

Suzanne Fawcett Turner

Dr. Rose Norman

Virginia Woolf Seminar

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To the Lighthouse: A Hero's Quest

Virginia Woolf is a master weaver. In *To the Lighthouse*, she successfully weaves together the themes of art, marriage, sexuality, female relationships, class, education, and parental relationships---all threads of feminist hues---into a very complex tapestry. As Harvena Richter notes, the book is like Forster's "iceberg" that is three-quarters hidden (17). The work is deeply psychological, the author herself acknowledges. In "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf writes, "I suppose that I did for myself what psychoanalysts [sic] do for their patients" (*Moments* 81). Although at the time, most critics assumed that Woolf was referring only to her unresolved feelings about her father and mother, a close reading of *To the Lighthouse* reveals that Woolf was seeking therapeutic relief for other issues as well. Hussey notes that Mephram warns against restricting the reading of the novel to Woolf's childhood and family issues, a popular framework for reading the work (Hussey 309). Of the many readings possible for *To the Lighthouse*---artistic, feminist, social, political--- one of the most interesting is a mythic reading. A few critics take the mythic approach, but they do so either in a broad reading of the book as a whole or by only focusing on the different mythic images. Mythic images do, indeed, permeate the work: For example, Mrs. Ramsay reads the myth of "The Fisherman and His Wife" to James, there is the odyssey-like voyage to the lighthouse, and a description of Mr. Carmichael as Posiedon in the final section of the novel, and many other images that are obviously mythic. Howard Harper, in his discussion of the many mythic images in *To the Lighthouse*, views the narrative as "the quest for ultimate answers" to life (135-62). According to Harper, "In the mythic world of *To the Lighthouse*, all actions are seen as archetypal. And the archetype of the voyage . . . finds its fullest expression so far. Constantly present in one form or another throughout the book, the promise of the voyage to the lighthouse becomes the mythic meaning of life itself" (158). For Harper, the quester in the voyage for

truth is a narrative consciousness that encompasses all of the characters and that “culminates in the archetype of the artist as visionary (158). However, this is a broad mythic reading of the book as a whole, and the idea of artistic vision is only one issue at stake. I suggest a more specific mythic reading of *To the Lighthouse*: the hero’s quest according to the motif developed by Joseph Campbell. This reading, based on Campbell’s model in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, will explore a quest made by a specific character rather than a general narrative consciousness and will show that Woolf is seeking to answer very specific questions for herself and not simply the “ultimate answer to life” as suggested by Mr. Harper. It will also vary from Harvena Richter’s “little voyage of discovery” which also deals with the idea of a quest by a general narrative consciousness (Richter 14-26).

Along with the motif of the hero-journey, there is an attendant element. The fictive hero is a woman whose journey represents a quest for resolutions or answers to issues in Woolf’s personal, private life. Richter writes, “Virginia Woolf [is] tunneling backward and downward into the past and the psyche of her character to find the emotions and drives which motivate and give meaning to action” (17). The fictive hero is actually functioning as a *surrogate quester* for Woolf, who at this point in her life is not able or not willing to search for these answers openly. Joseph Campbell writes, “The passage of the mythological hero may be over-ground, incidentally; fundamentally it is inward” (*Hero* 29). The heroic quest in *To the Lighthouse* can be viewed as both outward and inward---more importantly, it is on two levels: fictive and personal. The fictive hero is Lily Briscoe, the artist. (It can be argued that James Ramsay is also a questing hero, though not a surrogate quester for Woolf; however, that inclusion is outside the scope of this paper.) Other characters are looking for answers to various questions, as Harper suggests, but it is Lily, as a surrogate for Woolf, who actually undertakes the heroic journey according to Campbell’s motif---a journey into the dark, unknown, and often dangerous world of the inner self. The most salient fact is that Woolf herself is the true hero even though the one we see is Lily Briscoe. It must also be understood that the idea of a surrogate quest is not the same as voyeurism where one watches an

experience outside his or her control. The surrogate is ultimately controlled by the one for whom he or she is functioning. Woolf determines the elements of Lily's quest, not Lily or any other forces.

The essential role of myth, along with its archetypal images, is to enable a person to establish a center in the cosmos, a spiritual anchor in the chaos of existence and in a life filled with dualities. Woolf, through her surrogate Lily Briscoe, is searching for her cosmic center as a woman and as a writer in a man's world. Because she is seeking an elixir for herself or her community, Lily embodies the mythical archetype of the hero. Anthony Storr notes that the term archetype was given by Carl Jung to primordial images that represent typical forms of behavior present in what Jung describes as the collective unconscious (16). The archetype of the hero comes to the modern world from ancient mythology and exists today with some modifications and variations. Campbell's heroes are based on the ancient mythic archetype, but they are expanded to include the archetypal images perceived by Carl Jung of the modern hero (*Hero* 17-19). The modern hero, unlike the older mythic archetypes for whom journeys begin at a very young age, begins his or her quest with the call to adventure, regardless of the hero's age. Modern heroes include everyday people; they need not be royalty or gods. Modern heroes do not always answer their calls to adventure, and they are not always victorious. If a victory is won, the boon may be a personal one, a communal one, or both. Finally, and most importantly for Woolf's novel, modern heroes may be women as well as men (*Hero* 49-238). Thus, according to Campbell's model of the modern hero, although Lily is neither male nor royal nor of a prescribed age, she can still be a hero and make the hero's quest. In his introduction to *In Quest of the Hero*, Robert Segal points out that "myths [and their heroes] solve problems rather than perpetuate them, are progressive rather than regressive, and abet adjustment to the world rather than flight from it; myths serve not just to vent bottled-up drives but also to sublimate them" (ix). Segal also notes, "For Campbell, hero myths originate and function to fulfill not a blocked need but simply an as yet unrealized one: the need to discover and nurture a latent side of one's personality" (xxvi). This is exactly the function of the journeys of Lily and Woolf in *To the Lighthouse*. The need for a cosmic center is not always recognized for what it is. For Woolf it is "thing

itself,” the core of wedge-shaped darkness in Lily’s painting.

According to Campbell, “The usual hero-adventure begins with someone from whom something has been taken, or who feels there’s [sic] something lacking in the normal experiences available or permitted to the members of his [or her] society. This person then takes off on a series of adventures beyond the ordinary, either to recover what has been lost or to discover some life-giving elixir” (*Power* 152). Lily Briscoe’s outward quest is for a center, a balance, to the painting that she begins at the first of the narrative. Her inward quest is for a personal center---individuation. As a surrogate, Lily seeks individuation for Woolf with regard to the issues of grief, sexuality, marriage, and Vita Sackville-West, as well as her concerns about the writer as a artist. The idea of “normal experiences available or permitted to the members of his [or her] society” that Campbell believes are denied some people suggests the oppressive and often abusive Victorian patriarchal society that controlled the worlds of both Woolf and Lily Briscoe. According to Campbell, the basic motif of the universal hero-journey is “leaving one condition and finding the source of life to bring [one] forth into a richer or mature condition. [This is accomplished through] either trials themselves or by illuminating revelations” (*Power* 152-154). Carl Jung chooses the term *individuation* to describe the search for selfhood: “I use the term *individuation* to denote the process by which a person becomes a psychological *in-dividual*, that is, a separate, indivisible unity or *whole*” (Jung 212). Lily seeks a personal self and a professional, artistic self: the same goals Woolf seeks for herself. The elixir they both seek will be for themselves as individuals and for their community---female society.

The old myths are replete with images of dark forests, frog princes, ogre-monsters, and goddesses: “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (*Hero* 30). The new myths accomplish the same purpose, but with images applicable to their times and places. This characteristic coupled with the fact that many modern journeys are inward only can sometimes make them difficult to trace. Essentially, Campbell’s quest motif is divided into three primary parts, “a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage:

departure, initiation, and return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth . . . a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return” (*Hero* 30, 35). The monomyth is then subdivided into steps or keys which may vary from hero to hero (*Hero* 245). The attached diagram of Lily’s journey is intended as a guide based on Campbell’s monomyth.

One of the ways in which an adventure can begin is by accident: “A blunder---apparently the merest chance---reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood” (*Hero* 51). Lily’s journey begins with an invitation to spend the summer at the Ramsay’s summer house in the Hebrides. The mythic imagery of the location is set in place in Woolf’s title and reinforced almost immediately. The lighthouse, a symbol of intellectual and personal illumination, is said to be “after a night’s darkness and a day’s sail, within touch” (3). The hero must enter a dark world in order to make the journey and to obtain the elixir. Lily’s quest, will take ten years to complete, like the odyssey of Ulysses. It will include two outward journeys to the Ramsay’s summer house but only one continuing inward quest.

As the journey begins, the hero may meet someone who will serve as a helper or guide along parts of the journey. One of Lily’s helpers is Mrs Ramsay. Campbell writes, “In these adventures there is an atmosphere of irresistible fascination about the figure that appears suddenly as guide, marking a new period, a new state, in the biography” (*Hero* 55). Lily is fascinated by Mrs. Ramsay. “[Lily was] thinking that she was unquestionably the loveliest of people. . . different too from the perfect shape which one saw there. But why different, and how different? She asked herself. . . How did she differ? What was the spirit in her, the essential thing . . .” (*TTL* 49). Lily wondered, “Was it wisdom? Was it knowledge? Was it, once more, the deceptiveness of beauty, so that all one’s perceptions, half-way to truth, were tangled in a golden mesh? Or did she lock up within her some secret which certainly [she] believed people must have for the world to go on at all?” (50) Making the journey even more complex, Mrs. Ramsay becomes part of the grail for which Lily seeks---an understanding of human relationships and unity. Mythically, Mrs. Ramsay is an archetypal maternal figure---she mothers Lily and wants to see her married to William Bankes; she is also a goddess

figure because of her beauty. Mrs. Ramsay can also be viewed as the type of helper Kopp calls a guru or spiritual guide. Kopp writes, “Gurus may at first appear to be ‘the ideal bearers of final truths, but [in reality, they are] simply . . . the *most extraordinarily human* members of the community” (11). That is how Lily sees Mrs. Ramsay. Lily feels that Mrs. Ramsay has stored in her inner being, “like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out, would teach one everything . . .” (51). In reality, as Lily realizes finally, Mrs. Ramsay is simply a beautiful woman, wife, and mother.

Lily’s other helper is William Bankes. Lily and Bankes both have rooms in the village, and they walk to and from the Ramsay’s together. They are “allies” (18). William Bankes fits the description a helper Campbell calls *the old man*: “The first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure, often a little old crone or old man, who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass” (*Hero* 69). The narrator says, “He stood beside her in his judicial way (he was old enough to be her father too)” (*TTL* 18). Bankes is supportive of Lily in her quest as an artist. He is interested in her painting, and she feels that he is not critical of her as a female artist, that he has faith in her ability somehow that others do not (52-3). Bankes provides Lily with the amulet of male friendship and intellectual equality to help protect her from the dragon of Victorian marriage. Although Bankes and Lily never marry, they remain friends: “Indeed, his friendship had been one of the pleasures of her life. She loved William Bankes” (176).

Once the hero departs on the journey, a threshold must be crossed. At times, there is a *threshold guardian*, a monster figure, who stands between the hero and the zone of magnified power. “Beyond [this threshold] is darkness, the unknown, and danger” (*Hero* 77). Lily’s threshold guardian is Charles Tansley, the one the Ramsay children call the “little atheist.” “‘It’s due west,’ said the atheist Tansley, holding his bony fingers spread so that the wind blew through them” (*TTL* 5). Witch-like, he attempts to bar Lily from the zone of power through evil incantations: “There was Mr. Tansley whispering in her ear, ‘Women can’t paint, women can’t write . . .’” (*TTL* 48). This almost magical incantation follows Lily until the very end of her journey, almost succeeding in pulling her under. “She heard some voice saying she couldn’t paint, saying she couldn’t create, as if she were caught up in one of those habitual currents in which after a certain time

experience forms in the mind, so that one repeats words without being aware any longer who originally spoke them” (159).

Past the threshold of adventure, lies the descent into darkness. There the hero can encounter dangers, threats, battles, dismemberment, crucifixion, or abduction. He or she can also enter into the *belly of the whale* for a time (*Hero* 245-51). Campbell writes, “Here, instead of passing outward, beyond the confines of the visible world, the hero goes inward, to be born again. The disappearance corresponds to the passing of a worshiper into a temple---where he is to be quickened by the recollection of who and what he is . . . [like the Biblical myth of Jonah]” (*Hero* 91). As Lily makes her descent into darkness, she encounters the terrors that await her.

It was when she took her brush in hand that the whole thing changed. It was in that moment’s flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set on her who often brought her to the verge of tears and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child. Such she often felt herself---struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say: ‘But this is what I see; this is what I see,’ and so to clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her. (*TTL* 19)

Lily seeks a balance to her painting in which Mrs. Ramsay is portrayed by a “triangular, purple shape” (*TTL* 52). One reason she is having difficulty is that her feeling for Mrs. Ramsay is very confusing---is it the love of a daughter for a mother or is it the love of a woman for a woman? “[Lily] had much ado to control her impulse to fling herself . . . at Mrs. Ramsay’s knee and say to her---but what could one say to her? ‘I’m in love with you?’” (19) A little later, the narrator says, “For it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself . . .” (*TTL* 51). “What was the problem then? She must try to get hold of something that evaded her. It evaded her when she thought of Mrs. Ramsay; it evaded her now when she thought of her picture . . . What she wished to get hold of was that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself. . . .” (193). A balance to the

painting is more than an artistic need; it represents an inner, more personal need for answers to Lily's feeling for Mrs. Ramsay.

Another threat that Lily encounters is the dragon of Victorian marriage. This threat is complicated because Mrs. Ramsay, who is Lily's guru, believes everyone should marry (at times the hero must walk away from one guide and seek another): "People must marry; people must have children" (*TTL* 60). "Ah, but was that not Lily Briscoe strolling along with William Bankes? Yes, indeed it was. Did that not mean that they would marry? Yes, it must! What an admirable idea! They must Marry!" (71) However, Lily resists; she refuses to be forced into the conventional role of Victorian women. "She would urge her own exemption from the universal law; plead for it; she liked to be alone; she liked to be herself; she was not made for that . . ." (50). "She need not marry, thank heaven: she need not undergo that degradation" (102). She would simply move the tree to the middle of her picture---take a position of personal chastity of the sort Jane Marcus speaks of in "Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny." At the end of the narrative, Lily is still a single woman. She has triumphed in the battle of conformity, and she exults a little that Mrs. Ramsay had been wrong about Minta and Paul---he has a mistress and Minta has her own interests (*TTL* 176). The question, however, is whether Lily chooses to remain single because of her art or because of her feelings regarding her sexuality and men.

Mr. Ramsay also plays a part in Lily's quest for individuation and her struggles in the underworld of the psyche. Although he changes roles in the final section of the book, in the first section he is a tyrant figure. Lily feels somehow threatened by Mr. Ramsay although he never does anything overtly threatening. She sees him as "petty, selfish, vain, egotistical; he is spoiled; he is a tyrant; he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death . . . [he has] a fiery unworldliness" (24). Ramsay himself does not pose a direct threat to Lily--- it is that which he represents, what Jane Marcus calls "the old bullies" of James Stephen's generation who wanted no women painters and no women writers (78). Mr. Ramsay is Charles Tansley's mentor and a perpetuator of the Victorian paradigm. As a representative of patriarchy, he can be interpreted as the ogre-monster figure in Campbell's model. Ramsay is like the Water Master of Russian mythology who entices helpless women into

the water and drowns them. The Water Master is strong only in his element of water, not on land (*Hero* 80). Lily knows instinctively that if she allows herself to be “enticed” into the waters of the Victorian paradigm, marriage, she will drown. The ogre-monster of patriarchy is strong only with the paradigm of master and servant (Marcus 83-85).

The nadir of Lily’s journey comes in the last section, when she returns to the Ramsays’ summer house ten years following the death of Mrs. Ramsay. Still struggling to find a unifying balance for her picture, Lily finds that her feelings for Mrs. Ramsay are not resolved and that her questions of artistic and personal selfhood remain unanswered. Complicating the completion of her quest is Mr. Ramsay. Now he is the grieving male who has no Victorian female to support him, comfort him, and nurture him. Lily finds that, even though he presses her, she is unable to give him what he wants---sympathy.

Back at the Ramsay’s house after all those years, Lily decides to try to finish the painting she began ten years earlier. “She fetched herself a chair. She pitched her easel with her precise old-maidish movements on the edge of the lawn, not too close to Mr. Carmichael, but close enough for his protection” (*TTL* 147). Mr. Bankes is not along to help Lily at this stage of her journey, but Mr. Carmichael, the poet, is. She uses him as a buffer between herself and Mr. Ramsay just as she did Mr. Bankes in the first section. Lily still feels threatened by Mr. Ramsay. She feels that he is always “bearing down on her;” at his appearance “ruin approached, chaos approached. He permeated, he prevailed, he imposed himself. That man . . . never gave; that man took” (148-149). Mr. Ramsay, like his Victorian brothers, lives off the support of the women of their generation with no thought of giving in return. “You shan’t touch your canvas, he seemed to say, bearing down on her, till you’ve given me what I want of you: (150). What he wants, what he needs, is sympathy. Lily finds that she cannot give him sympathy because she is “not a woman, but a peevish, ill-tempered, dried-up old maid, presumably” (151). Campbell writes in *Myths to Live By*, “The mystical law governing the adventure required that the hero to achieve it should have no knowledge of its task or rules, but accomplish all spontaneously on the impulse of his [or her] nature”(69). Lily’s response to Mr. Ramsay comes through instinct---she does not *choose* to withhold from Ramsay what he needs---she is mysteriously

unable to give it to him. Instinctively, she knows that to give him sympathy would be to give him control of herself. Like Philomel, “Still she could say nothing” (*TTL* 152). “His immense self-pity, his demand for sympathy poured and spread itself in pools at her feet, and all she did, miserable sinner that she was, was to draw her skirts a little closer round her ankles, lest she should get wet” (152). Mr. Ramsay is now like the Grail King whose wound affects his whole land. Impulsively, Lily utters the words, “What beautiful boots!” Like the words uttered at last by Parzival, Lily’s words begin to heal Mr. Ramsay. “His pall, his draperies, his infirmities fell from him. Ah, yes, he said. . . .” (153). Now that he is the healed king, his trip to the lighthouse will be successful, and his land---his family---will be healed.

This trial behind her, Lily must still obtain her grail. In Chapter Five of the last section, Lily begins to think of Mrs. Ramsay as she enters the darkest part of her journey. “Lily, painting steadily, felt as if a door had opened, and one went in and stood gazing silently about in a high cathedral-like place, very dark, very solemn. Shouts came from a world far away” (*TTL* 171). Campbell describes this part of the journey as “entering intentionally or unintentionally the crooked lanes of [one’s] own spiritual labyrinth (*Hero* 101). It is here that Lily has what Campbell calls the meeting with the goddess.

“The ultimate adventure, when all the barriers and ogres have been overcome, is commonly represented as a mystical marriage of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the world. This is the crisis at the nadir . . . For she is the promise of perfection; the soul’s assurance that, at the conclusion of its exile in a world of organized inadequacies, the bliss that once was known will be known again: the comforting, the nourishing, the ‘good’ mother---young and beautiful---who was known to us, and even tasted, in the remotest past. (*Hero* 109, 111).

Campbell notes that this mother-image is not always benign. It includes the absent, unattainable mother; the hampering, forbidding mother; the controlling mother who will not let her children push away; the desired but forbidden mother of the Oedipal complex (109,111). Mrs. Ramsay is a mother figure for Lily in several

ways: unity with her is unattainable; she is hampering because she wants Lily to marry; she is now absent because she is dead.

The spirit of Mrs. Ramsay appears to Lily as she struggles to complete her journey. “It was an odd road to be walking, this of painting. Out and out one went, further and further, until at last one seemed to be on a narrow plank, perfectly alone, over the sea. And as she dipped into the blue paint, she dipped too into the past there” (*TTL* 172). “She went on tunneling her way into her picture, into the past” (173). As she paints, Lily has “a sense of someone there, of Mrs Ramsay . . . raising to her forehead a wreath of white flowers with which she went. It was strange how clearly she saw her. . .” (181). Then, “Some wave of white went over the window pane. The air must have stirred some flounce in the room. Her heart leapt at her and seized her and tortured her. Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay! . . . Mrs. Ramsay---it was part of her perfect goodness---sat there quite simply, in the chair . . .” (202).

All the while, Mr. Carmichael, Lily’s metaphysical helper, sits close by. Their communication is silent but effective. “A curious notion came to her that he did after all hear the things she could not say” (*TTL* 179). As the Ramsay’s boat arrives at the lighthouse, Lily looks at Mr. Carmichael: “Mr. Carmichael stood beside her, looking like an old pagan god, shaggy, with weeds in his hair and the trident . . . They had not needed to speak. They had been thinking the same things, and he had answered her without her asking him anything” (208). What Mr. Carmichael has said, comes earlier. Without hearing it, Lily knows his answer is that “nothing stays; all changes; but not words, not paint . . . what it attempted [the word and the picture] remained forever” (179). Matro expresses this idea as a “unity that arises from relations rather than from ‘oneness’ ” (214). An artist can represent only pieces of a whole because the whole is constantly changing. Lily cannot not achieve unity because things are never the same from one moment to another. Matro writes, “Her completed painting, then, will not represent the achievement of ‘wholeness,’ just as it will not depict particular feeling or people, but it will accurately reflect the pattern or design of her feelings, a mode of seeing and experiencing that is common to others and therefore not peculiar to her as an artist” (217). Her painting will represent the essence of the thing. The boat carrying the Ramsays reaches the

lighthouse as Lily draws a line down the center of canvas. “It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision” (*TTL* 209).

What is Lily’s vision, as a fictive character and as Woolf’s surrogate? In the first section, at the Ramsay’s dinner table, Lily decides to move the tree to the center of her painting, but she never follows through because she fears losing the unity of the whole. However, as the boat reaches the lighthouse, Lily finally receives her illumination. The line Lily draws down the center of her painting stands for selfhood as an artist. She realizes that she can paint the essence of the thing, even if it not the thing exactly. She is assured that women *can* paint; women *can* write--- if they want it badly enough to make sacrifices. Lily sacrifices marriage, and in doing so, feels that she has “triumphed” over Mrs. Ramsay and the Victorian paradigm in order to be an artist. Mrs. Ramsay created children, but Lily will create art. Jane Marcus notes that for Woolf, spinstership is the measure of success. The artists and reformers in Woolf’s works are women without men. The creative woman can achieve autonomy for her art only through refusing wifehood and motherhood (76). Although Woolf makes Lily a painter, she represents all genres of art including writing.

I believe the line also represents the acknowledgment of Lily’s sexuality and her feelings for Mrs. Ramsay. Women can love women. Hussey writes that Lily’s “true subject” is her love for Mrs. Ramsay and that she struggles to bring it into a world of shared art. Mephram, according to Hussey, points out that Woolf’s love affair with Vita Sackville-West provided “the emotional context in which Virginia sketched her self-portrait as Lily Briscoe” (Hussey 309). Hermione Lee writes, “Lily’s longing for Mrs. Ramsay in the novel was coloured by her missing Vita. She would put into the later stages of *To the Lighthouse* a passage on ‘people going away & [sic] the effect on one’s feeling for them’ ” (493). Lee also writes, “Virginia Woolf’s writing and thinking, especially in the 1920s, about the lives and friendships and sexuality of women, about biography and history and class, and about freedom and censorship, were all involved with Vita, who gave her the central relationship of her forties. She [Vita] came into the emotional mood of *To the Lighthouse*” (515). Woolf sublimates her feelings for Vita onto her surrogate, Lily. It is also possible that

Woolf's feelings are Oedipal feelings for her mother that she transferred to Vita. This assumption makes Lily's feelings for Mrs. Ramsay even more complex.

As a surrogate, Lily also expresses Woolf's grief for Julia Stephen. Mark Spilka, believes that there is no reason in the text for Lily's grief over Mrs. Ramsay's death and concludes that the only explanation for it lies in Woolf's biography (142). More than that, by coming to terms with Julia Stephen through Lily, on all levels---artist, woman, daughter---Woolf begins to achieve a stronger sense of her *self*. Lee remarks that Woolf becomes "more political, less helpless, less internalized" after *To the Lighthouse*. From there, she goes on to "embark publicly on the feminist writings where she has the argument with the Angel in the House (Lee 81). Jane Marcus lists Julia Stephen among the "female collaborators" whom Woolf battled on the misogynist front (80). These struggles were so terrible and depleting that Woolf needed to accomplish them at arm's length through Lily. A surrogate could do the work that Woolf had not the strength to do. "What was the problem then? She must try to get hold of something that evaded her," Lily muses (193). "She [Lily] was only trying to smooth out something she had been given years ago folded up; something she had seen" (199). Lily Briscoe appears to "have her vision," attains individuation, and ends her quest. But, does Woolf? Hermione Lee writes, "Perhaps she [Woolf] does not exorcize her mother as completely as she tells herself she has. She goes on, after *To the Lighthouse*, calling her death to mind, and is still trying to describe her, and still finding it difficult, at the end of her life." Lily completes her quest and returns a healthy individual. Woolf does not appear to have fared as well; her quest continued, and she forfeited her life in the course of it.

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