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Portrait of an Artist as a Mature Woman: A Study of Virginia Woolf's Androgynous Aesthetics in *To the Lighthouse*

by
Margaret E. Melia*

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. . . . [A] great mind is androgynous. . . . Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine.

—*A Room of One's Own*

To the Lighthouse is the best known and most widely discussed of Virginia Woolf's "novel-poems"—part of "her continuous experimentation in new forms, new vessels to contain what she experienced as the essential reality of existence" (Lehmann 55). When Woolf's writings matured into a style she had been seeking, so did her opinions about the life style necessary for the free exercise of artistic gifts. Although this theme is personified in *To the Lighthouse* by the painter Lily Briscoe, and further delineated in the expanded lecture, *A Room of One's Own*, and in several of her shorter essays, seldom have critics used these other writings to understand the ideas presented in *To the Lighthouse.* The novel itself begins in the middle of a conversation one early evening at the island summer home of two of the story's principal characters, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. The first of the book's three sections, "The Window," introduces during the remaining part of that single day, the eight Ramsay off-spring and various visiting friends, including the androgynous prototype, Lily Briscoe. After an introduction to the concerns and life styles of the numerous characters, the highlight of the evening is Mrs. Ramsay's carefully orchestrated dinner. Nightfall brings the brief center section, "Time Passes,"

*Portions of this study were submitted to the faculty of the Department of English, Emporia State University, as a project paper for the Master of Arts degree, July, 1985.

which skims the intervening ten years, parenthetically noting deaths and a marriage, while during the course of another single day, the long-empty house is readied for the ultimate return of the remaining original characters. In the concluding section, "The Lighthouse," Mr. Ramsay, James, and Cam complete the previously planned trip to the lighthouse as Lily places the final brushstrokes on her painting. With these separate acts, all three of the novel's principal characters find the "Reality" which allows each of them to function, however briefly, as a complete(d) entity.

To the Lighthouse has provided fertile ground for literary critics, biographers, feminists, and many combinations thereof. Although they have delved extensively into Woolf's life and work, their conclusions are often flawed by their attempts to study the novel as a quasi-biography or as Modernist or feminist tracts. A more beneficial approach draws upon the relationship between *To the Lighthouse* and *A Room of One's Own* and the other essays in which Virginia Woolf presents her ideas about artistic and androgynous aesthetics.

"Biography is hard to ignore in any study of *To the Lighthouse.*" begins Kate Adam's article, and this route seems to be the most extensive one taken by critics. Sarah Liberto, for example, compares Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay to Woolf's parents, Leslie and Julia Stephen; Phyllis Rose and S. P. Rosenbaum acknowledge the similarity between Leslie Stephen and Mr. Ramsay, but suggest that this portrayal is artistically inaccurate; and Simon O. Lesser suggests that Woolf's writings are based on her biological heredity. Although these familial similarities are tempting starting points, they do not begin to cover the depth of the ideas which Woolf wanted her reader to consider and are, therefore, an unfair limiting of her artistic and creative talents.

Critics of Modernism and feminism have also studied *To the Lighthouse.* Although Woolf felt that she had been more successful than her contemporaries, Eliot and Joyce, at creating a new writing style, Fokkema finds that "the assimilation of preceding codes within the metalingual framework of Modernism is a standard device of Modernism" (498), not only in *To the Lighthouse,* but also in the principal works of both Eliot and Joyce. Rose believes that Woolf "turned to feminism because patriarchal Victorian society had crippled her own sense of humanity and dignity" (201). Although Sharma views feminism as the basis for Woolf's aesthetic vision in *To the Liqhthouse,* she also recognizes the importance of "the completion of Lily's vision in art." She believes that it is Mrs.

Ramsay, who not only "attains her spiritual transcendence as a woman," but "symbolizes a new aesthetic feminism in this novel" (6).

These approaches to Woolf's writings have produced valid insights, but most critics neglect the relevance of *To the Lighthouse* to Woolf's androgynous theories. Hana Wirth-Nesher, perhaps, comes close to this understanding:

> Critics who have seen in Lily Briscoe the redeeming alternative to conventional life have neglected the clues embedded throughout the narrative that the artistic vision necessary to complete her painting is shared by everyone to a greater or lesser degree. (73)

Wirth-Nesher in her rejection of the biographic, modernist, and feminist critics focuses her attention primarily upon Lily Briscoe at the expense of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. As a result, her criticism is no more balanced than that of the earlier critics. Had Wirth-Nesher followed Woolf's own suggestions in *A Room of One's Own* and her essays and diary entries, she might have had a more complete picture of the novel. However, as Barrett points out in *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing,* there is some justification for Wirth-Nesher's omission of these smaller writings, because many have been out of print for some time and/or were printed anonymously as book reviews in periodicals. There is less justification for Wirth-Nesher's neglecting to use *A Room of One's Own.* This book is primarily written to and for women, but with the clear and certain knowledge that men will hear (and ultimately benefit) from her words, also. She states that "it is [the writer's] business to find [reality] and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us" (114). Ironically, the two critics to utilize *A Room of One's Own* when writing about *To the Lighthouse* are men, John Burt and Herbert Marder.

Burt agrees that "*To the Lighthouse* survives by returning to the very things—the realist novel and the old order—it had set out to discredit" (904); and he acknowledges Woolf's effort to resist "those progressive habits that would transform it from a work of art into a tract" (905). However, he has nothing to do with androgyny or new life styles, but with the form which each work takes. His interpretation is that "Just as the progressive and postwar arguments stand side by side in *A Room of One's Own,* modifying each other and holding each other in check, so two irreconcilable assessments of the past stand side by side [in *To the Lighthouse*]" (904). Marder, on the other hand, recognizes that "A great deal of the symbolism in Virginia Woolf's novels is related to

this search for wholeness" (129-30). He does not see Lily as an androgynous model to be emulated, but states that "Mrs. Ramsay as wife, mother, hostess, is the androgynous artist in life, creating with the whole of her being" (128). Unlike the previously mentioned studies of *To the Lighthouse,* the present author draws upon some of Woolf's other writings (essays, diary entries, and especially *A Room of One's Own*) to substantiate the contention that Woolf's belief in the need for an androgynous aesthetic for the flourishing of artists in general, and female artists in particular, is the central theme in *To the Lighthouse.*

Virginia Woolf presents two basic theories in *A Room of One's Own.* First, she argues that male-dominated, paternalistic societies have stifled women's creative endeavors, because they require women to expend time and energy protecting men, running the household and raising children, thereby allowing men the freedom to develop artistic gifts. Secondly, she argues that Nature has never denied women the right to develop their own artistic gifts. It is her hope that this discrepancy between society and nature can be eliminated. She feels that, once women begin to earn and control their own money, they will begin to meet their own needs, and the male will begin to accept his responsibilities. Socially, then, Woolf argues for androgyny, but she proceeds further. She feels that androgyny is also a good model for a great mind. She contends that a great mind must be a blend of masculine and feminine thoughts, for it will then have all of its faculties and can truly create. Woolf, however, does not see this blend as the neutralizing or diminishing of the qualities of either sex because "it would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only?" (*Room* 91). She makes it clear that androgyny is not only viable, but necessary. Consequently, androgyny, a principle held so firmly by Woolf, becomes the central theme of *To the Lighthouse,* clarifying Lily Briscoe's character and her relationship to the Ramsays.

The three principal characters in *To the Lighthouse.* Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, are fully developed as characters, but quite one-sided as personalities. They are on a quest seeking a "Reality" that will complete them. In the idiom of the novel, they are seeking their own variant of the letter "R."[1] The reality which

[1]The idea for the "R"-quest and its structural and linguistic application to the novel came from a conference with Dr. John L. Somer, Professor of English, Emporia State University, December 1983.

they are seeking, however, is an escape from their social roles to create a workable androgyny.

Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are a prototype of Victorian couples. He appears a typically cold, demanding, petty tyrant, and she as merely a beautiful, but poorly educated Dresden figurine. However, if this were truly the case, *To the Lighthouse* would never have held the interest of its many readers for so many years, and internally these two diametrically developed personalities would not serve as role models for Lily Briscoe. Because they are not stock or caricatured figures, they hold reader interest through the "R"-quests that become almost the sole bases of their "lives." The initial motive behind these quests can be found in Woolf's diary where, for example, she states, "Life is soberly and accurately, the oddest affair; has in it the essence of reality." Later, she adds:

> [I] got then to a consciousness of what I call "reality": a thing I see before me: something abstract; beside which nothing matters; in which I shall rest and continue to exist. Reality I call it. And I fancy sometimes this is the most necessary thing to me. (qtd. in Thakur 103-4)

To understand better the Ramsays' quest for their "necessary" reality, one needs to become better acquainted with the nature of the relationship between husband and wife. Although both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay have their strengths and weaknesses, like the ancient circular Chinese symbol of yin and yang, the weakness of one is compensated for in the strength of the other. Early in the novel, Mr. Ramsay is thought of by James, his angry son, as "a beak of brass, barren and bare" (*Lighthouse* 58). Mrs. Ramsay, however, always complements this hard masculine image with "a rain of energy . . . this delicious fecundity" (*Lighthouse* 58). She not only belies his male barrenness simply in her presence as the mother of his eight children, but, as she does with one of their children, soothes and comforts him with exactly the type of attention he needs—sympathy which draws him "within the circle of life" (*Lighthouse* 59). Thus, his weakness has been compensated for by her strength. This action renews him, but drains her to the point of physical exhaustion, perhaps a foreshadowing of her rapidly approaching demise, while he, continually replenished through her efforts, moves resolutely on.

Mrs. Ramsay has her own weaknesses, however, one of which is her "short-sighted eyes" (*Lighthouse* 48). Mr. Ramsay, on the other hand, has complementary "long-sighted eyes" (*Lighthouse* 284). Thus, the myopic Mrs. Ramsay is in some ways led through

life by the sharper-eyed Mr. Ramsay. However, it is important to remember that Mrs. Ramsay, although an uneducated woman (particularly when compared to her husband), has an "embracing, sympathetic knowledge" (Apter 83) which comes from observing what her "short-sighted eyes" see best—the people around her. Mr. Ramsay, as a published and well-respected philosopher, represents all of the college-educated sons of the Victorian Age, who, it seems to Woolf, have the entire world open to them so that, unhampered by familial wall, their (and his) knowledge can best be acquired by far-sighted eyes. Bennett refers to the Ramsay's differences as, "contrast and combination between his masculine sense of fact and her feminine sense of human needs" (72). As the Ramsays progress toward their personal realities, this "contrast and combination" becomes increasingly important.

When Lily Briscoe asks the son, Andrew, what Mr. Ramsay's books are about, he tells her, "Subject and object and the nature of reality" (*Lighthouse* 38). Because she is unable to comprehend these abstractions, Andrew tells her to "Think of a kitchen table . . . when you're not there" (38). And so it is that, when Lily thinks of Mr. Ramsay and his work, she imagines a concrete wooden table, high in a real tree. Mrs. Ramsay also looks to nature when thinking of her husband, but her images are more in keeping with his animal-masculinity when she thinks of him as "a desolate sea-bird, alone" (68); "the great sea lion at the Zoo" (52); and "strong he still was . . . how untamed and optimistic" (107).

On the other hand, Mr. Ramsay is a well-educated man, but he deals in his life and in his work with a philosopher's mind and too often sees only cold, distant facts. To his wife, he seems "sometimes made differently from other people, born blind, deaf, and dumb, to the ordinary things, but to the extraordinary things, with an eye like an eagle" (107). He lacks the sensitivity necessary to see the beauty of the flowers in his garden or even in the face of his own daughter. His sights are on the far-off and seemingly unobtainable (abstract) letter "R." He does not think of this goal as "Reality," but simply as an abstract point of knowledge which he fears he will never reach on the ladder of success. It takes a distanced perspective, such as Woolf's or the reader's, to see that there is nothing accidental or even coincidental about his alphabetical choice of "R" as his life's work/goal.

Moreover, Mr. Ramsay's route to "Reality" is slow and indirect, because he lacks sensitivity and, thus, is blind to beauty; and also because he depends totally upon his intellect. In his study of Mr. Ramsay, Thakur comments on this problem: "the incapacity of intellect to see reality as a whole makes it blind to beauty." Thakur argues that, ultimately, "unable to see beauty and realize truth, the intellect . . . lacks peace and reconciliation and produces restlessness, but, by its very nature, it keeps him from resting on the laurels of his justly earned knowledge and fame. He must continue his quest to the pacifying summit of "Reality."

During the interlude after Mrs. Ramsay's death before Mr. Ramsay ultimately reaches the lighthouse, he avoids the summer house that the (sensitive) people-oriented Mrs. Ramsay had kept so alive. It is only when he returns to the summer house and takes up Mrs. Ramsay's role, urging the children to go on the long-delayed trip to the lighthouse, that he can complete his quest. Marder agrees that, "After death, Mrs. Ramsay becomes a symbol of wholeness toward which Lily and Mr. Ramsay sail" (128). This final word, "sail," is particularly apt because Mr. Ramsay does reach his "R" goal ten years after her death when he sails to the *r*ock of the lighthouse. The *r*ock is significant, because it is here, just as they reach it, that Mr. Ramsay finally sees his children—James especially—as warm, living beings who need the (sensitively applied) praise and nurturing which previously only Mrs. Ramsay had given them all. Now that Mr. Ramsay has come finally to an "embracing, sympathetic knowledge" there, the *r*ock takes on a special significance—his "R" has been reached. Now, he can see those closest to him and satisfy their human needs—giving and sharing rather than just seeking and taking. His abstract goal of "R" is reached by means of the abstract sensitivity he has gained prior to landing on the hard *r*ock of his "Reality." And, thus, he is finally complete, because

> . . . the landing is real enough. But Mr. Ramsay has changed. He is strikingly youthful, stepping before them toward the goal, transformed, so that in his bearing he seems to embody newfound freedom, as if he were rejecting the masculine deity, and casting off his one-sidedness forever. (Marder 151)

Symbolically, then, Mr. Ramsay has achieved a state of androgyny. His grasp of reality can only be accomplished when he uses his sensitive, feminine faculties; when he sees his children close up, through Mrs. Ramsay's myopic vision; and when he tempers his cold, abstract vision with warm, abstract emotion. Ironically, he can only reach his reality, which is as hard as a rock, when he exercises his softer nature. He can only reach his abstract "R" by way of the abstract quality of sensitivity.

While Mr. Ramsay completes his "R"-quest of an abstract goal, acquiring an abstract sensitivity, Mrs. Ramsay, who had reached her "Reality" earlier in the book, needs the world of hard, concrete facts to complete her own quest for an abstract, emotional state of happiness. Apter suggests this difference when he writes, "the subtlety of her observation, the patience she has in watching others, waiting for them to reveal themselves to her, is certainly at odds with her husband's decisiveness and quick assembling of facts" (83).

As a sensitive woman, Mrs. Ramsay can be identified with the popular Victorian label, "Angel of the House." Woolf describes the "Angel of the House" in her essay, "Professions for Women," as follows:

> She was intensely sympathic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily . . . preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. (59)

One of the major scenes in the book shows how "immensely charming" Mrs. Ramsay can be while performing the "difficult arts of family life." It is the dinner party of the first evening. Mrs. Ramsay comes to it tired, wondering, "what have I done with my life?" (*Lighthouse* 125), but as an "Angel of the House" she knows that productions such as this dinner are a measure of her success in life, like her husband's books or Lily's painting; and so, "the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her" (*Lighthouse* 126). Having regained a strength of purpose, She is gracious and charming and keeps the food and conversation rewarding to all involved as she creates from a large group of very separate individuals a pleasant, convivial unit. This dinner is, in fact, her last triumph. As a sensitive person, she anticipates her death, and she feels about "eternity . . . as she had already felt about something different once before that afternoon; . . . so that again tonight she had the feeling she had had once today, already, of peace, of rest" (*Lighthouse* 158)—of "Reality," of a successful quest, of impending death.

The "Reality" which Mrs. Ramsay achieves is an abstract state of restful happiness, and she achieves it paradoxically by the acceptance of a concrete fact. Earlier, always sensitive to the emotional needs of those closest to her, she has tried to deny the fact of the impending, trip-delaying rain in order to protect her young son from disappointment. This refusal to recognize what the less sensitive Mr. Ramsay "saw" so clearly, angered him, and his seeming callousness offended her. When she states that she will not finish the stocking she is knitting to be taken to the lighthouse and, in fact, acknowledges that it will rain and delay the planned outing, she reaches her own "Reality." Previously, she has needed Mr. Ramsay to intrude into her sensitive world to bring to her the facts that make rational living possible. She needed this quality to make her life less chaotic and her world complete and livable. By accepting the hard fact of the impending rain, she completes the sphere of her self-knowledge, and her private quest is finished.

Mrs. Ramsay becomes the first of the seekers to reach wholeness through androgyny. She achieves this restful state only after she accepts the undeniable fact of the impending rain; after she comes to view the world with the clear-eyed, unemotional attitude previously open only to Mr. Ramsay; and after she tempers her sensitive nature with facts. Her reality is as soft as falling rain, but, only by hardening her heart to her son's possible disappointment, can she reach it.

Lily Briscoe must also reach her "Reality" as did Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. They have an obvious advantage over her through their shared last name, gained by Mrs. Ramsay in the highly acceptable Victorian woman's goal of marriage; and they have the advantage, as a married couple, of serving each other as role models. Because of this latter advantage, how could Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, singularly or as a couple, manifest for Lily Briscoe the reality she seeks by herself? It seems they could not. Mr. Ramsay is fairly well-off financially; Lily scrimps in genteel poverty. Mrs. Ramsay is beautiful and vivacious; Lily has "Chinese eyes." Mr. Ramsay begins his quest from a base of facts; Lily can only imagine what he writes about, "Subject and object and the nature of reality," (*Lighthouse* 38) by thinking of a table in a tree. Mrs. Ramsay exists (sensitively) in a very people-oriented sphere; Lily is a spinster who usually lives alone.

Lily's quest is the hardest of those of the three characters, because she has rejected Mrs. Ramsay's form of femininity and has been excluded by birth from masculinity. As a result, she must forge a new life for herself—an androgynous vision of reality. She must learn to fill in the gaps of her own life as she seeks the "Reality" of self-knowledge, because there will be no helpmate to counter-balance her solitary strengths and weaknesses. Although Marder did not write in reference to Lily, he is accurate in thinking that "the resolution [of Woolf's vision] has to do with the perfecting of the androgynous mind" (129).

What is Lily's "R" and how does she reach it? Unlike the Ramsays, who had abstract goals (the letter "R" for Mr. Ramsay and restful happiness for Mrs. Ramsay), Lily's is quite concrete. She wants to finish an abstract painting in tangible oils and canvas, and she finishes it and reaches the "Reality" of her self-knowledge by both of the routes which the Ramsays have traveled singularly—sensitivity and fact. Before Mr. Ramsay and the children leave for the lighthouse, she is finally able to compliment Mr. Ramsay and, therefore, soothe some of his human needs. Then, as Mr. Ramsay reaches the rock, she realizes the cold, hard fact that her painting will molder in a closet, unseen and unappreciated. This double-sided self-knowledge gives her the androgynous mind that allows her to center herself on her own strengths. Whereas the equally incomplete Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay reach their goals almost accidentally, as though receiving a gift, Lily has set a concrete goal for herself and reached it through her own hard work and effort. Thus, one concludes that Lily Briscoe will go on being satisfied with her life, because she has had her vision and, as Woolf writes, when the mind is whole "with perfect fullness. There must be freedom and there must be peace" (*Room* 108). Lily achieved an inner peace concerning her own life when "she remembered, all of a sudden as if she had found a treasure, that she had her work" (*Lighthouse* 128). Now, she can move on into life with strength and vitality and a strong grasp on "Reality," ready to face the facts of life with the sensitivity needed to handle each new situation alone, but well. Lily has achieved "the androgynous mind [which] is resonant and porous; that . . . transmits emotion without impediment; that . . . is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided" (*Room* 102). Her moment of discovery, of completion, occurs when she literally, finally, decisively places a single "line there in the centre" (*Lighthouse* 310). Even the British spelling of *center/centre* is most appropriate because the (nearly) centered "r" represents the "Reality" which will now center Lily's life and future.

Virginia Woolf makes it clear that she is more the humanist than feminist. Although she is very much aware that women have been stifled by a lack of money and power, she knows that it would be necessary for women and men to change. She speaks to this need in her essay, "Men and Women" when she writes,

> Energy has been liberated, but into what forms is it to flow? To try the accepted forms, to discard the unfit, to create others which are more fitting, is a task that must be accomplished before there is freedom or achievement. . . . [T]o pour such surplus 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. (67)

As one considers Woolf's words, here, with the life represented by the Ramsays (the accepted forms), one sees that she wants to discard the limiting, stereotypic masculine/feminine roles and substitute for them a new, freer androgyny as represented by Lily. She further points out in *A Room of One's Own* that "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" (108).

To the *Lighthouse* is an experimental piece which shows the influences of modernism, undoubtedly affected by the circumstances of Woolf's gender and family. All of these critical approaches should be taken into consideration when looking at the work. However, one gains a much fuller understanding of the nature of the work when it is studied in conjunction with her other writings concerned with the place of women artists in modern society; of the greatness which their gifts can achieve when freed from the chains of lack of money and a place to work; and of the necessity of an androgynous mind to reach the most productive creativity. Lily Briscoe typifies the modern woman artist who has reached these goals and can serve as a model for those seeking to know what Virginia Woolf hopes will be possible for all artists, male and female.

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Godwinian Influences in Wordsworth's *The Borderers:* Reconciling Head and Heart

by Barbara Peiffer*

Biographers and critics of William Wordsworth agree that *The Borderers,* bears the stamp of William Godwin's influence upon the young poet. There is strong disagreement, however, as to whether the play represents a complete rejection of Godwinian principles. Most critics have joined M. Legouis in asserting that Wordsworth, disillusioned by Godwinism, wrote *The Borderers* to illustrate the disastrous implications of this social and political philosophy (Campbell and Mueschke 470; Logan 86). This same body of criticism generally regards Oswald as the drama's villainous personification of Godwinian dangers. To assert, however, that the play represents an unequivocal rejection of Godwinism is a hasty oversimplification of both a complex drama and its complex author. Godwinian principles are, as George McLean Harper notes, "painfully questioned" in *The Borderers (Rousseau* 647), but they are not repudiated. Rather, the play reflects Wordsworth's struggle to reconcile "head and heart" (Fairchild 32); to unite human feeling and Godwinian reason. This struggle on Wordsworth's part was a remarkably intuitive and penetrating response to Godwin's theory of perfectibility through reason. For a brief period in the 1790's, William Godwin's principles dominated England's social and political theory (Clark 3). He was at one time a Dissenting minister, but later became an "atheist and philosopher of anarchical view" (Drabble 397). His *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice,* published in 1793, popularized his theory that men, acting according to reason, could exist harmoniously without legal or institutional restrictions (Drabble 397). This philosophy, which convinced Wordsworth,

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along with Coleridge, Southey, and Shelley, to surrender himself for approximately six years to a "close web of logic" (Harper, *Rousseau* 650; Brailsford 51), must be considered in connection with its influence upon *The Borderers.* Godwin's main doctrines, so ably and objectively reviewed by John Clark in *The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin,* consist of reason, perfectibility, necessity, and individualism.

As noted earlier, Godwin's entire philosophy was built upon his belief in the power of reason. H. W. Garrod observes that, for Godwin, reason is the only law (69), which all but ignores the role of feeling and intuition in human actions. Although Godwin reluctantly acknowledged that "sensory attractions, passions, and affections" were "strong forces," he insisted that they could "be incorporated into the rationally directed life" (Clark 86). Godwin's rather optimistic belief in human perfectibility was based upon this faith in the power of reason:

> Reason depends for its clearness and strength upon the cultivation of knowledge. The extent of our progress in the cultivation of knowledge is unlimited. Hence it follows, that human inventions, and the modes of social existence, are susceptible of perpetual improvement. (qtd. in Fairchild 29)

If Godwin believed that reason held the key to human perfectibility, he also believed it held the key to human benevolence. While recognizing the human potentiality for evil (Clark 88), Godwin maintained that the rationally directed man would reject psychological egoism and "act in all cases in whatever way [would] contribute most to the general good" (Clark 148). Accordingly, he defined virtue as "having benevolent intentions and knowledge of the consequences of one's actions for all affected" (Clark 148). Those who argue that the character of Oswald, in *The Borderers,* is a thoroughgoing Godwinian would do well to take this definition into account.

Godwin's theory of necessity is somewhat at odds with his assertion that men can choose to act benevolently. He maintained that "All events in nature and all human thoughts and actions . . . occur according to law. . . , [and that] things could not occur otherwise than they do" (Clark 87). Many critics have argued that such determinism reduces the universe to "a machine in which [men] are helpless cogs" (Fairchild 30); and, while absolving man of any responsibility for actions, also denies the existence of virtue. If all men are, according to Godwin, cogs in a relentlessly deterministic machine, at least they are unique and individual cogs. A trademark

of Godwinian theory is its "extreme individualism" (Clark 88). His emphasis upon individual autonomy led Godwin to reject all forms of centralized government as a "threat to private judgment, and thus to rationality and virtue" (296). While reluctantly acknowledging a government's ability to maintain order and protect its citizens (296), Godwin also feared its ability to suppress "freedom of inquiry and expression" (297). He, therefore, predicted, "after a long period of gradual reform and social progress" (297), the eventual disappearance of all forms of government.

With its emphasis upon individual freedom and its de-emphasis of government, *Political Justice* exerted a powerful influence at a time when England was "[struggling] for parliamentary reform and expansion of individual freedom" (Clark 3). An even greater endorsement of Godwinian principles was found by many in the French Revolution, which was, at that time, casting its shadow over England. Henry Brailsford, author of *Shelley, Godwin, and Their Circle,* writes:

> To men in the early prime of life, aware of their powers and their gift of influence, the Revolution came as a call to action. To a group of still younger men, poets and thinkers . . . , it was above all a stimulus to fancy. Godwin was their prophet, and they built upon his speculations the superstructure of a dream that was all their own. (51)

Wordsworth was among these poets and thinkers who, for a time, swore allegiance to Godwinism. His reasons for doing so were both political and deeply personal. The political impetus toward Godwinism came when England declared war upon France in 1793 (Gray 127), erecting a barrier between Wordsworth, an ardent supporter of the Revolution, and his country. *Political Justice* doubtless served to ease the strain between Wordsworth's national loyalty and his French sympathies. The appeal of Godwin's attack on all forms of government was soon "enhanced by the impression of the Terror of France, and by the criminal aggression of French imperialism" (Garrod 70). Godwinian anarchy, then, served as a balm to Wordsworth when his political faiths were being tested, both at home and abroad.

Wordsworth also had personal, as well as political, reasons for subscribing to Godwinism. These stemmed from a "profound remorse evoked by his conduct toward Annette Vallon" (Campbell and Mueschke 466), a young woman with whom he had an affair during his 1791 stay in France. Although Annette bore him a daughter, he permanently abandoned her. Basil Willey observes

that Godwin's theory of necessity provided just the balm the remorse-stricken Wordsworth required upon his return to England (Low 120). By assuring him that his actions toward Annette were pre-determined, and could not have been otherwise, "Godwin helped him to harden his heart by asserting his head" (Low 120).

Such biographical evidence for Wordsworth's interest in Godwinism is reinforced by numerous concrete expressions of his allegiance to Godwinian principles. One of these is his oft-quoted admonition to "Throw aside your books of chemistry and read Godwin on Necessity" (qtd. in Clark 3). Another undeniable piece of evidence for his interest in Godwin is his letter to the Bishop of Llandaff. Charles Roberts maintains that "verbal and structural, as well as thought parallels" in this letter reveal "a very considerable Godwin influence" (Roberts 598; 606). George McLean Harper adds that Wordsworth's involvement in Godwinism has not been overlooked by any biographers (*Rousseau* 645). One of these, H. W. Garrod, dates Wordsworth's Godwinian period "from the spring of 1793 to the summer of 1795, an epoch of semi-Godwinism, and from July, 1795, to . . . sometime in 1797, a period of fuller Godwinian influence" (Logan 95).

Today, Goodwinism is regarded as a sort of philosophical dinosaur; a short-lived, extinct, and faintly ridiculous theory. H. W. Garrod calls *Political Justice* nothing "more noteworthy than the ordinary nonsense of English individualism—carried, however, to a point where it is saved from being silly by becoming definitely insane" (68). On a gentler note, he adds:

> It is not easy to-day to recapture the conditions of Godwin's far-felt and deeply felt influence. It belongs to a mode of life and thought, and to a political and social environment, of which there can find their way to us only thin airs and fluitant echoes. (64)

Biographers and literary critics agree that *The Borderers,* composed from 1796-1797 and published in 1842, is one such echo.

M. Legouis led the way for many critics in asserting that *The Borderers* "represents Wordsworth's first recoil from the doctrines of Godwin" (Campbell and Mueschke, 470). According to Legouis, the character of Oswald is a personification of Godwinian ideals who serves to illustrate Wordsworth's realization "that rationalism of the Godwinian stamp makes inhuman monsters of us" (Logan 86). However, Logan's observation that Legouis regarded "Godwinian influence as something of a disease" (89-90) gives one

cause to suspect the objectivity of his unqualified interpretation of the play.

Objective or not, Legouis' view of *The Borderers* has found many adherents. Perhaps, the most vocal of these is B. Sprague Allen, who also regards the drama as "a record of [Wordsworth's] emancipation form the seducing formulas of Godwinian optimism" (*The Reaction* 62). Allen, like Legouis, justifies this interpretation by viewing Oswald as a vehicle for "exhibiting the disastrous results of carrying the principles of *Political Justice* too far" (*The Reaction* 63). He calls Oswald a "Machiavellian villain," who leads the "noble" hero, Marmaduke, into an unpardonable act of cruelty "[undermining] all his principles by Godwinian arguments" (*Analogues* 268). In labeling Oswald as such, however, Allen contradicts himself. To be a Machiavellian villain is to be without benevolence; to deliberately promote an act of cruelty is a failure to "act in all cases in whatever way will contribute most to the general good" (Clark 148). Because Oswald's unreasoned cruelty is directly opposed to Godwin's ideal of rational benevolence, he cannot reasonably be called Godwinian.

Although Oscar Campbell and Paul Mueschke also view *The Borders* as anti-Godwinian, they refrain from an unqualified interpretation of Oswald as villain. By accurately observing Oswald's conflict between reason and feeling, they inadvertently advance the theory that the play does not represent a complete rejection of Godwinism. However, the authors themselves assert that the play is anti-Godwinian in its theme of unrelenting remorse. At the time the play was written, they argue, Wordsworth was disgusted at the failure of Godwinian rationalism to free him of the remorse that tormented him after his abandoning of Annette Vallon (466). They claim that the figure of Marmaduke, doomed at the conclusion to wander in search of expiation, is, therefore, an autobiographical expression of Wordsworth's personal despair, unabated by Godwinism.

Despite the many scholars who advance such "anti-Godwinian" interpretations,there are some who have approached the drama more cautiously. For example, George McLean Harper warns:

> One should not dismiss it [*The Borderers*] with the hasty conclusion that it was written as a refutation of Godwin's views. It may have been written as a corrective, although hardly as either a refutation or a vindication; *adhuc sub judice lis est.* (*The Wordsworth-Coleridqe Combination* 264)

Crucial to a conscientious reading of *The Borderers* is the belief that the play is not a mere pitting of a purely Godwinian villain against a purely anti-Godwinian hero. Neither Oswald nor Marmaduke deserves to be thus simplified in order to advance any one reading of the drama. Careful examination of their actions and their words reveals a struggle within both men between the demands of the head and the demands of the heart.

Some, however, argue against the idea of an inner conflict in Oswald, asserting, instead, that his credo is one of relentless reason. Certainly, Oswald appears, on the surface, to be an avid spokesman for Godwinian reason. He calls "fools of feeling . . . mere birds of winter" (II.558), and powerfully describes the emancipation that will be Marmaduke's, if he throws off his emotions for pure reason:

> . . . . He may live
> To thank me for this service. Rainbow arches,
> Highways of dreaming passion, have too long,
> Young as he is, diverted wish and hope
> From the unpretending ground we mortals tread;
> Then shatter the delusion, break it up
> And set him free. (II.929-35)

Despite such eloquent endorsements of the power of reason, however, "it should be noted that [Oswald's] rationalism is not divorced from emotion" (Rountree 57). Despite his own insistence that he is "a Man not easily moved" (I.69), Oswald's behavior is more emotional that rational. One is told that "Strong feelings to his heart are natural" (I.34-35), and his outright hatred of Marmaduke is revealed early in the drama. His powerful feelings, including his hatred of Marmaduke, are motivated by Oswald's overweening pride, which revolts against being indebted to Marmaduke for saving his life. Spurred on by his wounded pride, Oswald maliciously leads Marmaduke into repeating the heinous crime of his own youth, thus "[declining] into arrogant misanthropy" (Woodring 91). Such pride and arrogance stand directly opposed to Godwin's denial of psychological egoism and his affirmation of benevolence. Oswald himself appears to draw some distinction between pride and other, perhaps softer, emotions, in stating: "Compassion!—pity!—pride can do without them" (III.1553); but surely overweening pride is as divorced from pure rationality as is any other emotion. Thus, there is a sharp contrast between Oswald's avowal of reason and his unreasoning passions.

Another contradiction within the figure of Oswald, which also warns against considering him as a pure Godwinian, appears in the contrast between his apparent affirmation of Godwinian individualism and his tyrannical manipulation of others. On the one hand, Oswald is as much a spokesman for individualism as he is for reason, asserting that "Happy are we, / Who live in these disputed tracts, that own / No law but what each man makes for himself" (II.595-97). Just as eloquently, he tells Marmaduke:

. . .they who would be just must seek the rule
By diving for it into their own bosoms.
To-day you have thrown off a tyranny
That lives but in the tepid acquiescence
Of our emasculated souls, the tyranny
Of the world's masters, with the musty rules
By which they uphold their craft from age to age:
You have obeyed the only law that sense
Submits to recognize; the immediate law,
From the clear light of circumstances, flashed
Upon an independent Intellect. (III.1486 96)

Despite such lofty speeches, Oswald is not a model of Godwinian individualism; he is, instead, and illustration of Godwin's recognition that individualism, without reason, perishes (Garrod 92). Undirected by reason, individualism survives only as "arrogant misanthropy" (Woodring 91), evident in Oswald's determination to thrust Marmaduke into a crime that is not of his own will or choosing. The only individualism Oswald respects is his own. He is a tyrant; "Power is life to him / And breath and being; where he cannot govern, / He will destroy" (III.1432-34).

All these conflicts between Oswald's professed ideals and his actions—between professed reason and manifest feeling, between professed individualism and manifest tyranny—underlie the central conflict of his personality: that between head and heart. Campbell and Mueschke stress that this conflict "is evident, particularly in [Oswald's] various soliloquies (471). In one such passage, Oswald powerfully conveys his own quandary between these two extremes:

Methinks
It were a pleasant pastime to construct
A scale and table of belief—as thus—
Two columns, one for passion, one for proof;
Each rises as the other falls: and first,
Passion a unit and against us—proof—

Nay, we must travel in another path,
Or we're stuck fast for ever;—passion, then,
Shall be a unit for us; proof—no, passion?
We'll not insult thy majesty by time,
Person, and place—the where, then when, the how,
And all the particulars that dull brains require
To constitute the spiritless shape of fact. . . . (III.
1145-57)

Although it is less pronounced, this same conflict between rationalism and natural feeling is also present in Marmaduke. The ostensible hero of the drama, Marmaduke is most frequently cited for his "noble nature" (Sprague Allen, Analooues 268); and certainly he is characterized throughout by compassion, which he calls "natural as life" (II.627). It is not without some degree of pride that Marmaduke says of himself: ". . . I have loved / To be the friend and father of the oppressed, / A comforter of sorrow" (II.633-35). Even so, he admits: "I have a heart to feel, / And I have felt, more than perhaps becomes me / Or duty sanctions" (II.1111 13). This latter remark suggests that Marmaduke is himself aware that compassion and feeling, by themselves, lack a necessary discipline.

For all his emphasis upon his own compassion, however, Marmaduke, like Oswald, pays spoken tribute to systematic Reason. Encouraged by Oswald's scheming, Marmaduke at one point denies all feeling:

I would not give a denier for the man
Who, on such provocation as this earth
Yields, could not chuck his babe beneath the chin,
And sent it with a fillip to its grave. (III.1241-44)

Just as unequivocally, Marmaduke vows: "I am cut off from man; / No more shall I be man—no more shall I / Have human feelings!" (III.I327-29). One senses, however, that these speeches are hollow; that they serve for Marmaduke, just as they do for Oswald, as exhortations to a pretended rationality in the face of genuine feeling.

Marmaduke's conflict between reason and feeling is even more pronounced in the way in which he responds to the accusations against Herbert, the father of his beloved Ideonea. At times, he is all logic and rationally insists upon proof, demanding that Herbert be brought before a hastily-convened court, at which the "best and wisest / Of every country might be present," his "monstrous crime to be laid open—here, / Where Reason has an eye that she can use, / And men alone are Umpires" (II.1118-27). Before this rational

court, he feels certain, "It shall be done as Wisdom shall decide" (II.1129). His dispassionate reasoning dissolves into anger, however, when he is persuaded to believe in Idonea's faithlessness. In his jealous rage, he little cares for proof of Herbert's guilt or innocence. He leaves the blind and feeble old man alone upon the moors with little hope for succor, telling Herbert that the "righteous judgment" of God will decree the punishment for his supposed crime. In doing so, Marmaduke ignores his own earlier and prophetic observation that men, when outraged, "grasp [their] swords and rush upon a cure / That flatters [them], because it asks not thought" (II.1033-34). Critics who argue against an "anti-Godwinian" reading of the play often cite Marmaduke's rash judgment of Herbert as a call, from Wordsworth, for Godwinian reason:

> The disaster of virtue in *The Borderers* may plausibly be urged to proceed from the fact that both the villain and the hero, though good Godwinians up to a certain point, failed in Goodwinism in its first essential. Neither of them followed reason; neither of them asked for proof at the time of their crime. The whole of Godwinism is a cry for proof. He who does not wait for proof acts against reason: is the creature of impulse. (Garrod 92)

Despite the popular critical conception that Oswald is pure reason and Marmaduke pure emotion, it now seems clear that neither character is homogenous; rather, each is a heterogeneous mixture of both reason and emotion. In Oswald, the two forces occur simultaneously, contradicting and confusing one another; Marmaduke, on the other hand, vacillates between the two extremes of intellect and passion. In their different ways, however, the internal struggles of both men are expressions of the central theme of *The Borderers:* the conflict between head and heart. There is considerable critical support for this interpretation of the play. Thomas J. Rountree suggests that, in *The Borderers,* Wordsworth "is tempering reason with feeling and illustrating the intricate relationship of the two human characteristics" (58). This idea is distinctly echoed when Oswald observes: "So meet extremes in this mysterious world, / And opposites thus melt into each other" (III.1529-30). As William Gordon notes, however, the relationship in the drama between the extremes of reason and feeling is not conciliatory; the two forces are separated and opposed. Gordon calls the play "the Godwinian poem, a poem of man in conflict with himself, and of separated reason asserted against nature" (76).

It is notable that the human duality remains unresolved at the drama's end. No lesson is learned by the characters; no solution to

their errors is offered by Wordsworth. At the play's conclusion, Oswald is stabbed for his treachery by Marmaduke's men, while Marmaduke, "In search of nothing that this earth can give," sets off to wander aimlessly, "A Man by pain and thought compelled to live, / Yet loathing life" (V.2349-52). Both Oswald and Marmaduke fail to learn from their errors and integrate their reason and feelings at the play's end.

Their failure mirrors Wordsworth's failure to integrate feeling into the rationally directed Godwinian philosophy. Campbell and Mueschke accurately observe that Wordsworth, throughout the play, is attempting to balance "two allegiances which at the time he believed to be incompatible. The one to a harsh form of eighteenth-century rationalism was not yet dead in his mind; the one to natural feeling had not yet matured into intuitive insight" (472). While acknowledging and admiring the power of reason, so compellingly put forth by Godwin, Wordsworth gave more credit than the former to the equal power of feeling. Rather than reject Godwinism for its failure to acknowledge fully the role of feeling, Wordsworth struggled to reconcile head and heart within the framework of Godwinian philosophy. His struggle to redeem Godwinian doctrine in his own mind was unsuccessful, evident in the tragic conclusion of *The Borderers,* as well as in his eventual abandonment of Godwinian principles.

Godwin himself underwent a similar struggle to reconcile feeling and intellect within the existing framework of his reason-driven philosophy. Hoxie Neale Fairchild suggests that Godwin, too, had a conflict between head and heart (32). Similarly, Thomas Rountree observes:

> In reality Wordsworth and Godwin were in remarkable general agreement on the relationship of emotion and rationality in the constitution of man. In July of 1797, the year when Wordsworth completed *The Borderers* . . . , Godwin had finished the revisions and additions for his 1798 edition of *Political Justice* and had given feeling a primary importance. (62)

Rountree adds that "Wordsworth and Godwin were both emphasizing emotion as well as rationality," and suggests that Wordsworth was "influencing Godwin to acknowledge the importance of emotion" (63).

Evidently, such acknowledgments on Godwin's part were too little and too late to prevent the defection of his supporters, one of whom was Wordsworth. Campbell and Mueschke note that critics have seen Wordsworth's defection as "abrupt" (465). "The

pessimistic and nihilistic implications of Godwin's rationalism," according to these critics, "suddenly became clear to the poet," and he abandoned the system for a wholly new one (465). *The Borderers* suggests, however, that Wordsworth did not abandon Godwinism immediately. Instead, he underwent a painful and concerted struggle to reconcile his own deference to the power of feeling with Godwin's deference to the power of reason. It was only when the futility of this struggle became apparent that "Wordsworth, grave and disillusioned, tried to forget that he had ever exhorted his fellow-students to burn their books and 'read Godwin on Necessity' " (Brailsford 157).

One must acknowledge the remarkable insight with which Wordsworth confronted Godwinian philosophy. In attempting to reconcile the conflicting claims of reason and feeling, he had isolated the fundamental weakness of Godwinian philosophy, a weakness which the philosopher himself would also recognize and attempt to rectify. No other devotee of Godwinism was so penetrating in his attachment to its doctrines. That Wordsworth, unlike other followers of Godwin, was able to isolate and expose the central dilemma of Godwinism, the struggle between head and heart, is one more testament to his insight and his intellect.

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