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“In Each of Us Two Powers Preside, One Male, One Female”:
Virginia Woolf’s Exploration of Mental Androgyny

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With foresight that anticipates the post-feminist perception of the inadequacy of traditional sexual binaries, Virginia Woolf proposes that “Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place” (*Orlando* 189). In effect, Woolf deconstructs such socially-constructed binaries by exempting characters from the physical and psychological limitations of designated gender roles that uphold patriarchal values. Such a radical suggestion of naturally-existing mental androgyny Woolf echoes in *A Room of One’s Own*, with the hypothesis that “in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female” (290). However, even as Woolf creates mentally androgynous characters that deviate from sexual stereotypes and even as she portrays them as free from limitations of conventional roles, Woolf sometimes adheres to traditional views of sexual identity and associated gender roles by distinguishing both sexes based on defining characteristics, albeit with the purpose of criticizing conformity in those characters. Still there exists a discrepancy in the means by which some characters remain mentally androgynous within the context of societies populated by those who conform to gender expectations. Perhaps if mental androgyny exists naturally in all characters as Woolf proposes, then the socially-constructed binaries act to psychologically and physically repress the female side in males and the male side in females, isolating the expression of stereotypical gender behaviors and mentalities in each sex for those who conform to social expectations. Thus, Woolf’s exploration of the liberating benefits of expressing one’s inner androgyny, as well as her critical portrayal of stereotypical male and female qualities in characters that conform, propels her feminist statement for freedom from the constraints of sexual stereotypes that control the way women live and think, enhancing her criticism of the patriarchy that enforces traditional sexual binaries.

Many critics address or acknowledge Woolf's proposal of mental androgyny and her critique of patriarchy, yet they tend to focus on neither the possibility that mental androgyny may exist naturally nor the tension that Woolf creates between conformity to traditional sexual roles and unconventionality in the form of mental androgyny in the context of a patriarchal society. Such a tension enhances the interpretation of patriarchal society as a force of physical suppression and physical subordination of females for the sake of continued male dominance and control. As Woolf explores male and female streams of consciousness in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *A Room of One's Own*, and *Orlando: A Biography*, she presents an underlying power struggle between the sexes based on socially-constructed sexual binaries. In evaluating the consequences of thinking of and living with both sexes as innately distinct and opposing entities, Woolf emphasizes the limitations of social classifications that do not account for an individual's variation in innate gender characteristics; she juxtaposes the mental and physical constraints that women encounter in the male-dominated domestic and political spheres with the freedom of mind and body that accompanies the expression of each sexes' inner androgyny. Although Woolf does not explain how such androgyny persists in a society that enforces conformity, she explores and highlights the beneficial and appealing consequences of its expression, with respect to the resulting freedom of expression and liberation from conventional life paths. Thus, Woolf deconstructs not only sexual binaries, but also the patriarchal system that upholds them and that splits the population into two imbalanced halves.

By emphasizing the prevalence of male dominance over females and its detrimental psychological and physical consequences for females in conventional domestic and political settings, Woolf criticizes the patriarchal imposition of sexual binaries for isolating the expression of stereotypical gender traits in each sex. Furthermore, characters' seemingly unconscious

conformity to conventional expectations allows Woolf to underscore the extent to which such patriarchy continues its negative influence upon infiltrating characters' lives and psyches. Gender dynamic among stereotypical married couples primarily exemplifies the domestic establishment of male dominance that subordinates women to men's wills. According to Sir William Bradshaw's idea of "Proportion," which symbolically indicates a congruity with social structures, men must live like he does, and women must live like Lady Bradshaw does, "embroider[ing], knit[ting], spen[ding] four nights out of seven at home with her son," accomplishing distinctively female duties (*Mrs. Dalloway* 98). Elizabeth Abel claims that Sir Bradshaw's imposition of these rules on his wife and patients characterizes him as an "officer of coercion," an "[ominous] embodi[ment]" of "male authority" in a "pervasively masculine present" (111). Ironically, goddesses – female beings of power – represent Sir Bradshaw's ideals of "Proportion" and "Conversion" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 98). Yet they "[renounce] their status as creative female powers" as "the contemporary counterpart to the ancient maternal deity," "serv[ing] the ideals of imperialism and patriarchy" (Abel 113). Indeed, "Conversion" "is even now engaged in dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 98). Woolf's characterization of the goddesses facilitates her criticism of such religiously-upheld constructs of patriarchal society that force women to obey men. The imperialistic imagery of "desire" for "power" and colonization "in the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa, the purlieus of London," that describes "Conversion, fastidious Goddess" ascertains Sir Bradshaw's active involvement in the continued domination of the human population by powerful males under the "[guise]" of "some venerable name" (98). R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt define the term "hegemonic masculinity" in the mid-1980s in a way that applies to sexual dynamic and hierarchy in Woolf's novels: "the pattern of

practice (i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that [allow] men's dominance over women to continue" (832). Sir Bradshaw and Mr. Ramsay – a similarly stern, imposing, “tyrann[ical]” male figure (*Lighthouse* 103) – encourage the continued influence of what Connell and Messerschmidt would call an ideological form of “hegemonic masculinity” in that the subordination of women as physical and intellectual inferiors continues according to “a set of role expectations” and socially-acceptable “identity” (832). The simile that likens Mr. Ramsay to a knife – “lean as a knife, narrow as the blade of one, grinning sarcastically” – captures his violent, hurtful tendency to cut down others' hopes and maintain control (*Lighthouse* 5). However, his main form of power never manifests itself as physical harm to his family; rather, he enforces others' obedience with his insistence on ideological congruity. The repetition of the descriptions “true,” “incapable of truth,” and “never tampered with fact,” along with the diction, “accuracy of judgment,” suggests that Mr. Ramsay allows little margin of error in opinion, little deviation by others from what he claims “[is] true” (5). Applying a postcolonial lens, James F. Wurtz similarly infers that “Mr. Ramsay's role as professor at Cambridge” makes him “responsible for training the future civil servants and officers who will keep the British Empire operating smoothly” (99). That Charles Tansley, a young philosopher who writes “dissertations” (*Lighthouse* 25), “imitat[es] Ramsay, right down to falling in love with Ramsay's wife” “profoundly disturb[s] on a deeper level” because “the younger intellectual” will continue Mr. Ramsay's patriarchal model (Wurtz 99).

Such an ideological “masculine hegemony” continues not only with the influential dominance of males like Sir Bradshaw and Mr. Ramsay, but also through “compliant[t]... heterosexual women” such as Lady Bradshaw and Mrs. Ramsay (Connell 832). Indirect evidence of the omnipresence and expansion of male power appears in the sinking, shrinking, and

shadowing of women in domestic relations to male figures. Even in their homes, Ellen Bayuk Rosenman asserts, women “are trapped in the sphere over which they preside—wielding considerable power, perhaps, over the practices of family life but unable to claim their autonomy or assert their needs within it” because “the private sphere of the home is also culturally constructed” by the traditional “values and demands of public space” (43). Indeed, both Lady Bradshaw and Mrs. Ramsay yield to the domineering influence of patriarchal power in their homes, proceed with their lives seemingly without question, even while physically and psychologically suppressed. Woolf uses this subtle tension to criticize the extent to which patriarchy detrimentally pervades and impacts the lives of women. In her marriage to Sir Bradshaw, Lady Bradshaw experiences “the slow sinking, water-logged, of her will into his,” suggesting that she succumbs to, or figuratively drowns in the same ideology of Conversion that Sir Bradshaw uses to control his patients (*Mrs. Dalloway* 99). The generic “the” to introduce such “sinking” implies a similar pattern among newly married women (99). Indeed, “water-logged” imagery also accompanies Mrs. Ramsay’s – and presumably all mothers’ – fulfillment of her motherly role, since children “come to her, naturally, since she [is] a woman” (*Lighthouse* 20). Consequently, Mrs. Ramsay “often fe[els] she [is] nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotion,” with her children “c[oming] to her... one wanting this, another wanting that” (20). Mrs. Ramsay devotes herself entirely to her role as entertainer and provider for her children to the extent that she serves as a dehumanized metaphorical object; the diction “sopped full” and its associated tactile, visual imagery captures the debilitating effect of others’ emotions filling her capacity (20). Significantly, the verbs used to describe Lady Bradshaw’s married life routine indicate her transition from previous independence to current subordination to her husband. Whereas Lady Bradshaw “once, long ago...caught salmon freely,” the assertive verb “caught”

placing her in a position of relative power, she now “cramp[s], squeeze[s], pare[s], prune[s], dr[aws] back” to accommodate her husband, the verbs indicating a shrinking movement with connotations of physical pain and discomfort (*Mrs. Dalloway* 99). The visual reference to fire in the description of “the craving which [lights] her husband’s eye so oilily for dominion, for power” accentuates Lady Bradshaw’s perpetual need to satiate his lasting, blazing greed (99). Using dramatic irony, Woolf reveals the negative psychological effect of Lady Bradshaw’s sacrificing her freedom and individuality to meet her husband’s demands. Readers infer that marriage causes the “very slight dulness, or uneasiness perhaps, a nervous twitch, fumble, stumble and confusion” that obstructs the “smooth and urbane” flow of evenings yet Lady Bradshaw has “submi[tted]” so “swift[ly]” that she does not realize “precisely what made the evening disagreeable” (99). Just as Lady Bradshaw senses a “pressure on the top of the head” that symbolically represses her source of autonomous thought (*Mrs. Dalloway* 99), Mrs. Ramsay “feel[s] [Mr. Ramsay’s] mind like a raised hand shadowing her mind” as they “[draw] together” (*Lighthouse* 70). The gerund “shadowing” indicates that Mr. Ramsay’s mind, or figuratively raised hand, actively blocks light from Mrs. Ramsay’s mind, preventing her from thinking clearly and casting a shadow that emphasizes the visual power hierarchy of men over women. Yet Mrs. Ramsay does not seem perturbed; in fact, she feels rather protected. Upholding traditional sexual binaries and her husband’s insistence on “accuracy of judgment” (*Lighthouse* 5), Mrs. Ramsay maintains a “self-effacing” point of view of males as intellectually superior to females (Rosenman 36):

she let it uphold her and sustain her, this admirable fabric of the masculine intelligence, which ran up and down, crossed this way and that, like iron girders spanning the swaying fabric, upholding the world, so that she could trust herself to it utterly, even shut her eyes, or flicker them for a moment, as a child staring up from its pillow winks at the myriad layers of the leaves of a tree. (*Lighthouse* 60)

The “iron girders” serve a double function of ‘saving’ (in Mrs. Ramsay’s view) and literally barring the female sex from the task of upholding the world; either way, males dominate with their “intelligence,” subordinating women to innocent, awestruck “child[ren]” who do not originally create the figurative “fabric” or orderly underlying structure of society (94). Although Mrs. Ramsay does not mind mental inferiority, she, like Lady Bradshaw, subconsciously perceives her conformity to the traditional female role of providing for others; Woolf conveys her subtle questioning of whether she “wished so instinctively to help, to give, that people might say of her, ‘O Mrs Ramsay!’... Was it not secretly this that she wanted” (25). Mrs. Dalloway expresses a similar question, yet thinks it “silly to have other reasons for doing things” as she walks up bond street, pondering her loss of individuality through marriage and her new identity as “Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 10). Syntactically, the order of the words “was it” poses Mrs. Ramsay’s question regarding an inner desire to fulfill her socially-assigned role. By including no subsequent question mark, Woolf subordinates the doubt as an insignificant part of the statement, just as Mrs. Ramsay suppresses her doubts about marriage. Mrs. Ramsay instead emphasizes her belief in its necessity, claiming “she must... they must all marry,” thereby encouraging the continuation of traditional domestic gender relations through her daughters and female guests (*Lighthouse* 29). Indeed, Wurtz claims that while “deeply embedded within the social structure that supports imperialism” as “mother and wife,” Mrs. Ramsay “re-inscribes the colonial ethos and serves to keep the processes of empire running smoothly at home” (100). That such “compliance among heterosexual women” to “the concept of” masculine “hegemony” makes it “most powerful” serves a subversive function on Woolf’s part (Connell 832); that the success and continuation of such a patriarchal system depends fundamentally on women who uphold it weakens it, supporting Woolf’s “political feminist” argument for the “empowerment of

women on the basis of their identity with men,” not only in marriage but outside the domestic sphere as well (Rosenman 35).

Female writers and single young women outside of the marital context experience similar physical and psychological limitations by traditional role expectations and sexual binaries. In general, social definitions and constructs repress women who wish or attempt to resist. Woolf imagines that if Shakespeare had had a sister, his family would have subjected her to traditional female roles of “mend[ing] the stockings” and “mind[ing] the stew” (*Room* 239), mirroring how the gypsies assign Orlando the tasks of “milking and cheese-making” when Orlando joins their camp after his spontaneous sex-change into a woman (*Orlando* 146). Such designations of traditionally-accepted roles to both characters on the basis of their sex incite them to rebel against the social norms of their communities, a sign of their potential to do much more and differently than what society expects. Yearning to write, but out of ink at the gypsy camp, Orlando tediously picks and squeezes berries, mixing them with wine for ink, even as the gypsies around her scrutinize her as a foreign, deviant being (145). Similarly, although her parents would tell her not to “moon about with books and papers,” the imaginary Judith Shakespeare would “[scribble] some pages up in an apple loft on the sly... careful to hide them or set fire to them” (239). However, in general, social constructs of sex impede one’s ability to progress in the direction of one’s instinct. Ultimately, social constructs of gender roles “[silence]” Judith, barring her from the literary sphere; Allyson Salinger Ferrante suggests that Woolf creates Judith as a symbol of “ghostly presence of feminine creativity,” “presen[t]” with creative potential, but suppressed by social constructs to the extent that only a “ghostly” remembrance remains (par. 6). Shortly following Orlando’s sex-change into a woman, on her voyage back to England, she laments that “all [she] can do, once [she] sets foot on English soil, is to pour out tea, and ask [her]

lords how they like it”; “[she] shall never be able to crack a man over the head, or tell him he lies in his teeth, or draw [her] sword and run him through the body... or lead an army, or prance down Whitehall in a charger” (158). Rosenman claims that “Woolf characteristically associates war and violence with men – most notably in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Three Guineas*,” but Woolf also does so in *Orlando* (36). In this passage for example, Orlando resents the fact that her role as a woman bars her from acting upon her desire for “war and violence” that society would have accepted had she physically remained a man. Significantly, “set[ting] foot on English soil” necessitates Orlando’s conscious switch in sexual identity and consequently, in behavior (158). Not only does society dictate how one should act based on one’s sex, but that same mandate also conflicts with personal instinct, which Woolf suggests “vacillat[es] between the sexes” (189).

With respect to writing and psychological limitations on artistic achievement, the construct of sex turns males into the “opposing faction,” indicating the political significance of the clash between sexual entities, which provokes female authors to “[burst] out in indignation against the position of women” (*Room* 251). Ironically, the “alien emotions” – “hates” and “grievances” – that so “[disturb]” and “harass” Lady Winshelsea’s mind prevent her from effectively rebelling against the unsatisfactory assignment of roles and expectations that define the “position” of each politically-reminiscent “faction” (251). Meanwhile, presumptuous and self-assured male authors, professors, and beaules embody the ideals of patriarchy, enforcing sexual segregation and male superiority in the political literary sphere. Woolf’s satirically cites Mr. Oscar Browning, a “great figure in Cambridge at one time,” as “wont to declare ‘that the impression left on his mind, after looking over any set of examination papers, was that, irrespective of the marks he might give, the best woman was intellectually the inferior of the worst man’” (*Room* 245). By commenting that “one of the chief sources of [a patriarch’s] power”

“must be” “feeling that great numbers of people, half the human race indeed, are by nature inferior to himself,” Woolf questions the substantiality of such a mentality, and undermines the male superiority complex in the political sphere (*Room* 227). As men discourage women from writing for the sake of their own status, the female attempt to write and resist the world’s “host[ile]... gaffaw” (*Room* 244) turns into “her trial to take her fence” “on the race-course” with “the bishops and the deans, the doctors and the professors, the patriarchs and the pedagogues all at her shouting warning and advice. You can’t do this and you shan’t do that!” (285). Yet Woolf urges female authors not to alter a word in particular “deference to the opinion of others” (266), with emphasis on not “looking to right or left” at the vehement patriarchal crowd (285). The comparable echo of Mr. Tansley’s insulting words, “women can’t paint, women can’t write” (*Lighthouse* 110) in Lily Briscoe’s mind to the extent that she “murmur[s]” them “monotonously,” “aware any longer who originally spoke them,” and that she “anxiously” “considers” her plan of action demonstrates the extent to which male discouragement infiltrates the female psyche and hinders the first gush of artistic action (89). Her struggle to start painting, as if she “hesitate[s] on some windy pinnacle,” “exposed without protection to all the blasts of doubt,” indicates her precarious and vulnerable position as a female artist to doubts that manipulate like an onslaught of wind (89). Whether gender assignments hinder or pervade one’s life with negative constraints or sexual bias as physical and psychological consequences of socially-determined binaries and stereotypes, Woolf criticizes the patriarchy for ubiquitously enforcing each sex’s fulfillment of traditional role expectations. Based on the extent to which society encourages conformity and isolates specific gender qualities in each sex, the question remains: how do characters remain mentally androgynous?

Although Woolf does not explicitly explain how one may defy social norms without suffering negative consequences, she portrays the people who do not fit under the same classification as triumphant within the system. A sense of aesthetic appeal and sensuousness accompanies mixtures of physiological traits in characters, making inner androgyny a fetching alternative to the rigidity and suppression of conventional binary roles. Significantly, after Orlando's spontaneous sex-change, her inner mixture of physical traits prevents her from satisfying the traditional classification of either man or woman, in terms of behavior, attitude, and routine, "giv[ing] her conduct an unexpected turn" (189). As she gains social consciousness as a woman, learning "the sacred responsibilities of womanhood," she begins to compare "womanhood" to manhood (157), in a sense, as Jill Channing claims, "blur[ring] the world as experienced by men and women" and calling into question traditional views of sexual identity (par. 11). Thus, Woolf uses the "transsexual experience" as a sort of "medium through which the selves interact with each other" (Connell 851), assuming inner human "vacillation between the sexes" (*Orlando* 189). In fact, Woolf proposes that all must be "woman-manly" or "man-womanly," especially in order to create art, thereby proposing a new model of sexual categorization that accounts for innate variation in gender characteristics (*Room* 296). Sasha and Lady Bexborough both effuse an attractive lure to Orlando and Mrs. Dalloway respectively. Sasha has "a boy's" "legs, hands and carriage," but "no boy had those breasts; no boy had those eyes which looked as if they had been fished from the bottom of the sea" (*Orlando* 38). The sea imagery conveys an erotic sense of voluptuousness, while "fished from the bottom" implies a rare catch of some exotic species. Orlando's immediate perception of Sasha's overall "extraordinary seductiveness" (37) mirrors Mrs. Dalloway's admiration of Lady Bexborough, who has feminine "skin of crumpled leather and beautiful eyes," and masculine characteristics of

“be[ing]... slow and stately; rather large; interested in politics like a man; with a country house; very dignified” (10). Lady Bruton represents an exception to the generalization of the term ‘attractive’ in describing the appeal of such signs of physical androgyny. Although her “ramrod bearing” and “robustness of demeanor” do not provide aesthetic appeal upon first impression, her ideas do, indicating her mental androgyny (*Mrs. Dalloway* 177); Woolf’s objectification of Lady Bruton’s idea of “Emigration” as “inevitably prismatic, lustrous, half looking-glass, half precious stone; now carefully hidden in case people should sneer at it; now proudly displayed” suggests that Lady Bruton’s “direct,” androgynous “impulses” produce a beautiful, valuable gem of thought (285). That people might “sneer” at such an asexually, unconventionally produced object propels Woolf’s criticism of the judgmental, conformist patriarchy; meanwhile, Woolf explores the advantages of expressing such a mental androgyny. Just as a combination of physical traits associates lends an outwardly seductive air, closely associated with sensual imagery, an amalgamation of mental characteristics of both sexes in one mind symbolically fertilizes and successfully gives birth to works of literature or art.

By demonstrating the attractiveness of and creative potential inherent in the intrapersonal mixing of physical and mental characteristics, Woolf propels her argument for the expression of mental androgyny, suggesting that “it is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine” (*Room* 290). The diction “masculine” and “feminine” refers to gender qualities, not biological sex. Therefore, instead of implying that one sex surpasses the other at creating art or literature, she hypothesizes that the sexes within a writer’s mind play roles in creating works of literature that mirror those of reproductive sperm and egg cells in creating life, as referenced by the diction “fusion” and “fully fertilized” (290). In this

sense, perhaps Lily Briscoe's victorious completion of her vision by the end of *Lighthouse* parallels the successful creation of metaphorical offspring from her self-fertilizing mind. Indeed, Marianne Hirsch associates Lily's development of painting ideas with a newborn's passage from birth canal to open air: Lily herself describes "painting" as "a birth process in which the 'passage from conception to work [is] as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child'" (203). By allowing Lily to successfully complete her "vision" at the end of the novel, Woolf demonstrates the possibility of Lily's independent, single-female life path: "Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision" (*Lighthouse* 117). After all, if Lily has an androgynous mind, she has the necessary 'biological' components in order to create art, and furthermore can live her life without marrying, relatively free from the domestic confines of patriarchy. To further demonstrate the fertile, propagating properties of an androgynous mind, Woolf describes how the separation of Mr. B's mind into isolated "chambers," and the lack of interaction or passing of "sound" between the various parts of his mind cause the "dea[th]" of his "sentence" in another's mind (*Room* 293). This "dea[th]" contrasts the life inspired by one of Coleridge's sentences. Because "Coleridge [is] androgynous" (295), his "sentence" "explodes and gives birth to all kinds of other ideas," more profoundly impacting the reader (293). Hence, mental androgyny appeals in the evolutionary sense of survival and propagation of a species, just as a successful novel created by an androgynous mind lives on in the minds of others, enhancing Woolf's argument from both a biological and literary standpoint. Likewise, the dissociation from either sex that comes in the form of "unconscious[ness]" of one's sex allows aspiring female authors like Mary Carmichael to positively overcome the emotional writing barriers Lady Winchilsea experiences. Mary Carmichael "master[s] the first great lesson" of writing, with a "sensibility" "wide, eager and free," like that of a "plant newly stood in fresh air" (*Room* 284).

As Lily Briscoe “los[es] consciousness of outer things, and her name and her personality and her appearance, and whether Mr. Carmichael was there or not,” she loses a sense of how her sexual identity – her “personality” and “appearance” as constructed and controlled by that “outer” world – impacts her creation of art, thus enabling herself to abstract and take figurative control over her surroundings, “model[ing]” them onto her canvas “with greens and blues” (*Lighthouse* 90). The vivid imagery of plants, green, and blue for both artists alludes to their budding artistic vitality, and natural state of mental androgyny. While exploring the consequences of intrapersonal amalgamation of traits, Woolf experiments with the interpersonal meeting of two androgynous minds in *Orlando* to further demonstrate how mental androgyny facilitates spoken and written interaction and understanding. Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine’s womanly aspects come across so strongly during his and Orlando’s spoken interaction that Orlando inquires, “Can it be possible you’re not a woman?” (*Orlando* 258). Both characters share the ability to converse with open minds, free from “repression” of any particular mindset – “focus” or “perspective” (*Room* 289):

each was so surprised at the quickness of the other’s sympathy and it was to each such a revelation that a woman could be as tolerant and free-spoken as a man, and a man as strange and subtle as a woman... and so they would go on talking or rather understanding, which has become the main art of speech. (*Orlando* 258)

Their interaction demonstrates how allowing the “whole of the mind” to “lie wide open” heightens the listener or reader’s “sense that the writer,” or speaker in this case, “communicat[es] his experience with perfect fullness” (*Room* 296). Orlando and Shelmerdine share this revelation presumably because their minds “[are] resonant, porous... naturally creative, incandescent and undivided” and “[allow] the transmittance of emotion without impediment” (*Room* 290). Rather than just “talking,” they “[understand]” each other (*Orlando* 258). Androgyny of mind not only facilitates the influential communication of written and interpersonal exchange, but also one’s

overall freedom of expression and creation of “art” (258). In effect, Woolf advocates for the expression of mental androgyny as a form of liberation from physical and psychological constraints imposed by the patriarchal enforcement of traditional, repressive sexual binaries.

Paradoxically, mentally androgynous characters effectively escape the confines of traditional roles even though the definition of androgyny originates from stereotypical definitions of gender. Perhaps the balance between the psychological traits of both genders in one human being simultaneously accounts for and resolves this paradox. Although post-modern feminists would disapprove of Woolf’s reliance upon the traditional classifications and categorizations of sex, Woolf necessarily must acknowledge such definitions in order to effectively undermine them. On one level, Woolf promotes the view that mental androgyny facilitates interpersonal interaction and intrapersonal development of ideas and art. If the model she proposes for the mind applies to the broader society, which the empowered religious, political and patriarchal writers and rulers of history have traditionally controlled, Woolf on a broader scale encourages equal contribution of the sexes to modern-day social discussion and interaction for the birth of a shared artistic, literary, and social history in both domestic and political spheres. Implicitly, Woolf envisions and calls for a society in which the two sexes collaborate as they would in an androgynous mind; females must assert themselves in society, including political affairs, voting, and writing, so that the patriarch-dominated society currently driven by a detrimental male superiority complex will resemble an androgynous mind, with two equal halves interacting harmoniously and synergistically rather than antagonistically.

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