

A Garden Party for Spinsters, Queers, and Whores:
Gender Performance and Nature Imagery
in the Novels of George Eliot and Virginia Woolf

By

Sara Elizabeth Jordan

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Professor Dorice Williams Elliott
Chairperson

Committee members: Professor Kathryn Conrad

Professor Ann Wierda Rowland

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The Thesis Committee for Sara Elizabeth Jordan
Certifies that this is the Approved Version of the following thesis:

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Introduction

From the Garden of Eden to *Of Queen's Gardens*: Green Spaces and Gender Theory

Victorian girls were instructed to be metaphorical gardens and to cultivate their gardens; indeed, one of the most significant “gardening manuals,” educational handbooks given to young women and girls, was written in the Victorian period. John Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies* was originally a two-part lecture series delivered in 1864. The second lecture “Lilies,” entitled “Of Queen’s Gardens,” provided very clear instructions for young women on how to behave so that they could be the most satisfactory and productive domestic partners. Ruskin makes clear the gender divisions and maintains women’s place in the home, but he does grant the importance of their contribution to his ideal kingdom: “if they rightly understood and exercised this royal or gracious influence, the order and beauty induced by such benignant power would justify us in speaking of the territories over which each of them reigns, as ‘Queens’ Gardens” (69). Ruskin rhetorically shifts women from the house into the garden, as this extension of the home also becomes part of their domain. Ruskin reminds women that if they are dutiful gardeners, then Jesus will meet them at the garden gate (Heaven). Ultimately, *Sesame and Lilies* offers advice on the proper manner for raising British children. While Ruskin contends that “you may chisel a boy into shape,” a different approach must be taken with the fairer sex because:

you cannot hammer a girl into anything. She grows as a flower does—she will wither without sun; she will decay in her sheath, as a narcissus will, if you do not give her air enough; she may fall, and defile her head in dust... but you cannot fetter her; she must take her own fair form and way; if she take any... Let her loose in the library, I say, as you do a fawn in a field. It knows the bad weeds twenty times better than you; and the good ones too. (83-84)

Ruskin appears so confident in the gentle character of women that he calls for certain liberties for young ladies to direct their own education. Women, like pretty flowers or sweet fawns, will grow into their domestic environment if given the run of that defined space. Ruskin's easing of regulatory practices also acts to confine women in the garden, trusting that nurture will bring out their nature, in both connotations of the word. Ruskin's essay reiterates women/nature/religion rhetoric, while also enforcing women's private and domestic roles.

Ruskin's essay continues to compound the multiple level binary of man-civilization- public-city/ woman-nature-private-home, which each level shaping the ways in which the next is understood in a continuous, self-propelling cycle. Victorian social politics relegated women to the private sphere, and religion and art have long utilized images of nature to reinforce women's domesticity. While Adam eventually left Eden, put on a suit and tie, and got a job in the city, Eve stayed naked in the garden, either polishing her juicy apples or finding leaves to hide her shame. As Eve became a cautionary or ideal model for women—as either the wicked temptress or dutiful wife and mother—natural spaces came to embody both sides of the society's

conception(s) of gender. In fact, Carolyn Merchant claims that Edenic associations of nature appear in three forms:

As original Eve, nature is virgin, pure, and light—land that is pristine or barren, but has the potential for development. As fallen Eve, nature is disorderly and chaotic; a wilderness, wasteland, or desert requiring improvement; dark and witchlike, the victim and mouthpiece of Satan as serpent. As mother Eve, nature is an improved garden; a nurturing earth bearing fruit; a ripened ovary; maturity. (32)

Nature can be seen as an undomesticated, untamed wilderness; likewise, women can be wild, unbound creatures intimately connected with the flora and fauna of wild spaces. On the other hand, nature can be seen a tranquil and serene spot, free from the problems, anxiety, and population of the city; correspondingly, women can be seen as innocent and pure people, void of the malice, greed, and other sins of men. By positioning women as passive nature, men become the tools of agency that can effectively “cultivate” either the dangerous wilderness (wild women) or barren land (young girls) into the production of crops (children and domesticity). Normative discourse recognizes and emphasizes the differences between wilderness and gardens, warning of the dangers of uncultivated green spaces over a cup of tea in the garden.

Separate sphere theory entrapped women in domesticity, and normative discourse employed nature imagery to legitimize this confinement as “natural.” However, by reading George Eliot’s and Virginia Woolf’s novels together and by

applying both gender theory and ecocriticism to read each author's respective revisions of the nature trope, we can expose ways in which each of these authors destabilize various binaries intrinsic to the foundation of the heterosexual hierarchy. Using natural elements, Eliot creates nostalgic gardens, places unspoiled by modern ills and vices. In the garden, women are able to (and allowed to) speak freely and intelligently on challenging topics. Likewise, Woolf uses floral imagery to help her characters act out taboo sexual fantasies. Popular (heterosexual) sex manuals for girls and young women were often cast in terms of flowers, and consequently, Woolf uses traditional nature imagery to describe behaviors of inappropriate sexual partners or of people acting "outside" of their gender.

In this project, I will argue that the fiction of George Eliot and Virginia Woolf reclaims nature imagery to challenge hegemonic rhetoric that confines gender and sexuality into oppositional positions; both authors also recast the cultivated garden as a space for women to perform gender in ways beyond conventional notions of "femininity." I will first examine two of Eliot's early novels (*Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*) to analyze how she uses conventional literary devices to provide literal spaces for unlikely heroines to (temporarily) escape from gender constraints. I will then look at two novels from the middle and the end of Woolf's career (*Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Years*) in order to consider the ways in which she draws on traditional floral and plant imagery to help her characters to act out "unnatural" desires and gender performances.

In popular clichés of middle-class Victorian England, rigid morality and strict politeness commonly dominate the characterizations of personal behaviors and public sentiments. While this certainly might be true, the Victorians also reconsidered and challenged dogmas intrinsic to the operation of society and state. In particular, social politics and individuals within society began to question the constitution and role of women—also known as “The Woman Question.” Legislation granted women the rights of child custody, divorce, and income, while debates and discussions about the capabilities and capacities of the “fairer” sex occurred in the public sphere. Social and political changes would eventually occur, in an attempt to grant equality to all people regardless of sex, but the walls of the gender divide took a over a century to begin to crumble and the residual walls still exist today. For intelligent and professionally driven women like George Eliot and Virginia Woolf, these walls threatened their authorial goals. The public sphere granted entrance only to men, and most women found it difficult to open the doors. As a result, women often were denied a public voice or were relegated to the limited forum of fiction. George Eliot and Virginia Woolf were each able to unlock the doors, but the cost of the keys required each author to sacrifice part of (her)self. Eliot and Woolf helped to pave a path for future women writers and scholars, and yet, both authors have complicated and contradictory relationships with feminist theory and criticism. Just as earlier the Victorian “Woman Question” asked what role women could/should play in society, so too “modern” gender theorists have been asking how gender is conceptualized and what role gender categories play within society. While feminist critics often position

both Eliot and Woolf as conservative and out-dated, their manipulation of traditional literary conventions and tropes reveal quite progressive and forward-thinking conceptions of gender¹. Rather than being the domestic space of Ruskin, nature, specifically the garden, becomes a freer space for women to escape, if only momentarily and conditionally, the confines and limitations of gender.

Mary Anne (Marian) Evans was born on November 22, 1819 to Robert Evans and his second wife, Christiana Pearson, in Warwickshire, England, a place she would later refer to as “fat central England” (qtd. in Ashton 12). Mary Anne would change her name many times to signify an important moment or development in her life; while she preferred Marian Evans Lewes, she was also known as Mary Ann, Pollian, and Polly with the last name of Evans, Lewes, or Cross (9). Of course, literary audiences best know her as “George Eliot,” the self-educated Victorian writer who began editing the *Westminster Review* in 1851 and published her first full-novel, *Adam Bede*, in 1859. Eliot consciously chose a “male” pen name to circumvent preconceived and pejorative opinions about women writers and to shield her private life from moral criticism. In 1853, Eliot began a relationship with George Henry Lewes, a married man who could not divorce his wife, and lived with Lewes until his death in 1878. Eliot eventually married John Cross in 1880, and died that same year on December 22. *Adam Bede* is the only novel written with Eliot's personal (private) female identity unexposed to the public; and although reviewers initially praised the “male” author's triumph, many critics since have attacked Eliot for her seemingly conservative and oppressive views, especially in regards to women. While once an

entry into public life, Eliot's pen name seems to signify her abandonment of the female gender and mark her self-hatred at any traces of femininity left behind. Critics have also reproached Eliot for supporting traditional ideology and reiterating normative discourse. A member of F. R. Leavis's "Great Tradition," the High Victorian Eliot is a central part of the mainstream canon. Yet, George Eliot's work also provides radical views, as she constructs her fictional communities to defy traditional and conventional binaries. By looking beyond basic perceptions of Eliot, a more complete appreciation of Eliot's manipulation of the societal roles and social constructions helps to understand the foundation of many late twentieth/ early twenty-first century developments in critical theory, particularly in terms of gender and sexuality discourse.

Two years after Eliot's death, Virginia Woolf was born. Woolf expanded and collapsed many of the binaries that bound Eliot; in fact, Woolf famously wrote a 1919 essay on Eliot, in which she examined the collapse between fact and fiction (between the person Evans and author Eliot). Woolf's relationship with Eliot extends beyond the page; in fact, the connection between the Victorian and Modern reads as a continuation of the construction of women in literature and literary professions. Of course, Woolf's personal circumstances and the social conventions of her time allowed her more room (as it were) to express her identity(s). Virginia (then Stephen) began her writing career in 1904 and continued well after she became Virginia Woolf in 1912. It could be argued that the traditional union of marriage helped to preserve her work, as Leonard Woolf dutifully served as her encourager, editor, and publisher.

Woolf's writing certainly questioned the patriarchy, but the answers she provides do not necessarily satisfy contemporary critics, but rather prompt more questions. Are her gender critiques unavailable for women outside Woolf's financial comfort? Does she desire women, or is she just friendly? How much did her mental illness influence her writing; were her radical approaches to gender just part of her disease? Often times, her work is dismissed as aesthetically Modern with the claim that she innovates form without much awareness of her content. Woolf's narrative techniques and use of language too often overshadow the message on the page. The questions of her biography's influence on her work, as well as the aesthetic/philosophic binary, jeopardize the contribution Woolf makes to present day gender theory (among other critical discourses). Woolf, like Eliot, used fiction to challenge contemporary normative discourses, which further collapsed the division of fact and fiction.

Not only did the author deconstruct established binaries, but also Eliot and Woolf each manipulated traditional literary devices in order to achieve their respective social critiques. Their individual, yet similar, use of recognized conventions has not escaped the attention of critics. Alison Booth also sees the similarities in biography, authorial choices, and philosophic dogmas between Woolf and Eliot, and Booth's *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf* (1992) ponders how gender affects greatness, or rather it means for a woman writer to be considered "great" in a literary tradition dominated by men. Booth focused on three overall strategies of the authors—impersonal narrative voice, revisionary history of the common life, and redefinition of heroism—all of which she ultimately finds

subversive and an attempt to challenge and revise literary tradition and convention. As an example of various levels of subversion, Booth briefly describes Eliot and Woolf's use of what she terms "horticultural imagery" which can be considered "a literalization of the metaphor of culture" and the images of gardens and cultivated plants commonly used to shape the discussion of how to nurture, if not also educate, women (48). Mainly focusing on formal education, Booth briefly surveys a few of Eliot and Woolf's writings to demonstrate the ways in which each author uses or undermines traditional horticultural imagery, ultimately concluding that each author is suspicious of the garden analogy and that both used the language of these analogies to discuss the ways in which women are confined and restricted. This small example of horticulture imagery raises further questions that deserve more extensive inquiry. Eliot and Woolf's awareness and manipulation of horticulture imagery goes beyond their views of the formal education of women, and instead begins to destabilize the language of patriarchal discourse.

The socio-economic changes that marked the Victorian landscape helped to fuel the series of debates and discussions that collectively comprised the "Woman Question." The public forum and the intelligentsia deliberated issues of suffrage, property and legal rights, marriage, sexuality, the body, and education, among others; and supporters of these changes and defenders of traditional values were by no means clearly divided against each other. Women, in particular, took multiple and divisive positions; clearly, the "Woman Question" had no obvious or universally accepted answer. Furthermore, understanding this public and political discussion in terms of

distinctive sides—misogynists vs. feminists or defenders of “woman’s place” vs. supporters of woman’s rights—simplifies the complexities and ramifications of this active debate, which called into question long established and defining values of the British culture and state. Mary Poovey’s influential 1988 text *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* outlines and exposes the various sets of beliefs that contributed to this debate as well ideas about gender. Poovey establishes that gender is not only socially constructed but it is also historically constructed; moreover, gender is neither a stable nor an authentic category and must be continually justified and (re)constructed through discourse and ideology. Gender is a product of competing ideologies and not, as it is conventionally conceived, the product of a cohesive and authoritative ideology. Ideologies exist beyond ideas, as they are inscribed on behaviors and institutions in order to permeate social relationships and the creation of subjectivity. However, this process is neither universal nor complete. Poovey’s central argument is “This [middle-class Victorian Britain] ideological formulation was uneven both in the sense of being experienced differently by individuals who were positioned differently within the social formation (by sex, class, or race, for example) and in the sense of being articulated differently by the different institutions, discourses, and practices that it both constituted and was constituted by” (3). The ideology that current scholars typically associate with middle-class Britain was not necessarily the governing ideology, as it (like most ideology) was continually challenged and, thus, continually constructed in the face of

oppositional discourse. The “Woman Question” attacked or defended sites of instability in the ideological formulation of gender.

Normative discourse invests in binary oppositions, setting one against another in order to engage in regulatory practices and to assert hegemonic control as Judith Butler has established in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Gender politics abound with such binaries, which are notably tied to physical markers or behaviors of the body. Male/female, woman/man, virgin/whore, heterosexual/homosexual, married/single are long established divisions, and early feminist critics added gender/sex in attempts to overcome the gendered hierarchy. Today, most feminist criticism and post-modern theories of identity accept that sex is based on biology and gender is based on sociology. While once a radical notion, gender as a social construct has obtained somewhat of an incontrovertible, even given, status. The sex (male-female) binary has often been forgotten, if not simply overlooked, in gender politics or at least relegated to concrete products of chromosomal translations. In the aptly titled *Bodies that Matter*, Butler even complicates sexual differences as biological given, by exposing the hegemonic investment in the male-female binary:

The category of “sex” is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a “regulatory ideal.” In this sense, then, “sex” not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it

governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls (1).

Normative discourse often points to apparent differences in sexed bodies to legitimize governing systems of gender constructions. This system, then, is built on the need for visible and authentic sexual differences. In other words, a subject of chromosome XX must have a vagina, breasts, a higher voice, and other secondary sex characteristics in order to be taught how to be “her” culture’s definition of a woman. The definition may include how to dress, how to stand, how to speak, or how to use her biologically determined body to visibly assert her participation in gender categorization. Additionally, the XX must translate into preconceived physical and psychological notions of gender, must materialize in feminine characteristics; the focus on physical attributes problematizes sex’s distinction from gender. Butler continues with, “Thus, ‘sex’ is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, ‘sex’ is an ideal construct that is forcibly materialized through time” (1). Biological sex is not determined or cemented at the moment of conception, but rather, sex—like gender—is an imposed category that must be reiterated and reproduced on a continual basis in order for its authority over gender construction to remain credible. Complicating gender as identity, Mary Hawkesworth’s “Confounding Gender” problematizes the singular concept of gender. Hawkesworth draws on Joan W. Scott “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical

Analysis” (1986) to “define gender as a concept involving two interrelated but analytically distinct parts. ‘Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power’” (652). Like Butler, Hawkesworth and Scott argue that gender works as a regulatory practice, as well as a category of identification. The terms “woman” and “man” help regulate appropriate behaviors, position people within a social hierarchy, and are historically and culturally defined.

While *Sex is biology, gender is constructed* has become an unquestioned refrain in most post-modern discourse, Butler repeatedly (and daringly) asks who is doing the constructing. Instead of supplying an easy answer—or even *an* answer—, Butler formulates a sex-gender-desire triangle to help map the continual performance of knowable gender. Instead of the singular identification or categorization of male or female, Butler argues that sexual organs legitimize gender roles that legislate appropriate desires to be acted out with sexual organs. Gender, and corresponding desire, is not a stable identity, but rather a continual act, as “[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being... [T]he action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meaning already socially establish” (43-44, 178, original emphasis). Gender as a performance does not simply replace gender as a construct, but instead Butler overturns the very foundation of hegemonic discourse by exposing the arbitrary and regulatory

framework. In the novels of Eliot and Woolf, some characters act “outside” of their genders; and importantly, most of these subversive performance occur either in green spaces or with representations of nature.

By drawing upon Butler’s conception of performativity and upon Queer Studies, critics have begun to expand the limitations of the gender binary and free Eliot from her seemingly conflicting identities. Sheri Catherine Smith’s “George Eliot, Straight Drag and the Masculine Investments of Feminism” (1996) shows how Eliot negotiated the uneasy position between the gender binary—that is of claiming both male and female identities. Smith uses Judith Butler’s argument of “straight drag” to claim Eliot had a broader understanding of gender than the either/or binary. In her writing, Eliot seems to allow for the possibility of movement among or within genders, and for Eliot, gender becomes a transparent category in which one can escape its confines, restructure the self, or have the ability to overcome its limitations. This desire to “escape” gender is an important connection between Eliot and Woolf, as authors and people. Eliot and Woolf both attempted to defy binaries with their lives and literary styles; and correspondingly, most of their work attempts to deconstruct gender binaries. Eliot and Woolf might not be universally identified as “feminist,” but this certainly does not necessitate that either of them as misogynists. Both Eliot and Woolf use fiction to conceptualize the impossible—a society without gender regulations. Much of feminist criticism continues to insist on a difference between men and women (be it characteristics or power), while Eliot and Woolf deny the strict division between the two (and only two) genders. Eliot blends the genders

together into a rainbow, claiming that only through equality can society have harmony. On the other hand, Woolf releases women from the domestic garden and depicts the city as the new realm of possibility where women will surely find success once their circumstances are equal to those of with men. Woolf and Eliot do not necessarily acknowledge a universal category of “woman”, and thus while some feminist critics have objected to the authors’ seemingly misogynist viewpoints, by creating their characters in the space between the gender binary, Eliot and Woolf’s conceptualization of gender is very much in line with contemporary (and somewhat radical) gender and queer theories.

Along with their associations with theories of gender performativity, George Eliot and Virginia Woolf’s utilization of green spaces to negotiate and challenge regulatory gender practices also aligns their work with the burgeoning critical fields of ecocriticism and ecofeminism. Beginning in the early 1970s, scholars from various fields began to develop sociological analyses of the relationship between people and the environment, a move largely promoted by the global environmental crisis. These early investigations were generally referred to as “environmental sociology,” and it was not until two decades later that literary critics from various backgrounds began to articulate and identify the conceptual framework of ecocriticism. Cheryll Glotfely, in the introduction to the *Ecocriticism Reader: Landmark in Literary Ecology*, asserts 1993 as the birth of the recognizable critical

school of ecocriticism, which she defines as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (qtd. in Wallace and Armbruster 1). This relationship seemed primarily preoccupied with nature writing and writing of the wilderness; and this limited scope prompted the 2001 collection of essays *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, which seeks to expand the definition of environment and to broaden the range of inquiry so that ecocriticism will begin to deconstruct nature/culture, a hierarchal binary that Wallace and Armbruster assert as one of the central conceptual challenges of this field. Likewise Catherine Roach argues in “Loving Your Mother: On the Woman-Nature Relation” that “the hierarchical dualism between “nature and “culture” or between the nonhuman and the human... is unsound because it encourages the belief that “culture” and humanity are quite apart from “nature” and that we humans may thus use and abuse the environment at will, without ourselves suffering from the damage we inflict” (qtd. in Longenecker 3). Foregrounding Roach’s argument is the attachment of men to culture and the relegation of women to nature. This double binary (men-culture/women-nature) serves as chief concern of ecofeminism.

Ecofeminism has developed as a separate, if not connected, critical field due to ecocriticism’s tendency to ignore feminist or gender issues². Drawing on feminist and ecological issues, ecofeminism “is concerned with the destructive relationship between society and the environment based on a radically feminist analysis of patriarchy, which challenges both environmental sociology and feminist theory (Littig 2). The entanglement, and perhaps entrapment, of women and nature has been a

concern of certain movements associated with feminists; this discourse's complicated history is succinctly, though not simply, articulated in Stacy Alaimo's *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space*. Alaimo argues that the association of women to nature is compounded by the multiple connotations of "nature," as "[t]he dual meanings of nature converge at the site of woman, fixing her in a vortex of circular arguments: woman is closed to nature and is thus inferior; woman is inferior because nature has made her so" (3). As we have seen, social, artistic, and religious discourses draw on natural imagery in order to prescribe the ways in which women should cultivate their innate characteristics to best serve their families, their communities, and their God. The ways in which gender is understood helps to dictate the ways in which nature is understood, which further reinforces hegemonic perception and regulation of gender. Both Eliot and Woolf attempt to circumvent this continuous cycle by using nature imagery to characterize subversive gender performances. By using the language and devices of regulatory discourse, Eliot and Woolf challenge the authority of women-as-nature, and, consequently, begin to destabilize gender/culture.

George Eliot and Virginia Woolf continually use the and/or/both/neither construction to negotiate identities in literature and in life, as each woman's identity is defined by deconstructing binaries and both of their revised nature imagery works to expose normative discourse and deconstruct binaries. By releasing these authors from the confines of historical trajectory and placing them side by side along with contemporary critical theories, we can develop a deeper understanding of George

Eliot and Virginia Woolf's contribution to theories of gender difference, construction, and performance and to theories of ecological influences on gender constructions, constraints, and conceptual frameworks. The goal of this project is not to recast Eliot and Woolf as post-modernists, but rather to expose the roots of contemporary theory in the work of these authors and to demonstrate the ways in which these popular and acclaimed authors undermined traditional literary devices and challenged the authority of regulatory binaries.

Chapter One

Using the Pastoral to Undermine Patriarchy: Green Spaces in George Eliot's *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*

Instead of allowing preconceived polarities to regulate and to restrict her self, Marian Evans, under the pen name of George Eliot, created a personal and philosophical gray space to order to conduct an authorial mission that undermined socially constructed black and white categories. Eliot evades and exploits many binaries—real/imagined, fact/fiction, man/woman, private/public, artist/critic, writer/reader, radical/conservative—in the public platform of her novels, in order to comment on and critique contemporary society. Yet, despite her own evasion of imposed binaries, the imagined landscapes of her novels generally pit two divergent models of woman against each other, and often only one, not necessarily the heroine, survives. The self-sacrificing, hard-working Dinah Morris endures and marries the title character in *Adam Bede*, while the pretty and conceited Hetty Sorrel is transported to Australia after causing and experiencing great suffering. While the sweet and friendly Lucy Deane survives, the strong-willed and intelligent Maggie Tulliver drowns in the climatic flood in *The Mill on the Floss*. These polarized pairs echo popular conceptions of dichotomous femininity, and Eliot's heroines—Dinah and Maggie—embody alternatives to the ideal (or idealized) Victorian woman.

Dinah and Maggie's alternative gender performances often occur in green spaces in which they are a symbolically distanced from the ideological binaries that

govern British culture. Both of these women are unlikely heroines and neither fit into the supposed feminine ideal; in fact, both perform behaviors coded as masculine. While preaching on the Green, Dinah takes on the authoritative and public voice typically reserved for men. Walking in the Red Deeps, Maggie receives books to further her education beyond the realm of household management and child rearing. Eliot exploits the nature/culture binary and manipulates traditional nature imagery to undermine conventional gender and sexuality by purposely setting the novels outside of industrial, capitalist society. Most often, these characters find uninhabited (or uninhibited) spaces away from, or predating, capitalism³. While the green spaces are not necessarily freed from normative discourse, the women are given the space, literally and figuratively, to perform behaviors outside of prescribed gender practices. The differences in these spaces—the cultivated pasture of *Adam Bede*'s Green and the wild forest of *The Mill on the Floss*'s Red Deeps—provide crucial limits on these subversive behaviors and the type of landscape relates to the heroine's fate as she attempts to rejoin society.

In her first full-length novel, Eliot evokes golden memories of a pre-industrialized Britain, as *Adam Bede* is set amid the characters and countryside of the agricultural community of Hayslope. Her text begins with an epigraph written by Wordsworth, speaking what is commonly known as Eliot's authorial mission and personal philosophy of universal and moral sympathy, which should be granted without bias to class, place, or gender:

So that ye may have/ Clear images before your gladden'd eyes/ Of nature's
 unambitious underwood/ And flowers that prosper in the shade. And when/ I
 speak of such among the flock as swerved/ Or fall, those only shall be singled
 out/ Upon whose lapse, or error, something more/ Than brotherly forgiveness
 may attend. (45)

Her implementation of Realism allows attention to be granted to “nature’s unambitions underwood and flowers that prosper in the shade,” or rather to the people and subjects who are often overshadowed by the more prosperous heroes or beautiful landscapes. Realism constructs a fictional world with building blocks that can be found in the reality it attempts to represent. The laws—both human and universal—that govern actual existence must be upheld in Realist fiction. Realism also helps Eliot bridge the space between the work of the author and the interpretation of the reader by mirroring the images and scenery her audience experiences in daily life. The connection of her fiction to the reader's reality is a crucial aspect of Eliot's moral project. Because Eliot saw in literature the ability to instruct, her novels' adherence to the laws of reality allowed her fictional worlds to easily illustrate how her prescribed morality could function in reality. In Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*, Eliot famously justifies her aesthetic techniques with the mission of moral education. By engaging with the novel, the reader learns to be sympathetic to characters in fiction and will then be able to extend the same feeling to people in real life because of their resemblance to the events and characters in the novel. The novel, like most of Eliot’s canon, is both performative and pedagogical, as it both reflects the ideals of society

and instructs its readers on how to become the ideal. By beginning the novel with these lines of William Wordsworth's poetry, Eliot utilizes nature imagery to create in the readers a sense of compassion for the characters, as we become united as members of the same flock. Our shepherd is a higher power (which could either be the Judo-Christian God or the author), and we are asked, not to judge behaviors or personalities, but to offer "brotherly forgiveness." Eliot, through Wordsworth, uses religious nature imagery to equalize the ground between the readers and the characters, dismantling the fact/fiction binary. The reader should apply the lesson learned—not only those of moral sympathy, but also the ability and possibility of non-hegemonic gender performances—in his or her life beyond the novel.

The reader, however, may find it difficult to imagine him or herself in the positions of these characters, as the landscape and social circumstances vary significantly from those of the audience. Yet, despite being set in a pre-industrial society, the gender roles are not as divergent from the capitalism's investment in the heterosexual hierarchy. Nancy Armstrong claims that preparation for the middle-class female self began in the eighteenth century, and thereby precedes the economic basis of that self by at least a hundred years. The authorial choice of setting in *Adam Bede*, in particular Eliot's use of the pastoral, has been discussed by many of her leading critics, most notably U. C. Knoepfelmacher in *George Eliot's Early Novels: The Limits of Realism*. The modern pastoral is most often characterized by nostalgia for the past, for an idealized state of tranquility and affection that no longer exists (and never did). This idealized state most closely resembles a prelapsarian paradisaical

existence of harmony with nature and where innocence is not lost. Margaret Homans argues that both *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* supplement Armstrong's project, which focuses on fiction from the eighteenth century through 1840s, as "Eliot's novels authoritatively project backward an actual condition that Armstrong claims earlier novels could only imagine" (158). Eliot's hero/ines may be unconventional by popular standards, but they reinforce middle-class ideals and values. Knoepfmacher argues the connections between *Adam Bede* and a Prelapsarian Eden (as well as the novel's relationship with Milton's *Paradise Lost*):

In *Adam Bede*, ... the remoteness of Loamshire's pastoral world permits the author to create a domain where... morality can exercise its own logic... [and] Eden—or its early approximation—is the chief locale. ... Dinah joins Adam in the fertile valley where she will bear his children. Adam's initial vision of a paradisiac existence with Hetty is... rudely jolted...; but Adam's life with a second Eve allows him to become a Loamshire patriarch whose children will be fruitful and multiply. It is Hetty and Arthur who must thread their solitary way outside of Eden. (90-91)

While Knoepfmacher focused on the maintenance of patriarchy in Eden, Eliot's choices of Eve and Adam are far more interesting, as her choices complicate Edenic patriarchy. Eliot does not offer a new social and ideological structure; rather, the author provides alternative possibilities of hero/ines. The use of the past acts to reinforce (Eliot's) present-day ideals, as Homans argues: "Not only generalizing mid-Victorian middle-class qualities but also projecting them backward in time, Eliot's

[*Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*] universalize the British middle class and, in so doing, aligning themselves with other efforts to consolidate middle-class hegemony in the nineteenth century” (156). Adhering to middle-class ideals and values, Eliot’s Adam and Dinah are hero/ines because of their individual internal superiority and not because they engage in flashy displays of money or beauty; Adam and Dinah are “nature’s unambitious underwood and flowers that prosper in the shade,” to which Eliot dedicated her fiction.

In the popular fiction of Eliot’s time, especially in that which Eliot criticized in her essay “Silly Novels by Lady Novelist,” pretty Hetty Sorrel would be the obvious choice of heroine among the characters of Hayslope. In this imagined conventional novel, we would follow Hetty’s journey as she aspires to raise her social station and win the hand of her handsome gentleman; instead, we watch Hetty’s downward spiral through the murder of her illegitimate child, prosecution and potential execution for said crime, transportation to Australia, and her death during the return voyage seven years later. Early in the novel, we begin to see the ways in which Eliot undermines this conventional heroine by exposing Hetty’s immorality through characterizations created through nature imagery. In an almost erotic scene, Hetty learns that “Mr. Craig, the gardener at the Chase, was over head and ears in love with her, and had lately made unmistakable avowals in luscious strawberries and hyperbolic peas” (141). Not only is Hetty given a harvest, but also the cultivation of this garden extends beyond the limits of what is “natural.” Hetty, who adorns herself with lace and earrings, acts very much like these superlative gifts, as both are

the products of humans intervening in and manipulating nature. Eliot seems to punish Hetty for this misappropriation of nature and prevents her from experiencing genuine emotions for Adam, who is an appropriate suitor for her. Significantly, these lacking feelings are described using natural imagery: “[Adam] could no more stir in her the emotions that make the sweet intoxication of young love than the mere picture of a sun can stir the spring sap in the subtle fibres of the plant” (144). Hetty lacks any feelings for Adam that could be considered romantic; her ego inflates with his adoration of her, but she does not return the sentiment. In fact, Adam has as much of an effect on Hetty as fictional sunlight has on photosynthesis. Moreover, Hetty is cast in the passive position of a flower. Hetty does not have the ability to move around the garden to seek nutrients; instead, she is rooted and reliant on the gaze of a man (sun) to provide her with the attention she desperately needs.

Not only is Adam’s love for Hetty expressed in green imagery, but also Hetty appears like an Eve-figure in Adam’s eyes. Adam’s desire for Hetty is in harmony with the environment surrounding her, as the green spaces and wildlife unite for him to indicate Hetty’s desire for Adam and her blossoming sexuality. In a field of plump, ripe currants, Adam’s arousal is heighten by his and Hetty’s surroundings and projects the natural signifiers of love on to Hetty. At first, the fruit adds to the erotic sensations felt by Adam:

Adam's heart was too full to speak, and he thought Hetty knew all that was in it. She was not indifferent to his presence after all; she had blushed when she saw him, and then there was that touch of sadness about her which must

surely mean love.... And he could glance at her continually as she bent over the fruit, while the level evening sunbeams stole through the thick apple-tree boughs, and rested on her round cheek and neck as if they too were in love with her. (265)

Rather than returning Adam's genuine feelings, Hetty is behaving like a temptress or like conventional (patriarchic) portraits of Eve, whose wicked use of fruit led to man's fall. This characterization of Hetty, which draws on certain characterizations of Eve as temptress, evokes patriarchal fears of women's sexuality. While Hetty certainly desires objects, Judith Mitchell's *The Stone and the Scorpion* contends that Hetty is never positioned as the subject of desire because she does not play the role of active (sexual) aggressor. Also, the narrator sexualizes Hetty by emphasizing her love of fine things and attention (Hetty loves the earrings, not the sentiments they represent). As the embodiment of the type of femininity Eliot is criticizing, "[Hetty] is supposed to strike the reader as foolish, certainly, but not evil—as she would if she acted out of sexual desire" (100). In fact, Mitchell's larger project analyzes the lack of sexuality—more specifically, erotic desires—given to Eliot's female characters. Although the lush, juicy fruit titillates Adam, Hetty is naïve to her potential power over him, a power, no doubt, Eliot would have punished her for exercising in this natural space. Hetty denies Adam and spends most of this scene lost in a daydream about Arthur. Hetty forgoes the freedom available in this, and most, green space, and instead focuses on the opportunity to be instilled in institutional domesticity as

Arthur's wife. Eliot's green spaces are reserved for her heroines who may perform gender trouble, but they do so responsibly and morally, as defined by Eliot.

Instead of the hard-working, kindhearted Adam, Hetty falls in love with Captain Arthur Donnithorne, heir to the Chase. Hetty's desire for Arthur no doubt is motivated by Arthur's gentleman status; whereas Arthur's, whose family or rank would never allow a marriage to a woman like Hetty, feelings for Hetty certainly are physical and transient. Their lovemaking occurs in green space of the Fir-tree Grove, and unlike Adam Bede, Arthur Donnithorne can inspire natural splendor, or rather nature imagery articulates Hetty's imagination of her potential romance with Donnithorne:

Hetty looked at herself to-night with quite a different sensation from what she had ever felt before; there was an invisible spectator whose eye rested on her like morning on the flowers. His soft voice was saying over and over again those pretty things she had heard in the wood; his arm was round her, and the delicate rose-scent of his hair was with her still. The vainest woman is never thoroughly conscious of her own beauty till she is loved by the man who sets her own passion vibrating in return. (195)

Once again, Hetty is teased for her manipulation of nature for her own self-serving interests. Hetty, not the narrator, sets herself in a green space to be the object of masculine gaze, a gaze she likens to dawn breaking. Hetty's fantasy uses nature to reinforce patriarchy by envisioning herself as an object of desire; Hetty dreams of being the flower instead of craving a flower for herself. Furthermore, Arthur attempts

to recreate authentic natural sensations by using artificial rose scent in his smell, an important clue to the lack of validity of Arthur's feelings. The passage ends with the narrator mocking Hetty, whose own vanity has helped Arthur to trick her. Hetty does not use the green spaces to free herself from gender constraints; in fact, the scenes with Arthur reinforce the authority of both patriarchy and capitalism. By maintaining Hetty in green spaces, rather than in drawing rooms or in other places where true ladies belong, Arthur is able to treat Hetty differently than the gentlemanly rules of wooing would typically allow. Because Arthur positions Hetty as belonging to nature, he does not have responsibility to her as he would a woman in society. Like his childhood spent playing with Adam in the woods, Arthur's romance with Hetty could be easily forgotten (and forgiven) once he takes his inherited position of power over the land. Arthur Donnithorne is meant to rule this land, not to nurture it, and this position extends to the people of the land.

While Hetty reinforces traditional notions of "Woman as Nature," her cousin Dinah complicates this trope. Dinah Morris is the responsible and moral heroine who is allowed into these green spaces, and in *Adam Bede*, Eliot creates a literal and figurative space for the heroine to perform masculine behaviors. Dinah holds a public position of power and authority as a Methodist preacher, a denomination that, significantly, allows and encourages religious services to be conducted in green spaces outside of the confines of the man-made sanctuary. Thus, Eliot creates a literal and figurative space for the heroine to perform masculine behaviors. Eliot describes the Green, the patch of land from which Dinah preaches, from the

perspective of a traveler first happening upon this space. The land becomes the object of the traveler's gaze, and this initial fetishizing continues as the land becomes coded as feminine:

That rich undulating district of Loamshire to which Hayslope belonged lies close to a grim outskirts of Stonyshire, overlooked by its barren hills as a pretty blooming sister may sometimes be seen linked in the arm of a rugged, tall, swarthy brother. . . . High up against the horizon were the huge conical masses of hill, like giant mounds intended to fortify this region of corn and grass against the keen and hungry winds of the north; not distant enough to be clothed in purple mystery, but with sombre greenish sides visibly specked with sheep, whose motion was only revealed by memory, not detected by sight; wooded from day to day by the changing hours, but responding with no change in themselves—left for ever grim and sullen after the flush of morning, the winged gleams of the April noonday, the parting crimson glory of the ripening summer sun. (61-62)

When attempting to geographically place the Green in the fictional landscape, Eliot personifies the natural elements. More interestingly, Eliot genders the land, as Hayslope becomes the “pretty blooming sister [who] may sometimes be seen linked in the arm of a rugged, tall, swarthy brother,” which not only feminizes the land of novel, but also situates the land as a place of sexual awakening that needs to be guarded by a more mature male (61). The idea of protection is reiterated by the roles of the hills and of the woods, both of which are responsible for defending human use

of (the mansion) or harvesting of (farmland) green spaces. While farmland cultivates naturally occurring elements, this type of land is coded differently here from uncultivated land and, significantly, as land which need protection. Moreover, nostalgic sentiments cloud the description of the Green, as Eliot's directions not only lead the reader outside of the village but also remind him/her of views unobstructed by factories, housing developments, or other products of industrialization. The tranquility of the Green can even be appreciated by an unknown traveler, who after suffering through "a bleak treeless region," finally enters this paradise of nature's bounty. The description of what the traveler sees reinforces the femininity of the land, as well as signifies feminine heterosexuality: the land is virtually pregnant with food and splendor, the "flower-sprinkled tresses of the meadow" mimic a woman primping for her lover; the land woos the sheep; the "flush" of the morning is replaced by the "parting crimson glory" of the evening (62). Eliot's depiction of the land sets the stage for discussion of woman's (hetero)sexuality, one that we can be sure will not stray too far from hegemonic discourse. The Green is a cultivated space wherein a shepherd (divine or otherwise) oversees its activities. While Dinah can make use of some liberties in this place that she certainly would not have available in an Anglican sanctuary, she will not stray into the wilderness of wicked or radical behavior—she will stay with the sheep.

Dinah is introduced to the reader and to the characters of Hayslope, and to the reader, while standing on the Green; and while she is certainly scrutinized by the other characters, she is not the object of gaze. In fact, first she is de-feminized

through a comparison to a young boy, and then she is de-sexualized with a reminder of her religious calling: “[Dinah] seemed as unconscious of her outward appearance as a little boy: there was no blush, no tremulousness, which said, ‘I know you think me a pretty woman, too young to preach’; no casting up or down of the eyelids, no compression of the lips, no attitude of the arms, that said, “But you must think of me as a saint” (66-67). Although the land on which she stands abounds with erotic imagery, Dinah is stripped of any sexuality. Mitchell claims that Dinah’s lack of vanity is “the proper conduct for a beautiful woman...Indeed, she is unconscious of her own beauty, a trait that becomes the hallmark of a morally good woman in George Eliot’s later novels” (*Stone* 100). While Mitchell claims that Dinah’s lack of vanity corresponds to her lack of sexuality (another trait Mitchell posits as a hallmark of Eliot’s morally good women), her “unconscious [ness] of her outward appearance” corresponds to the green space that surrounds her, genuine and innate. Although Dinah may lack awareness of her physical beauty, the narrator leaves the reader with no doubt of its presence:

[Dinah’s] was a small oval face, of a uniform transparent whiteness, with an egg-like line of cheek and chin, a full but firm mouth, a delicate nostril, and a low perpendicular brow, surmounted by a rising arch of parting between smooth locks of pale reddish hair. The hair was drawn straight back behind the ears, and covered, except for an inch or two above the brow, by a net Quaker cap. The eyebrows, of the same colour as the hair, were perfectly horizontal and firmly pencilled; the eyelashes, though no darker, were long

and abundant—nothing was left blurred or unfinished. It was one of those faces that make one think of white flowers with light touches of colour on their pure petals. (*Stone* 67)

The portrait of Dinah lacks the extravagant details of the many portraits of Hetty found throughout the novel; however, while Hetty spends a good deal of time preening her features to be their most attractive, Dinah's beauty radiates through the simplicity of her dress. While the previous passage worked to de-sexualize Dinah, this passage uses natural imagery to emphasize her maternalism and purity. Her face is likened to an egg, the symbol of women's fertility and the female contribution to procreation. And although her face also resembles flowers whose color is usually associated with virginity, these white flowers also have traces of light color, signify that Dinah will not remain abstinent. Her purity, like the flower's, will bear traces of sexuality. Although Eliot's refusal to grant full desire and sexuality to her heroine is disconcerting, all of the characters—women, men, and children—are rewarded for their restraint and punished for indulgence.

For most of the novel, Dinah appears caught in a binary of religious devotion and romantic love. As mentioned earlier, Dinah, a Methodist, believes that a church is where any two believers meet (which is quite controversial to the Anglican faith that demands a church be a physical and sacred space) and is allowed to take an authoritative role as woman, as this denomination—at the beginning of the novel—is one of the few religions that allow women a position of power. However, in 1803, the Methodist Conference of clergy and lay-preaches banned women from preaching,

and this reality is reflected in the novel's epilogue. Fellow Methodist and Adam's brother Seth argues that the family should have left the Methodists and joined a church that would have allowed Dinah to continue to preach. Many critics, including Mitchell, find Dinah's giving up of her ministry in order to be Adam's wife and the mother of his children rightly problematic; moreover, Adam's voice, not Dinah's, explains his wife's choices:

‘Nay, lad, nay,’ said Adam, ‘she was right and thee wast wrong. There's no rules so wise but what it's a pity for somebody or other. Most o' the women do more harm nor good with their preaching—they've not got Dinah's gift nor her sperrit—and she's seen that, and she thought it right to set th' example o' submitting, for she's not held from other sorts o' teaching. And I agree with her, and approve o' what she did.’ (583)

Adam responds with what can be assumed to be Eliot's own response to her critiques of her supposed misogynistic practices that not all women are created equal. In reaction to a mass of unimaginative women's fiction, George Eliot published "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" in the October 1856 edition of the *Westminster Review*. The essay criticizes the female authors responsible for perpetuating the stereotypical image of women and their interests and confronts the public for buying this subjugation of women. The "silly novels" tend to involve a love story between shallow characters, and the mediocre plots do not stray from the typical story line. Hetty typifies the would-be heroine of one of these "silly novels," and Eliot symbolically and purposefully kills this character. For Eliot, these works neither

challenge the reader nor contribute to literature, and the novels purely serve as insignificant entertainment. Eliot does not disapprove of amusement but rather attacks the myth that women are only capable of mediocrity. Likewise, Adam recognizes that not all women have “Dinah’s gift nor spirit” and claims that Dinah will continue her teachings, even if she had to give up her title and position. In this scene in the Epilogue, Arthur remembers Dinah’s power and strength as she preached on the Green, and it seems as though Eliot is arguing that not all women are able to handle the responsibility that derives from entering the “green” spaces between the binary. Dinah is successfully able to construct her own gender, but ultimately must sacrifice her own fulfillment for the greater good of her family.

Published a year after *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss* utilized many similar tactics Eliot employed in the former novel. Once again, two opposite women are present, one of whom uses green spaces to perform gender outside of normative constraints; however, instead of clear—albeit simplified—labels of good and bad of Dinah and Hetty, Maggie Tulliver and Lucy Deane’s distinctions are complicated and seemingly reversed (in other words, the heroine often fall on the “bad” side). Because the unconventional heroine dies, we must consider why Maggie is not allowed to remain in the world. The two leading arguments are that a) Maggie’s transgressions with Stephen leads to her punishment/death, or b) there is no available place for a woman like Maggie, so Eliot sacrifices her. The second reading seems

more likely, and we shall see how Maggie's gender trouble renders her unavailable for middle-class Victorian Britain.

The transition between agrarian and industrial economies only increases the nostalgia for idealized Arcadian memories of the past, especially in early years when the mill is financially successful. The narrator emphasizes Tom and Maggie's distance from their childhood in such compelling terms that the same sense of nostalgia felt by the characters is felt by the reader. Eliot extends the link between the innocence of childhood and the serenity of green spaces for both Tulliver children:

Life did change for Tom and Maggie; and yet they were not wrong in believing that the thoughts and loves of these first years would always make part of their lives. We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it, –if it were not the earth where the same flowers come up again every spring that we used to gather with our tiny fingers as we sat lispng to ourselves on the grass; the same hips and haws on the autumn's hedgerows; the same redbreasts that we used to call "God's birds," because they did no harm to the precious crops. What novelty is worth that sweet monotony where everything is known, and *loved* because it is known? (36)

By universalizing the narrator's world to be the same as the reader's world, as well as Tom and Maggie's world(s), we all become rhetorically equalized. More specifically, Tom and Maggie are positioned as arising from the same earth, from the same circumstances. While the conventional novel would allow Maggie to fade into the

background, Eliot's novel maintains Maggie in the spotlight. If Maggie and Tom are equals in the ideal garden of their childhood, why cannot they be in choice of protagonist? Instead of focusing on Maggie's attachment to Tom (particularly in their final scene) as having incestuous overtones, Susan Fraiman's "*The Mill on the Floss*, the Critics, and the *Bildungsroman*" claims this is a novel of two siblings as they develop, a dual *Bildungsroman*. Of course, Fraiman is not the first critic to analyze the novel's generic implications⁴, but she argues that Maggie's "*The Mill on the Floss* undercuts Tom's *Bildungsroman* principally by shoving it off to the side, unwilling to make it the center or norm" (140). Maggie's narrative cannot be called a "*Bildungsroman*" because, as a woman, she does not receive the prerequisite education; therefore, Maggie is aspiring to a position not available in her reality, and so her death is guaranteed from the beginning. The nostalgia in this passage is doubly innocent—both speaking of the naiveté of childhood and because neither Maggie nor Tom know of the destructive ways in which their lives will change. Revisiting this passage after the conclusion of the novel, the reminders of the natural cycle of life reads almost as a eulogy for Tom and Maggie. The "young yellow-brown foliage of the oaks" will eventually grow brown and fall from the trees, and the "familiar flowers" are actually new flowers that have grown anew where others have died. But for now, we, the reader, are asked to remember our own childhood, spent (presumably) in sun drench grassy fields, full of flowers and birds' songs. Eliot extends the nature trope to the reader's perception of this reality.

While Tom may be the most conventional choice for protagonist, certainly Lucy Deane would be the apt female protagonist in this Victorian novel. After all, Lucy is a model for, or modeled after, the Angel in the House. Since she was a little girl, Lucy's beauty and soft demeanor has been praised continually by the Dodson sisters, and as a young woman, her days are consumed with embroidery, music, occasional charity work, and of course, Stephen Guest. While no match for Hetty's self-absorption, Lucy plays a similar role in *The Mill on the Floss* as Hetty does in *Adam Bede*—a foil for the protagonist. In fact, we are constantly reminded of the differences between the women, "It was like the contrast between a rough, dark, overgrown puppy and a white kitten" (53). Maggie's dark hair and tan skin visibly differs from the preferred blond curls and white skin of Lucy; a preference of which Maggie is keenly aware and of which is embedded in cultural aesthetics, as she dreams of reading "no more books where the blonde-haired women carry away all the happiness... If you could give me some story, now where the dark woman triumphs, it would restore the balance" (298). This novel will prove to be neither, but it appears as though the narrator shares Maggie's first sentiment, as this will not be the blonde-haired woman's story. While Lucy does not share Hetty's overt vanity, the former is aware of her beauty and its power; however, "[u]nlike Hetty, she is a 'true' signifier, a beautiful woman whose beauty signifies what it is supposed to signify, a sort of maternal loving-kindness" (Mitchell "Female Beauty" 21). Lucy's beauty further suits her to be the ideal Angel in the House, and it is her complicity to fulfill this role that deems her inappropriate to fulfill the role of unconventional heroine, and in fact,

she acts as impediment to Maggie. In the aptly titled chapter “First Impressions” (book 6, ch. 2), Lucy attempts to help her cousin shed her shabby clothes in favor of more fashionable clothing, which will help make Maggie more attractive for potential suitors. Lucy settles on making Maggie change her brooch, exclaiming “[T]hat little butterfly looks silly on you” (333). Symbolically, Lucy removes the representation of nature from Maggie’s breast and attaches her own jet brooch in its place. The freedoms associated with green spaces frighten Lucy—as a child she cries, “But *I* couldn’t run,” when given the chance to escape into the wilderness. Instead, Lucy enjoys the rigidity of the drawing room and polite society. Beyond just mere comfort, she needs societal regulations to construct her identity for her and to provide her with a “script” for her gender performance. As an Angel of the House, Lucy does not enter green spaces; rather, she sits at the feet of Stephen Guest to work on her embroidery.

While the pretty and petty woman is punished and the dark haired, devoted woman succeeds in *Adam Bede*, Eliot seemingly reverts to convention when Maggie drowns in *The Mill on the Floss*. Critics have over-emphasized the autobiographical connections between George Eliot (or rather Marian Evans) and Maggie Tulliver’s personality and family relations, but what is most important in this discussion is Eliot’s inability to make space for Maggie in St. Ogg’s or elsewhere. The fate of the unlikely heroine is not the only difference between the two novels; the former is set almost entirely in the farmlands of Hayslope, while the latter begins in the natural spaces near Dorlcote Mill but also travels to the drawing rooms of society ladies and

the offices of business men. While these differences affect the ways in which the characters perform gender and sexuality, Eliot continues to manipulate green spaces in order to expand the available roles for her characters. For Maggie, the one of the most important spaces is the Red Deeps. After her father's financial ruin, Maggie's character is typified by her denial of S/self, especially in terms of desire and comfort. As a dutiful daughter, Maggie becomes caregiver to her father, taking the place of his wife, and, therefore, denies her own sexuality. Book Five begins with Maggie's mental struggle over her renunciation and her delight in the Red Deeps. Her entrance into the woods is the one enjoyment she allows herself, and it is also the setting of her romance with Philip Wakem. At first glance, the Red Deeps embodies Maggie's repressed sexuality—it is “a pleasure she loved so well, that sometimes, in her ardors of renunciation, she thought she ought to deny herself the frequent indulgence in it” (269). Her ascetic self knows she should deny the indulgence before this sin leads to more shameful acts. This green space also mimics her love for Philip, for like the man with a physical disability, Maggie is able to appreciate this space that is often overlooked by others. She finds delight in the almost invisible pleasures of humming insects and tiny flowers, as she able to see through family rivalries and physical deformities to see Philip's gentle personality. However, it is this green space's connection to her past that is most important to Maggie as a woman: “In her childish days Maggie held this place, called the Red Deeps, in very great awe, and needed all her confidence in Tom's bravery to reconcile her to an excursion thither, –visions of robbers and fierce animals haunting every hollow” (268). Maggie no longer needs

the protection of a man (or boy), as she can now enter into the woods without fear of peril. Later, Maggie will decline her brother's offer to manage his household, will deny Philip a commitment, and will refuse to elope with Stephen. While the woods provide cover for her tête-à-têtes with Philip, it is the discussions of literature, not romance, which most excites Maggie. In a world in which her own father believes "a woman's no business wi' being so clever; it'll turn to trouble no doubt," the wood serves as a place of escape for the regulation and restrictions that her culture, her family, and her self have put on Maggie's available performances (14). Unlike in the drawing rooms of Lucy Deane where she must conform (albeit unsuccessfully) to gender and sexual conventions, the Red Deeps provides a space for Maggie to begin to imagine positions outside of the dutiful and subordinate roles of daughter, sister, and wife.

In the trees of the Red Deeps, Maggie vacillates between selfless devotion to others and sexual love of another. To describe Maggie's performance of heterosexuality, Eliot draws on floral imagery. Despite her attempts to deny her feelings, Maggie's attraction to Stephen Guest, and his to her, draws the two together in a series of complicated and provocative encounters, until the ill-fated rowing trip. In this initial scene, we see the moments when Maggie and Stephen first act on their sexual feelings for the other. In order to appreciate fully the conflict between nature/culture in these sexual performances, it is important to quote the passage at length:

She was looking at the tier of geraniums as she spoke... Something strangely powerful there was in the light of Stephen's long gaze, for it made Maggie's face turn toward it and look upward at it, slowly, like a flower at the ascending brightness. ... The change of movement brought a new consciousness to Maggie; she blushed deeply, turned away her head, and drew her arm from Stephen's, going up to some flowers to smell them. ... 'Oh, may I get this rose?' said Maggie, making a great effort to say something, and dissipate the burning sense of irretrievable confession. 'I think I am quite wicked with roses; I like to gather them and smell them till they have no scent left.'

Stephen was mute; he was incapable of putting a sentence together, and Maggie bent her arm a little upward toward the large half-opened rose that had attracted her. Who has not felt the beauty of a woman's arm? ... A woman's arm touched the soul of a great sculptor two thousand years ago, so that he wrought an image of it for the Parthenon which moves us still as it clasps lovingly the timeworn marble of a headless trunk. Maggie's was such an arm as that, and it had the warm tints of life.

A mad impulse seized on Stephen; he darted towards the arm and showered kisses on it, clasping the wrist.

But the next moment Maggie snatched it from him, and glared at him like a wounded war-goddess, quivering with rage and humiliation. (394-395)

Maggie's desire to "smell [the roses] till they have no scent left" speaks of an insatiable passion, one that she knows is considered wicked, or inappropriate for her gender. Maggie has already dedicated herself (and her body) to the needs of her family, and perhaps realizes that the roses are out of her reach. In other words, Maggie is not meant for love and romance. While Maggie is tantalized by naturally occurring objects, Stephen lusts after an object that reminds him of classical art. In fact, the arm, according to the narrator, conjures images of the Parthenon, a relic of Greek democracy. Margaret Homans furthers this contention by arguing that Stephen does not desire Maggie, but rather he desires the arm. Homans reads this passage as a sign of Stephen's consumption, as "[t]he fetishizing of this arm shows both that Maggie's sexuality is no longer for her use but for Stephen's and that her sexuality has become a marker of her and Stephen's rank as consumer" (175). Stephen is able to objectify Maggie, or rather a specific part, as she reaches for the rose, and he uses it for his own purposes and pleasures. Like the potted geraniums that first attracted Maggie, the arm is removed from its natural situation for the use of the consumer. Yet, Maggie's mental resolve is stronger than Stephen's physical objectification, as she snatches the arm back "like a wounded war-goddess." This characterization connects to the previous image of the Parthenon, a temple to the Greek goddess of Wisdom Athena. Like Athena, Maggie's strength comes from her intelligence, which will serve as the unfeminine behavior that prevents her inclusion in society. In a scene that attempted to allow Maggie to express her sexuality, a part of Maggie's body and objects from green spaces are separated and exploited for the use of the

leisure class; however, Maggie's mind resists and she is free from the hand of male domination.

Maggie's ultimate death has frustrated many critics who do not understand why Eliot cannot find a suitable place for Maggie to live in St. Ogg's or elsewhere. As a precocious intelligent woman, Maggie is the heroine for whom Eliot (and many of her readers) seems to long. In particular, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* positions Maggie as the model the successfully sensitive young girl who attacks "official optimism, ready made values, hypocritical and cheerful morality... The heroes... obstinately uphold the principles, congeal morality in formal rules; but Maggie tries to put the breath of life into the, she upsets them, she goes to the limit of her solitude and emerges as a free being, beyond the sclerosed universe of the males" (360). While Beauvoir appreciates Maggie's attempt to free herself from societal regulations, her estimation of the character's success exceeds the evidence provided in the novel. In fact, Maggie ultimate freedom in death arises from her need to save her brother from the flood. Even in the end, Maggie is willing to sacrifice herself to save her older brother. Rather than a mournful lament for the loss of human life, the epilogue to *The Mill on the Floss* returns nature's life cycle:

Nature repairs her ravages, –repairs them with her sunshine, and with human labor. The desolation wrought by that flood had left little visible trace on the face of the earth, five years after. The fifth autumn was rich in golden cornstacks, rising in thick clusters among the distant hedgerows; the wharves

and warehouses on the Floss were busy again, with echoes of eager voices, with hopeful lading and unloading. (468)

Eliot provides no satisfactory reason as to why Maggie dies or even a consular lesson learned from her death. Instead, the reader is reminded that time progresses, and life goes on—for organisms on all levels of the ecosystem. Nature repairs itself and through time, but it cannot erase its past. Perhaps Eliot is cautioning her contemporaries that social change happens progressively, but even setbacks do not necessarily mean destruction. Eventually, “the golden cornstacks” will grow back stronger and lusher. Maggie may not have had a place in her St. Ogg’s, but hopefully her nieces will be the dark haired heroine of her (and Eliot’s) dreams. Beauvoir and like-minded critics are correct in their readings of Maggie’s manipulation and evasions of gender constructions and constraints; but Maggie’s gender trouble disrupted her community and prevented her from maintaining a place within that community. Perhaps a place did exist for her, but Maggie could not leave the Red Deeps.

Unlike the cultivated pasture of Dinah’s Green, the Red Deeps is wilderness, a landscape that threatens the heterosexual hierarchy, and it is Maggie’s foray into the wilderness that prevents her from being able or willing to conform to the rules of Victorian (or a pre-dating) society. While cultivated nature is associated with the domestic sphere, and thus coded as feminine, wilderness exists beyond the regulatory framework of culture. In fact, the wilderness is not only positioned outside of the city or culture, but also outside of and in opposition to civilization. Bianca Theisen

articulates the dual ways in which civilization is defined in opposition of the wilderness, as civilization is “figured forth on the one hand in the exclusion of a female monster like the sphinx which could be associated with a wild, threatening, or devouring aspect of female sexuality, and on the other hand in the inclusion of woman in her desexualized role as wife or mother in the boundaries of the city” (539). Instead of embracing her desexualized role, Maggie revels in her time spent in the Red Deeps, whose very name conjures images of the vagina. Had she survived the flood, Maggie would have probably remained on the outskirts of society and in close proximity to the wilderness. Despite outrage over the death of this unconventional heroine, Mitchell asserts that “Maggie is the closest [Eliot] ever comes to creating a female subject of desire. Nor will Eliot ever again come so close to actively criticizing the world of patriarchal principle” (*Stone* 121). In *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot allowed her heroine to perform gender more closely aligned to the sphinx than to the Angel in the House.

Chapter Two

A Rose by Any Other Name would be a Cigar: Flora Imagery in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Years*

Metaphors of literary history typically construct canonical authors in a family tree, with Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, and Shakespeare among the most revered forefathers of modern literary production. Contemporary authors, both men and women, find it difficult to escape the looming shadows of the forefathers (or Fathers), and biographies and criticism often discuss how past writers influence later authors. Before becoming an important figure of English literature herself, Virginia Woolf's education constituted primarily of reading her literary legacy; and consequently, almost all of Woolf's work contains at least one allusion to a canonical writer—in plot, in language, in direct reference. Critics typically hail Virginia Woolf as the Mother of Modernism; yet, her innovative literary and aesthetic work is grounded in literary tradition. The use of the genealogical metaphor continues to subordinate women writers in the literary field and obscures the ways in which the present constructs the past and the ways in which the past exists in the present. Woolf acts to cut down this literary family tree and uses the past figures and techniques to comment on and critique standards—be it literary, political, or social. The tension between the present and the past dominates two of her novels, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *The Years* (1937). Both novels are told through various characters' perspectives—*Mrs. Dalloway* follows separate and mostly unrelated characters on a single June day in

1923, while *The Years* tracks multiple generations of an extended family for more than four decades. Although certainly different in scope and situations, both novels provide multiple portraits of middle-class domestic arrangements. Various characters contemplate their current relationships while investigating alternative options; the older generations must choose between inappropriate desires and acceptable lifestyles, and the children of the twentieth century are allowed to imagine social and domestic roles beyond their parents' realm of possibilities. While the novels are mainly set within cosmopolitan London, the city offers a multitude of gardens, parks, and other green spaces for the characters to escape the confines of regulatory discourse. Drawing on traditional cultivation metaphors, Woolf manipulates floral and plant imagery to help her characters construct gender roles and act out sexual behaviors that are outside of dominant ideology.

Both internally haunted and externally confronted by previous desires, the title character of *Mrs. Dalloway* struggles to reconcile her youthful visions of life with the socially acceptable existence of her adulthood. Despite her sheltered upbringing at Bourton, Clarissa was exposed to radical ideas—or at least, ideas that ran contrary to normative discourse—which provided her with gender and sexual possibilities beyond those of heterosexual middle-class wife and mother. Clarissa's relationships with Sally Seton and Peter Walsh might allow her to entertain alternative possibilities, but in the end, she chooses marriage to the respectable Richard Dalloway. Throughout the novel, Clarissa vacillates between attempting to perform her role of “perfect hostess” and wanting to escape the confines of social conventions.

Clarissa's first discovery of her desires vividly occurred to her as she walks in the green spaces of her family's summer home:

Lovely in girlhood, suddenly there came a moment—for example on the river beneath the woods at Clieveden—when, through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed [Richard]. And then at Constantinople, and again and again. She could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together. For *that* she could dimly perceive. She resented it, had a scruple picked up Heaven knows where, or, as she felt, sent by Nature (who is invariably wise); and yet she could not resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman, not a girl, of a woman confessing, as to her they often did, some scrape, some folly. And whether it was pity, or their beauty, or that she was older, or some accident—like a faint scent, or a violin next door (so strange is the power of sounds at certain moments), she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt. Only for a moment; but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which spilt its thin skin and gushed and poured with extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! (31)

In green spaces, Clarissa realizes she internally lacks a quality—probably sexual feelings—important to her relationship with her husband. Interestingly, she specifies the places as either the wilderness or an exotic local. In these places, she is released from social constraints of her gender, and it is in these places that she “fails” as Richard’s wife. While unable to be aroused by her man, Clarissa is sexually aroused by a woman. Clarissa cannot explain the origin of these desires (she does not *choose* to have them), but she does consider them “natural,” in both connotations of the word. And while she undoubtedly recognizes that these feelings are considered wrong by her society, Clarissa’s attribution of her lesbianism to “Nature” legitimizes her desires. Woolf inverts the justification of the heterosexual hierarchy, using similar, if not the same, rhetoric to explain Clarissa’s desire of another woman. Clarissa’s passion mimics the environs around her, rushing like a stream until she is drenched in the realization that she loves a woman as a man loves a woman. Unable to escape normative discourse, Clarissa can only conceive of passionate love for a woman as a masculine characteristic; and in that moment and in times of remembrance, she identifies with a man. Finally, Clarissa’s desires reach a climax; and her orgasm is articulated in terms used to describe the soothing of dry, damaged skin (“alleviative over the crack and sores”). The river that ran through the wilderness in which Clarissa could not give in (at least mentally) to her husband washes over her repressed self.

Images of her past desires stalk Clarissa as she performs her current duties of being Mrs. Richard Dalloway, and she attempts to reconcile her fragmented self.

Clarissa's journey for personal identity is controlled and defined by external forces—societal expectations and relationship to others. The plot centers on the party given by Clarissa, a party *given* for her husband. As she shops for flowers for the party, “[s]he has the oddest sense of being herself invisible... this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (10). Her name is forfeited for his full name, her self surrendered to fulfill a role in this patriarchal society. Clarissa may feel invisible because she is split into different parts for different purposes. Even when alone, Clarissa does not possess agency over herself. While gazing in a mirror, she sees her face and realizes: “That was her self—pointed; dartlike; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she also know how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman...” (36). As she tries to create one stable image of herself, her mind disintegrates into a tangent of the impossibility of wholeness. Clarissa strives to be a fundamental member of her society, but she cannot form a unified (or collected) self. Rather, Clarissa fluctuates between enthusiastically performing her present role as wife and mother and longing desperately for past times when she was not constrained by these titles.

Significantly, these revelations of a fractured self come to Clarissa as she buys flowers, as it is only in the flower shop that the adult Clarissa experiences the passion and joy remember in her youth at Bourton. Entering Miss Pym's shop, Clarissa becomes overwhelmed by multiple stimuli:

There were flowers: delphiniums, sweet peas, bunches of lilac; and carnations, masses of carnations. There were roses; there were irises. Ah yes—so she breathed in the earthy garden sweet smell ... turning her head from side to side among the irises and roses and nodding tufts of lilac with her eyes half closed, snuffing in, after the street uproar, the delicious scent, the exquisite coolness. And then, opening her eyes, how fresh like frilled linen clean from a laundry laid in wicker trays the roses looked; and dark and prim the red carnations, holding their heads up; and all the sweet peas spreading in their bowls, tinged violet, snow, white, pale—as if it were the evening and girls in muslin frock came out to pick sweet peas and roses after the superb summer’s day, with its almost blue-black sky, its delphiniums, its carnations, its arum lilies was over; and it was the moment between six and seven when every flower—roses, carnations, irises, lilac—glows; white, violet, red, deep orange; every flower seems to burn by itself, softly, purely in the misty beds; and how she loved the grey-white moths spinning in and out, over the cherry pie, over the evening primroses! (13)

Almost nowhere else in the present day narrative does Clarissa appear this satisfied, this animated. Floral imagery abounds in an almost increasingly rapid succession, as if Clarissa is overcome with joy at the sight and smell of all these flowers. The flowers are what originally draw her outside of the home; the novel opens with “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself,” as if purchasing flowers were not a job for someone of her social position (3). Clarissa steps outside of both her social

status and gender role; however, because flowers are associated with domesticity (and thus femininity), Clarissa is not necessarily performing gender trouble. In fact, the flowers turn into with images of domesticity—“frilled clean laundry,” “girls in muslin frocks,” “cherry pie”—as if the sight of these flowers remind her identity as a woman. Yet, significantly, Clarissa *purchases* these flowers. As she attempts to formulate a coherent, stable identity, Clarissa must buy these natural objects that symbolically represent a specific version of femininity. These flowers are not wild and untamed, but rather they have been taken from their gardens and brought to the city where they will enter dinning rooms and crystal vases. The flowers are rootless and no longer able to reproduce, much like Clarissa’s memories of her youthful liberties at Bourton. The associations Clarissa envisions when entering Miss Pym’s store are imagines from her childhood in which she, like the flowers, was not constrained nor forced to fit into specific vases. The smell of the blooms reminds Clarissa of her own past, only for her to once again return to the city after she has purchased the flowers for her husband’s party. While the flower shop provides one of the few moments of ecstasy felt by the adult Clarissa, it also participates in the reiteration of patriarchy through its marketing of specifically cultivated flowers—flowers whose stems are grown long and strong so that they may stand erect in vases.

While the flowers in the shop reinforce traditional notions of femininity, Clarissa soon begins to remember alternative ways to perform gender and sexuality. In particular, her childhood friend (and lover) Sally Seton treatment of flowers denies

conventional cultivation practices. Clarissa's awareness of Sally's behavior with flowers reflects her development of strong feelings for Sally:

Sally's power was amazing, her gift, her personality. There was her way with flowers, for instance. At Bourton they always has stiff little vases all the way down the table. Sally went out, picked hollyhocks, dahlias—all sorts of flowers that had never been seen together—cut their heads off, and made them swim on the top of water in bowls...(Of course Aunt Helena thought it wicked to treat flowers like that). (33)

The rigid formality and regulation of Bourton, symbolized by straightly aligned vases, is replaced by Sally's irregular and "wicked" arrangements. Sally's introduction of new flowers undoubtedly mimics her exposing Clarissa to "new" forms of sexuality; Sally shows Clarissa alternative possibilities for flower arrangements, just as she will attempt show Clarissa alternative possibilities of domestic arrangements. Sally disrupts the cultivation process by mixing flowers, removing the stems, and placing their heads in water. The bloom (most commonly associated with the vagina) is separated from the stem (the phallus) and floated in water, a sensual act. Sally's behavior undermines traditional notions of cultivation—both of flowers and of women. Unfortunately for Sally, Clarissa is not willing or ready to publicly perform lesbianism, as she enters into a legal and socially sanctioned marriage to a man of her class (and the Dalloway household, undoubtedly, puts proper groupings of flowers with their heads firmly attached in vases). Furthermore, Sally also chooses a heterosexual union, with a member of the

aristocracy nonetheless. Despite having spoken of marriage of a “catastrophe,” both Sally and Clarissa eventually comply with hegemonic discourse and perform more socially appropriate roles of wife/mother.

The scenes from the summerhouse are of Clarissa’s sexuality blossoming, a process performed in the open landscape of the country, rather than in the confines of the city. The flower imagery continues in “the most exquisite moment of her whole life,” as Sally picks a flower from a nearby urn before kissing Clarissa on the lips (35). Clarissa is overwhelmed with emotions as Sally has given a gift “wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it—a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which...she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling!” (35). The kiss turns from a flower into a diamond, the latter object containing a large amount of intrinsic and social value. Both objects are naturally occurring, but the diamond has been appropriated by heterosexual courtship as the ultimate symbol of commitment, used to symbolize forever. While the marks of the kiss will fade and the flowers picked from the urn will wilt, a diamond will outlive both Clarissa and Sally, even though neither women are able to create this type of formal engagement. Clarissa’s ability to surpass (momentarily) socially prescribed sexual roles provides her a moment of spiritual transcendence. This moment, “[this] religious feeling” is introduced by Sally’s picking of a flower out of a carefully arranged planter. Once again, an element traditionally associated with femininity and heterosexuality is incorporated in a gender and sexual performance

outside of normative practices. Woolf reclaims the flowers from patriarchy to help her characters experience desires typically withheld from them.

Although nature imagery has primarily been associated with women, Woolf extends floral imagery to characterize the sexuality of Clarissa's double, Septimus Warren Smith. Septimus, a veteran of the Great War, is shattered by the trauma of the battlefield and haunted by the memory of his war buddy, and probably lover, Evans. Septimus has a tenuous relationship with his present reality, often suffering from violent and vivid flashbacks to his experiences in the war. His war bride, Rezia, attempts to maintain a conventional home and marriage, despite Septimus's continued connection to his dead lover:

Rezia came in, with her flowers, and walked across the room, and put the roses in a vase, upon which the sun struck directly, and it went laughing, leaping round the room. She had had to buy the roses from a poor man in the street. But they were almost dead already, she said, arranging the roses. So there was a man outside; Evans presumably; and the roses, which Rezia said were half dead, had been picked by him in the fields of Greece. (91)

Rezia brings the flowers into their flat in an act of traditional notions of domesticity; however, like their marriage, the flowers are near death. Furthermore, as Cornelia Burian argues in "Modernity's Shock and Beauty: Trauma and the Vulnerable Body in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*" the flowers serve as a bridge between life and death for Septimus and as a way for him to communicate with the dead. Instead of a marker of a conventional heterosexual household, Septimus believes that they are a

message sent to him by Evans from a country often associated with male homosexuality due to the classical period's gender and sexual constructions that permitted intimate relationships between men. Burian asserts "[t]he roses thus symbolize, as for Clarissa, . . . homosexuality . . . [F]or Septimus and Clarissa, flowers express the traumatic aftereffects felt by those who are unable to live out their true sexual identity" (73). Although Burian's reading calls for stable and "true" sexualities, a type identity refuted by gender performativity, her reading connects different examples of Woolf's revision of traditional flower imagery. However, unlike Clarissa who attempts to use flowers to legitimize her role as heterosexual by re-feminizing her relationship with them, Septimus continues to understand flowers as a symbol for his love for a man. Septimus does not necessarily feminize his own association with flowers, a claim that would entrap homosexuality in the man/woman binary despite the lack of appropriate sex organs. In fact, Septimus' use of flowers queers the nature trope and calls into question the "natural" justification of the heterosexual hierarchy.

While Clarissa and Septimus are trapped in her past, her living peers made progress in the fight for gender equality. Notably, her daughter Elizabeth has already rejected the split identity (past/present, free/constricted, country/city) that haunts Clarissa:

People were beginning to compare [Elizabeth] to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies, and it made life a burden to her, for she so much preferred being left alone to do what she liked in the

country, but they would compare her to lilies, and she had to go to parties, and London was so dreary compared with being alone in the country with her father and the dogs. (131)

Whereas, Clarissa submits to conventional understandings of women and nature, Elizabeth embraces the free space of the nonconfining countryside. While this ground is not the wild, unbridled wilderness, Elizabeth is still able to “do what she liked” and to escape some demands of society. Yet, while Elizabeth attempts to perform a progress gender, her notions of the country maintain the nature/culture binary, a binary that reinforces the gender binary and subordinates women. In her youth, Clarissa also attempted to subvert traditional notions of nature and thus gender; but as an adult, she allows herself to be (and probably participated in) cultivated of herself into a proper wife, mother, and household manager. Like her mother, Elizabeth also loves a woman, Doris Kilman, to whom Clarissa even offers flowers from Bourton (127).

Elizabeth attempts to break out of her mother’s tightly confined environment (as Clarissa, at times, tries to do the same), and as a teenager, she embodies a future, not a past. As the only youth of the narrative, Elizabeth is symbolically the future of the culture. Significantly, Elizabeth questions her mother’s life at length while she sits on a bus, which travels into the parts of London that are not appropriate for a polite girl. Elizabeth is the only character who uses motorized transportation, so even her journey for identity is more “modern” than the adults’ quests. Instead of walking through the park, Elizabeth drives down the Strand, missing the opportunity attached

to green spaces. Yet, Woolf seems to allow Elizabeth the ability to think outside of tradition without the assistance of the garden Elizabeth begins to speculate on the future she might like to have, her future role in society. After pondering her possibilities, she decided the “she would like to have a profession. She would become a doctor, a farmer, possibly go into Parliament” (133). Missing from her list, significantly, are the duties of “hostess,” “wife,” “mother.” However, she does want to be a farmer and direct the cultivation of plants on a spread of land much larger than a garden (“She might own a thousand acres and have people under her” (133)). This career goal seems to suggest that Elizabeth will have (or has) more agency of personal identity than women of previous generations have had. The future Elizabeth envisions is not her mother’s life; her sense of being a woman is not tied to the relationships and roles that define Clarissa’s gender. Elizabeth marks shifting attitudes of social and gender identity. Elizabeth’s comfort in city speaks toward her transgression of the nature/culture binary. No longer does a woman need to rely (necessarily) on green spaces; after all, “she liked the geniality, sisterhood, motherhood, brotherhood of this uproar” (134). Elizabeth is able both to reclaim the green space (as a farmer) and find a community within the public sphere. She may not be quite ready to fully commit to life in the city, but she is making steps away from her family’s traditions, “[f]or no Dalloways came down the Strand daily; she was a pioneer, a stray, venturing, trusting” (134). Elizabeth—and future generations of the British culture—must take her own journey toward the realization of personal, gender, and sexual identity.

While Woolf allows the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* to imagine (or fantasize) possible expressions of gender or sexuality, the characters in *The Years* have the space to perform a much wider range of identities. Essentially, *Mrs. Dalloway* focuses on singular characters—albeit various singular characters—whereas *The Years* track various members of an extended family in relationships with each other and with others. It is in the later novel that Woolf provides different models of couplings, rather than different choices of partners for one person; and in particular, the novel centers on the family structure. In “Virginia Woolf in the House of Love: Compulsory Heterosexuality in *The Years*,” Claire Hanson uses Adrienne Rich’s concept of “compulsory heterosexuality” to argue that Woolf’s assessment of the family structure positions the novel as a “more radical (and therefore more uncomfortable) text than others written by Woolf, and that it takes us into territory which has only recently become the object of feminist enquiry and debate” (55). Rich’s influential 1980 article “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” defines compulsory heterosexuality as:

For women heterosexuality may not be a “preference” at all but something that has had to be imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force...the failure to examine heterosexuality as an institution is like failing to admit that the economic system called capitalism or the caste system of racism is maintained by a variety of forces, including both physical violence and false consciousness. (648)

Rich argues patriarchy is (literally and figuratively) reproduced through this system of compulsory heterosexuality. Rich proposes that for women, heterosexuality is a secondary tendency and/or identity. As the source for nurture, the mother (woman) serves as the original aim for her male and female children's desires, and there lacks an existing need for women then to re-focus their desires on males. The "original homosexuality" is suppressed by an enforced heterosexuality. Butler (through Michel Foucault) furthers this idea by contending that heterosexuality and homosexuality are both constructed positions that allow the law (or patriarchy) to regulate sexuality (*Gender Trouble* 38-39). Instead of complying with the laws of patriarchy, Woolf writes a novel that undermines the normality of heterosexuality and even the existence of distinctive gender and sexuality categories. Although *The Years* does provide a few examples of fulfilled, monogamous heterosexual couples, most of the characters are unable or unwilling to perform (active) heterosexuality; and yet, few are acknowledged as homosexual. Instead, most characters occupy a metaphorical third space between the sexual binaries.

As the eldest daughter of an ailing (and then dead) mother, Eleanor Pargiter must assume many of the responsibilities and duties of the female head of the household. Eleanor suppresses any form of desire she may have in order to fulfill her inherited role of "wife" and "mother," and her celibacy—whether imposed or chosen—positions her outside of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Religious celibacy is often still coded and constructed as heterosexual women are, with religious devotion to a male savior/god taking the place of sexual behavior to a male

partner/husband. But Eleanor is not a bride of Christ, and her virginity outlives her with youthful innocence. Once Eleanor's father dies, however, Eleanor's services are now longer needed, and she is free from the duties of the home. Her realization of her liberation comes as she "gave one look at the sunflower on the terracotta plaque. That symbol of her girlish sentiment amused her grimly. She had meant it to signify flowers, fields in the heart of London; but now it was cracked" (101). At one time, Eleanor needed the reminder of the free space of nature to afford her freedom from gender constructions and constraints, but her new position as spinster offers her freedom from the confining roles of wife and mother while still allowing her to participate in society. While she used to need the symbolism of the flower, the crack has opened new possibilities for her personal and public identities. While Eleanor is now able to see through the artifice of her childish dreams, she still grieves this loss. Although her (non)sexuality does not fit within the established binary, Eleanor does not escape identification: "The man on whose toe she had trodden sized her up; a well-known type; with a bag; philanthropic; well nourished; a spinster; a virgin; like all the women in her class, cold; her passions had never been touched; yet not unattractive" (102). The man's ability to mark and pin-down Eleanor's identity places her back in the system of compulsory heterosexuality, in that had her desires "been touched" then she would she would actively perform a sexuality (or complete Butler's sex/gender/desire triangle). Rather, Eleanor's freedom from sexual desires allows her to fulfill her other passions—philanthropic causes, friends, travel—and she uses her celibacy to escape compliance with the binary. In fact, she becomes

something else altogether. Eleanor is not the object of the man's gaze, in which case she would probably be represented by a rose or lily. Rather, she is associated with a sunflower, a flower whose seeds supply sustenance, and thus life, without the need to be fertilized by another. Eleanor's bloom (her uterus) may not produce children, but her seeds (her philanthropy) provide nourishment for others.

In her youth, Eleanor managed to escape the confines of her gender construction by denying her sexual desires. By performing the domestic duties but not the sexual role of wife and mother, she did not threaten patriarchy by performing outside her gender role. After menopause, she no longer has to worry about hiding her sexuality. She also finds that the seeds of her sunflower are no longer enough to sustain her, so she finds herself once again drawn to green spaces and their untamed inhabitants:

She wanted to see the owl before it got too dark. She was becoming more and more interested in birds. It was a sign of old age, she supposed, as she went into the bedroom. An old maid who washes and watches birds, she said to herself as she looked in the glass. There were her eyes—they still seemed to her rather bright, in spite of the lines round them—the eyes she shaded in the railway carriage because Dublin praised them. But now I'm labelled, she thought—an old maid who washes and watches birds. That's what they think I am. But I'm not—I'm not in the least like that, she said. She shook her head, and turned away from the glass. It was a nice room; shady, civilized, cool after the bedrooms in foreign inns, with marks on the wall where

someone had squashed bugs and men brawling under the window. But were where her glasses? Put away in some drawer? She turned to look for them.

(203)

Eleanor's interest in birds seems to be a marker of her status as an "old maid"; however, she is quick to point out her disconnect from that identity and its other behaviors or markers. Furthermore, Eleanor recognizes bird watching's association with her gender (and sexuality), but unlike the birds, she will not allow herself to be watched and labeled. Rather than a sweet wren or sparrow, Eleanor seeks the owl, a predator associated with the night and the goddess Athena. Eleanor's fascination with this particular bird speaks to her suspect position. Like Maggie Tulliver who was also connected to Athena, Eleanor is an intelligent woman who is not always content to stay within the confines of her gender. As a middle-aged woman, Eleanor is still active, still engaged, and not willing to withdraw from society just because her reproductive capabilities have ceased. A woman in menopause "is no longer the prey of overwhelming forces; she is herself, she and her body are one. It is sometimes said that women of a certain age constitute 'a third sex'; and in truth where they are not males, they are no longer females" (Beauvoir 31). Eleanor is no longer the prey of her monthly hormonal cycle nor of the sexual (procreative) advances of men. Her body is hers, and no longer potentially inhabited by a child. While the term "old maid" still attaches her to female end of the male/female binary, Beauvoir would argue that Eleanor is freed from this entrapment. Eleanor's self-awareness of the external constructions of her self reads as a double here. While she is being watched

(and judged), she watches the birds; only Eleanor cannot find her glasses, which seemingly indicates that she will be less judgmental on her subjects.

Eleanor's cousin Kitty is not granted the opportunity to formulate an identity beyond the domestic sphere. As a youth growing up in Oxford, Kitty is prevented from cultivating her love of the nature and outdoors by her mother, who instead helps her daughter develop the social and domestic spheres a wife (of a certain socio-economic status) should have. Kitty is guided away from the free space of nature into the confining gender (and sexual) roles prescribed by the hegemony, particularly the aristocracy. Although Kitty performs a convincing Lady Lasswade, she never truly feels comfortable in this role, and in an exhilarating scene, we see Kitty quite literally escape from her life in upper-class London to the openness of the country. As Kitty changes out of her party dress and jewels, she puts on "[t]he little tweed travelling-hat poised on the top of her hair [that] made her look quite a different person; the person she liked being" (267). The clothes act as masks, allowing her to signify the switch between the matriarchal Lady Lasswade and Kitty, who lacks any modifiers as the free space of the countryside does not regulate her role. Despite her "successful" marriage, Kitty is only happy being Kitty and being Kitty in nature. Once outside of London and normative discourse, Kitty gazes at the land—not *her* land—as aristocratic laws of inheritance denied the wife and mother and granted possession from father to son. Yet possession is a value of the patriarchal system Kitty is escaping, and she simply gazes at the land: "Uncultivated, uninhabited, [the land] exist[ed] by itself, for itself, without towns or houses it looked from this height...A

deep murmur sang in her ears—the land itself, singing to itself, a chorus, alone. She lay there listening. She was happy, completely. Time had ceased” (277-278). Kitty becomes the land, freed from the constraints and demands of her social and cultural roles of woman, wife, mother, Lady, hostess, etc., and the free space of the uncultivated land allows her agency of herself. Yet, Kitty must eventually return to her life and this reprieve is only temporary. In fact, Kitty is only playing at be free; she imagines that the land is not cultivated or inhabited and that time stops. Kitty becomes *her* vision of the land, not necessarily the reality of the land. While Patricia Cramer in “‘Pearls and the Porpoise’: *The Years*—A Lesbian Memoir” argues that Kitty is a closeted lesbian, this passage seems to indicate that Kitty resists classification or definition; rather Kitty basks in the liberation of solitude and the singularity of the self.

While the tension between the past and the present seems resolved in this relationship, the present’s connection to the future is jeopardized by it. Peggy and her brother North act as representatives of the new generation, those who would come of age during the World War I. Peggy differs from her aunts in that she is able to join a profession and does not have to rely on philanthropy or marriage to help form her identity. Yet, Peggy constructs her identity not from status as a doctor, but rather from her position of difference from previous generations. At Delia’s party, Peggy surveys the room full of her family and seemingly takes notes:

As she sat where Eleanor had sat she saw the telephone picture that Eleanor had seen—Sally sitting on the edge of her chair with a smudge on her face.

What a fool, she thought bitterly, and a thrill ran down her thigh. Why was she bitter? For she prided herself upon being honest—she was a doctor—and that thrill she knew meant bitterness. Did she envy her because she was happy, or was it the croak of some ancestral prudery—did she disapprove of these friendships with men who did not love women? She looked at the picture of her grandmother as if to ask her opinion. But she had assumed the immunity of a work of art; she seemed as she sat there, smiling as her roses, to be indifferent to our right and wrong. (327)

She mentally chastises Eleanor and Sally for their life choices. She calls Sally a fool for loving a man who also loves men, but Peggy seems more threatened, or perhaps jealous, than disgusted by this relationship. Nicholas and Sally each perform gender trouble, as neither play by the rules of middle-class Britain. Peggy, on the other hand, relies on the objectivity of science and the knowledge of her education to presumably erase the need for intimate relationships. She turns to the oft-discussed portrait of her grandmother for answers; but the Victorian matriarch merely smiles down at her flowers, in this case, with an aura of blissful ignorance of the changing social and political structures her children, and their children, must negotiate. The elder Rose Pargiter is forever encapsulated in this portrait, forever seen as a tranquil and serene object of beauty and love. Peggy, who was born long after Rose's death, constructs her grandmother (and the women of that generation) by what she has been told; however, this construction, like the painting, is only two-dimensional. Furthermore, Peggy begins to paint portraits of the living, flattening their contradictions and

complications into a singular image: “It’s the sense of the family, she added, glancing at Eleanor as if to collect another little fact about her to add to her portrait of a Victorian spinster” (333). For Peggy, Eleanor’s failure to marry or for other formal domestic arrangements regulates her to a stereotypical image of a Victorian spinster, as Peggy uses both the historical moment and definable sexuality to formulate Eleanor’s entire identity. As Peggy stands in the corner and stares down at her family, she creates inaccurate and potentially harmful images of the previous generations. Moreover, Peggy potentially misreads the roses in the portrait, as well as the elder Rose. As I have shown, nature imagery has the possibility to be subversive. Perhaps, the roses are like ones Sally Seton plays with or the ones that fill Clarissa Dalloway with ecstasy. If Peggy represents Britain’s future, hopefully her peers will not follow her lead and paint simplified portraits of the complexities of the past.

Virginia Woolf continually revisited the past in her fiction. Not only does Woolf revise traditional literary devices and amend the sentiments of previous literary figures, but she also allows previous generations to have a voice in her modern fiction. Although her aesthetics were certainly progressive, Woolf does not distance herself from the Victorians; in fact, she seems to embrace them. Even, *The Years*’ Peggy cannot deny this era’s influence: “It was the force that she had put into the words that impressed her, not the words. It was as if she still believed with passion—she, old Eleanor—in the things that man had destroyed. A wonderful generation, she thought as they drove off. Believers...” (331). The Victorian era saw foundational change in its social, economic, and political structures, and the public forum (if not

open to all) was alive with debate and discussion of how these changes must occur. Despite their witness to great transformation, the Victorian too often are seen as austere and polite, but even Peggy begins to realize that Eleanor's generation were also full of idealists who sought to construct their own realities outside of the spaces of hegemonic society. Woolf provides us with multiple portraits of people performing gender outside of normative discourse, even if only to cut the heads off flowers.

Conclusion

Fruit from the Tree: Eliot and Woolf's Dialogue with Gender Theory and Ecocriticisms

While Virginia Woolf's father was acquainted with George Eliot, Woolf herself never had the opportunity to meet her. However, Woolf would write several essays on Eliot, one of which was first published in the November 20, 1919 Times Literary Supplement. In "George Eliot," Woolf defends some of her predecessor's authorial, and personal, choices, saying:

For her, too, the burden and the complexity of womanhood were not enough; she must reach beyond the sanctuary and pluck for herself the strange bright fruits of art and knowledge. Clasp them as few women have ever clasped them, she would not renounce her own inheritance - the difference of view, the difference of standard - nor accept an inappropriate reward. Thus we behold her, a memorable figure, inordinately praised and shrinking from her fame, despondent, reserved, shuddering back into the arms of love as if there alone were satisfaction and, it might be, justification, at the same time reaching out with 'a fastidious yet hungry ambition' for all that life could offer the free and inquiring mind and confronting her feminine aspirations with the real world of men. ... [S]he sought more knowledge and more freedom till the body, weighted with its double burden, sank worn out, we must lay upon

her grave whatever we have it in our power to bestow of laurel and rose.

(*Women* 160)

Woolf both acknowledges and appreciates Eliot's paradoxes—the occupation of both sides of a binary—since Woolf's private life did not always correspond with her authorial voice either. Both authors were bold in the pages of their fiction, while still recognizing their respective contexts; and, although both women saw immense social change, they each maintained a sense of caution by not letting their characters enter the wilderness. Maggie Tulliver, the exception, could not reconcile her subversive gender performances with the rigidity of St. Ogg's, or early nineteenth century Britain, and her death mirrored the silencing of many women denied public voices. Through time and socio-political action, women gained entrance into the masculine domain of culture and education, being allowed to “pick the strange fruits.” As I have shown, both Eliot and Woolf challenge conventional ideas about cultivated femininity as well as undermine the traditional and continual man-civilization-public-city/ woman-nature-private-home binary. These “strange fruits” also can both be Eliot and Woolf's educations, which enabled the authors to engage in metaphorical conversations with their literary forefathers, and the products of the authors' work, which enables their readers to image alternative gender performances. Each author challenges certain literary traditions and conventions and attempts to provide their peers and their descendents with alternative discourses of “complexities of womanhood,” rather than the limited dichotomy (or trichotomy) of Eve.

Man's fall from the Garden of Eden has consumed the attention of authors for nearly the entirety of Judo-Christian literacy; and femininity, correspondingly, has either bore the mark of Eve's shame or basked in the innocence of life in the garden. John Ruskin reiterated normative discourse as he endorsed the concept of "Woman as Nature" and taught young women how to cultivate their gardens in order to serve best their households. "Woman as Nature" easily morphs into "Woman as Nurture," as we are reminded of woman's procreative power and responsibility. The link between biological characteristics (sex) and social role (gender) has allowed hegemonic discourse to regulate the body, and literary conventions have worked to objectify it. While poets turn their lovers into roses, the individual woman is silenced into a beautiful object that is both soft and delicate. Women, then, are socialized to be like the fragile object and, of course, to attract the attention of the male gaze. The ideology of women (gender) is transcribed onto nature, as nature's ideology is onto women. The continual duplication tightly weds woman to nature, which only serves to further subordinate women as men become the bearers of culture. The regulatory binary of woman (nature)/ men (culture) traps subjects by forcing individuals into narrowly created categories.

If novels are primarily concerned with the individual's quest for personal and/or public identity, then Fraiman is accurate to claim that the genre of the *Bildungsroman* is not available to Maggie Tulliver or other would be heroines. In George Eliot's *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Years*, we have seen women not *develop* and *mature*, but rather

they significantly *blossom* into their social roles and responsibilities. In most cases, these women are not given complete agency of identity, but are instead given limited options within a restrictive realm. Both Eliot and Woolf attempt to grant their feminine (and masculine) characters more freedom to perform behaviors outside of normative parameters, but in the end, normative ideology still regulates, even in fictional reality. By manipulating traditional nature imagery to deconstruct gender and sexual binaries, Eliot and Woolf draw preexisting discourses into their respective fiction. Both women were well read and aware of the literary legacy that they would inherit once they themselves became authors. Although not necessarily overtly engaging in public discussions, Eliot and Woolf's individual fiction enters the debate on gender, both of "their" time and "our" time. In fact, Eliot and Woolf also act to deconstruct the binaries of past/present, in which a Victorian and a Modern seemingly join forces with Post-Modern gender theory and ecocriticism(s). While the instance of a linear and clearly divided view of history easily dismisses the writers as old-fashioned and out-dated, the concepts of gender and sexuality that these authors create in their novels would serve present day scholars' attempt to understand the ideological constructions and regulatory practices of identity.

To be sure, the historical moment does provide a specific context to understand certain political and social structures. The reality of George Eliot does not perfectly mirror that of Virginia Woolf, and neither flawlessly translates into the present day. Gender, of course, must not be viewed ahistorically, and certain accommodations must be made to allow contextual references to provide a more

complete portrait of the ideology at work. There are limitations in this project because of the specific and varying ways in which “woman” and “man” are defined. However, as long as these two terms are set in opposition to each other, sex continues to regulate gender’s behaviors and the ways in which desire is expressed. In tandem with gender performativity discourse, George Eliot and Virginia Woolf open up the binary and allow their characters to blossom into any sort, even the wicked variety, of flowers that they choose. Nostalgic green spaces become freer places that temporarily liberate dwellers from some gender constraints in order to allow gender performances outside of regulatory ideals. Roses become bodies to be plucked by any who wish. While Eliot and Woolf must wrap their gender trouble and queer characters in symbolism and implication, the novels defy literary conventions and hegemonic discourse. The novels seemingly fail to answer “The Woman Question,” perhaps because they refuse to provide a singular portrait for the category of “woman;” instead, they unlock the garden gates to allow subjects who enter the green space to construct their own identities.

NOTES

¹ For a detailed discussion of movements within Anglo-American feminism and corresponding criticism on George Eliot, see Kate Flint's "George Eliot and Gender" (2001). Woolf explicitly discusses gender in her extended nonfiction works *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. For analysis of Woolf position on gender in these pieces, see Laura Marcus's "Woolf's Feminism and Feminism's Woolf" (2000) for *A Room of One's Own* and Naomi Black *Virginia Woolf as Feminist* (2004) for *Three Guineas*. Both pieces, especially Black, provide comprehensive and thorough discussions of feminist scholarship on Woolf. See also Toril Moi's "Introduction: Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist Readings of Woolf" in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985).

² Merchant explains that "[t]he term, 'ecofeminisme,' was coined in 1974 by French Writer Françoise d'Eaubonned... who called upon women to lead an ecological revolution to save the planet. Such an ecological revolution would entail new gender relations between women and men and between humans and nature" (5).

³ Capitalism upholds works to uphold gender norms and public/private binary by delineating women as the consumers and managers of the household. See Poovey and Armstrong for further development of how different ideologies act together and against one another to regulate gender construction and sexual norms. Homans provides a detailed analysis of the relationship between gender and class, and the ways in which Eliot constructs specially middle-class values and ideal femininity.

⁴ Fraiman provides an extensive and meticulous discussion both of the history *The Mill on the Floss* as a *Bildungsroman* and of the various theoretical development of this generic convention, particularly the connection and tension between genre and gender. See Fraiman for further development.

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