1992

Bloomsbury and Gender: Isolation and Connection in the Novels of Forster and Woolf

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Bloomsbury and Gender: 
Isolation and Connection in the Novels of Forster and Woolf

A THESIS
The Honors Program
College of St. Benedict/St. John's University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Distinction "All College Honors"
and the Degree Bachelor of Arts
In the Department of English

by
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March, 1992
Bloomsbury and Gender: Isolation and Connection in the Novels of Forster and Woolf

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At one point in her "biography" of Orlando, Virginia Woolf records that her protagonist's identity, having suddenly and mysteriously changed from a man to a woman, is under legal question. The courts must decide whether Orlando is dead or alive, male or female, duke or nonentity. Meanwhile, Orlando continues to go about her daily life. It is perhaps this image--of lawyers deeming the proper social status of an individual while that individual independently seeks a personal identity--that best represents the vision that Woolf shared with fellow Bloomsbury novelist, E. M. Forster. Both novelists employed their craft to question England's conventional social relationships. Their characters struggle to achieve a human identity by exceeding the social and historical limits of class and gender roles. The characters' struggles parallel the personal and artistic struggles that Woolf faced as a woman, that Forster faced as a homosexual man, and that each faced as a writer.

A brief discussion of gender and sexuality will establish that the concerns of Forster and Woolf, though related, are essentially different. Biological distinctions between the sexes concerned neither novelist so much as did gender, which Madeleine Kahn defines as "the social overlay upon sex," or society's rules for how each sex should behave (7). While Forster and Woolf each felt excluded by society's prescribed gender roles, their perceived alienation was a response to two different sexual identifications. In short, Forster was not a woman and Woolf was not a homosexual man. This obvious point reminds us not to invent for them a shared
identity that did not (and can not) exist.

Forster's concern was his society's denial of male homosexual identification. Like other homosexual men in Bloomsbury, Forster primarily concerned himself with male identity, and not with sexual orientation in general:

[Woolf's homosexual friends] did not ally themselves by sexual preference with lesbians or by a sense of sexual oppression with feminists, but by gender, with men, and with the power of patriarchy itself. (Marcus 177)

According to Barbara Rosecrance, Forster did not care about the fate of homosexual women, and retained "despite his support of Radclyffe Hall's Well of Loneliness a special aversion to lesbians" (153). My point is to illustrate that although the two were friends and their fiction shared common themes, the relationship of Forster and Woolf was not a simple alliance of repressed sexuality.

Although Forster's identity as a homosexual motivated his criticism of English society, he could not openly attack sexual roles from this standpoint. As one critic observes, "He had the misfortune to live at a time when it was peculiarly difficult for a man of his temperament to achieve wholeness of being" (Colmer 224). Forster reacted by creating strong female characters who resist conventional gender roles. Through the voices of women, Forster could freely attack heterosexual identification. Although he writes in the third person, Forster's approach may be similar to "narrative transvestism," a technique which allows a male author access to the "voice on the other side of the structural divide
between genders" (Kahn 10). Clearly, Forster's objective was not merely to identify with women, but to adopt a temporary female identification in order to criticize the societal roles established for men. Thus, Forster employs his female characters to disguise and project his own attack on imperialism, class hierarchies, and heterosexual relationships.

Forster's focalized narration functions as a convenient and socially acceptable literary device; it does not prove an identification with women. Indeed, the posthumous publication of Maurice clearly reveals that Forster's personal interest in attacking conventional society has nothing to do with that society's treatment of women. In the novel, women are little more than bothersome distractions.

One might expect that Virginia Woolf's unconventional sexual orientation, whether lesbian or bisexual, would have similarly challenged established gender roles. But this is not the case. Unlike Forster, Woolf was less concerned with the sexual identification than with the social position of women. Christine Downing explains:

the construction of female gender identity . . . is radically different from the construction of male identity, whether heterosexual or homosexual. Women may turn to women as a way of rejecting their powerlessness in heterosexually defined contexts. That powerlessness stems not from their sexual orientation but from their gender. (10)

In fact, female homosexuality was less threatening than male
homosexuality to conventional society at the time. Woolf published about female-female relationships during her lifetime, but Forster’s Maurice did not appear until after his death. Freud himself noted "that homosexuality in women, no less common than in men . . . has been ignored by law and neglected by psychoanalysis" (Downing 85). Because male gender identification was privileged, male sexual identification assumed more importance than female sexual identification, and therefore, male homosexuality threatened the social system much more deeply than lesbianism.

While an understanding of Woolf’s sexual orientation may be relevant to a deeper understanding of her life and work, it is of secondary importance to a more general issue: gender identification. For Woolf:

Difference between the sexes exists only in relation to each other and to the representation of it. It is a matter of where the dividing line is, and its location varies historically and socially. (Minow-Pinkney 130)

Woolf, too, questions the conventional heterosexual relationship, but not because of the role into which it forced lesbians. Woolf was married, after all, and was not restricted (by her marriage) from falling in love with women. Her complaint about the typical male-female relationship centered on its unequal distribution of power and control. In her novels, marriage is presented as a social relationship for which women must sacrifice individual identity:

Can one really live with other people? And still be oneself,
free to live, free to develop? The question haunts Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay. . . . The problem, we note, is radically a woman's problem. (Blackstone 34)

Woolf attacked women's societal roles, especially in marriage, because those roles placed women in a position of powerlessness.

Woolf advocated androgyny as an alternative identification to society's confining (and unnatural) gender roles:

truly we might call her an androgynist, because she puts the emphasis every time on what a man and a woman have to give to each other, on the mystery of completion, and not on the assertion of separate superiorities. (Blackstone 30)

The androgyny that Woolf envisioned was not a denial of separate gender identifications; rather, it called for a balanced relationship of power between male and female, and a celebration of their differences.

"Only Connect"

Having ascertained that the personal concerns of Woolf and Forster were related to the gender identification of each, it is interesting to consider the remarkable similarities of theme in their novels. Forster brought to his fiction the same sense of isolation and desire for wholeness that are manifest in Woolf's novels. Virginia Woolf, in an essay about the literature of her contemporaries, noted a tendency which applies to both Forster's novels and her own:

the desire to be whole; to be human. "All that I would like
to be is human"--that cry rings through their books--the longing to be closer to their kind . . . to share the emotions of their kind, no longer to be isolated and exalted in solitary state upon their tower, but to be down on the ground with the mass of human kind. ("Leaning Tower" 176)

This is the tie, then, between the novels of E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf--"only connect."

I have used "connection" as an umbrella term to describe this tendency in the novels of each. As I consider each novelist in turn, I will clarify how Forster's specific interpretation of connection differed from Woolf's. In general, however, connection can be understood as a harmony within human relationships, and the reconciliation between the physical and transcendent realms (McConkey 53).

**Forster's Novels: An Overview**

Forster's characters, whether male or female, are both people and functions. In *Aspects of the Novel*, he asserts that characters place an emphasis on a story's value. Unlike daily life, in which "we never understand each other," novels can completely expose people, and "this is why [characters in novels] often seem more definite than characters in history, or even our own friends" (74-75). This is true of Forster's people, many of whom are named allegorically. Miss Lavish exaggerates and embellishes her own zest for life; Reverend Eager is just that--eager to prove his worth. In *A Passage to India*, Miss Quested seeks the "real India"
in vain, the name Fielding suggests the "travelling" nature of the man, and Mrs. Moore is cleverly misconstrued as a Hindu goddess. It is through his characters that Forster presents different understandings of humanity.

Each character inevitably experiences isolation. McConkey notes that for Forster's characters, "their greatest moments are moments, curiously, of simultaneous failure and achievement" (26), presumably because none of his characters are permitted to connect without first experiencing this doubt. In these times of "panic and emptiness," all is dark and confused. As in the Marabar Caves of *A Passage to India*, interpretation is limited and causality cannot be determined. The characters usually endure, prevailing when they accept their own human love.

In his essay, "Art for Art's Sake," Forster maintains: "Art for art's sake does not mean that only art matters" (89). For Forster, the "depiction of human life in all its sublimity" is the essence of a masterpiece (Advani 143-144). Virginia Woolf objects to Forster's early novels "because his fictional characters are clearly the mouthpieces for specific theoretical ideas and attitudes" (Wheare 24). Her objection is justified. Nevertheless, Forster's vision of human relations and his detachment, both of which he shares with his main characters, include an "unmeditated love for the whole world and a vision of a realm beyond" (McConkey 29). Forster himself rationalized the prominence of love in novels:

Love, like death, is congenial to a novelist because it ends a
book conveniently. He can make it a permanency, and his readers easily acquiesce, because one of the illusions attached to love is that it will be permanent. Not has been—will be. (Aspects 86)

Forster's enduring theme is the attempt to connect different realities. McConkey outlines this attempt as concerning nature and the universe in A Room With a View; in Howards End, a harmony within human relations, "but also reconciliation between the physical and transcendent realms"; and an inability to connect the human with the divine in A Passage to India (52-54). I wish to examine this attempt to connect in each novel.

"Courage and love!"—Fantasy and Connection in A Room with a View

For E. M. Forster's A Room with a View, connection is a simple matter of acknowledgement—nature, the human senses, and instinct are true; English cultivation is false. Forster uses the contrast between Italy and England (and particularly London) to reveal the hypocrisy of English society against the honest backdrop of emotion in Italy. He turns to the passion and violence of Italians, to music, and to the humanist creed of Mr. Emerson to demonstrate that such a connection is possible.

A Room with a View establishes that the structure of English society is unnatural; that it distorts human senses, encourages deceit (including self-deception), and teaches individuals "Faith" when it should emphasize "Love." Lucy Honeychurch represses her instincts and has learned to crave social comparison. Without
society, it is impossible for her to gauge whether her thoughts are right or wrong (77). The role allowed her as a woman is completely at odds with her true personality, and Charlotte Bartlett, Lucy's dutiful aunt, must explain to her why women must serve only to inspire:

It was not that ladies were inferior to men; it was that they were different. Their mission was to inspire others to achievement rather than to achieve themselves. Indirectly, by means of tact and a spotless name, a lady could accomplish much. But if she rushed into the fray herself she would be at first censured, then despised, and finally ignored. Poems had been written to illustrate this point. (67)

As a representative of English civilization, Cecil Vyse needs Lucy to fulfill the role expected of her. He believes that "a woman's power and charm reside in mystery, not in muscular rant" (155), and he is annoyed when Lucy does not behave like a Leonardo. Chapter IX, entitled "Lucy As a Work of Art," is an obvious illustration that society's gender roles are constructions. As such, these roles objectify individuals and prevent true, human identification.

That these societal roles are culturally determined becomes clearer when the English characters interact with Italians. First, there is the drive out to the country. The Italian driver and his lover represent Greek gods to Mr. Beebe, who calls them Phaeton and Persephene. The reaction of the others to their indecorous kiss is telling: Reverend Eager is offended and feels foolish, Miss Lavish supports them because they represent unconventionality, and Mr.
Emerson joyfully notes the connection between Spring in Nature and Spring in Man (104). Thus, both Reverend Eager and Miss Lavish are products of their society. Both are snobs and respond to human emotions with a predictable efficiency—Mr. Eager snubbing anything that is not typically English and Miss Lavish snubbing anything that is. Only Mr. Emerson responds to the lovers with genuine feeling.

The novel considers the physical intuition of those English who are receptive to their senses. The Emersons, who are rejected by English society both in England and in Florence, illustrate that an Englishman is made, not born. Forster champions them as heroes because they obey their instincts as human beings, not as gentlemen. George Emerson's call, "Courage and love," is a direct contrast to Reverend Eager's "Courage and faith" (110-113). When George kisses Lucy, he is responding to passion and love, not beliefs or propriety.

England's insistence on propriety serves to negate the importance of visceral feeling. The naked human form is never acknowledged by such a society. Even as Mr. Beebe, Freddy, and George bathe, they are aware of their clothes on the bank:

And all the time three little bundles lay discreetly on the sward, proclaiming:

"No. We are what matters. Without us shall no enterprise begin. To us shall all flesh turn in the end."

(201)

Forster uses the "voice" of the clothes to examine how individual
identity is concealed and shaped by garments of class and gender.

Cecil, as the epitome of the English gentleman, represents the "society and cultivated talk" that Lucy must reject as hypocritical and unnatural (253). She can imagine Cecil only in a room, not in the open air. He, like his society, hypocritically claims to believe in democracy, when in reality he is only comfortable with the "feudal" relationships in London and Italy (235), and generally despises the world—"it is almost a test of refinement" (146).

Lucy attempts to deny the inconsistencies between the truths she senses and the truths society tells her to believe. During this time, she herself becomes as hypocritical as English society. At the piano, she plays victory, but in life, she lives drudgery, as Mr. Beebe observes (55). She lies about the name of the Emersons, and she lies to most of the main characters, including herself, in a series of chapters whose titles begin, "Lying to. . . ." Lucy re-interprets her instincts about Cecil and George: "She loved Cecil; George made her nervous" (218). When she pretends to love no one, "the night received her" (266). Her deception is eventually accompanied by an inability to experience genuine feeling and a sense of isolation.

A Room with a View was a "fantasy" for Forster; it ends on a triumphant note, with connection prevailing. Lucy Honeychurch, having opened her windows all along to the views outside, at last heeds the nature within herself. Intuitive Italians, including the vendor whom Reverend Eager ignores, the man who dies before her in the square, and the Italian driver and his lover, appeal to Lucy
throughout the novel. Forster stresses how aware they are of their senses, and how they make their own presence difficult to ignore: Italians connect. When Phaeton shows Lucy to George instead of to Mr. Beebe, it is not an example of miscommunication, but of instinct: "Italians are born knowing the way... Any one can find places, but the finding of people is a gift from God" (108). These repeated encounters prevent Lucy from denying the strong emotion that seizes her when George leaves, reminding her of the autumn "odours of decay... reminiscent of spring" (257). No longer can she maintain the inconsistency of the tune she plays and the words she sings, "'easy live and quiet die'" (288). In the end, Mr. Emerson shows Lucy how to achieve connection through "the holiness of direct desire" (311). Nevertheless, the connection achieved (the marriage of Lucy and George) cannot be easily assimilated into the English social structure, and the union of the two is met with anger and disappointment by most of the other characters. The resolution, though fanciful, bores Mr. Beebe and points to the general mistrust for marriage that Forster will develop in later novels.

"Panic and emptiness"--Isolation in *Howards End*

In *Howards End*, Forster examines more closely conventional male identification, presenting it as a social construct void of any personal emotion. Connection in *Howards End* depends upon an individual identity. Without it, the characters experience an ignorant disregard either for the feelings of other people (as is
true for most of the Wilcox family), or for the realistic societal conditions at work (as with the idealistic Helen).

Margaret Schlegel's role is to discover the importance of the personal, and to strike a balance between the extremes of callous realism and naive idealism that her husband and her sister personify. Henry Wilcox's repeated lack of concern for Leonard Bast shows Margaret that she and her husband do not think in the same way: "Now she understood why some women prefer influence to rights" (230). Forster's underlying point is that it is exhausting for an individual to combat the accepted roles and positions of a society directly. Henry is a successful businessman and a respectable Englishman, and yet for all his social position, he cannot connect with other people. When Meg feels that she is fighting for women against men (290), she is really fighting for the connection that women make--she is fighting for a balance between rational and emotional extremes.

Forster's characters reflect a willingness to restrict the identities of each other based on divisions of class. Jacky asks for her husband "'as if he was an umbrella'" (113). Ironically, it was an umbrella that first brought Leonard to the Schlegel's. The implication is that Jacky thinks of her marriage and an inanimate object like an umbrella in the same practical terms. This is not merely a reflection of how individuals in the lower class view themselves, however. It also reflects how they are viewed by the upper class, and in this case, it specifically recalls how Mr. Wilcox has limited Jacky's identity to that of the insignificant
mistress. Leonard, too, limits people to social stereotypes, to "pictures that must not walk out of their frames" (123). Mr. Wilcox declines to think much about other people at all, explaining that intellectuals are impractical in assuming that everyone else is unhappy. In this way, he dismisses any personal responsibility to, or connection with, other people. He cannot even refer to his dead wife by name (203). Mrs. Wilcox and Margaret Schlegel are more elusive characters—they have a mysterious, unspoken connection because each has grounded her identity in Howards End.

Because most of the characters have such a narrow understanding of each other, the theme of isolation is especially prominent in Howards End. Margaret often feels alone and unwanted (87). Mr. Wilcox likewise feels alone, even in Margaret's presence (161). Their first kiss is described as "so isolated" (184). For the Wilcoxes, the personal does not exist, there is no "I" and only "panic and emptiness" in the middle of everything in life (234-235). Even Helen, who is an idealist when it comes to personal relations, is alone during her pregnancy and described as "certainly lonely" (235). When Henry rationalizes his affair to Margaret, he cites a dread of being isolated (245). Margaret, the connecting force of the novel, enters Howards End alone on two separate occasions (266). And Tibby finds himself alone in the presence of Charles Wilcox, separated by an economic and spiritual gulf (311). Isolation is more than just being alone. It is the sense that one's feelings cannot be shared or even understood. To feel isolated is to feel abandoned and unable to achieve
The connection desired in the novel is, as McConkey suggests, between the inner life, the imagination, and the outer life of action (77). Belonging to a place--having roots--plays an important part in this connection. Helen and Meg agree that it is easier to like a place than a person (130). For Mrs. Wilcox, Howards End was a spirit; Margaret Schlegel was a spiritual heir (98). Their relationship was short-lived, but so powerful that Mrs. Wilcox wants to extend her home, her roots, to Meg.

People affect one's inner and outer life, although to varying degrees. Paul is a ripple in the lives of the Schlegels, but Mrs. Wilcox is a great wave (102). Margaret's final, emphatic goal is "only connect" (186). Margaret attempts to connect everything in this novel--the monk with the beast, the prose with the passion. She begins to feel a love for the island for the first time (204), only because she senses her own stability of identity. Howards End seems like a comrade (206), and Margaret proclaims that she loves Shropshire (217). Her dislike for flux is pronounced and she must serve, through a connection of love, as the balance between Mr. Wilcox and the way things are, and Helen and the way they ought to be (230). Margaret succeeds because she loves generously. Her goals are more humane than Henry's selfish concerns and more realistic than Helen's ideals.

In Howards End, "It is those that cannot connect who hasten to cast the first stone" (312). Human connection is impossible for someone who does not have a sense of personal identity. Because
the Wilcoxes lack this sense, they have little propensity for love or mercy. Charles is imprisoned by the law that is made in his image (334). Margaret alone is left to show Henry what he has been missing. Ironically, she inherits Howards End after all; there, she reconciles Helen and Henry. Again, Forster's resolution is somewhat contrived, but the connections he establishes continue to defy the limits of societal roles and to relieve the loneliness experienced by challengers to that society.

"Alas, the two nations cannot be friends"
Resignation and Acceptance in A Passage to India

As with A Room with a View, Forster uses a foreign setting in A Passage to India to call into question the social identifications constructed by England. This time, he begins with a focus on chivalry and the code it establishes for male and female identification. Again, Forster implies that chivalry is a learned, social relationship between the sexes, not a natural one. He goes beyond the limitations of gender roles to reveal the restrictions of class and culture. Despite repeated attempts, the characters in this novel cannot connect with each other. Their isolation is even more profound because it is not alleviated in the end. Forster shifts his focus to include an attempt at connection between the human and the divine. India, unlike Italy, does not represent a setting conducive to acknowledging the natural truth. Instead, all truths become equally confused, and the cultural differences between India and England threaten any belief that love (whatever
that is) can bridge the gaps between people.

Forster hints that most of the English who live in India, the "Anglo-Indians," resent the roles that a chivalric society imposes on them as individuals. The English women in India dislike Fielding because he takes no notice of them. At home, this may have been acceptable, but in Anglo-India, it becomes even more important for their superior identification as Englishwomen to assert the conventional roles of their society. In reality, the role of women in chivalrous England is not radically different than the role of women in India—"wedlock, motherhood, power in the house" (14). Nevertheless, the Anglo-Indians maintain an air of assumed superiority. Hamidullah notes the contradiction by recalling that in fifteen years he has never won an argument with his wife, and "yet the missionaries inform us our women are downtrodden" (271).

Besides encouraging a false sense of moral superiority, Forster recognized that English chivalry imposed feelings of shame on sexuality—a shame which men were obliged to protect women from experiencing. But when the English women sympathize with Adela after her perceived rape, it is really Ronny that they pity (185). Likewise, the Collector resents his own chivalry to Adela. Forster suggests, "perhaps there is a grain of resentment in all chivalry" (214). Whether or not they doubt Adela's story, the Anglo-Indians feel obliged to carry on the false, conventional roles of the helpless and the helpful—but they resent having to do it.

Even Mrs. Moore, as she becomes increasingly disenchanted with
personal relationships, expresses a particular doubt about conventional marriage: "centuries of carnal embracement, yet man is no nearer to understanding man" (135). That Mrs. Moore says "man," instead of "humanity" or "people," may reveal Forster's specific interest in attacking marriage, which could not have given him, a homosexual man, the opportunity to relate to others. Through the limitations of English gender roles, Forster introduces again the idea that "society" impedes intimacy between people.

In this novel, as in the others, it is the relationships between people that Forster explores. The attempt at true human connection fails again and again when cultural stereotypes, self-centered interests, official relationships, and assumptions of superiority hamper the efforts toward intimate friendship.

One of the most obvious barriers to mutual understanding between people is the fact that many of the English want to control India, not understand it. Like Sir Harry Otway, Cecil, and Reverend Eager of Room, or the Wilcoxes of Howards End, the Turtons at Chandrapore function as "little gods; soon they would retire to some suburban villa, and die exiled from glory" (28). Mrs. Turton exercises an attitude of English authority over Indian women until she discovers that some speak English and are "Westernized," and she fears that they "might apply her own standards to her" (42). Mrs. Moore's son Ronny is equally incapable of connecting with Indians. He can only deal with them in an official context, and rationalizes England's attempt to hold "the wretched country by force," by insisting that "India likes gods" (50). He cannot see,
as Mrs. Moore can, that "Englishmen like posing as gods" (50). Ronny is comfortable with the false connection he imagines in his mind, where God and religion exist only to support the National Anthem (52). He enjoys a position of power simply by being an Englishman; he has no need for an intimate connection with Indians.

The Indians respond to the English with their own stereotypes and generalizations, concluding that the English can only associate with each other ultimately. Hamidullah says:

They all become exactly the same, not worse, not better. I give any Englishman two years, be he Turton or Burton. It is only the difference of a letter. And I give any Englishwoman six months. All are exactly alike. (11)

Dr. Aziz also "generalize[s] from his disappointments it is difficult for members of a subject race to do otherwise" (13). Culture divides England and India. Even when individuals find some common ground—as do Ralph Moore and Aziz—they will always align themselves with their own camp in times of conflict. Nationalism pre-empts reason during crises, and when Adela accuses Aziz of rape, the English close ranks around her: "Pity, wrath, heroism, filled them, but the power of putting two and two together was annihilated" (165). Such fierce nationalism gets in the way of a mutual understanding between cultures.

The vastness of the cultural differences presents more of a challenge to connection than any of the obstacles in Forster's preceding novels. The two cultures have completely different codes for manners and gestures; even poetry is more public in India.
Aziz, unlike Fielding, cannot travel light because he is rooted in society and in Islam, and because he has children: "he was placed" (121). Religion and tradition have contributed not only to Aziz's social classification, but also to his personal identity. Whereas connection to a place enabled human connection in *Howards End*, Aziz's rootedness actually inhibits him from forming a more intimate friendship with Fielding.

Thus, it is not only the patriotic English and Indian men who cannot achieve connections in this context; even those who are genuinely interested in understanding each other are prevented from doing so. Adela Quested's approach to India is ambitious but naive. She supposes that she will always see the country "as a frieze, never as a spirit, and she assumed that it was a spirit of which Mrs. Moore had had a glimpse" (47). Her hurry to see the real India appears self-centered when contrasted with Fielding's suggestion, "'Try seeing Indians'" (26). Nor does Adela share the patience of Mrs. Moore, who "ha[s] learnt that Life never gives us what we want at the moment that we consider appropriate. Adventures do occur, but not punctually" (25). Adela's initial enthusiasm is ignorant, but not malicious. Her failure to connect with Aziz is only the result of her inflexibility of belief. She has no concept of "truth of mood" and instead accepts everything Aziz says as "true verbally. In her ignorance, she regarded him as 'India,' and never surmised that his outlook was limited and his method inaccurate, and that no one is India" (72). Even so, Aziz identifies with Adela's idealism:
She was only recommending the universal brotherhood [Aziz] sometimes dreamed of, but as soon as it was put into prose it became untrue. (145)

Perhaps the best example of the failure to connect is the disastrous "Bridge Party." Forster observes, "perhaps it is futile for men to initiate their own unity, they do but widen the gulfs between them by the attempt" (37). This shift in ideals for Forster reflects an increased awareness of human limitation in connection. For him, connection now relies more on a transcendent realm.

The characters' longing for a god adds to their experience of isolation. In India, this need and this isolation are expressed both in life and in art. Aziz recites a poem like Professor Godbole's song: "it voiced our loneliness . . . our isolation, our need for the Friend who never comes yet is not entirely disproved" (106). The Marabar caves embody this same confusion and isolation. There, all noises produce the same sounds and a baby may be mistaken for a vile thing. The description of the cave's darkness, and of a flame's failure to unite with its reflection may serve as a metaphor for human isolation: "The radiance increases, the flames touch one another, kiss, expire. The cave is dark again, like all the caves" (125). In Professor Godbole's philosophy, nothing can be performed in isolation; all actions, good or evil, relate to his Lord in terms of presence or absence. Such a philosophy, though interesting, offers little comfort to Mrs. Moore, who feels that it reduces everything in life to equal trifles, devoid of meaning.
Despite their inability to connect, the characters of *A Passage to India* are more real than Forster's earlier characters because they transcend the stereotypes of their names, their sex, their class, everything—as real people will. Mrs. Moore has an immediate connection with Aziz because she is more than just proper—she is respectful, having taken off her shoes at the mosque (20). When Mrs. Moore maintains that she does not understand people but only knows whether or not she likes them, Aziz responds, "Then you are an Oriental" (23), words he will later repeat to her son.

The disillusionment of Mrs. Moore, coupled with the general failure of human connection, creates in the novel a detachment "which imparts a poignant awareness of loneliness and incompleteness" representative of Forster's personal concern (McConkey 93). Mrs. Moore can achieve a connection with God and nature only through her death, when she is associated with God-like images. The image of a wasp that she calls a "pretty dear" later connects her to Godbole, who remembers a wasp at the temple: "He loved the wasp equally, he impelled it likewise, he was imitating God" (286). After her death, her presence takes on even more meaning as her memory is associated with the Hindu goddess, Esmīss Esmoor.

Forster's emphasis on the transcendental underscores the limitations of merely human relationships. When the novel ends, Fielding and Aziz part as friends, but with a keen awareness that they can meet no more (316). Human intimacy between the two can not be achieved so long as England's relationship to India is one
Forster's Creative Ideal: Homosexuality and Connection in *Maurice*

*Maurice* is the only novel in which Forster openly attacks English society for its unnatural exclusion of male homosexuals. He extends his complaint to include the general shame that society associates with human sexuality. Mr. Ducie teaches: "To love a noble woman, to protect and serve her—this, he told the little boy, was the crown of life" (14-15), but Maurice is confused by the contradiction when he sees Mr. Ducie's shame that ladies may see the drawings he made in the sand. Sex is too sinister for ladies to see. Finkelstein observes:

The role of homosexuals in *Maurice* parallels women's role in *A Room With a View*. Maurice must be rescued by Alec from conventional antisexuality and from the feeling that homosexuals are somehow evil, just as Lucy must be rescued by George from a comparable antisexuality and from the belief that women are inferior. (137)

Homosexuality is both abhorred and ignored in *Maurice*, but generally the threat it poses is to "chivalry" (85). The misogyny that Forster describes in the novel is a misplaced resentment of chivalry and conventional sexual roles. Forster does not consider in this novel that conventional society is just as unnatural and limiting for women as it is for homosexual men. While both Clive and Maurice were "misogynists" at one time (100), Clive renounces his attraction for men in order to be accepted into the larger
group of society. Clive becomes "normal" and turns from the company of the excluded to the ranks of the exclusive. He responds to his former lover's homosexuality with disgust and only restrains himself from showing violence out of a respect for cultivation: Clive and Maurice "were Cambridge men . . . pillars of society both" (243).

Without question, Maurice examines the way that English society forces homosexuals into a position of alienation. Maurice tells Clive, "You and I are outlaws" (127), a theoretical and legal truth. Forster describes Alec and Maurice similarly: "Both were outcasts" (217). This exclusion is not based on any threat to humanity, but on a social prejudice.

Forster blames England especially for this exclusion. When the hypnotist cannot "cure" Maurice, he recommends that Maurice leave the country, saying, "'England has always been disinclined to accept human nature'" (211). Forster strengthens his attack by exploring how even the term homosexuality is excluded from acceptable conversation. In the novel, homosexuality is referred to as "the unspeakable vice of the Greeks" (51), while a homosexual man is an "unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort" (159).

Maurice has particular value in assessing Forster's personal view of humanity. In the "Terminal Note" to the novel, Forster explains:

A happy ending was imperative. I shouldn't have bothered to write otherwise. I was determined that in fiction anyway two men should fall in love and remain in it for the ever and ever
that fiction allows, and in this sense Maurice and Alec still roam the greenwood. (250)
John Colmer calls Maurice "an exercise in personal therapy" (114), and suggests that it offers insight into "Forster's dilemma as an artist and as a man: how to come to terms with his own sexuality in a society that imprisoned homosexuals and censored homosexual literature" (113). Rosecrance adds that in Maurice Forster expresses two objections to homosexuality: the exclusion of literal and symbolic procreation, and the inability to accept sexuality without shame (154). She rightly asserts: "That Maurice ends happily, because only fiction allows such an ending, limits it to a 'thesis novel'" (153). Maurice represents Forster's creative ideal--that human connection is possible, and that it includes homosexual men.

Woolf's Novels: An Overview

Virginia Woolf began working on Mrs. Dalloway just as Forster was finishing his career as a novelist. She brought with her new techniques that challenged the rules of fiction and resisted judgment by its previous standards. Forster says she is:
like a plant which is supposed to grow in a well-prepared garden bed--the bed of esoteric literature--and then pushes up suckers all over the place, through the gravel of the front drive, and even through the flagstones of the kitchen yard. ("Virginia Woolf" 242)
Woolf incorporates poetry into her prose and, like Forster,
endorses the theory of fiction as painting (Advani 138). For her, pattern, imagery, and form are not only devices for rendering theme; they are themes.

Forster, among others, criticized Woolf for being apolitical and aloof:

Improving the world she would not consider, on the ground that the world is man-made, and that she, a woman, had no responsibility for the mess. ("Woolf" 244)

On the contrary, Woolf wrote in her diary that she hoped to criticize the social system (Bloom 145). Perhaps her critics did not acknowledge that a refusal to participate in politics is itself a political statement which calls attention to the exclusive nature of that system.

In any case, her novels do challenge conventional societal roles. Her novels consider that societal institutions, especially marriage, pose a threat to the development of individual identity. At the same time, Woolf longs for a connection between people, and also between individuals and their society.

It is her interest in personal relationships that links her novels to Forster's thematically. Woolf's characters, like his, often experience brief moments of insight and connection. Forster couples this experience with confusion and calls it "muddle"; Woolf refers to it as "being" (Trivedi 229). Unlike Forster's work, the essence of Woolf's fiction is character, and not the narrative itself: "In a very real sense it is true she does write novels in which nothing happens" (Rosenthal 190). Although emphasis and
technique differ between the two, connection is just as integral to Woolf's novels as it is to Forster's.

Woolf's sense of connection includes an awareness of the physical senses. Forster considered this one of her greatest contributions to fiction:

Our debt to her is in part this: she reminds us of the importance of sensation in an age which practises brutality and recommends ideals. ("Woolf" 252)

Woolf also explores issues of time and history through her concept of connection. She contrasts temporal existence and meaning with the eternal. The human relationships in Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse attempt to connect people not only in time, but also to time.

"Remember my party!"—Society and Connection in Mrs. Dalloway

Mrs. Dalloway is steeped in the problems of connection. London society is introduced as an arbitrary point of connection between people. Despite all its civility and moderation, it can create only a simulation of the real intimacy that so many of the characters crave. Clarissa Dalloway willingly functions as the "perfect hostess" in that society; her party is the focus of the novel. By staging such gatherings, Clarissa attempts to fulfill her own need for connection. The sounds of cleaning in her house remind her that "All was for the party" (38). Even Peter Walsh, who accuses both Clarissa and society of superficiality, has moments of admiration for "her perfect manners" (62) and respect for the
proportion that constitutes English society. In the novel, Woolf considers the surface connections that society fosters, the personal relationships of individuals within that society, the limitations of marriage, isolation within society and from it, and Clarissa Dalloway’s specific dependence on people and love of connection.

For Woolf, connection is not limited to human relations, or even nature, but includes connections through time and any part (living or not) of the human world. When the important car draws the attention of so many curious bystanders, "it had left a slight ripple" (17), much like the ripples and waves the people are capable of creating in Forster’s Howards End. Woolf never forgets that such moments are arbitrary and not controlled by the people they touch, but she respects their far-reaching effects. An aeroplane shoots over the heads of a young girl from Edinburgh, an old woman, an old man, and then distracts Clarissa and the bystanders at Buckingham Palace (28). Septimus, the shell-shocked veteran, connects everything: the leaves, his body, sparrows, fountains, a child’s cries, a horn (22). For him, beauty connects with pain; death and time are all part of his "madness." Septimus’ sense of connection closely parallels Clarissa’s, as does his sense of isolation. Although the two never meet, a relationship exists between them, simply because the feelings they experience are so similar.

Woolf does not merely point out societal roles in Mrs. Dalloway; she also explores the way her characters actually
interact personally with one another. Peter is always interested in "people's character" (7), but he exhausts Clarissa because he is too intimate: "everything had to be shared" (8). Peter's deep feelings for her are of terror and ecstasy. He thinks always of her generosity, but when she shouts for him to remember her party, "He stood there thinking, Clarissa refused me" (49). After his visit, Clarissa feels a momentary regret:

[she] remembered possibly (for he saw her look it) something he had said—how they would change the world if she married him perhaps; whereas, it was this; it was middle age; it was mediocrity. (155)

The personal relationships are often thus in Woolf: two characters understand each other, even love each other, but cannot match each other's feelings at the same time and in the right degree.

Richard Dalloway also fails to connect with Clarissa in the way that he desires. Intending to tell her that he loves her but managing only to give her flowers, he denies his failure and thinks instead that he has defined happiness.

The relationship between Miss Kilman and Elizabeth is too disproportionate to be satisfying to either. Miss Kilman is possessive, described by Clarissa as the type to "suck up half our life-blood" (12), a spirit-killer, as her name implies. Leaving her to ride the bus, Elizabeth "was delighted to be free" (135). In contrast, the relationship that Sally Seton and Clarissa once had was close. It succeeded because their feelings for each other were "not like one's feeling for a man" (34). They each considered
marriage "a catastrophe" (34), but that each does marry effects a change in their own relationship.

Marriage itself does not signify unity in Mrs. Dalloway, but convention at the price of identity. Clarissa feels invisible in her role: "this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway" (11). Marriage is not endowed with any eternal meaning. This is clear from Woolf's observation that, with time, all the bystanders on the street will be "but bones with a few wedding rings mixed up in their dust and the gold stopplings of innumerable decayed teeth" (16). Not only does the novel portray marriage as temporal, it questions whether marriage has any value for human connection. Rezia's marriage is the primary cause of her isolation: "Look! Her wedding ring slipped--she had grown so thin. It was she who suffered--but she had nobody to tell" (23).

Nearly all the characters experience such profound moments of isolation, regardless of their marital status. Miss Kilman feels excluded when Elizabeth leaves: "Beauty had gone, youth had gone" (133). Lucrezia cries out in the park, "I am alone; I am alone!" (24). Meanwhile, Septimus wants to get away from other people and avoid "that eternal suffering, that eternal loneliness" (25). He panics when Rezia leaves for a moment, thinking he was to be "alone forever" (145). Septimus feels strongly the paradox that Clarissa Dalloway senses—that it is frightening to be alone, and that it may be even lonelier to be among people with whom you do not connect. Like Forster in his depiction of isolation in Maurice,
Woolf describes the detached, suicidal man as an "outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world" (93).

Clarissa Dalloway's isolation has striking parallels with that of the insane Septimus:

She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day.

Again, Woolf uses the image of the sea and of drowning to depict a sense of isolation. Both Septimus and Clarissa can see the safe shore, but each feels removed from it. The image calls to mind Woolf's own isolation and suicide.

Clarissa is also described as a nun comfortable in her habit. When Lady Bruton, "whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing," invites Richard but not her, Clarissa feels "suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless" (31). She regrets her narrow bed and her marriage to Richard: "I am alone for ever, she thought, folding her hands upon her knee" (47). Despite the social prominence of her husband, Clarissa has a recurring sense of abandonment. Her bed is narrow; her marriage has offered security instead of intimacy, establishing only a superficial connection.

Isolation is prevalent, relationships between people are revealed to be arbitrary, and still Mrs. Dalloway celebrates the attempt to connect. This attempt is the essence of Clarissa's character:
In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June. (4)

Although Peter criticizes Clarissa for her parties, he fails to acknowledge a dependence on people that they both share. If nothing else, Clarissa's parties serve her own desire to make connections between people:

she felt continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. (122)

Her role as a point of connection creates in her a "feeling of being something not herself, and that every one was unreal in one way; much more real in another" (171). As with her marital role, Clarissa's role as hostess costs her a sense of her own personal identity. But it is a role she has freely chosen, and it allows her to assume, if only temporarily, a triumphant identity—as the one who brings everyone else together.

"Almost like a work of art"--Connection in To the Lighthouse

As with Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse underscores Woolf's doubts about marriage and family institutions. Again, she considers the ephemeral meaning of human relationships, especially between men and women. Again, she explores the limitations of
marriage and the isolation of people from each other and from their worlds, and the attempt, nonetheless, to connect with that world.

Time has more meaning in To the Lighthouse than in Mrs. Dalloway. Mrs. Ramsay aspires to have eternal, not temporal, values. At one moment during dinner, she feels "there is a coherence in things, a stability" as she looks out the window (158). She is sensitive to the topic of things not lasting, and is aware that her husband begins "to be uneasy; to want somebody to say, Oh, but your work will last, Mr. Ramsay, or something like that" (161). Time determines meaning for her; an established tradition, like marriage, is valuable by definition. This is why she is so determined that everyone should marry: "it was all one stream, and chairs, tables, maps, were hers, were theirs, it did not matter whose, and Paul and Minta would carry it on when she was dead" (170-171). Mrs. Ramsay cannot do much about her own temporality. By passing on her values, however, she will continue to connect with people and with time as a living force, even after her death.

Mrs. Ramsay's self-appointed role in relationships is that of mother and protector. She extends her protection to connect with her children and her guests. Because her daughters are more skeptical of "chivalry, of the Bank of England and the Indian Empire, of ringed fingers and lace," they desire a less maternal role in life: "in Paris, perhaps; a wilder life; not always taking care of some man or other" (14). Even though Mrs. Ramsay's daughters crave a change in the role of women, they show a great
deal of respect for their mother. In her absence, both her guests and her children are dissatisfied with conventional relationships. Andrew and Nancy both feel uncomfortable about the union of Paul and Minta. Cam feels toward her father a division of feeling that James cannot understand—an attraction to him, and at the same time, a hatred for "his dominance: his 'Submit to me'" (253). Cam's feeling is indicative of the changing relationship of woman to man: a simultaneous attraction to, and resentment of, his power.

Mrs. Ramsay's relationship to men is a particularly traditional and maternal one:

Indeed, she had the whole of the other sex under her protection, for reasons she could not explain, for their chivalry and valour, for the fact that they negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance; finally for an attitude which no woman could fail to feel or to find agreeable, something trustful, childlike, reverential. . . .

(13)

This is especially true of her relationship with her husband. He depends on her for sympathy and she gives so much to him that "there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by; all was so lavished and spent" (60). Mr. Ramsay once stopped to admire the beauty of "a hen, straddling her wings out in protection of a covey of little chicks" (34), and it is this same maternal quality that he admires in his wife. But such a role makes Mrs. Ramsay feel the need "To be silent; to be alone" (95). Her identity as protector exhausts her because she craves both a
sense of solitude and sense that she is needed. So that when Mr. Carmichael does not need her, she thinks of her own pettiness "and of human relations, how flawed they are, how despicable, how self-seeking, at their best" (65-66). Mrs. Ramsay knows that her husband wishes to protect her; she sees to it that he is praised: "But she wished it was not necessary: perhaps it was her fault that it was necessary" (162). And it is her fault in part. She wants to connect people, and yet she resents that she must. Connecting people is the only active pursuit that Mrs. Ramsay is allowed within the bounds of traditional gender roles.

As Forster makes a distinction between an Indian truth of mood and an English truth of fact, so does Woolf distinguish between a man's rational knowledge and a woman's emotional instincts. The different ways of thinking are yet another obstacle to a true, mutual understanding or connection between the sexes. For Mr. Ramsay, loneliness was "the truth about things" (361). He is enraged by the feminine irrationality of Mrs. Ramsay: "'Damn you,' he said. But what had she said? Simply that it might be fine tomorrow. So it might" (50). In turn, Mrs. Ramsay thinks it is brutal of her husband to "pursue truth with such astonishing lack of consideration for other people's feelings" (51). She can't understand why he cannot conceal his feelings to spare others; she herself is so good at concealment that she cannot express what she feels.

A unique exemption from traditional gender roles is afforded to Lily Briscoe, who would never marry: "Mrs. Ramsay liked her for
it" (29). Lily resents the chivalric code, although she is familiar with it; she wants to experiment with male-female relationships. Lily's friendship with William Bankes evolves because he, like her, is unmarried and has no children. Lily sees that Mrs. Ramsay needs to pity others, and that she pitied men for lacking something. Lily herself is aware of man's need to feel superior. When she hears Charles Tansley "whispering in her ear, 'Women can't paint, women can't write'" (75), she knows that he does not believe what he says so much as wish that it were true. 

Lily resents the conventional expectations that men and women have for each other—that Charles should help her out of physical harm and that she should offer psychological support in return: "But how would it be, she thought, if neither of us did either of these things? So she sat there smiling" (137). At Mrs. Ramsay's silent appeal, Lily renounces "the experiment" and flatters Charles:

She had done the usual trick—been nice. She would never know him. He would never know her. Human relations were all like that, she thought, and the worst (if it had not been for Mr. Bankes) were between men and women. (139)

Lily's realization that conventional chivalry prevents true intimacy between people is what allows her to understand why Mrs. Ramsay was content "to rest in silence, uncommunicative; to rest in the extreme obscurity of human relationships" (256).

Lily realizes the limitations of reason and understands that Mr. Ramsay must experience self-doubt. Like Mrs. Ramsay, Lily herself is more interested in human relationships than in
knowledge, but her approach to human connection is one of observation and detachment. She considers the ways in which one could know people:

Only like a bee, drawn by some sweetness or sharpness in the air . . . one haunted the dome-shaped hive, ranged the wastes of the air over the countries of the world alone, and then haunted the hives with their murmurs and stirrings; the hives, which were people. (79-80)

Lily's metaphor for human connection is an image of detachment, not the exhausting and ceaseless giving of Mrs. Ramsay.

*To the Lighthouse* reveals the shallow, unsatisfying connections of conventional married life. The relationship of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, though close and affectionate, is not intimate: "They disagreed always about this, but it did not matter. She liked him to believe in scholarships, and he liked her to be proud of Andrew whatever he did" (103). The relationship of Paul and Minta irritates Andrew and Nancy, who go off independently, each "letting that couple look after themselves" (114). Mr. Bankes is sorry to realize that as he sits by Mrs. Ramsay at dinner, he feels "nothing for her. The truth was that he did not enjoy family life" (134). Lily is always wary of love and sees a moment in the lives of the Ramsays as representative of their relationship: "So that is marriage, Lily thought, a man and a woman looking at a girl throwing a ball" (110). Even Mrs. Ramsay considers at one point, "why is it then that one wants people to marry?" (183). After her death, Lily imagines the failure of Paul and Minta Rayley (259).
Only because of her relationship to her art can Lily "stand up to Mrs. Ramsay—a tribute to the astonishing power that Mrs. Ramsay had over one" (262). Even after death, Mrs. Ramsay seems to be advocating marriage for her guests and her children. It is difficult to resist her because of the respect she commands, but especially because she has never voiced the fatigue and isolation that are central to her experience.

Isolation is an important motivating factor for Mrs. Ramsay, just as it is for Mrs. Dalloway. Her isolation recalls the isolation of Clarissa and Septimus before her:

She had a sense of being past everything, through everything, out of everything, as she helped the soup, as if there was an eddy—there—and one could be in it, or one could be out of it, and she was out of it. (125)

Soon afterward, Mrs. Ramsay realizes that nobody has come together at her dinner: "And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her. Again she felt, without hostility, the sterility of men, for if she did not do it nobody would do it" (126). Mrs. Ramsay imposes the obligation of connection on herself. Just as Clarissa Dalloway felt that people ought to be brought together, Mrs. Ramsay feels it is her job as a woman to make connections. Her isolation stems in part from her self-sacrifice, but it also relates to the fact that neither her daughters nor Lily have inherited this sense of obligation. She fears that no one will carry on this role in her absence, and in that, she feels abandoned.
When Mrs. Ramsay is gone, it is Mr. Ramsay who must suffer this isolation:

[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.] (194)

Lily, too, suffers her loss: "The house, the place, the morning, all seemed strangers to her" (218). She misses the dead woman, but more importantly, she can no longer connect with other people.

Mrs. Ramsay's death, so significant, is introduced in an isolated, bracketed sentence as if it were only incidental. Prue's marriage and sudden death, and Andrew's death during the war are presented likewise, symbolic of the broken connection in the lives of the characters. From now on, nature is beyond personal relations and cannot mirror them. The cleaning woman cannot keep up the house and when the women have to prepare it for Mr. Ramsay, "some rusty laborious birth seemed to be taking place. . . . Oh, they said, the work!" (210). Only after her absence can one realize the extensive power of connection that Mrs. Ramsay possessed and why it so exhausted her to use it. When Mr. Ramsay seeks sympathy from Lily, she cannot respond as Mrs. Ramsay did:

They stood there, isolated from the rest of the world. His immense self-pity, his demand for sympathy poured and spread itself in pools at her feet, and all she did, miserable sinner that she was, was to draw her skirts a little closer round her ankles, lest she should get wet. (228)
Lily does feel sympathy for Mr. Ramsay, but regrets that it is too late and observes later that "the human apparatus for painting or for feeling; it always broke down at the critical moment" (287).

After Mrs. Ramsay's death, human relations seem not to reflect maternal instincts, but a callous, predatory nature. Woolf includes the isolated image of the boy on the boat cutting a piece out of one fish to bait another and then throwing it back, mutilated but alive, to endure its pain (268). Connection again is presented as being beyond human capability:

the distant views seem to outlast by a million years (Lily thought) the gazer and to be communing already with a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest. (34)

As suggested by the section entitled "The Window," Mrs. Ramsay is open to the outside world. Her house is shabby because she lets the children bring objects from the natural world within. Mrs. Ramsay experiences freedom in darkness, but identifies with the beam of light from the lighthouse. She connects with "inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers" (97). Unlike Mr. Ramsay, she does not find truth in loneliness, and she senses that he does not always believe the phrases that he says: "for if she had said half what he said, she would have blown her brains out by now" (108). This unexpected violence from Mrs. Ramsay is a glimpse into the private torture that she endures silently.

Mrs. Ramsay has an extraordinary power to make lasting connections--she knows when to light the candles so that everyone is "conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island"
(147). Lily remembers this power vividly ten years after her death:

she brought together this and that . . . and so made out of that miserable silliness and spite . . . something--this scene on the beach for example, this moment of friendship and liking--which survived, after all these years complete . . . and there it stayed in the mind affecting one almost like a work of art. (239-240)

The description closely resembles the connection that Mrs. Ramsay experiences when reading poetry:

And then there it was, suddenly entire; she held it in her hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here--the sonnet. (181)

The parallel is obviously intentional. Mrs. Ramsay and Lily both work as artists. Both try to make the moment permanent (241), to connect art and life and human relations and time. Of course, Woolf is also working as an artist to make this moment permanent. She connects her own writing to the creative endeavors of her characters. Lily sees this connection at last and is able to realize her vision through painting: "she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished" (310). Woolf realizes her vision at the same time, on the last page.

**Woolf's Creative Ideal: Androgyny and Orlando**

Woolf's usual concerns--connections of time, of nature and
humanity, of gender and social differences—resurface on a more fanciful plane in her light "biography," Orlando. Her primary function in writing the novel is to re-examine the differences between men and women, to reveal the social and historical (and not biological) nature of these differences, and to advocate androgyny as a completion of the sexes.

As a biography, Orlando examines how different historical values shape the development of social identification. When Orlando considers marriage, it is only because everyone else is married: "When the sound of the Archduke's chariot wheels died away, the cry that rose to her lips was 'Life! A Lover!' not 'Life! A Husband!'" (243-244). Nevertheless, it is the Victorian age and Orlando must marry. Woolf writes: "It was not Orlando who spoke, but the spirit of the age" (246), stressing the idea that societal institutions have always dictated the development of individuals.

Like Forster's Maurice, Orlando specifically criticizes England for perpetuating unnatural gender roles. Orlando does not seriously consider her sex change, or "the penalties and privileges of her position" (153), until she leaves the band of gypsies to return to England. Once a man, and now changed into a woman, Orlando realizes the unnatural expectations of gender roles:

Here she tossed her foot impatiently, and showed an inch or two of calf. A sailor on the mast, who happened to look down at the moment, started so violently that he missed his footing and only saved himself by the skin of his teeth. "If the sight of my ankles means death to an honest fellow who, no
doubt, has a wife and family to support, I must, in all humanity, keep them covered," Orlando thought. Yet her legs were among her chiefest beauties. And she fell to thinking what an odd pass we have come to when all a woman's beauty has to be kept covered, lest a sailor may fall from a mast-head.

Although Orlando's inner identity does not change with his/her sex, the character learns to acquire different social behaviors as a woman. Again, Woolf is pointing out the social restrictions on the development of women.

Internally, Orlando is androgynous. Orlando's sex change "did nothing whatever to alter their [Orlando's] identity" (138). Orlando's identity alternates between the sexes: "she was man; she was woman; she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each" (158). Here, of course, is Woolf's main point: "In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above" (189). As in Forster's A Room with a View, Woolf reveals the inadequacy of clothing in determining identity.

By making Orlando a poet, Woolf satirizes the tendency of literary criticism to idealize literature of the past and underestimate the achievements of new writers. But Orlando's career also serves to connect Virginia Woolf to England's literary tradition. Orlando becomes a successful Modern writer and is left there, to wonder about the mystery and incompleteness of the Modern
Age. The integration of androgyne and writing reflects one of Woolf's primary concerns. In *A Room of One's Own*, she will urge the woman writer to unite the two sexes in the mind. Orlando represents Woolf's creative ideal as the androgynous hope for the future of women artists. The account ends with Orlando's renewed belief in magic (300), because Woolf's creative ideal, like Forster's, could not yet be implemented in society.

Common Ground: Connection through Fiction

The creative ideals of E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf were a response to their perceived alienation from society. Neither novelist got the opportunity to witness the social realization of their respective ideals. Woolf's early death by suicide prevented her from knowing how much she has influenced literature by women (or literature in general, for that matter). In his "Terminal Note" to *Maurice*, added in 1960, Forster writes that since he had finished the novel (in 1914), the public's attitude toward homosexuality changed "from ignorance and terror to familiarity and contempt" (255). *Maurice* was published after his death, more than fifty years after he had finished writing it.

But during their Bloomsbury years, each enjoyed considerable artistic, sexual, and social freedom. The themes of isolation and connection that recur in their novels also relate to their shared creative struggles--each was an accomplished essayist, critic, and novelist. In their novels, they recreated both the isolation and the sense of connection that they experienced as writers. The
realm of fiction freed them of the expectations of conventional society. For Forster and Woolf, writing was a process of connection. Ironically, their success in the fictional realm allowed them to enjoy popularity in the society from which they felt excluded.
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