained debate among women critics over the merits and/or flaws of Woolf's feminist theory as articulated in A Room of One's Own.

While few women critics deny the value of Mary Beton's<sup>20</sup> efforts to establish the material and social circumstances that precluded the possibility of women displaying Shakespeare's genius, or her naming of female forebearers and her emphasis on a female tradition--"we think back through our mothers if we are women" (132), her supposed advocacy of androgynous mind as a model for female

authority draws mixed reviews. Carolyn Heilbrun and Nancy Topping Bazin<sup>21</sup> celebrate this androgynous aesthetic, while Elaine Showalter finds the metaphor characteristic of Woolf's inability to come to terms with her female [hetero-]sexuality. Jane Marcus, on the other hand, sees "androgyny" as a "red herring" to deter the patriarchs from comprehending (and thus censoring) the "sapphistry" of the rest of the text.

Heilbrun's and Bazin's positive responses to androgyny correspond to the positive view that the women's movement initially took toward androgyny in the early seventies, when it was seen as a concept that liberated women from the limitations of sex stereotypes. On the other hand, Showalter's negative response to androgyny is characteristic of the disillusionment with which feminists came to regard that concept as they recognized that it still identified bipolar characteristics as gendered and that the "masculine" traits were still more valued than their "feminine" counterparts. The readings of Woolf's fiction that Heilbrun, Bazin, and Showalter derive from their interpretation of the "androgyny" metaphor in A Room of One's Own are consistent with the status of androgyny within the ideology of the women's movement. Jane Marcus's readings are likewise informed by the ideologies of feminism in the late eighties, when feminist and lesbian-feminist theorists began to reclaim traits that patriarchy



had conditioned women and men alike to believe were "masculine," such as anger and sexual desire. On the other hand, there are critics such as Tremper, who are reviving the rhetoric and arguments that supported androgyny, without adequately accounting for the problems and compromise it poses.

This chapter proposes to give an overview of how Beton substantiates Woolf's thesis, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction," and to demonstrate how, in terms of its imagery and implications, Beton's abrupt conclusion that women and men alike should write with an androgynous perspective is contrary to what "a room of one's own" entails for women writers.

From Beton's theorizing, we can delineate three facets of authority requisite for the author to effect meaning: author/ity as having the necessary material circumstances to be an author, authority as received authorization, and authority as expertise in conventional craft or technique.

Answering the question, "what conditions are necessary for the creation of works of art" (42), Beton determines, as does Woolf, that in terms of material support, five hundred pounds and a room of one's own will suffice. The money provides the economic independence that frees the woman writer from altering content in deference to the man who provides for her, and allows her the leisure to

contemplate. The room provides the privacy necessary to write without interruption or unsolicited advice from over-the-shoulder readers.

Addressing the question, "what is the state of mind most propitious to the act of creation" (88), Beton begins by showing the state of mind most adverse to it. She notes "the world's notorious indifference" to the male writer's burdens of authorship (90) and explains that the woman writer's agonies were compounded not only by indifference but by hostility as well. As evidence, she documents the proclamations of some of English society's most prominent patriarchs (foremost among them, Oscar Browning)<sup>22</sup> regarding women's inability to write or think, and their insubordination in aspiring to do so (91-98, 100-111). According to Beton, such hostility works as an obstacle within the mind, changing art into argument or propaganda, and forcing the author to write in counterpoint to criticism (118-23, 126-131), thus "thinking of something other than the thing itself" (129). She explains that although such obstacles may have been in the minds of male novelists, (particularly after the Suffrage campaign), they were almost assuredly in the minds of female novelists:

But how impossible it must have been for them not to budge either to the right or left. What genius, what integrity it must have required in the face of all that criticism, in the midst of that purely

patriarchal society, to hold fast to the thing as they saw it without shrinking. Only Jane Austen did it and Emily Bronte. (129-30)

Even worse for women's writing than the lack of authorization from contemporary society, however, was the lack of authorization provided by tradition, for as Beton says, "masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice" (113). Since "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (132), and "since freedom and fullness of expression are of the essence of the art" (134), Beton concludes that "such a lack of tradition, such a scarcity and inadequacy of tools, must have told enormously upon the writing of women" (134). After establishing that hostility against one's writing and the lack of a tradition contribute to the state of mind most adverse to the act of creation, Beton proceeds to explain "the state of mind that is most propitious to the act of creation" (88):

the mind of the artist, in order to achieve the prodigious effort of freeing whole and entire the work that is in him, must be incandescent, like Shakespeare's mind...there must be no obstacle in it, no foreign matter unconsumed. (99)

Beton later associates this state of mind with "androgyny."

First, however, she reveals that the "integrity" of the books manifested by such a mind is due to the fact that in literature, as in life, "it is the masculine values that prevail" (128).

Clearly, then, Mary Beton's answer to the third question, "would the fact of her sex in any way interfere with the integrity of the woman novelist--that integrity which I take to be the backbone of the writer?" (127) is "yes"; hostility will beget hostility and women's works will be flawed according to conventions or standards that disavow protest, preaching, and revenge as legitimate aims of fiction (99, 117, 119, 129).

Mary Beton's responses to her rhetorical questions suggest that integrity is a quality achieved only when adequate material circumstances, social sanction, and tradition converge, allowing an unobstructed view of "things in themselves." The ability to communicate one's vision with integrity is therefore the ability to effect authority. Mary Beton explains integrity thus: "What one means by integrity, in the case of the novelist, is the conviction that he gives one that this is the truth" (125). In addition, integrity is sustained throughout a work by coherence. Beton describes the craft by which the hypothetical novelist Mary Carmichael would create coherence in her work:

Now is the time, she would say to herself at a certain moment, when without doing anything violent I can show the meaning of all this. And she would begin--how unmistakable that quickening is--beckoning and summoning, and there would rise up in memory, half forgotten, perhaps quite trivial things in other chapters dropped by the way. And she would make their presence felt...and one would feel, as she went on writing, as if one had gone to the top of the world and seen it laid out, very majestically, beneath. (162-63)

So defined, "integrity" and "coherence" seem to be rather simplistic and general concepts that could easily be equated with the demand for realism and self-referential order characteristic of male modernist fiction. They are, however, integrally related to a very elaborate paradigm for authority that conflates sexuality, textuality, and an architecture of mind, body, and book.

There are extenuating circumstances that affect the manifestation of integrity or coherence by an author. For instance, the integrity, or "conviction of truth," that an author elicits depends on his or her "freedom to think of things in themselves" (67). In chapter six, Beton suggests that freedom is won only by the mind that has sublimated its sex-consciousness in androgyny (170-71). Beton cites

Coleridge's concept of androgyny as explanation: "He meant, perhaps, that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided" (171). The division to be overcome by the androgynous mind is figured by Beton both as a separation of rooms and as a sexual separation. As an example of the first, we may consider the critic Mr. B: "the trouble was that his feelings no longer communicated; his mind seemed separated into different chambers; not a sound carried from one to the other" (176). In parallel terms, the division that must be overcome is a sexual distinction between male and female sensibilities; the manner in which it is overcome is likened to sexual intercourse:

the sight of the two people getting into the taxi and the satisfaction it gave me made me ask whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness? And I went on amateurishly to sketch a plan of the souls so that in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man's brain, the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain, the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being

is that when the two live in harmony together spiritually co-operating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her...It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. (170-71)

Presumably, such intercourse would allow the strictly feminine sensibility to cast off the sense of chastity that restricts women from speaking of their experiences as a body (86-88); it would also provide an outlet for the strictly masculine sensibility that would otherwise obliterate everything, particularly women, in protest (173-75).

Having established that such a "fusion" between the male and female halves of the mind must be procreative, Mary Beton concludes her sketch of the androgynous mind by recasting the sexual imperative within a marital context: "Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the act of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated" (180). Thus, the nature of the interaction between the male and female sensibilities in such a mind would be sexual, procreative, and legitimate rather than platonic, or hedonistic, or illicit.<sup>23</sup>

The author next has the task of fabricating the novel conceived, of imparting order and coherence. Appropriately, Beton uses architectural imagery to describe the construction of plot and character. Concerning content she claims,

If one shuts one's eyes and thinks of the novel as a whole...it is a structure leaving a shape on the mind's eye, built now in squares, now pagoda shaped, now throwing out wings and arcades, now solidly compact and domed like the Cathedral of Saint Sofia at Constantinople. This shape, I thought, thinking back over certain famous novels, starts in one the kind of emotion that is appropriate to it. But that emotion at once blends itself with others, for the "shape" is not made by the relation of stone to stone, but by the relation of human being to human being.

(123-24)

It is important to recognize here that in the previous pages Beton has established that nearly all "certain famous novels" were written by men and depicted only relationships involving men. Novels about the relations between women were not written then (142-46); thus this "shape" determined by interpersonal relationships is a predominantly masculine "shape." In eliciting the "kind of emotion that is appropriate to it," it most often alienates



the woman reader, for "the emotion with which these books are permeated is to a woman incomprehensible" (177). In fact she is likely to feel like an outsider looking in, "as if one had been caught eavesdropping at some purely masculine orgy" (178). In this description of women's relation to male writing, imagery of architecture-- "structure" or "shape"--overlaps again with imagery of sexuality, both serving as metaphors for gendered sensibility and voice.

Mary Beton's description of the ordering structures of fiction--syntax and genre--likewise conflates architecture and sexuality. She suggests that because "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (132), the "common sentence" that male writers had available for their use was unsuited for women (133). She continues her explanation thus:

Moreover, a book is not made of sentences laid end to end, but of sentences built, if an image helps, into arcades and domes. And this shape too has been made by men out of their own needs for their own uses. There is no reason to suppose that the form of the epic or of the poetic play suits a woman any more than the sentence suits her. (134)

From Beton's description of both content and structure we must realize that the existing arcades and domes--

landmarks of the literary landscape--prohibit access to women in the same way that the libraries and chapels at "Oxbridge" (11-12) or Cambridge do. Women who tried to build such monuments of their own found both the foundation and the construction shaky: "The whole structure, therefore, of the early nineteenth-century novel was raised, if one was a woman, by a mind which was slightly pulled from the straight, and made to alter its clear vision in deference to external authority" (129). The end result is inevitable: "Down comes her book upon our heads. There was a flaw in the centre of it" (129). As an alternative, says Beton, the woman writer must develop her own sentence,<sup>24</sup> and her own sequence, or "shape" (132-36). Shifting terms from architectural to sexual, Beton suggests to her female audience that in the future of fiction, "the book has somehow to be adapted to the body, and at a venture one would say that women's books should be shorter, more concentrated, and framed so that they do not need long hours of steady and uninterrupted work"<sup>25</sup> (135).

At another venture, one might superimpose Woolf's imagery onto Beton's narrative to construe this future shape. Might the architecture of this future book be a "room" in contrast to an arcade or cathedral, created by the woman whose lodgings and mind are "a room with a lock on the door" (186) [emphasis added] as opposed to a honeymoon suite? "Adapted to the body," might such a

"room" refer to female anatomy as well as mind, "the human frame being what it is, heart, body and brain all mixed together, and not contained in separate compartments" (30)? "A room of one's own" would thus be a space for sexual choice as well as intellectual freedom.

Certainly such a reading would subvert the definitiveness of Mary Beton's "androgynous mind" metaphor. I believe, however, that such extrapolation is encouraged by the numerous parallels between the frame-story and the interior narrative. Although Woolf suggests a clear distinction between her voice and that of her persona/protagonist, Mary Beton, she transgresses that distinction at the book's end. Following Mary's creation of the androgynous mind model, Woolf reappears to provide the closing comments: "Here, then, Mary Beton ceases to speak"; "I will end now in my own person" (182, 183). Yet during the peroration their voices coalesce, as Woolf claims arguments and anecdotes supposedly made by Mary Beton. For example, she states, "I told you in the course of this paper that Shakespeare had a sister" (197), when it was within Mary Beton's narrative that the story was told, and in Beton's voice. That Woolf appropriates Mary's story of the hypothetical Judith Shakespeare, endorses it as if it were fact, and extrapolates it into a motivational myth (197-199) demonstrates the power of the outer frame to confirm and authorize the inner narrative.<sup>26</sup> The outer

frame, however, may also qualify or undermine the inner frame.

Woolf repeatedly encourages the audience to be discriminating in giving their assent to the views expressed by Mary Beton, herself, or any such "one." In fact, both the narratives about, and of, Mary Beton result from Woolf's conviction that:

when a subject [in this case Women and Fiction] is highly controversial--and any question about sex is that--one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker. Fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact. (5)

Credibility is therefore a matter of access (to the speaker's circumstances and the factors which may bias her opinions) and assessment (measuring the degree to which the "truth" is refracted by such bias). To demonstrate the limitations of experience and view wrought by a patriarchal upbringing, Woolf creates Mary Beton, a fictional persona with circumstances remarkably similar to her own, whose opinions, we might presume, are likewise consistent with Woolf's. Both Woolf and Beton intermix facts and quotes

with fictional scenarios; both emphasize the impact of material circumstances on the production of fiction; both are wary of the male interloper, the patriarchal censor of "obscenity" in the persons of Sir Chartres Biron (141) or Archibald Bodkin (194); and both are insistent that their audience come to "think of things in themselves" (67, 193). They share similar turns of phrase, not even counting the anecdotes Woolf appropriates from Beton. They both also warn against the use of fiction for the sake of propaganda, whether the cause is justified or not. Still, we must remember that Woolf confirms only some of Mary Beton's conclusions, among them the need for a room of one's own and the importance of a literary tradition comprised of women. Conspicuously absent from that group is Beton's proposal of androgynous mind. When Mary Beton's narrative is finished, Woolf reminds us once again to consider her biases and read cautiously:

While she has been doing all these things, you no doubt have been observing her failings and foibles and deciding what effect they have had on her opinions. You have been contradicting her and making whatever additions and deductions seem good to you. That is all as it should be, for in a question like this truth is only to be had by laying together many varieties of error. (183)

Of course, Beton's "failings and foibles" are revealed to us by Woolf; Woolf likewise orchestrates our observation of those flaws. I suggest, therefore, that when Woolf asserts that "truth is only to be had by laying together many varieties of error," she refers not to a linear, side-by-side laying together, but to an overlaying of concentric narrative frames, whereby each informs the other, but the outer frame, the voice from the margin, has the privilege of the first and final word.

Beton explains the process of deriving meaning from novels as a dynamic between two such concentric frames, "life" and "shape"; the dynamic she describes is similar to the relationship that exists between Woolf's and Beton's narratives:

a novel starts in us all sorts of antagonistic and opposed emotions. Life conflicts with something that is not life. Hence the difficulty of coming to any agreement about novels, and the immense sway that our private prejudices have upon us. On the one hand, we feel You--John the hero--must live, or I shall be in the depths of despair. On the other, we feel, Alas, John, you must die, because the shape of the book requires it. Life conflicts with something that is not life. Then since life it is in part, we judge it as life. (125)

Like the frames represented by Woolf's autobiographical frame-story and Beton's fictional interior narrative, the outer frame of "life" and the interior frame of "shape," or "art," are inextricable. However, the outer frame has more authority; we judge the novel on its consistency with "life."

It is significant that neither Woolf nor Beton disclaim or denigrate such judgement, although Woolf determines the natures of "life" and "reality" to be somewhat more abstract than they are traditionally supposed (respectively 198, and 191-92), and Beton conjectures that our understanding of "truth" is not necessarily based upon our own "life" experiences, but rather on "an inner light" or "premonition," "traced in invisible ink on the walls of the mind," by "Nature, in her most irrational mood" (125). This "premonition" parallels the "instinct" that prompts Beton to construe the heterosexual marriage and its sexual consummation as a basis for androgyny: "One has a profound, if irrational, instinct in favour of the theory that the union of man and woman makes for the greatest satisfaction, the most complete happiness" (170). That Beton characterizes the instinct that evokes her metaphor and the premonition which it confirms as "irrational" gives us cause to be wary. Notably, Woolf endorses neither the "natural" premonition, nor the heterosexual instinct in her peroration. In fact, she claims that:

when I rummage in my own mind I find no noble sentiments about being companions and equals and influencing the world to higher ends. I find myself saying briefly and prosaically that it is much more important to be oneself than anything else. (193)

Later in her career Woolf emphatically denies the verity of arguments made from nature, and hence, the credibility of Nature as a basis for authority. She calls instead for a feminist revision of the conventional premises of truth, including Nature, that have been exploited by the patriarchy to perpetuate sexual and racial oppression. Woolf's call for feminist revision is most evident in Three Guineas, when she proposes an Outsider's Society that would follow the suffragettes of the early nineteenth century in undertaking:

endeavours of an experimental kind to discover what are the unwritten private laws; that is the laws that should regulate certain instincts, passions, mental and physical desires. That such laws exist and are observed by civilized people is fairly generally allowed; but it is beginning to be agreed that they were not laid down by "God," who is now very generally held to be a conception, of patriarchal origin, valid only for certain races, at certain stages and times; nor



by nature who is now known to vary greatly in her commands and to be largely under control; but have to be discovered afresh by successive generations, largely by their own efforts of reason and imagination. Since, however, reason and imagination are to some extent the product of our bodies, and there are two kinds of body, male and female, and since these two bodies have been proved within the past few years to differ fundamentally, it is clear that the laws that they perceive and respect must be differently interpreted. (185, note 42)

While Three Guineas can be regarded as a feminist revision of the premises of "truth" that Mary Beton's androgynous mind metaphor takes for granted, I believe that Woolf's image of a room of one's own with a lock on the door is also such a revision, and provides the impetus for the model of female authority that the Outsider's Society represents.

We have learned in A Room of One's Own that male and female writing, their respective "efforts of reason and imagination," do indeed take different "shapes," based on the "fundamental" differences between male and female bodies, and the consequential differences of experience, as bodies, that each incurs. Male writing derives both its form and its authority from the public institutions whose

ideals it expresses. Thus the domes and arcades of cathedrals and colleges are the shape of male writing; it is from within such institutions that the societal conventions, or "unwritten private laws," that regulate "certain instincts" (such as "chastity" and heterosexual bias) are established and inscribed. It is under the auspices of the church and the college that society at large receives these "unwritten laws," what Mary Beton calls "the perpetual admonitions of the eternal pedagogue" (130). Such are the words of God as transcribed by the bishop,<sup>27</sup> and the designs of nature as delineated by the professors. The authority of male discourse is effected by writing within conventions readily accessible to other Fellows or members, and is retained by excluding others from knowledge of those conventions, while simultaneously using the privilege of voice to deny outsiders (women, the working class, and colonial natives) the means to establish their own conventions.<sup>28</sup>

Mary Beton recognizes the effectiveness of such exclusion, and that a woman had to be "stalwart" to persist in writing anyway:

One must have been something of a firebrand to say to oneself, Oh but they can't buy literature too. Literature is open to everybody. I refuse to allow you, Beadle though you are, to turn me off the grass. Lock up your libraries if you like;

but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you  
can set upon the freedom of my mind. (131)

What Beton seems less cognizant of, however, is the infiltration of patriarchal bias into even the economically independent woman writer's psyche. Her own metaphor of androgynous mind is compromised by such bias, most notably in her injunction that "If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her" (170). The reader must recognize that it would be oppressive to the woman writer if even in the mind, that "room of one's own," the female muse were required to be accompanied by a Fellow, moreover to copulate with him, in order to communicate with her audience.

We must realize, however, that "androgyny" is a model for authority that attempts to communicate with an audience of both men and women. Mary Beton claims about the novels of Galsworthy and Kipling that "some of the finest works of our greatest living writers fall upon deaf ears. Do what she will a woman cannot find in them that fountain of perpetual life which the critics assure her is there" (177). In this claim, she reveals that the lack of communication only occurs across genders, that the male critics accord these works by male writers the authority that comes of following traditional conventions. What she does not consider, (that I argue Woolf does,) is that women

might write to a female audience only, an audience that may not discount righteous indignation as legitimate content for fiction nor display shock because Chloe "liked" Olivia.

Unlike the persona Mary Beton, Virginia Woolf sees the threat of patriarchal imposition clearly; to the image of a "room of one's own," that represents "freedom of mind" to Beton, she adds a lock on the door (186). While the patriarchal "you" can not put a lock on the woman writer's freedom of mind, a self-installed lock of a different type can prohibit his access to her. This lock does not restrict her mind from venturing forth outside its room; in fact, her creative energies can no longer be contained by the rooms she has heretofore been confined to:

For women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must needs harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics. (152)

Nor does this lock maintain public propriety and privilege, as do those at college, chapel, and cathedral; instead it ensures both intellectual and sexual self-determination. It is from such a room with a lock on the door that Woolf suggests female authority derives, and from such a room that the body, whose experiences must be told, and the mind that shall communicate those experiences, are to remain

free from sexual and psychological imposition by the male. I suggest once again, on the basis of an interpolation of Woolf's imagery into Beton's narrative, and on the basis of both the explicit and implicit contrast to the institutional shape of male writing, that the shape of women's writing--its sexual, textual, and intellectual metaphor--is a room of one's own with a lock on the door.

## CHAPTER III

### "ANDROGYNY" AND THE DUPLICITOUS NARRATOR

What we understand about the relationship between androgyny, a room of one's own, and the prospects for female authority depends on how we read Mary Beton. Before giving her voice, Woolf calls on us to question her credibility, to draw our own conclusions, to "observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker" (5). Moreover, she cautions us that as she mouths Beton's words, "Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping" (6). Beginning, then, with a sort of liar's paradox to beguile rather than guide us, we must find a criteria by which to gauge credibility, to discern the "truth" from the "lie." I have proposed a process of confirmation and corroboration, where, by virtue of a narrative frame, Woolf resists implication in Beton's "lies" but concurs with her evocation of "truth."

However, to refer Beton's entire discourse to the conclusions Woolf derives from it would be extremely reductive. Nor could Woolf's conclusions stand on their own without the substantiation that Beton's investigation

provides. The vast majority of Beton's own conclusions follow from reasoned argument; those that seem untenable are most often patently facetious. Consider, for example, her tentative adoption of the argument against allowing the "protected sex" access to previously male employment:

Remove that protection, expose them to the same exertions and activities, make them soldiers and sailors and engine-drivers and dock-labourers, and will women not die off so much younger, so much quicker than men that one will say, "I saw a woman today," as one used to say, "I saw an aeroplane." (69)

Notably, she does not suggest, "make her a barrister, a bishop, a professor, or a judge," and thereby ironizes the argument by the exception of those "protected professions." Beton must also be aware that women did serve as ambulance drivers, nurses, and laborers during the war. More telling, in terms of her later metaphor for androgyny, is her awareness of the hardships women have endured even as "the protected sex": the wife- and daughter-beating that were the recognized right of the patriarch during the Elizabethan era (72-73); the bearing and care of children throughout the ages, but particularly during the Victorian era, when a Mrs. Seton might have "thirteen children by a minister of the church" (35); and the demeaning personal servitude by which women prior to 1918 had to make their

livings (64) if they wished to avoid the sexual servitude of marriage. Also apparently facetious is Beton's blame of the suffragists for the misogyny of contemporary male writing. However, Beton's position on this issue is a bit more complex, for she does not explicitly counter her claim elsewhere:

No age can ever have been as stridently sex-conscious as our own; those innumerable books by men about women in the British Museum are a proof of it. The Suffrage campaign was no doubt to blame. It must have roused in men an extraordinary desire for self-assertion; it must have made them lay an emphasis upon their own sex and its characteristics which they would not have troubled to think about had they not been challenged. (172)

Descrying the effects of this sex-consciousness in the work of the hypothetical Mr. A--"He is protesting against the equality of the other sex by asserting his own superiority"--Beton continues to place the blame on the feminist agitators:

He is therefore impeded and inhibited and self-conscious as Shakespeare might have been too had he known Miss Clough and Miss Davies. Doubtless Elizabethan literature would have been very different from what it is if the women's movement



had begun in the sixteenth century and not the nineteenth. (175-76)

We have been encouraged, even conditioned by both Beton and Woolf to respond "But," at junctures such as these. For Beton has already exonerated that representative feminist, Miss Emily Davies, whose research makes possible in part Beton's own argument (115), and whose successful endeavor to gain women the vote allows Beton to advocate provisions for women's authority that depend upon women retaining their rights to own property and earn money. On the other hand, Beton has discredited the male insistence that women are inherently inferior as an "illusion" of disproportion-- "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (60)--of dubious value to "civilized societies" but "essential to all violent and heroic action" (61). Hence we might conclude that the sex-conscious protests of women of that era are based on truth and justified, whereas those of their male contemporaries insist upon an illusion, are unjust and invalid. However, Beton's closing comments assert unequivocally that the first sentence she would write for "her" lecture on Women and Fiction would be "it is fatal for any one who writes to think of their sex." Furthermore, she would add:

It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly. It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause; in any way to speak consciously as a woman.

(181)

This is an instance where we must find recourse in the authority of the outer frame. If Beton is indeed Woolf's retrojected self (5), the end of her investigation, analysis, and conjecture refers us back to the beginning of Woolf's lecture. There has, it seems, been a great deal of revision between the first sentences Beton drafts for this talk on Women and Fiction, and the first words Woolf utters as she addresses her audience: "But, you may say, we asked you to speak on women and fiction--what has a room of one's own to do with that?" (3). This recursive ploy reasserts the primacy of the metaphor of "a room of one's own" and suggests that "androgyny" is at best a tentative answer to women's attainment of narrative authority, dismissed upon reflection; at worst, it implies a retraction by Beton of her heretofore feminist rhetoric, a concession to the patriarchs that hide behind curtains (159), infiltrating women's rooms, impinging upon their consciousnesses, and imposing both demands and strictures upon their bodies.

There remains the supposition that Shakespeare's plays would have been stifled had the consciousness-raising of

those early feminists taken place three centuries earlier. Beton and Woolf rationalize that possibility in like manner. For if women had enjoyed the freedoms--won largely through the efforts of such agitators--three hundred years earlier, then the "masterpieces," which "are not single and solitary births," but "the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice" (113), would have already found their voice in some Mary Carmichael, whom, even given the exaggerated sex-consciousness of the Modern era, "will be a poet...in another hundred years' time" (164). Likewise, Judith Shakespeare would have "put on the body which she has so often laid down" over a century ago; although without that additional three hundred years of freedom that a room of one's own represents--privacy, economic independence, sexual autonomy--we must wait "another century or so" (198) for her resurrection. The "masterpieces" of William Shakespeare--made possible by the general populace's unquestioning acceptance of male privilege--may have been lost, but they would have been replaced by the masterpieces of a Judith Shakespeare who required freedom rather than privilege.

In the previous instances, we have seen how the narrative frames encircling Woolf and Beton interact to suggest a truth beyond simple statement and assertion--

Beton's narrative informing and proposing, Woolf's frame confirming and qualifying. We should also consider that while Woolf's conclusions depend upon Mary Beton's endeavors, Mary Beton's narrative does not require Woolf's (aside from the a priori creation of Beton herself). This distinction is important for two reasons. First, it underscores Woolf's rhetorical strategy of deferring conclusions, placing the burden of proof upon Beton and the challenge of analysis on her audience. Second, it indicates that Beton has a subversive project of her own, for she often discredits her own conventional suppositions, independent of Woolf's voice-over--generally, by contextualizing them. As we shall see, she is not simply Woolf's dupe or a daughter of the patriarchy.

What I mean by "deferred conclusion" is demonstrated best by Woolf's interpretation of the topic "Women and Fiction," and her subsequent disclaimer that "she should never be able to come to a conclusion," she "should never be able to fulfill...the first duty of a lecturer--to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth" (4). Yet as soon as she substitutes for that formidable responsibility "an opinion upon one minor point--a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (4), she creates and authorizes Mary Beton to compress into that metaphor connotations and contexts that address the topic as she first interpreted it:

The title women and fiction might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, women and what they are like; or it might mean women and the fiction that they write; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them; or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together and you want me to consider them in that light. (3-4)

When in her peroration Woolf reiterates the need for a room of one's own, it fuses all those considerations into its "truth." The metaphor "a room of one's own" is our nugget of pure truth, but we have had to mine it from layers of assertion and qualification.

Beton too employs the strategy of deferring conclusions to the questions that inform her own discourse. As practical matters impinge upon her contemplation--she may not enter the library at Oxbridge, she has missed the turn to Fernham--the respective questions, "what is style and what is meaning?" (11), and "which is the truth and which is the illusion?" (25) are apparently abandoned. Yet these question reemerge periodically, the terms gaining significance as they are defined in new contexts.

In its original context, the question, "what is style and what is meaning?" is prompted by Beton's consideration of "the affectation of style" in Thackeray's Esmond, "with its imitation of the eighteenth century." Such style can

only be effectual if it is indeed "natural to Thackeray" and in the service of "sense" rather than for the sake of "style" itself, Beton suggests (11). Later Beton applies the same standard to women's narrative style, particularly its "sequence," in her reading of Mary Carmichael's first novel:

she had gone further and broken the sequence--the expected order. Perhaps she had done this unconsciously, merely giving things their natural order, as a woman would, if she wrote like a woman. But the effect was somehow baffling; one could not see a wave heaping itself, a crisis coming round the next corner. (159)

The implication here, that woman's "natural" sequence may not be the same as the masculine order--"the wave heaping," the readily anticipated climax--is confirmed later in Beton's investigation, as she shows the sensibility and the sequence of "the finest works of our greatest living writers" to be inimical to women:

the emotion with which these books are permeated is to a woman incomprehensible. It is coming, it is gathering, it is about to burst on one's head, one begins saying long before the end...But one will rush away before that happens and hide in the gooseberry bushes...(178)

As Beton cites this reaction with regard to "Mr. Kipling's officers who turn their backs; and his Sowers who sow the Seed," and elaborates that such figures in contemporary male novels make the woman reader feel as if she "had been caught eavesdropping at some purely masculine orgy" (178), she reinforces the idea that male sequence reflects male sexuality as it expresses male sensibility. For that reason women must reject such order, replacing it with a sequence consistent with their own experience. To arrive at this conclusion, however, Beton has to foresake her conventional expectations:

whenever I was about to feel the usual things in the usual places, about love, about death, the annoying creature twitched me away, as if the important point were just a little further on. And thus she made it impossible for me to roll out my sonorous phrases about "elemental feelings," the "common stuff of humanity," "the depths of the human heart," and all those other phrases that support us in our belief that, however clever we may be on top, we are very serious, very profound and very humane underneath. She made me feel, on the contrary, that instead of being serious and profound and humane, one might be--and the thought was far less seductive--merely lazy minded and conventional into the bargain. (159-60)

These critical cliches describe a literature masculine in both style and sense. The "integrity" between the style of such literature and its sense is masculine also. When Beton explains, "What one means by integrity, in the case of the novelist, is the conviction he gives one that this is the truth" (125), she purposefully uses the male pronoun. She also makes it clear, by contrast, that such "truth" does not have a basis in the experience of the feminine "one": "one feels, I should never have thought that this could be so; I have never known people behaving like that" (125). The fact that women affirm this "truth," despite their own experience--"Yes...you have convinced me so it is, so it happens"--is a testament to the power of culturally conditioned "instinct" and "desire" (126).

Beton's concept of "integrity" also brings to bear the question she had grappled with on her way to Fernham, "which was the truth and which was illusion?" Although her contemplation is disrupted and she supplies no immediate answer (25), our understanding of "integrity" as a conviction of "truth" requires at least a tentative answer to that question.

As before, Beton's question is prompted by a consideration of literary merit, and again she poses it in terms of the impact of one's era on such evaluations. After praising the poetry of Alfred Lord Tennyson and



Christina Rossetti for epitomizing the romantic sentiments shared between the sexes before the Modern age, she continues to contemplate:

I went on to wonder if honestly one could name two living poets now as great as Tennyson and Rossetti were then. Obviously, it is impossible, I thought, to compare them. The very reason why that poetry excites one to such abandonment, such rapture, is that it celebrates some feeling that one used to have...so that one responds easily, familiarly, without troubling to check the feeling, or compare it to any one has now. But the living poets express a feeling that is actually being made and torn out of us at the moment. (23)

Beton's reflection itself challenges such abandonment, for she does check the feeling. What she finds as the basis for her affirmation is nostalgia. We learn, moreover, that the "feeling one used to have" was based on "illusion":

Shall we lay blame on the war? When the guns fired in August 1914, did the faces of men and women show so plain in each other's eyes that romance was killed? Certainly it was a shock (to women in particular with their illusions about education and so on) to see the faces of our rulers in the light of the shell fire. So ugly

they looked--German, English, French--so stupid...But why say "blame"? Why, if it was an illusion, not praise the catastrophe, whatever it was, that destroyed illusion and put truth in its place? For truth... (25)

Her contemplation of literature and relations between the sexes is temporarily interrupted by missing the turn to Fernham; back on course, Beton resumes her inquiry by restating her question, "which was the truth and which was illusion?" to interrogate her apprehension of her environment as well. Although she drops this question without providing a pat answer, her narrative points out that other illusions about the sexes--the illusion held "all these centuries" that women are inherently inferior to men (60-62), the illusion that education modifies male savagery (65), the illusion that chastity is an instinct for women (86-87)--underlie the "truth" we read in canonized literature. Literature is in collusion with Nature and education to keep relations between the sexes status quo, for literature provides the stories--women in relation to men only--while Nature, (we have been educated to believe) traces patriarchal "premonitions" on the walls of the mind (125) and instills in us instincts, such as "the union of man and woman makes for the greatest satisfaction, the most complete happiness" (170). Again, the integrity of these works, their authority, is a

correspondence between socially-conditioned instinct and generally-accepted illusions. As we have seen in Beton's initial reaction to Mary Carmichael's novel, failing to check such feelings leads one to accept and expect the conventional, thus perpetuating the illusions about the sexes that sustain it.

By deferring her queries about women and fiction to first consider apparently innocuous questions of the impact of an age on discriminations of literary merit, Beton calls upon the Modern prejudice against the conventional to establish support for her subsequent and parallel claims regarding the impact of one's sex on such deliberations. She can be assured that the objection, "But Tennyson and Rosetti are clearly not superior to Eliot or Yeats" will be forthcoming, as will the agreement, "certainly one should not affect an outdated style to express the sensibility of the present." Yet she can not be so sure that an audience other than women will grant that Mr. A is not superior to Mary Carmichael, or that women should not affect masculine style to express their sensibility.

In the event that we do not perceive the correspondence between one's era and one's sex in making assessments of literature's "truth" and "meaning," we can recall Beton's previous example, regarding the same

variables as they affect judgements about the worth of various professions:

Is the charwoman who has brought up eight children of less value to the world than the barrister who has made a hundred thousand pounds? It is useless to ask such questions; for nobody can answer them. Not only do the comparative values of charwomen and lawyers rise and fall from decade to decade, but we have no rods with which to measure them even as they are at the moment. I had been foolish to ask my professor to provide me with "indisputable proofs" of this or that in his argument about women. Even if one could state the value of any one gift at the moment, those values will change; in a century's time very possibly they will have changed completely. (69)

Beton's argument claims that the value of women and men and what they do are relative to the age as well as to each other, that changes in time bring changes in status. Yet we have seen that there are valuations--"illusions"--that persist for centuries, just as there are "professors" who think they have the measuring rods (153). Beton shows us that literature has played, and still plays, an essential and reciprocal role in maintaining the authority of both.

Moreover, such authority had become so entrenched that it took world war to disillusion both women and men.

In the foregoing instances, I have attempted to illustrate that, Woolf's intervention aside, Beton qualifies her own characterization of androgyny, causing us to question its desirability. She shows us that a lack of sex-consciousness may be the product of privilege or a complacent acceptance of "illusion," resulting in the promulgation of misbegotten "truths." Similarly, the authority or "integrity" of the vision an androgynous mind manifests may be no more than a confirmation of the reader's pre-conditioned expectations.

Finally, the argument can be made that Beton's concept of androgyny is meant to counteract specifically the sex-conscious misogyny of contemporary male writing, a contingency that would perhaps facilitate women's pursuit of the alternate provisions for women's authority Beton established in the first five chapters--a room of one's own, a tradition of women writers, and a sentence, sequence, and style consistent with women's experience.

After providing her first "sketch" of the androgynous mind--ending with the injunction, "If one is man, still the woman must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her" (170), Beton conjectures, "Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create any more than a mind that is purely feminine" (171), and

proposes "it would be well to test what one meant by man-womanly, and conversely by woman-manly, by pausing and looking at a book or two" (171). Yet despite what she conjectures and proposes, the books she examines are all by men, and they illustrate only the dangers of the purely masculine mind. Indeed, in the previous chapter, Beton's critique of the work of Mary Carmichael as representative of contemporary women's writing noted in particular its lack of sex-consciousness, due largely to the fact that she has a room of her own (164).

The first book Beton looks at is a new novel by Mr. A, who is "protesting against the equality of the other sex by asserting his own superiority" (175). His narrator is a self-assertive "I," "a straight dark bar," "a shadow across the page" that keeps us from distinguishing what lies behind it. More disconcerting, however, is that his protest takes on connotations of rape. We share Beton's reading of a scene from Mr. A's book:

she has not a bone in her body, I thought watching Phoebe, for that was her name, coming across the beach. Then Alan got up and the shadow of Alan at once obliterated Phoebe. For Alan had views and Phoebe was quenched in the flood of his views. And then Alan, I thought, has passions; and here I turned page after page very fast, feeling that the crisis was

approaching, and so it was. It took place on the beach under the sun. It was done very openly. It was done very vigorously. Nothing could have been more indecent. (174)

Although this scene may not be explicitly or overtly a rape--the "it," the crisis alluded to unspecified, perhaps unmentionable--the obliteration of Phoebe, the passion of Alan, and the open and vigorous and indecent act that culminates their relationship suggest to me a subjugation of that nature. If so, it is a rape that author, narrator, and character alike collude in, a scene inscribed on the mind's eye by the masculine "I" as a warning. Yet rather than revile Mr. A for the aggression of his book, she recalls the idealized relations between the sexes in the poetry of Tennyson and Christina Rossetti (175) and blames the suffragists for making "virility" "self-conscious" (176).

Mr. A's book is not, however, an isolated instance. Both its sentiment and the sequence of its plot are typical, suggests Beton, as she parodies the purely masculine climax in the novels of Galsworthy and Kipling. Although I have quoted part of this passage before, I cite it here more fully. Note in particular the exaggerated imagery, for it is specifically this imagery that is modified in Beton's description of the consummation of opposites in the "androgynous" mind.

It is coming, it is gathering, it is about to burst on one's head, one begins saying long before the end. That picture will fall on old Jolyon's head; he will die of the shock; the old clerk will speak over him two or three obituary words; and all the swans on the Thames will simultaneously burst out singing. But one will rush away before that happens and hide in the gooseberry bushes... (177)

While we have seen that women would be well advised to "rush away before that happens," Beton once again suggests that women have brought this upon themselves:

All seducers and reformers are responsible. Lady Bessborough when she lied to Lord Granville; Miss Davies when she told the truth to Mr. Greg. All who have brought about a state of sex-consciousness are to blame, and it is they who drive me, when I want to stretch my faculties on a book, to seek it in that happy age before Miss Clough and Miss Davies were born, when the writer used both sides of his mind equally. One must turn back to Shakespeare then, for Shakespeare was androgynous; and so was Keats and Sterne and Cowper and Lamb and Coleridge... (180)

The list of these androgynous writers goes on, and all of them are male. By now, we should be aware that something



is awry. To what "happy age" does she refer, we might wonder, since she spent more than a chapter detailing the hardships women endured in the Elizabethan era. Moreover, she previously attributed the sex-consciousness of the Modern age to the war; certainly Miss Davies did not start that. Other objections may be raised on the basis of the disproportionate relationship between the sexes in those pre-sex-conscious times:

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle. The glories of all our wars would be unknown... Supermen and Fingers of Destiny would never have existed. The Czar and the Kaiser would never have worn their crowns or lost them. Whatever may be their use in civilized societies, mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action. That is why Napoleon and Mussolini insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge. (60-61)

We must therefore ask ourselves, as Beton professes her nostalgia for the literature of the past, whether a return to pre-war illusions would really rectify the "unmitigated

masculinity" evident in Fascist Italy (179) or the "self-assertive masculinity" imminent in England. Or, we might ask if the sensibility imploring the "development by the average woman of a prose style completely expressive of her mind" (165) is really as threatening as that motivating the consortiums of men convened "to develop the Italian novel" and the "Fascist poem" (179). Having pointed out that there was a misogynist Napoleon before there was the misogynist Mussolini, Beton seems to indicate that women can neither relate to men as inferiors or as equals without "causing" them to become despots or rapists.

In addition to blaming the suffragists for male sex-consciousness, as if their actions were reprehensible, and waxing nostalgic over poetry that idealized the relationship between the sexes, Beton raises up an all-male "androgynous" tradition as an example contemporary writers should emulate. Notably, the tone of these arguments seems to be conciliatory toward men and the patriarchal literary tradition. They are, however, a prelude to Beton's final pitch for "androgyny," which she claims she would write at the very beginning of her paper on "Women and Fiction." Yet in terms of arguments Beton has made earlier, "androgyny" does not make sense as an alternative for women writers to adopt, especially considering that their sex-consciousness has been almost eradicated as a result of having rooms of their own, and that the metaphor for

androgyny would reconstruct in the consciousness the very relationship that has oppressed women for centuries.

The explanation that "androgyny" is directed specifically toward men, under the guise of a sexually-indiscriminate argument, is the most logical conclusion to be drawn from the argument as Beton has presented it. Thus, despite the fact that Beton is writing for an audience of college women, her exhortation addresses a male writer:

Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the act of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated. The whole of the mind must lie wide open if we are to get the sense that the writer is communicating his experience with perfect fullness. There must be freedom and there must be peace. Not a wheel must grate, not a light glimmer. The curtains must be close drawn. The writer, I thought, once his experience is over, must lie back and let his mind celebrate its nuptials in darkness. He must not look or question what is being done. Rather, he must pluck the petals from a rose or watch the swans float calmly down the river. (182)

While there is cause to wonder why the writer must not look at what is being done, there is even more cause to wonder

why Beton has chosen to use a male writer to exemplify this dynamic of "androgyny" in a paper on the topic of "Women and Fiction." The imagery of Beton's metaphor provides another indication that it is intended specifically to redress male sex-consciousness. Thus we might note that the swans floating calmly down the river are a direct contrast to the imagery used to characterize the climax of "purely masculine" novels by contemporary male writers, wherein "all the swans on the Thames will simultaneously burst out singing" (177) to mark the death of some great man. In addition, the image of the closed curtains contrasts directly with a scene from Mary Carmichael's book, which Beton notes parenthetically while concluding her discussion of the importance of "a room of one's own":

Give her another hundred years, I concluded, reading the last chapter--people's noses and bare shoulders showed naked against a starry sky, for some one had twitched the curtain in the drawing room--give her a room of her own and five hundred a year... (164)

The significance of such imagery is further established with reference to Beton's claim about the importance of her inheritance in dissipating her own sex-consciousness: "Indeed my aunt's legacy unveiled the sky to me, and substituted for the large and imposing figure of a gentleman, which Milton recommended for my perpetual

adoration, a view of the open sky" (67). Since such a view is clearly associated with women's ability to express themselves in both instances, and is also associated with the economic independence that "a room of one's own" represents, the contrast of such imagery to that used in Beton's metaphor for "androgyny" is another indication that "androgyny" is not applicable to women. On the other hand, the contrast of the swan imagery in this metaphor to imagery that characterizes male sex-consciousness, suggests that "androgyny" is a metaphor directed toward men.

In this chapter, I have sought to establish the ways in which Beton herself undermines "androgyny" as a viable perspective for women writers to adopt. As I suggested in the first chapter, the misogyny of contemporary male writers, that "force in things which one had overlooked" motivates this abrupt change in the focus of her discourse.

## CONCLUSION

In the foregoing chapters, I have sought to elucidate the rhetorical strategy of A Room on One's Own as proof that, contrary to the prevailing critical view, Woolf did not advocate "androgyny" as a perspective that women writers should cultivate in order to effect authority.

One aspect of that strategy is Woolf's creation of a fictional persona to re-enact the process which led her to claim "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (4), as the thesis of her lecture on "Women and Fiction." Under that pretext, Mary Beton investigates women's authority in a variety of contexts that establish "a room of one's own" as a metaphor for such authority and provide it with its connotations of economic independence, intellectual freedom, and sexual autonomy. By the end of chapter five, she reaches the conclusion with which Woolf began her lecture, thus presumably fulfilling her rhetorical purpose. However, instead of referring us back to Woolf's discourse, Beton begins the final chapter by proposing that both women and men should adopt an androgynous perspective in order to write literature. It is that portion of Beton's narrative that has led to the impression that Woolf is a proponent of androgyny.

However, the sexual imperative and patriarchal ideology that Beton incorporates within her metaphor for such a perspective make it contradictory to the imagery and implications of "a room of one's own," which Beton establishes in the first five chapters. I have argued that Woolf circumscribes Beton within a narrative frame, specifically so that she can illustrate the biases and limitations of a perspective that would have been imposed on a woman of her class and generation, and yet reject those prejudices. Woolf clearly warns us to look for such bias before giving Beton voice (5), and reminds us of them again before resuming the argument for "a room of one's own" in her own person (183). Thus, while she corroborates the provisions for women's authority that Beton develops in conjunction with the "room of one's own" metaphor, she excludes "androgyny" from her own recommendations, making no reference to it in either the introduction or the conclusion.

Another aspect of the rhetorical strategy of A Room of One's Own that subverts the utility of "androgyny" as an approach to women's authority is the duplicity of Beton's own narrative. While there are numerous instances of this duplicity, I have noted in particular how Beton makes a universal argument for "androgyny" in order to redress specifically the sex-consciousness of men. She has already shown in the previous chapter that the contemporary woman

writer has lost her sex-consciousness, largely as a result of having "a room of her own"; indeed, in the section on "androgyny" all of the examples of sex-consciousness that she cites are from the writing of men. In addition, the "androgynous" tradition she holds up as an example to modern writers is made up of male writers only, and her projection of the form that "androgyny" would take uses a male writer as its example (even though her paper is supposedly on "Women and Fiction"). Thus when she justifies her metaphor on the grounds that "No age can ever have been as stridently sex-conscious as our own" (172), she refers in particular to male sex-consciousness. This makes sense in light of the fact that women's circumstances were generally improved following World War I and the Suffrage movement, while men lost some of the privilege they had taken for granted previously. I have suggested that Beton's duplicity is prompted by her awareness of the repercussions that her more radical proposals for women's authority might entail, as indicated by the misogyny of Modern male writing, the rise of Fascist sentiment (also misogynist), and the recent censorship of Radclyffe Hall's novel, The Well of Loneliness, for its lesbian content.

In the introduction to this thesis, I suggested that the importance of excluding "androgyny" from Woolf's provisions for women's authority had to do with the nature of the criticism of both her fiction and theory that is



derived from that premise. Those that accept "androgyny" as a credible alternative for the woman artist's empowerment generally reconstruct the masculine bias of that metaphor, as demonstrated by the cited readings of To the Lighthouse by Carolyn Heilbrun and Ellen Tremper. On the other hand, those that recognize that "androgyny" is a detrimental model for women to emulate and yet believe Woolf endorsed that model, usually characterize Woolf's feminist theory as flawed or compromised, as suggested by the critiques of Showalter and Farwell. If we agree, as most feminist critics do, that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (132), then women critics as well as women novelists must think back through Woolf.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> From here on, I designate "a room of one's own" and "androgyny" as metaphors or models for women's authority by placing them within quotation marks.

<sup>2</sup> The essays that deal with A Room of One's Own as a primary text are chapter four, "Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny"; chapter seven, "Taking the Bull by the Udders: Sexual Difference in Virginia Woolf--A Conspiracy Theory"; and chapter eight, "Sapphisty: Narration as Lesbian Seduction in A Room of One's Own." However, A Room of One's Own is referred to frequently in the other essays also.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, Marcus considers Woolf's substitution of the Mary persona (with its respective manifestations as Mary Beton, Mary Seton, and Mary Carmichael) for the self-assertive "I" typically found in male discourse to be part of a rhetorical strategy of collaboration and inclusiveness, rather than a tactic to separate Woolf from the views expressed by Beton (145-50). I agree that the sense of the text as a whole is effected by the collaboration between Woolf and the narrator/persona, Mary Beton, but I believe that part of Woolf's project in A Room of One's Own is to show how insidious patriarchal bias is, and how women are persuaded to acknowledge the patriarchal values that oppress them. I argue that Woolf achieves this end by having Beton embody these biases and later discard

them or reveal their inadequacy with regard to women. However, Beton's proposal of "androgyny" is a relapse into such bias, and is prompted by her awareness of the masculine backlash against the freedoms women gained in the decades around the turn of the century.

<sup>4</sup> Woolf provides a more thorough explanation in the notes to Three Guineas, as follows: "Our ideology is still so inveterately anthropocentric that it has been necessary to coin this clumsy term--educated man's daughter--to describe the class whose fathers have been educated at public schools and universities. Obviously, if the term 'bourgeois' fits her brother, it is grossly incorrect to use it of one who differs so profoundly in the two prime characteristics of the bourgeois--capital and environment" (146, note 2). In accordance with this description, Beton is clearly an "educated man's daughter."

<sup>5</sup> Heilbrun later recants her support of androgyny as an interpretive construct, and provides a new reading of To the Lighthouse that makes no reference to androgyny in "To the Lighthouse: the New Story of Mother and Daughter" ADE-Bulletin. New York, NY (ADEB). 1987 Fall, 87: 12-14.

<sup>6</sup> The pretexts and dates of these essays are as follows: "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924), refutes Arnold Bennett's claim that Modern writers do not create characters that are "real, convincing, and true" on the basis that human nature has changed, and material

circumstance no longer conveys the truth or reality of "life itself," as Bennett and the Edwardians suppose it to. "Modern Fiction" (1925) is a sort of manifesto for Modern fiction, that characterizes the struggle of the Moderns to create fiction that depicts a psychological, rather than simply material reality. "How it Strikes a Contemporary" (1923), challenges the critical preoccupation with the past and the usefulness of assessing Modern fiction by standards established within a very different social order, and suggests that Modern writing should be valued for its sincerity and its attempt to come closer to life. "Women Novelists" (1918) is a review of R. Brimley Johnson's survey of women's novels, The Women Novelists. In that review, Woolf suggests that any theory as to the course of development followed by women novelists must consider not only literature, but social history as well. "Men and Women" (1920), is a review of Leonie Villard's account of the "evolution" and "emancipation" of nineteenth-century English women, as documented by their characterization in novels. Woolf qualifies Villard's project by noting that the women characters in novels by men misrepresent women as what men desire women to be or wish to be themselves; or, such characters may simply be scapegoats for the general ills of humanity. Significantly, Woolf agrees with Villard's insistence on the importance of women working (in the factories) as a prelude to their intellectual freedom.

Woolf also notes in this review the restrictions placed on women's writing by the fact that language and the forms of literature have been shaped by men. Finally, "The Intellectual Status of Women" (1918), is Woolf's rebuttal of Desmond MacCarthy's support for Bennett's claim that "women are inferior to men in intellectual power" to which he adds that "no amount of education and liberty of action will sensibly alter." Woolf counters that their conclusion lacks substantive evidence (women having been denied education and liberty for centuries), and that women's advances from century to century have been "immense."

<sup>7</sup> McNeillie adds the note to this essay that suggests that in addition to the change in reign from King Edward VII to King George V, this date also alludes to the fact that: "The First Post-Impressionist Exhibition opened at Grafton Galleries on 8 November 1910, the ramifications of which startling event were yet to be fully registered in [Woolf's] fiction" (Virginia Woolf's Essays 437).

<sup>8</sup> In "From Beyond the Reaches of Feminist Criticism: a Letter from Paris," Shari Benstock attests to the relevance of Woolf's practice, as she similarly seeks to recontextualize Gertrude Stein's literary project, extricating it from assessments that "discuss her work within the confines of the modernist project" (25), and according to "the dictates of modernist thought" (26), without acknowledging "the set of masculine claims and

heterosexual values embedded in the work of modernism" (13). In her larger project of contemplating the future of feminist criticism, Benstock mediates between the women critics "who suggest that women should look to themselves and their own experience for models of critical discourse and those who suggest we should look beyond male-female dichotomies" (27). These alternatives seem curiously parallel to the alternatives Woolf mediates between in A Room of One's Own--"a room of one's own" and "androgyny." Indeed, Benstock engages the question of the future of feminist criticism in much the same way Woolf engaged the question of the future of women's fiction, and to much the same end. See also "Two Modernist Interpretations: Linguistic Routes and Postwar Despair" and "Alternative Modernisms" in Benstock, Women 24-34.

<sup>9</sup> In A Room of One's Own, the term "chastity" encompasses both women's ignorance of sexual matters, and their lack of egotism and concern for fame (the latter quality is also referred to as "anonymity" [49-50]).

<sup>10</sup> In the version of HSC that Woolf revises for The Common Reader, she satirizes the critical preoccupation with the past: "it would be better to retreat, as Matthew Arnold has advised, from the burning ground of the present to the safe tranquillity of the past...a study of the classics is to be recommended. Moreover, life is short; the Byron centenary is at hand; and the burning question of

the moment is, did he, or did he not, marry his sister?" (245).

<sup>11</sup> Woolf incorporates the terms "evolution" and "emancipation" from Villard's book into her own argument. See note 6.

<sup>12</sup> Notwithstanding Woolf's mocking comment in ISW, "though women have every reason to hope that the intellect of the male sex is steadily diminishing, it would be unwise, until they have more evidence than the great war and the great peace can provide, to announce it as fact" (56). However, that assertion is intended as a pointed rejoinder to MacCarthy's willingness to pronounce women as intellectually inferior, rather than as a serious prognosis of male intellect.

<sup>13</sup> John Burt makes a relevant argument in his intriguing article, "Irreconcilable Habits of Thought in A Room of One's Own and To the Lighthouse." He explains that the central argument of A Room of One's Own--that women's writing will gain authority as the economic and social circumstances that restricted their access to literary production are rectified--depends upon a "progressive view of human nature," a view clearly discredited by the first world war: "the war reveals facts about human nature that make every hope about moral advancement and progress mere wishful thinking." The underargument then "idealizes the imaginative androgyny of the past" in order to displace the

post-war fear and antagonism between the sexes with a longing for a more peaceful coexistence. Burt acknowledges that such "androgyny" "idealizes the very sexual transaction that was the source of the problems that the major argument was intended to solve," yet contends that the hope for the future that "androgyny" is meant to salvage is not rational but emotional.

However, in interpreting the relationship between the two arguments, Burt places an unwarranted emphasis on male response as indicative of the prospects for women. While the war revealed that women's oppression by men was symptomatic of a larger will-to-power, it also provided some women the opportunity to escape such oppression by earning their own living. Although Woolf indicates (through Beton) that the sex-consciousness of men is a very real concern (particularly as it becomes embodied by a political movement such as Fascism), she reaffirms the necessity of women pursuing the economic, intellectual, and sexual autonomy symbolized as "a room of one's own." She does not, as Burt asserts, "take back her argument in a limited way" to "appease the force of the unspoken argument of the war, which might otherwise have repealed a progressive essay entirely" (894).

<sup>14</sup> Judith Johnston notes Woolf's awareness of the rise in fascist sentiment in Britain in the early 1930's, demonstrated by the resurging popularity of Sir Oswald



Mosley, a British fascist who had enlisted the support of Harold Nicolson (Vita Sackville-West's husband) for his party. Nicolson represented them in Parliament. See "The Remediable Flaw: Revisiting Cultural History in Between the Acts."

<sup>15</sup> These allusions are detailed in Jane Marcus's "Sapphisty: Narration as Lesbian Seduction in A Room of One's Own," a provocative reading "based on its relation to the trial of Radclyffe Hall's novel, The Well of Loneliness (1928), for obscenity" (163).

<sup>16</sup> Beton's criticism of Mr. A's purposeful and self-conscious indecency echoes her criticism of James Joyce's "conscious and calculated indecency" in B&Br (210), and in MF and HSC.

<sup>17</sup> In Three Guineas, Woolf argues convincingly that the repression of women within patriarchy parallels the political repression within fascism, that in fact, fascism originates in the power dynamics of the patriarchal family. While this position was radical and reviled at the time, its thesis has gained credibility as feminist scholars such as Maria-Antoinetta Macciocci have demonstrated that the ideology of fascism required the sexual and social repression of women, relegating them to sexual and reproductive functions. See also Barrett 14-15, Marcus 79-82, and Johnston 253-258.

<sup>18</sup> Sandra Gilbert provides a thorough discussion of male sex-consciousness following WWI, in the essay, "Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War." Signs 8:3 (1983), 422-450. For an even more comprehensive discussion, see War of the Words by Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in which they argue not only that "modernism, because of the distinctive social and cultural changes to which it responds, is differently inflected for male and female writers," but that such difference is inscribed in twentieth-century literature specifically as a conflict, a battle of the sexes (xii).

<sup>19</sup> Showalter claims that this "I" is not only impersonal, but desexed. However, the "I" is identified specifically as Mary Beton later in the text; furthermore, all of the options Woolf suggests are a Mary of some last name or other.

<sup>20</sup> Because my arguments insists that Virginia Woolf distinguishes her views from those of the narrator/persona Mary Beton by a narrative frame, I maintain that distinction in my own references to the various views articulated in A Room of One's Own.

<sup>21</sup> Bazin links manic depression to the polar opposites of feminine and masculine and applies Woolf's metaphor of androgyny to an attempt to find balance between the two. I believe that she forces the bi-polarities of sexuality onto the bi-polarities of manic depression. Her reading of To

the Lighthouse, in particular, characterizes the relationships between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay too narrowly.

22 Woolf discredits Browning's derogatory statements about women students by juxtaposing his utterance "the best woman was intellectually the inferior of the worst man" with his subsequent return to his quarters (derived from a biographical anecdote), where he remarks of the obviously uneducated and disadvantaged stable boy laying on his sofa, "he's a dear boy and really quite high-minded." Woolf implies that his sexual preference determines his assessment of female intelligence. Marcus clarifies this argument in Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy. She notes that the homosexual academics of Woolf's own circle, Lytton Strachey, E.M. Forster, and Lowes Dickinson, identified with the power of the patriarchy rather than with "outsiders," such as women. As part of the "homosexual hegemony over British culture derived from the values of the Cambridge Apostles and King's College," they practiced a misogyny as debilitating as their fathers'. By attacking Browning, their "philosophical father," Woolf was able to express the anger that she was unable to direct toward her friends (76, 137, 164).

23 In other of Woolf's works, such relationships with men are shown to be conducive to women's expression of themselves: the platonic sharing (advocated in Three Guineas) as demonstrated in To the Lighthouse by the

relationship between Lily Briscoe and William Bankes and between Lily and Augustus Carmichael, and at one time between Mrs. Ramsay and Augustus Carmichael; the hedonistic, as demonstrated by Mrs. Manresa in Between the Acts; and the illicit, as demonstrated by Aphra Behn or George Eliot (ROO 110).

<sup>24</sup> This passage initiates an on-going debate amongst feminist critics over whether women should claim a share in the literary tradition and linguistic practices that already exist, establish a separate canon and a different relation to language, or devise an entirely new language. A sense of the major issues involved in these respective arguments can be found in Nina Baym's "The Madwoman and her Languages: Why I Don't Do Feminist Literary Theory," in Benstock, Feminist Issues 45-61, Sandra Gilbert's "Woman's Sentence, Man's Sentencing: Linguistic Fantasies in Woolf and Joyce," in Marcus, VW and Bloomsbury, 208-14, and in Nora Eisenberg's "Virginia Woolf's Last Word on Words: Between the Acts and 'Anon'."

<sup>25</sup> Here Beton incorporates a gender stereotype from patriarchy into her theory for women's authority. There are other instances too, where her theorizing is marred by the apparent acceptance of such limitations; for instance, her assertion that women's creative power "differs greatly from the creative power of men. And one must conclude that it would be a thousand pities if it were hindered or

wasted, for it was won by centuries of the most drastic discipline, and there is nothing to take its place. It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men...Ought not education to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities? For we have too much likeness as it is..." (152). While it may be argued in this instance that Beton's plea accepts the stereotypes that patriarchy has imposed on women, stereotypes which have already led to different educations for men and women--his formal and paid for, and hers informal and untutored. However, it is the example of Olivia having to "devise some entirely new combination of her resources, so highly developed for other purposes, so as to absorb the new into the old without disturbing the infinitely intricate and elaborate balance of the whole" (147) that has prompted Beton's musing on the nature of women's creative power; it is more specifically that women writers should acknowledge and adapt what they have learned from the past, rather than emulating men that Beton is concerned with.

<sup>26</sup> Woolf's use of concentric frames to qualify various assertions or positions is used also in Between the Acts and Three Guineas. In Between the Acts, the message at the center of the vignette within the play within the pageant within the novel is "La, to think I read it in a book and cried for another," which one could argue is Woolf's

injunction for us in the outer frame to resist the frame-jumping narrator of that book, who in the final passage makes the audience passive witnesses to an archetypal rape.

<sup>27</sup> Beton satirizes the ends to which such figures use their authority: "I thought of that old gentleman, who is dead now, but was a bishop, I think, who declared that it was impossible for any woman, past, present, or to come, to have the genius of Shakespeare. He wrote to the papers about it. He also told a lady who applied to him for information that cats do not as a matter of fact go to heaven, though they have, he added, souls of a sort" (80).

<sup>28</sup> Woolf discusses "the conspiracy of silence" that the male literary establishment and press practice regarding the political advances by women in Three Guineas. See in particular 162, note 16.

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VITA 2

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