LES FLEURS DU MODERNISM: FLORAL LANGUAGE IN MRS.

DALLOWAY AND ULYSSES

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English

by
Janessa Osle
Spring 2012
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the

Thesis of Janessa Osle:

Les Fleurs du Modernism: Floral Language in Mrs. Dalloway and Ulysses

Sherry Little, Chair
Department of English and Comparative Literature

June Cummins
Department of English and Comparative Literature

Glen McClish
Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies

4/26/2012
Approval Date
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by

Janessa Osle

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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by

Janessa Osle

Master of Arts in English
San Diego State University, 2012

This thesis examines the significant role of flowers in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. The language of flowers became popular in the Victorian era, a time in which there was great emphasis placed on conservative ideals and propriety. The language of flowers, therefore, was used to convey certain emotions and desires that would not have been appropriate to express directly. This new, unspoken language allowed lovers to carry on a silent communication, expressing their feelings for one another without a single word ever being uttered. It was not until the turn of the century that the literary world began to shift and there emerged a new generation of writers who were weary of the antiquated Victorian ideals. Flowers still played a significant role in literature, but their meaning became progressively more sexualized, and writers such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce often affiliated them with issues of gender and sexual identity. The modernists, therefore, began using flowers as tools for expressing sexuality and desire in a way that was suggestive, yet subtle. This text explores how Woolf and Joyce strategically use flowers in order to add another layer of meaning to the already complex issues of sexuality, gender identity, and desire.
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It is a pleasure to thank those who made this thesis possible. I owe my deepest gratitude to Professor Sherry Little, who dedicated her time and offered helpful and insightful feedback and advice. It is an honor to have had the chance to work under her guidance. I would also like to show my gratitude to Professor June Cummins and Professor Glen McClish. Thank you for your helpful feedback and guidance in this process. I would also like to thank my family and friends whose financial and moral support contributed to the successful completion of this thesis.
CHAPTER 1

THE LANGUAGE WITHOUT WORDS:
COMMUNICATING WITH FLOWERS

Roses, she thought sardonically. All trash, m’dear. For really, what with eating, drinking, and mating, the bad days and good, life had been no mere matter of roses, and what was more, let me tell you, Carrie Dempster had no wish to change her lot with any woman’s in Kentish Town! But, she implored, pity. Pity, for the loss of roses.

--Virginia Woolf
Mrs. Dalloway

Flowers have always been an intrinsic though easily overlooked part of many different societies and cultures. Because of their aesthetic value, historically they have been connected to passionate love and sexuality. Many poets have compared women to flowers, underscoring female beauty but also the impermanence of that beauty. It is not surprising, then, that communicating with flowers came to be known as a sort of secret language in which lovers could express their feelings without any reservations. It was not until the early nineteenth century that people began to use flowers to communicate specific thoughts and feelings. As Jean Marsh in The Illuminated Language of Flowers articulates, “Hundreds of flowers and plants were given meanings that ranged from simple words like Fidelity (ivy) to giddy phrases such as Your purity equals your loveliness (orange blossom) or First emotions of love (purple lilac)” (9). Marsh reproduces the flower dictionary and drawings from Language of Flowers, by Kate Greenaway, the well-known Victorian children’s book illustrator and writer. Because of the growing interest in this secret language and its exotic nature, many books were published in the Victorian era that listed flowers and plants along
with their corresponding meanings. These books made it possible for anyone who read them to partake in this silent and symbolic communication.

In *The Culture of Flowers*, Jack Goody presents a detailed historical account of the cultural significance of flowers in different countries around the world. He points out how Christianity condemned the symbolic nature of flowers, specifically the rose. Goody explains how because of its connection to Venus, “the rose suffered a partial eclipse because in Rome it had become ‘a symbol of voluptuousness and debauchery’” (89). As Goody also points out, by the late twelfth century flowers became associated with pleasure in secular life: “we find references to the picking of both wild and garden flowers, the strewing of flowers and green herbs in a beloved’s room, the giving of a rose to a lover, and above all the association of spring flowers with love, beauty, dancing…” (157). According to Goody, these activities were mainly exclusive to the privileged aristocratic class. In *The Language of Flowers: A History*, Beverly Seaton claims that the language of flowers became prominent in the sentimental flower books that were intended for women in the Victorian age. These books were written in a way that was “not too difficult for female readers, who are also linked with children” (16). As Seaton articulates, “Flowers, in fact, were seen as the most suitable aspect of nature to represent women, or to interact with them, reflecting as they do certain stereotypical qualities of the female being: smallness of stature, fragility of mind and body, and impermanence of beauty” (17). It makes sense that flowers were seen as appropriate representations of women; the Victorian age perceived women as small, feeble beings who were completely dependent upon men and whose beauty and health were fleeting. Vital to this text is Seaton’s floral dictionary, which provides the symbolic meanings and interpretations of specific flowers.
So, then, what is the origin of this secret language of flowers? Many scholars claim that it was introduced to Europe in the early eighteenth century by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Seigneur Aubry de la Mottraye after a trip to Turkey (Seaton 62). As Seaton points out, through their explanations of the sélam, a “Turkish language of objects supposedly used in communication between harem girls and their lovers,” the two travelers introduced this new exotic game to continental Europe (37). It is important to take into consideration, though, that “neither of the two calls the sélam a language of flowers, nor do they suggest the development of any Western equivalents. Apparently, this was left to others, who must have abstracted from the sélam those objects that Westerners find romantic, especially flowers” (63). The fact that the sélam, being connected to harem girls, is the most popular notion of the source of flower symbolism implies that this language was sexually charged. I assume that James Joyce had some knowledge of this origin since he includes many Turkish references throughout Ulysses. It is also interesting to note that when the “language of flowers was introduced to English readers, it had to be cleansed of unwholesome continental material, for there was not only the usual English distrust of French morality but also the general Francophobia generated by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars” (Seaton 80). Although the English versions of the language of flowers borrow a lot from the French, they tend to leave out specific concepts and ideas in order to maintain a sense of propriety and moral rectitude.

The growing popularity and fascination with flowers became quite expectedly the main subject of many artists of the Victorian period. The French poet Charles Baudelaire, the inspiration for the title of this work, saw the world he was living in as corrupt and debased. Goody argues that “So much took place with flowers and gardens that for
Baudelaire flowers became evil symbols of a world he had rejected” (232). One needs to keep in mind, though, that the Victorians were extremely conservative and that explicit sexuality and eroticism were disapproved of. It was not until the turn of the century that the literary world began to shift and there emerged a new generation of writers who were weary of the antiquated Victorian ideals. Flowers still played a significant role in literature, but their meaning became progressively more sexualized, and writers such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce often affiliated them with issues of gender and sexual identity. It is obvious that the main purpose of this new language was to conduct a secret love affair, which is especially evident in Henry Flower’s letter in *Ulysses*, but also in *Mrs. Dalloway* when Sally kisses Clarissa in the garden. In the latter, it is in the presence of flowers that the complex and confusing nature of sexuality and gender identity is embodied. In *Ulysses*, flowers are used as a kind of secret language and the strong, independent Molly Bloom becomes associated with a flower at the end. The name *Bloom* also plays a part in this association with flowers. Flowers play a significant role both in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Ulysses*, embodying sexual passion and erotic love in a literary period when even though the fetters of a Victorian society were loosening, there were still strict rules as to what was appropriate to talk about candidly and what should be only insinuated and suggested.

One of the first major works in which a person’s identity was analyzed as being directly tied to his or her sexuality was Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*. In this historical account, Foucault explains how in the seventeenth century, sex came to be seen as an obscene act which should be concealed and not openly talked about: “Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction” (3). It was during this time that sex
became a political tool for repression. Foucault attributes this repression to the development of capitalism, which, he claims, saw sex as incompatible with work productivity. He also examines how “illegitimate sexualities” were segregated from the rest of society: “The brothel and the mental hospital would be those places of tolerance: the prostitute, the client, and the pimp, together with the psychiatrist and his hysteric—those ‘other Victorians,’ as Steven Marcus would say—seem to have surreptitiously transferred the pleasures that are unspoken into the order of things that are counted” (4). The fact that these people who, because of their sexuality, were cast out of society and transferred to these grim institutions, reveals how narrow-minded society as a whole tends to be. It is no surprise that many of Woolf’s characters suppress their own desires in order to fit into society and avoid being considered an anomaly and, therefore, marginalized.

Foucault also refers to silence, which is what the language of flowers relies on, as a tool that actually assists in communication. He articulates, “There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (27). The idea that silences accompany discourse reveals the value that society places on propriety and insinuates that there are some things which should be left unspoken. Foucault also points out how sexuality was a “medicalizable object,” which implies that it is measurable and tangible. This notion is interesting because sexuality is at the core of the individual, an inherent and imperceptible aspect of a person, yet doctors were trying to make it palpable and detectable, transforming it into a medical dysfunction which could, therefore, through power and control, be suppressed. In his discussion of “normativity,” Foucault explains how “Throughout the nineteenth century, sex seems to have been incorporated into two very distinct orders of knowledge: a biology of reproduction, which developed
continuously according to a general scientific normativity, and a medicine of sex conforming to quite different rules of formation” (54). These orders of knowledge imply that sex is natural and normal as long as the individual remained within the confines of what society deemed as acceptable or appropriate. Anything outside of these confines immediately places individuals on the margins of society, making them a different “species” to be prodded at and examined relentlessly (43).

In her groundbreaking work on queer theory, *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick examines “the closet” trope and how it has actually propagated homophobia and isolation. She argues,

> a lot of the energy of attention and demarcation that has swirled around issues of homosexuality since the end of the nineteenth century…has been impelled by the distinctively indicative relation of homosexuality to wider mappings of secrecy and disclosure, and of the private and public, that were and are critically problematical for the gender, sexual, and economic structures of the heterosexist culture at large, mappings whose enabling but dangerous incoherence has become oppressively, durably condensed in certain figures of homosexuality. (71)

According to Sedgwick, “the closet” implies a world of secrecy and isolation and allows for the oppression of homosexuals. In her other important work, *Tendencies*, Sedgwick examines the term “queer” and the vast array of meanings it signifies. She defines it as “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made…to signify monolithically” (8). It is evident that “queer” is a general term which signifies many different aspects and elements, not just same-sex expression or desire. She also claims that “a lot of the most exciting recent work around ‘queer’ spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all” (9). Just like the idea of gender, “queer” is a term that is unstable and ever-shifting.
Contemporary feminist theory and gender criticism came to prominence in the 1980s, and both have opened up new ways and possibilities of approaching literary texts. In *Key Concepts in Modernist Literature*, Julian Hanna points out the major divergent strands of feminism, such as the French poststructuralist school and the different branches of American feminist criticism. In *Joyce and Feminism*, Bonnie Kime Scott articulates, “Basic to feminism is a belief in the virtue of male-female equality and a corresponding balance in culture” (4). Virginia Woolf’s ideal as a writer and a feminist was to unite, in the individual, the masculine and the feminine in hopes of achieving a harmonious balance. Through his unique and complex characters, Joyce also places value on this androgynist ideal. Woolf’s quest for this ideal emerges in her prose, raising important questions as to how women should be treated and viewed by men and society as a whole. In *Feminism and Art*, Herbert Marder explores Woolf’s feminism in terms of her view on the continuous and pervasive subjugation of women. Marder argues that “Virginia Woolf’s feminism...grew out of a desire for wholeness and harmony” (4). Marder’s interpretation of Woolf’s feminism will be helpful in analyzing her feminist narrative strategies in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In regard to gender criticism, Hanna contends that it “raises questions about the construction of gender and sexuality that had been articulated earlier in Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), where the author famously stated: ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’” (130). Judith Butler, a leading figure in feminism, gender criticism, and queer theory, also believes that gender is not something you are born with, but that it is instead culturally and socially constructed. Butler’s ideas concerning gender are helpful when examining androgynous characters like Sally, Peter, and Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and also Bloom and Molly in *Ulysses*. 
According to Hanna, “The ‘constructionist’ and ‘performative’ view...challenges the category of ‘sex’ and even the notion of a stable subject, arguing instead that gender and sexuality, and other forms of identity, are always socially constructed” (130). In her groundbreaking anthology, *The Gender of Modernism*, Bonnie Kime Scott articulates how gender is the result of many different cultural factors: “Additional implicated categories are class, race, nation, economic stature, and family type. Hence we cannot properly deal with gender in isolation but should see it as one of many layers of identification” (3). In challenging the concept that gender and sex are static, Butler calls attention to those who do not fit neatly into the categories and norms that society has delineated and maintained. She articulates,

Inasmuch as “identity” is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of “the person” is called into question by the cultural emergence of those “incoherent” or “discontinuous” gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined. (23)

The failure to conform to the “gendered norms” can be seen in certain characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Ulysses* who continuously struggle with their identity because of the burden society has placed on them to be one of many mindless, homogeneous, procreating machines.

In *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Ulysses*, there are a number of characters who struggle with their desires and identity. Butler articulates, “Freud interprets the self-critical attitudes of the melancholic to be the result of the internalization of a lost object of love” (83). With this concept in mind, all of the main characters discussed in this text suffer from a form of “melancholia,” either longing for a lost love or lost time they can never regain (78). The concept of “performativity” is also important in analyzing sexuality and gender identity. Butler argues that the “gendered body is performative” since “acts and gestures, articulated
and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion
discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory
frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (185-86). Here, Butler suggests that the individual is
an actor who performs certain acts and gestures, which are really fabrications, that give the
illusion of a gender normativity, but never really reveal their true inner identity and desires.
She goes on to explain: “Hence, as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender
is a performance with clearly punitive consequences…indeed, we regularly punish those who
fail to do their gender right” (190). In setting performativity up as a form of survival, Butler
reveals how it is a necessity since our culture is so ready to castigate and penalize those who
deviate from social norms. In creating complex and dynamic characters who are not easily
understood, Woolf and Joyce raise important questions and issues regarding gender and
sexuality. Many of their characters suppress their own desires and reject their identity so as
not to be conspicuous or stray too far from the norm—the ones who do are held in contempt
and disapproved of. In addition, Woolf and Joyce both use the silent language of flowers to
communicate that which cannot be said. They both strategically use flowers, which are
aesthetically pleasing and part of nature, to allude to sexuality and desire, approaching
sensitive subjects in an imaginative and innovative manner and paving the way for
modernism.
CHAPTER 2

REPRESENTATIONS OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER IDENTITY IN MRS. DALLOWAY

VIRGINIA WOOLF

As one of the founders of modernism, Woolf is progressive and somewhat controversial in her prose, which helped pave the way for the discussion of different sexualities and desires. From a feminist perspective of Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf explores the tension between sexual desires and accepted or expected gender roles and identities through the presence of flowers. Through her depiction of complex female characters, Woolf exposes this tension and reveals how they never really achieve a normative femininity. To make things even more interesting, Woolf purposely makes the characters of Peter Walsh and Septimus Warren Smith sexually ambiguous as well. The latter is a tortured, discontent human being who plays the role of the prophet and poet and who eventually takes his life, never reaching a normative masculinity. Woolf’s characters all fail to achieve normative gender performativity, exhibiting melancholia in which, despite outward appearances, their true identities and desires place them on the fringe of society.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the novel, it is important to look at significant moments in Woolf’s life that made a tremendous impact on her, leaving her forever scarred. Born on January 25, 1882, and to a father who held strict Victorian ideals, Virginia had the opportunity to live in two different literary periods and to be a forerunner in the modernist movement. Virginia was born into the Stephen family, which faced many hardships and
mourned many untimely deaths. At the young age of 13, Virginia lost her mother and had to look after a father who was extremely depressed. In his magnanimously detailed biography of his aunt, Quentin Bell describes this period in the Stephen’s lives: “It was, for the children, not only tragic but chaotic and unreal. They were called upon to feel, not simply their natural grief, but a false, a melodramatic, an impossibly histrionic emotion which they could not encompass” (40-1). They were surrounded by complete and utter darkness and gloom.

There was also the sexual abuse that Virginia and Vanessa experienced at the hands of their step-brother, George Duckworth. As Bell explains, “To the sisters it simply appeared that their loving brother was transformed before their eyes into a monster, a tyrant against whom they had no defence, for how could they speak out or take any action against a treachery so covert that it was half unknown even to the traitor?” (43). Bell explains that the transformation from fraternal love and affection to that of sexual offenses and violations was so subtle and in the midst of the aftermath of their mother’s death, that the two sisters did not fully comprehend it and dealt with the situation in contemplative and silent disgust.

Throughout her life, Virginia struggled with her sexuality and was terrified of the sexual aggressiveness of men. She felt that “George had spoilt her life before it had fairly begun” (Bell 44). This anxiety toward sexuality and the abhorrence of lust and aggression, which Virginia understandably carried within her, are painfully apparent in the complex natures of her characters.

By age 13, Virginia knew that she was, to some degree, mentally unstable and had admitted to hearing voices in her head. This aspect of her life is very reminiscent of Septimus Warren Smith, who suffers from shell shock and hears the voices of the dead. Her first thoughts of suicide were at this young, blooming age. She suffered from terrible mood
swings and continuously struggled with bouts of depression. By 1900, George, with selfish motives of wanting to better himself, decided that Virginia should associate with high society. Dinners and other events were always exhausting for her since she had nothing in common with these aristocrats. On one occasion, he took her to dine with a countess and when Virginia felt encouraged and comfortable enough to talk, she said “something awful, something appalling. We shall never know what it was, and perhaps she was simply talking too much; but she always had a terrifying way of forgetting her audience” (Bell 77). Bell explains how a subject such as Plato could lead to topics that were inappropriate for young women to talk about. After all, this was a time when women were expected to keep quiet in public. Her writing seemed to be the only outlet for her and the only activity that seemed to help her mental illness and her anxiety. As she herself said, through writing she was trying “to prove to myself that there was nothing wrong with me—which I was already beginning to fear there was” (qtd in Bell 88).

In 1912, Virginia decided that Leonard Woolf was the man she would spend the rest of her life with, which, according to Bell, was the best decision she ever made: “As their intimacy progressed Virginia’s fears melted away, her confidence grew, her feeling for Leonard became more definite and at length, on 29 May, she was able to tell him that she loved him and would marry him” (187). A few years later around 1925, Virginia met Vita Sackville-West and supposedly had a love affair with her, which lasted about four years; her love for Leonard never changed or faltered. This affair reveals Virginia’s bisexuality and her love of women, but it also suggests, as many of her characters do, that sexuality is complex, erratic, and ambiguous. After a lifelong battle with her mental illness, Virginia decided to end her life on March 28, 1941. She left two letters to the people whom she loved most—
Leonard and Vanessa—explaining that she was hearing voices again and that she did not think she would recover this time. In her letter to Leonard she wrote, “If anybody could have saved me it would have been you…I can’t go on spoiling your life any longer. I don’t think two people could have been happier than we have been” (qtd. in Bell 226). Just as Septimus is the prophet who cannot bear to live any longer, so was Virginia Woolf. She faced her inner demons for most of her life, but in the end, could not bear to fight them any more.

**THE PERFECT HOSTESS: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN VICTORIAN SOCIETY**

“Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (Woolf 3). From the very first line of the novel, it is apparent that Clarissa Dalloway has a desire for independence and to break away from the home and the patriarchal. It is important to note how the novel opens with Clarissa going to buy flowers, as they will later play a huge role during the most sexually charged scenes. Throughout the novel, Woolf portrays Clarissa as a privileged, bourgeois woman who is not content with anything in her life, though she does not externally show it. In *Feminism and Art: A Study of Virginia Woolf*, Herbert Marder explains how with the Women’s Movement at its pinnacle in the late nineteenth century, “More and more people were seeing the point, that although women might be quiet, they were not necessarily satisfied with their lot in life” (7). Clarissa, along with the other mentally and emotionally anguished characters in the novel, reflects certain aspects of Woolf’s own personal life. Woolf, as previously mentioned, was happily married to her husband while simultaneously having a long love affair with another woman. Because of this, she is an exemplary figure in showing the complexities of sexual identity and desire.
As Manuel DeLanda explains in *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, “An individual may be characterized by a fixed number of definite properties (extensive and qualitative) and yet possesses an *indefinite* number of capacities to affect and be affected by other individuals” (71). DeLanda suggests that it is impossible to define someone completely, something that Woolf alludes to with the complex nature and identities of her characters. Disrupting gender norms, her feminist narrative strategies constantly reassess the processes of gendering by depicting both the masculine and feminine sides of a single character. With the androgynous mind as the ideal in Woolf’s feminism, she places emphasis on women *and* men, and on the give-and-take that needs to happen between the sexes in order to achieve a harmonious balance. According to Marder, Woolf’s philosophy was to “let feminine influences act freely, both within society and within the individual.” The key to achieving this is for both sexes to cooperate and truly try to understand one another, which is the only way that society will become “civilized” (3). In “Feminist Narrative in Virginia Woolf,” Rachel Blau Duplessis claims,

> With no easy or one-directional passage to “normal femininity,” women as social products are characterized by unresolved and continuous alternations between allegiance to males and to females, between heterosexuality and female-identified, lesbian, or bisexual ties. (325)

This conflict can most clearly be seen in the character of Clarissa Dalloway. She is constantly struggling to accomplish a normative femininity, yet never really does. She concerns herself with trivialities in order to distract herself from the “brutal monster” that stirs inside her, causing her to resent her desires and reject her true identity (12).

On her way to go buy the flowers for her party, Clarissa reminisces about her younger days and her old friend and suitor, Peter Walsh. He had told her that she would “marry a
Prime minister and stand at the top of a staircase; the perfect hostess he called her (she had cried over it in her bedroom)” (7). The fact that this statement is insulting and hurtful to her reveals that Clarissa always wanted more from life than to be the perfect hostess, the perfect wife. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that the term “woman” is problematic since it lumps all females into the same category; it denotes a common identity and does not allow for differences. She says, “If one ‘is’ a woman, that is surely not all one is” (4). This statement is rather controversial since women have always had very rigid, patriarch-determined, socially constructed roles to play. Butler’s controversial statement ties back to queer theory and the constructionists’ view that gender is a constantly changing subject. Clarissa struggles with both her illness and the complexity of her sexuality and desires. She also struggles with wanting to free herself of the burden of social conventions, but caring too much about what people think of her. Woolf, in her signature prose style, describes it as a monster stirring deep inside her: “to hear twigs cracking and feel hooves planted down in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul; never to be content quite, or quite secure” (12). She goes on to describe it as hatred, implying that her true feelings and desires only cause her home to “rock, quiver, and bend” (12). This feeling of discontentment and unrest parallels Woolf’s lifelong struggle with her own mental illness and her reservations about high society.

When she arrives at the flower shop, Clarissa seems to have a spiritual or symbolic orgasm. As she looks at all the flowers, it is a kind of sensory overload for her—the look, the feel, and the smell of the flowers lead to a climactic point of complete excitement and utter admiration of their beauty. Woolf describes the experience as lifting “her up and up when – oh! a pistol shot in the street outside!” (13). This euphoric moment is disrupted by the loud and overbearing modern world outside, suggesting perhaps that industrial progressiveness
and technology interfere with and reject a closer relationship with nature. It is because of the modern world, society, and her own resentment, that, although she admires the beauty of nature, she rejects her true natural desires and inclinations. Clarissa, in her reflections, recognizes that there is something within her that makes her different:

She resented it, had a scruple picked up Heaven knows where, or, as she felt, sent by Nature (who is invariably wise); yet she could not resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman. And whether it was pity, or their beauty, or that she was older…she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt. (Woolf 32)

It is apparent that she is in a state of androgyny since she can relate to the feelings and desires of men. Butler argues that “one is one’s gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within the binary pair” (30). This concept explains why Clarissa would think that she feels what men feel; she is incapable of accepting these feelings as being unique to her or as reflecting her true desires since society has outlined what men and women are supposed to feel respectively.

In her essay “The Death of Sex and the Soul in Mrs. Dalloway and Nella Larsen’s Passing,” Tuzyline Jita Allan claims, “the repressive instinct, embodied in the sentence ‘she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt,’ threatens to neutralize the imagined moment of lesbian jouissance by evoking male-centered homosexual desire” (109). Clarissa struggles most with her sexuality in her relations with Sally Seton; her encounter with Sally was the first time Clarissa had really fallen in love with another woman, which again parallels Woolf’s own relationship with Vita Sackville-West. She is extremely fearful and completely resentful of these feelings, though, and continuously tries to resist them. Although she has a brief moment when she acknowledges their presence, she quickly goes back to the domestic,
menial task at hand. The fact that Woolf compares Clarissa’s feelings to that of “what men felt” completely disrupts the gender norm and challenges sexuality and “appropriate” desires and acts. In a society where, according to Michel Foucault, “sexual irregularity was annexed to mental illness,” the thought that a man or woman could have feelings for the same sex was terrifying since most western societies were ideologically brainwashed with the notion that sex is for reproductive purposes (36).

Sally, who fuels Clarissa’s bisexual desire, is very open and forward about sex and attributes this to having “French blood” (Woolf 33). The reference to a different culture does not necessarily justify her behavior, but from the British perspective, makes it more comprehensible. Clarissa describes how she had a certain way with flowers: “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” (34). Her originality and adventurous spirit is embodied in her unique handling and pairing of the flowers. It is important to note that Aunt Helena “thought it wicked to treat flowers like that,” suggesting that even in her approach to flowers, Sally was an anomaly and a social outcast (34). Her free spirit and nature threatens the social norms and the Victorian sense of propriety that Clarissa’s family is so ready to protect and defend. Also, Sally’s directness and impulsive nature associates her with more masculine qualities and makes Clarissa desire to be as free as she is. Clarissa thinks back on how “They sat up till all hours of the night talking. Sally it was who made her feel, for the first time, how sheltered the life at Bourton was. She knew nothing about sex—nothing about social problems” (33). It is evident that Sally, with all of her passion and experience, forces Clarissa to feel her own insignificance and to realize that she has spent her life repressing her desires.
Sally resists social and cultural restrictions on sexuality and lives her life the way she chooses—this is why it is so strange when we meet her once again at the end of the novel and she is married and the mother of five. At Bourton, she ran “along the passage naked,” rode her bicycle “round the parapet on the terrace,” and “smoked cigars.” It is also interesting that they “spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe” since they both end up in domestic roles (Woolf 34). Unlike Clarissa, though, Sally still has that passion for life and is not as concerned with how she is viewed by others. Although she gives the appearance of being domesticated, she has achieved a harmonious balance: that of passionate Sally Seton and that of the married and motherly, Lady Rosseter. Because of Sally’s youthful vitality, it is a little surprising for Clarissa when she sees her again so many years later at her party: “The lustre had gone out of her. Yet it was extraordinary to see her again, older, happier, less lovely” (171). Although she has physically lost her radiance, she seems to be happy and boasts about having five boys numerous times. It is also apparent that Clarissa’s romanticized view of Sally is crushed: “it was bound, Clarissa used to think, to end in some awful tragedy; her death; her martyrdom; instead of which she had married, quite unexpectedly, a bald man with a large buttonhole who owned…cotton mills at Manchester. And she had five boys!” (182). Sally’s reality is not quite as tragic and romantic as Clarissa imagined it to be. In fact, her fate seems a little stale and mundane since her life seems to revolve solely around her sons and her plants. In seeing her again, Peter thinks, “Lord, Lord, what a change had come over her! the softness of motherhood; its egotism too” (187). It is jarring to see Sally, who had so much vitality, become soft and domesticated.

In the process of playing these two roles, Sally also seems to suppress her desire and identity, to a certain extent, in order to become more socially acceptable and less shocking
and “untidy” (Woolf 34). She does still find a form of escapism in the many flowers she has planted in her garden: “Despairing of human relationships (people were so difficult), she often went into her garden and got from her flowers a peace which men and women never gave her” (192-93). It is interesting that Sally prefers the company of flowers to people, revealing that she is more comfortable in the freedom and independence of nature rather than with the limitations and restraints of having to adhere to social customs and conventions.

According to Jean M. Wyatt in “Mrs. Dalloway: Literary Allusion as Structural Metaphor,” Sally is a very well-balanced person:

In middle age, when Sally has become a maternal figure with a brood of five sons, the flower imagery reflects the change. Instead of plucking flowers, demanding passion, she now grows them in abundance: “plants, hydrangeas, syringas…she…had beds of them, positively beds!” (p. 290). Incorporating the two poles of sexuality which together create new life, Sally, like a hermaphrodite, embodies entire the principle of fertility. (441)

Wyatt’s allusion to fertility and hermaphroditic qualities also makes Sally’s character a type of earth-mother figure—she has procreated and remains very close to nature. In examining Foucault’s study of the hermaphrodite, Herculine Barbin, Butler refers to the latter as the “sexual impossibility of an identity.” She claims that, according to Foucault, “Herculine is not categorizable within the gender binary as it stands” (32). I believe Woolf created Sally to represent both the masculine sexual identity and the feminine, all wrapped up in one person and achieved over time. Even though she was referring to the art and process of writing, Woolf held that women “must recognize that both sexes are present in the mind; they must conduct their lives so as to give each element expression, and to join both into a harmonious whole. Then their femininity would cease being a puzzle and a burden to them; they would become truly unconscious of their sex” (Marder 107). Woolf struggled to achieve this ideal
and one can see how through a character like Sally, she was emphasizing its importance and how, by being unconscious of one’s sex, there were a lot more opportunities to find happiness and contentment with oneself. In fact, in maintaining this perfect balance between her radiant, ardent nature and her more mild, maternal one, Sally admits, “She felt more deeply, more passionately, every year” (Woolf 193). This statement, therefore, reveals that instead of denying or rejecting her true identity and desires, she has actually reached a state of ultimate equilibrium and stability, something that Clarissa has not been able to do.

In reminiscing about that night in Bourton, Clarissa describes it as “the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips” (Woolf 35). It is significant that this important moment in Clarissa’s life happened in the presence of flowers. The flower that Sally picked signifies Clarissa’s own passion, nature, and desires. In placing the kiss in the setting of the garden, Woolf is also suggesting that maybe these feelings that she has for Sally are natural. Butler, in Gender Trouble, argues, “Within psychoanalysis, bisexuality and homosexuality are taken to be primary libidinal dispositions, and heterosexuality is the laborious construction based upon their gradual repression” (105). Butler’s argument is that if heterosexuality only exists due to the repression of bisexual and homosexual desires, these desires are inherent and natural inclinations, whereas heterosexuality is learned and culturally constructed. This perspective is helpful in analyzing Mrs. Dalloway since it insinuates that bisexual and homosexual desires are completely natural, just as flowers are. At this crucial moment in Clarissa’s life, “The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it…which, as they walked…she
uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling!” (Woolf 35-6). The fact that she considers this passionate feeling and desire a precious gift implies that Sally has given her a secret knowledge and enlightenment, which no one else could have revealed or exposed. The moment that she shared with Sally in the garden has seemed to have left a mark upon her soul forever, so that the same ardent feelings she had that night resurface whenever she is in the presence of flowers. To her, flowers will always evoke her innermost and deepest desires and her love for Sally. In this way, flowers are portrayed as a kind of secret language, carrying specific meaning to each of the characters.

In her essay “The Victorian Literary Kiss,” Elisabeth G. Gitter demonstrates the importance of the kiss in Victorian novels. She explains how Shelley’s description of the kiss in *Epipsychidion* fascinated many Victorian writers: “Shelley’s image of the kiss as a communion in which breath, bodily fluids, and bodily substance intermingle, so that the two lovers fuse into one, comes from parallel traditions” (165). Gitter goes on to explain how one tradition is the medieval conceit of the “soul-in-the-kiss,” exemplified by Bion’s *Lament for Adonis*—in this tradition, the kiss is a symbol of spiritual fusion (166). In the second tradition, it is a source of nourishment: “the mouth of the beloved, who is usually a woman, is typically described as a honeycomb, or as a flower at which the lover may gather nectar, or as flowing with milk or wine” (166). Here, the kiss symbolizes an amorous feast or “Eucharistic banquet” (166). Both traditions portray the kiss as an action performed by two lovers in order to become one. With Gitter’s explications in mind, it is apparent that the kiss that Clarissa and Sally share spiritually fuses them together. It is interesting that Sally tears off the heads of flowers and picks one right before she kisses Clarissa—the image thus evoked is the deflowering of a virgin.
In her article “‘Scissors and Silks,’ ‘Flowers and Trees,’ ‘Geraniums Ruined by the War’: Virginia Woolf’s Ecological Critique of Science in Mrs. Dalloway,” Justyna Kostkowska describes how Woolf perceived nature and the role of people in it. She articulates, “In her thinking and writing, Woolf successively develops a view of the world as a unity. For example, as she describes in the passage from ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ a flower is not a separate element to be plucked and enjoyed, but one with the earth that sustains it: part earth part flower” (186). From this perspective, Sally is portrayed as a violator of sorts, destroying nature and thus revealing her sexual ferocity. In portraying Sally in this manner, Clarissa is immediately cast as the victim; she externally opposes homosexuality, yet fondly remembers this moment with Sally. This crucial moment in her life reflects her ambiguity and reveals her ambivalence in her own feelings and desires. It is interesting that, with Kostkowska’s articulations in mind, Sally at first could be seen as a destructive and detrimental force to nature, yet by the end of the novel, she has become a nurturing earth-mother figure. It is obvious that Sally has awakened certain desires in Clarissa that she never knew she had before and now has no idea what to do with them. Having been raised with strict Victorian ideals of propriety, Clarissa buries these feelings deep inside her and does not allow them to surface except when she is alone. Even then, it is a “brutal monster” and a burden, implying that she will never find peace and accept her true desires and identity.

Every character in the novel is connected to a flower in one way or another. Elizabeth, who is the complete opposite of her mother, is also quite complex: “but now at seventeen, why, Clarissa could not in the least understand, she had become very serious; like a hyacinth, sheathed in glossy green, with buds just tinted, a hyacinth which has had no sun” (Woolf 123). The fact that Clarissa sees her as a flower which “has had no sun” implies that
Elizabeth is more of a recluse and prefers to be left alone and unperturbed. Clarissa, of course, attributes this change in Elizabeth to the religious and rigid Miss Kilman, who gives Elizabeth her school lessons. She also cannot understand her daughter because she is nothing like her; Clarissa concerns herself with trivialities like parties and lunches while Elizabeth could not care less about socializing with others. In fact, she would rather live “alone in the country with her father and the dogs” (135). Flowers are also associated with womanhood and coming out in society: “People were beginning to compare her to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies, and it made her life a burden to her” (134). Elizabeth, in a way, rejects her femininity and what society expects from a young lady. According to Seaton’s combined vocabulary, hyacinths symbolize “game” or “play” and lilies signify “purity” (181, 183). Elizabeth sees the frivolity in her mother’s preoccupations, suggesting that she considers it a sort of game, or unimportant; and despite all the pressures from society, she has remained pure and true to herself. In this way, she is extremely progressive and androgynous since she would rather be with her father out in the country and eschews social customs and gender norms. Marder articulates, “Furthermore, domestic life as Virginia Woolf saw it is almost exclusively social; there is no privacy for women. The son of the house may be granted freedom to develop his mind…but the daughter is expected to be at everyone’s beck and call” (34). Elizabeth tries to challenge this notion by making it clear that she does not care for certain social customs and that she does not appreciate being compared to feminine objects such as flowers.

Doris Kilman, like Clarissa, also attempts to suppress her desires. Despite being a very well-educated woman, Doris struggles with her unattractive appearance and her jealousy of Clarissa—she mentions that she cannot afford pretty clothes like Clarissa, and she turns to
religion in order to assuage the “hot and turbulent feelings which boiled and surged in her” and to cover up the sinister thoughts she has toward her (Woolf 124). She obsesses over Clarissa and desires to humiliate her and make her feel lowly, just as she feels, all under the guise of it being God’s will. She also obsesses over Elizabeth, but rather in a sexual way—this is the one way that she can really hurt Clarissa: by taking her daughter away from her and teaching her to be different from her mother. She repeatedly mentions what a beautiful girl Elizabeth is and tries to keep her from going home to the party. In her frantic internal state, she is “about to split asunder…The agony was so terrific…if she could make her hers absolutely and forever and then die: that was all she wanted. But to sit here, unable to think of anything to say…to be felt repulsive even by her—it was too much” (132). These intense feelings she has stirring about in her allude to Clarissa’s inner monster, making them more similar than either one of them would ever want to admit. They both passionately dislike one another yet they are both dealing with the complexities of their inner identities.

For Doris, her unattractiveness means that she will never become romantically involved with anyone of the opposite sex. In a society where women are merely commodities, Doris is a case of complete hopelessness, looking forward only to a life of solitude. She is also stereotypically masculine in that she talks about the war, goes to meetings, reads books—all political—and she assures Elizabeth that all professions, including law, medicine, and politics, are open to her. Her inability to find a man to marry, and her acceptance of spinsterhood, means that she will never accomplish a normative femininity and can never even give the illusion of it like Clarissa or Sally. Through Kilman’s character, the split from the traditional Victorian woman, or Coventry Patmore’s notion of “The Angel in the House,” is apparent. In fact, Kilman, as her name suggests, squashes the
flowers that Clarissa gives her, implying a killing or suppressing of her femininity, her sexuality, and her desires.

Woolf also chose to depict Lady Bruton as a character who has more masculine qualities than feminine. She is involved in politics and has a lot more respect for men than women. She also serves as a foil to Clarissa, whom she does not care for much, and snubs her by inviting her husband, Richard, to a lunch party, but not her. She does not like women who “often got in their husbands’ way, prevented them from accepting posts abroad, and had to be taken to the seaside in the middle of the session to recover from influenza” (Woolf 106). It is clear that she does not have any respect for Clarissa and considers her a typical feeble female. For Clarissa, Lady Bruton embodies what is respectable and revered in society. As Wyatt articulates, “The opposition of Lady Bruton and Sally Seton reflects both class conflict and the conflict within Clarissa” (441). Wyatt goes on to explain how both of these women “typify the two sides of Clarissa’s experience: her social world and her emotional life” (441). Clarissa’s inner conflict with these two opposing elements is one of her biggest struggles since she wants to be passionate, but is held back by the rigidity of social customs.

Because of the “futility of her own womanhood,” Lady Bruton has invited Hugh Whitbread and Richard Dalloway to lunch to help her write a letter to the *Times* (Woolf 109). Although she is a General’s great-granddaughter and a strong, independent, and political woman, Lady Bruton still requires the aid of men around her, knowing when and how to use them. When Hugh Whitbread, who has brought her red carnations, suggests that Lady Bruton would look charming with the flowers against her lace, she rejects the appeal by placing them down beside her plate. After he has helped her write her letter, though, “Lady
Bruton, who seldom did a graceful thing, stuffed all Hugh’s carnations into the front of her dress, and flinging her hands out called him ‘My Prime Minister!’” (110). She knows exactly how to manipulate him in order to get what she wants. According to Seaton, red carnations symbolize “pure love,” but also “woman’s love” (173). The signification of the red carnations is interesting because Lady Bruton is not necessarily loving or affectionate. From a queer theory perspective, “woman’s love” could imply that she has homosexual desires while maintaining strong heterosexual friendships and having more masculine inclinations.

At the party, Aunt Helena, whom Clarissa used to pick flowers for at Bourton, is still connected to flowers even though she is now in her eighties. She had even written a book on orchids which was read by Darwin, revealing her expertise on the subject:

> For at the mention of India, or even Ceylon, her eyes (only one was glass) slowly deepened, became blue, beheld, not human beings—she had no tender memories, no proud illusions about Viceroyos, Generals, Mutinies—it was orchids she saw, and mountain passes and herself carried on the backs of coolies in the ‘sixties over solitary peaks; or descending to uproot orchids (startling blossoms, never beheld before) which she painted in water-colour. (Woolf 178)

It is clear how passionate Aunt Helena is about her flowers and how she feels more at ease with them than with people, just as Sally does. The meaning that comes up for orchids in Seaton’s combined vocabulary is “skill” or “adroitness” (Woolf 187). Aunt Helena certainly needed some degree of skill to explore an exotic country and discover and paint new flowers. It is interesting too how when Lady Bruton goes to talk to her, she remembers “nothing whatever about the flora and fauna of India,” revealing her complete disinterest in the subject and again underscoring her propensity for less feminine topics.
It is evident that through her female characters, Woolf has created a group of diverse and complex women who are hindered by society in one way or another from ever achieving their true identity. Though Clarissa is not necessarily happy, she accepts that this is her life—pretty clothes, fancy parties, and high society—and this is all it ever will be. Standing at the top of the staircase, she thinks to herself:

She was not enjoying it. It was too much like being—just anybody, standing there;...yet this anybody she did a little admire, couldn’t help feeling that she had, anyhow, made this happen, that it marked a stage, this post that she felt herself to have become, for oddly enough she had quite forgotten what she looked like, but felt herself a stake driven in at the top of the stairs. Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself. (Woolf 170-71)

In “Equating Performance with Identity: The Failure of Clarissa Dalloway’s Victorian ‘Self’ in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway,” Shannon Forbes examines how unfulfilling the perfect hostess role is for Clarissa. She explains how “Clarissa tries to equate the performance of this role with her identity, but her attempts to use the role as a substitute for the fixed—essentially the Victorian—sense of self she covets result in emptiness, a lack of fulfillment, and ironically, virtually no self at all” (39). Sally, too, seems to deny her true identity in order to fit into the status quo. Although she switches back and forth between her two roles, Sally and wife and mother, through her love of flowers she has been able to remain true to her inner self.

Flowers come to represent not only one’s deepest desires but also one’s femininity. Elizabeth, Miss Kilman, and Lady Bruton reject flowers because they are not comfortable playing the part of the rigid, socially acceptable female. Perhaps, they are not comfortable with their gender identity since they are affiliated with more masculine qualities and traits. Sally and Aunt Helena represent the image of earth-mother by being so close to nature, while
Clarissa is unable to reconcile the two opposing sides of her character: the emotional, inner world and the social, external one.

**THE SENSITIVE MALE**

The heterosexual relationships in *Mrs. Dalloway* are unusual and quite convoluted. The audience does not see much of the Dalloways’ marriage and the glimpses that are given of the Warren Smiths’ are extremely grim and bleak. Peter Walsh, still enamored of Clarissa, has had numerous failed relationships and careers. He is an interesting figure because of his sentimentality and his funny habit of randomly falling in love with women. While Septimus sees the grim reality of the dark world in which he lives, thus making him a prophetic figure, Peter Walsh sees Clarissa for who she really is, and through his association with flowers, it is suggested that he has a good understanding of women. It is not only the women who struggle with their desires and identity; the men in the novel also struggle in their relationships with women and with people in general. None of the men achieve a normative masculinity since they are unable to overcome their own fears and accept their true identities.

It is important to take a brief look at Richard Dalloway, although he is not a prominent character, in order to better understand Clarissa. On his way home from Lady Bruton’s lunch, Richard decides to surprise Clarissa with flowers. After having talked about Peter Walsh at the lunch, and in remembering his love for Clarissa, Richard felt the need to go home and show his wife how much he loves her. He acknowledges the fact that he never tells her how he feels about her: “The time comes when it can’t be said; one’s too shy to say it, he thought,…setting off with his great bunch held against his body to Westminster to say straight out in so many words (whatever she might think of him), holding out his flowers, ‘I
love you’” (Woolf 115). It is clear that their marriage is lacking any sense of intimacy and passion that is usually found in such a union. It is also interesting how he is described as “Bearing his flowers like a weapon,” transforming an affectionate gesture of love to a defensive, combative one (116). What is it exactly that Richard needs to defend himself against? The fact that he bears the flowers like a weapon reveals just how uncomfortable he is with his own feelings and how terrified he is of having to actually convey those feelings to his wife. Richard admits that “Partly one’s lazy; partly one’s shy. And Clarissa—it was difficult to think of her; except in starts, as at luncheon, when he saw her quite distinctly” (115). The fear he has implies that there is something missing in their marriage, that there is some disconnect between the two which seems to be irreparable. It is also strange that he cannot think of his wife affectionately except when someone else brings her up. It is also insinuated that Richard and Clarissa have not been intimate for quite some time: “she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet. Lovely in girlhood, suddenly there came a moment…when, through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed him” (31). The fact that they sleep in separate rooms makes the distance between them physical, not just emotional, and even greater.

Richard, since he is unable to perform at the colossal moment, employs the flowers to communicate his feelings: “she understood without his speaking” (Woolf 118). But how telling that after all the planning of exactly what he was going to do and say, Richard could not find the courage to tell his wife that he loved her. His inability to communicate is a good example of how knowing the language of flowers illuminates what is transpiring beneath the surface. The fact that he brings her red and white roses raises some interesting and intriguing interpretations. In Seaton’s floral vocabulary, red roses symbolize “bashful shame” while
white roses signify “silence” and “innocence” (191-92). Richard has pure intentions to please Clarissa and show her that he cares, but he is held back by his disabling insecurity. He also keeps thinking to himself “Happiness is this,” which implies a naïveté, or a blatant disregard, about how he views his life and his marriage (117). He allows his bashfulness to stand in the way of sharing his feelings with his wife, which forces him to be silent. The flowers themselves, “first bunched together; now of their own accord starting apart,” reflect the Dalloways’ strained and distant marriage (119). But even though “she understood without his speaking,” even the flowers fail him in this instant, and perhaps, as Mrs. Dempster remarks, it was “All trash” (27). Clarissa, who has concerned herself so much with flowers and parties and materialism, has become this empty shell of a human being with no soul and no passion. The distance between the married couple is most apparent at the party when they are separated the whole time, Clarissa constantly running around, greeting guests and making superficial small talk. At the end, Richard is off to the side, observing his daughter, and he feels proud of her. He and Elizabeth are glad when the party is over, implying their disinterest in social gatherings and revealing the fact that they share a closer bond than he and Clarissa. Richard and Elizabeth are not as concerned with social customs and trivialities while Clarissa is consumed by her party. In the end, it seems as though Richard and Clarissa cannot relate to each other, nor do they have a strong foundation for their marriage on which they can feel secure enough to candidly communicate their desires and feelings to one another.

As mentioned earlier, Woolf makes the male characters sexually ambiguous as well. Peter Walsh, portrayed as a great admirer of women, is constantly associated with flowers. The fact that Woolf uses floral language for Peter implies that he has a good understanding of
women, more so than the typical man; he is considered a sort of anomaly. Peter is associated with more feminine characteristics—he is sensitive, observant, moody, dependent, interested in flowers, and always in love. In fact, he is specifically associated with blue hydrangeas since they always remind Sally of him. According to Seaton, hydrangeas signify “a boaster” and they can also mean “you are cold” (Woolf 181). The first interpretation is definitely apropos of Peter’s situation since he boasts about his exciting and passionate love affairs. The second meaning is interesting because he does tend to detach himself emotionally in the presence of Clarissa so as not to become impassioned or aggravated by her. He also views her as cold, passionless, and soulless.

Peter meditates on how he and Clarissa “had always this queer power of communicating without words,” which correlates with the purpose that the language of flowers serves. The fact that they are both associated with flowers implies that they are uniquely and profoundly connected. All of Peter’s associations with women center around flowers. At Bourton, he had found Aunt Helena “some rare flower” and he would take walks in the garden with Sally where there were “rose-bushes and giant cauliflowers—he could remember Sally tearing off a rose, stopping to exclaim at the beauty of the cabbage leaves in the moonlight” (Woolf 61, 75). Peter’s dream vision at the park allows him to imagine a powerful and mystical earth-mother figure: “The solitary traveller is soon beyond the wood; and there, coming to the door…is an elderly woman who seems…to seek, over a desert, a lost son; to search for a rider destroyed; to be the figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world” (58). He awakens from the dream exclaiming, “The death of the soul,” which he had thought to himself that summer at Bourton when he was annoyed by Clarissa’s rigidity and pretension. This dream also connects him to Septimus, who sees
death all around him and whose best friend, Evans, was killed in the war. According to Wyatt, in his dream, Peter sees:

a monumental woman compounded of sky, trees, and ocean, representing the unity of existence beyond the individual life, tempts the sleeper to leave the multiplicity of this life for the “one thing” that embraces all…But he reverses himself, returning from the darkness of the forest to the light of his sitting-room to embrace his landlady, who represents the ordinary life of this world. (442)

Peter sees that death is the great equalizer. When this material life in which they are all living is over, it will not matter what one’s social status was or how one was viewed by society. He sees right through Clarissa and realizes how vain and arrogant she is and how her soul died long ago. Allan argues that “With homoeroticism as the subject, the psychic strain resulting from the contradictory impulse to express and rein in female desire is likened in *Mrs. Dalloway* to ‘the death of the soul’ (58)” (106). It is important to note that this observation is made by Peter, who knows Clarissa well and judges her harshly, but honestly. He sees that, because she is so self-absorbed and concerned with what others think, she has suppressed her desires and, therefore, has murdered her soul and her true identity. Peter has this great moment of awakening through the envisioning of this awe-inspiring, every-man’s-mother figure, suggesting that he is much more in tune with nature and that he understands that life, and all of its earthly pleasures, is fleeting. Wyatt also brings up the idea of life and death, light and darkness, which is so prominent throughout the novel. These opposing binaries are much more prominent in scenes with Septimus, but also with Clarissa, who in the midst of her party, thinks of death.

Along with their already complex relationship, Peter also feels extremely judged by Clarissa: “he was a failure, compared with all this—the inlaid table, the mounted paper-knife, the dolphin and the candlesticks, the chair-covers and the old valuable English tinted prints—
he was a failure!” (Woolf 43). He realizes that, for Clarissa, material goods are what determine if you are successful and relevant in society. On his way to the party, Peter has another moment of realization, which again connects all the disparate scenes in the novel: “he had found life like an unknown garden, full of turns and corners, surprising, yes; really it took one’s breath away, these moments;…a moment in which things came together; this ambulance; and life and death” (152). The ambulance, of course, has Septimus’s dead body in it. In this scene, there is a strong sense of interconnectedness that hearkens back to the juxtaposition of life and death, light and dark. This is not Peter’s last reference to garden and floral imagery either. Toward the end of the novel, he compares women and love to “so splendid a flower to grow on the crest of human life,” solidifying the idea that women are strongly connected to flowers and that through this connection, they can either embrace or reject their true identity and desires (159). The fact that Peter has a more in-depth view of this concept reveals just how well he understands and how much respect he has for the female figure.

Woolf chose to make the character of Septimus Warren Smith extremely complex and truly touching. He, too, has androgynous qualities, just as the other characters who are struggling with their gender and sexual identity. Woolf has assigned him the part of the tortured poet and artist who has prophetic visions. Like Clarissa, he sees beauty in nature and in life, but living also makes him mad, especially after having survived the war, all limbs not intact. Serving as a parallel character to Clarissa, Septimus outwardly shows what Clarissa internally feels. Septimus, a World War I veteran, suffers from shell shock and lives in his own mind; he is seemingly out of touch with reality, but this detachment actually allows him to be more honest with his feelings and to judge people more genuinely.
According to Wyatt, “Septimus presents the most extreme example of character created by literary allusion. To Septimus, life is books.” She also claims, “His descent into madness is literary too, patterned on the *Inferno,*” reinforcing his role as the prophetic artist (440). He obsesses over his friend Evans, who died in the war; he constantly sees him and tries to call out to him as if trying to make up for something. A queer perspective might read this as Septimus confused with his sexuality and identity—after all, he only married Lucrezia “one evening when the panic was on him—that he could not feel” (Woolf 86). The fact that he is constantly plagued by the urge to commit suicide reveals his discontentment with life. While he has brief moments when he sees the beauty in life, he is brought back to his grim reality and the dark thoughts that stir around in his head. He, too, like Clarissa and Doris Kilman, has a “monster” living inside him.

Septimus is constantly associated with flowers throughout the novel. During one of his visions, which he believes is his duty to interpret for and relay to mankind, he experiences the following: “The earth thrilled beneath him. Red flowers grew through his flesh; their stiff leaves rustled by his head. Music began clanging against the rocks up here. It is a motor horn down in the street, he muttered….Now he withdraws up into the snows, and roses hang about him—the thick red roses which grow on my bedroom wall, he reminded himself” (Woolf 68). This moment exemplifies how Septimus’s actual world and his own inner reality merge together, and one is able to see how much he struggles with both of these realities. It is apparent that seeing life through Septimus’s eyes is overwhelmingly chaotic. He definitely sees the beauty in nature, more so than others, but he also sees the ugly side of human nature. In the midst of another one of his visions, he attempts to take himself out of it: “But he would not go mad. He would shut his eyes; he would see no more….But they
beckoned; leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down” (22). Septimus truly sees the interconnectedness of people and nature, despite the destructive forces of the modern world, which annihilate that connection. It is curious how Woolf has made Septimus the closest to nature. He sees himself literally as an extension of nature—the flowers and trees grow through him. Kostkowska argues that “Physically and metaphorically, nature in Mrs. Dalloway is inseparable from the human world,” which is so evident with Septimus (189). In his unique outlook on life, Septimus cannot detach himself from nature and, therefore, the line between nature and people is not clearly demarcated.

The effects of the war have left Septimus both emotionally and physically handicapped. He suffers from a severe case of shell shock, unable to decipher the world in which he is living from the world of the dead. He sees Evans everywhere, which is interesting since he had made himself completely numb when Evans was killed. Through Septimus, one is able to not only see the physical effects of the war, but most importantly, the psychological toll it has taken on him. The fact that he “could not feel” haunts him throughout his life after the war. Septimus acknowledges that when Evans was killed he, “far from showing any emotion or recognizing that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably. The War had taught him” (Woolf 86). The war had taught him to abandon his emotions and to no longer feel, yet in doing so, Septimus is left half-alive, a half-human being, almost zombie-like. He also carries an immense amount of guilt as if he had “committed an appalling crime” (96). Any sense of patriotism is eradicated since World War I is defined in these extremely negative terms. In fact, when Septimus is asked by Sir William Bradshaw about his service in the war, he
replies, “The European War—that little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder? Had he served with distinction? He really forgot. In the War itself he had failed” (96). He does not remember anything in particular because he has made himself numb to the whole situation, but he does feel as if, in his service, he had done something wrong, implying just how gruesome and devastating World War I really was. Having been completely surrounded by death, Septimus has carried the souls of the dead with him, making the actual act of living a burden.

For Septimus, flowers represent his desire to live completely, and in the moments when he feels himself truly a part of nature, he is most happy. But flowers also symbolize death for him: “Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids” (Woolf 70). It is evident that, in nature, Septimus literally sees the mortality of humans and just how unrelenting nature is—after the war had destroyed everything, flowers continued to spring up and bloom, so that in the midst of so much death and devastation, there was still life. Even before the war when Septimus was a student, he was associated with flowers: “But of all this what could the most observant of friends have said except what a gardener says when he opens the conservatory door in the morning and finds a new blossom on his plant: —it has flowered; flowered from vanity, ambition, idealism, passion, loneliness, courage, laziness, the usual seeds, all muddled up” (84). Flowers, in the case of Septimus, do not necessarily embody his true sexual and gender identity specifically, but they instead symbolize the complexity of Septimus himself, setting him apart from the rest of mankind.

In seeing the ugliness of human nature, Septimus blames the world itself for taking away his ability to feel. In looking at Rezia, he thinks, “She looked pale, mysterious, like a
lily, drowned, under water, he thought” (Woolf 89). In response to her wanting a child, Septimus believed that “One cannot bring children into a world like this. One cannot perpetuate suffering, or increase the breed of these lustful animals, who have no lasting emotions, but only whims and vanities, eddying them now this way, now that” (89). This idea, to Septimus, is the crisis of modernism, and it is also the reason that Rezia looks like a drowned lily. He is able to see, from a unique perspective, the toll that living has taken on her. The fact that he sees her as a dead flower again reveals the strong connection he has with nature.

While Clarissa reluctantly acknowledges her place at the end of the novel, Septimus decides to commit suicide in order to escape the oppressions of life and the people around him. Kostkowska claims, “Woolf shows the social oppression of everything natural: from animals and plants to human freedom and sensibility, to be a result of the separation from nature. She depicts the society’s destructive influence on nature as well as on its own members who seek to express themselves, that is, remain ‘natural’ and free” (190). It is because of society’s rigid standards and rules that an individual cannot express their true desire if it goes against what society has labeled appropriate or acceptable. Sir William Bradshaw is the greatest catalyst for Septimus’s suicide. If Septimus represents nature, Bradshaw comes to signify, not only for Septimus but for the other guests at the party, the ugly side of society. Even Clarissa thinks, “if this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had impressed him, like that, with his power, might he not then have said (indeed she felt it now), Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that?” (Woolf 185). According to Marder, “Plainly, Sir William is as sick, in his way, as those whom he persecutes. And Septimus, in his terror of a lobotomized life, can see no means of escape
from the representatives of the establishment except suicide” (49). Because Bradshaw embodies the kind of society that oppresses and punishes people who are different, Septimus cannot bear to be classified as mad when he knows that “his brain was perfect” (88). Essentially, he sees that he lives in a world of vanity that rejects those who are honest and who see past the insincerity and pretentiousness.

Clarissa hears about his suicide at her party and, in understanding him to a certain extent without ever having met him, feels happy for Septimus and finds that death can be comforting. She thinks to herself, “in the middle of my party, here’s death,” which again suggests this image of death in the midst of life, which Septimus is haunted by (Woolf 183). She also appreciates what Septimus has done because something real and substantial has disrupted her idealized and superficial world. Clarissa contemplates how “Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate….There was an embrace in death” (184). It is interesting that death can silently communicate certain messages to the living, as do flowers. But these messages are only received by those who are perceptive enough to see the reality of life, the pain and the ugliness that comes along with living in a world that oppresses those who are different. Clarissa recognizes, just as Septimus did, that “there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one’s parents giving it into one’s hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear” (185). Clarissa and Septimus both see the beauty of life and nature, yet they are haunted by what mankind has done to both. It is through Septimus’s suicide that Clarissa feels as if a weight has been lifted. She admires his courage in ending his life, which had constantly been oppressed by humanity, and understands his decision. The novel ends as the party comes to a
close, without any of the characters ever accomplishing a normative gender identity, thus rejecting their true desires and remaining eternally discontent.
CHAPTER 3

FLORAL LANGUAGE IN ULYSSES: SECRET MESSAGES AND DESIRES

Nature, it has been said, makes no sudden starts; and in a special manner, as the Proverb of Hell affirms, to create the little flower of genius is the labour of ages. That little flower is, with startling frequency, a flower of evil, springing up amid decay, the vigorous offshoot of a withering stock.

--Stanislaus Joyce
*My Brother’s Keeper*

**JAMES JOYCE: THE MAN BEHIND THE MYTH**

One of the most interesting aspects of James Joyce’s writing is his portrayal of men and women and how they interact with and relate to one another. It is also intriguing how his female characters always seem to fit into one of three categories: virgin, whore, and wife and mother. The figure of the wife and mother is the most jarring since the portrayal is usually extremely negative and unflattering, accenting the already grim depictions of domestic life characteristic of Joyce’s texts. Joyce definitely raises important questions about gender and literature, and through his prose and his letters to family and friends, his frustrations with Ireland, Catholicism, and social conventions, along with his self-imposed exile, are painfully apparent. In the labyrinthine world of multi-layered meanings, symbols, and allusions he has created in his fiction, Joyce calls attention to gender roles and identity issues, many times assigning his characters, both male and female, very androgynous qualities. In *Ulysses*, Joyce addresses these issues of gender and identity through the creation of Bloom, an extremely sensitive man but an ethnic, religious, and social outcast, and his wife, Molly, a very aggressive and sexual woman who rebels against the control of men and society.
As mentioned earlier, the modernist era was a time of great change in literature, art, philosophy, and science, and writers began to focus on more progressive themes and concepts. Joyce, among many others, took a special interest in issues concerning women, gender, sexuality, and desire. According to Hanna in *Key Concepts in Modernist Literature*, Hélène Cixous, who developed *l’écriture féminine*, considered Joyce’s writing feminine in some respects and even wrote her doctoral dissertation on him (130). In *Joyce and Feminism*, Scott also acknowledges that “Critics, old and new, male and female, feminist or not, can come together over the subject of Joyce, who was one of literature’s great unifiers” (1). Although many of the depictions of women in Joyce’s texts can be considered progressive since he portrays them as either blatantly discontent with domesticity or extremely liberated, Joyce is not necessarily celebrating this new atmosphere of independence and sexual candidness. As Hanna articulates, this atmosphere was “often used to symbolize decadence and decline, or the triumph of shallow materialism over a more meaningful existence” (45). Hanna also points out how women made great strides in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, and this period “saw the advent of the New Woman, high-profile campaigns by suffragists and suffragettes, and finally the gaining of the vote for most women in most Western countries” (130). With all of this progress in mind, Joyce chose to depict Molly as a very independent woman, assigning her a strong and forthright personality, thus making her extremely memorable, though confusing. Joyce tends to confound the reader with a female figure such as Molly because she is unabashedly sexual and an adulteress, yet she loves her husband and admires how different he is from the other male Dubliners. It is also important to note that he makes Bloom extremely sensitive and assigns him a profound understanding of women and their issues.
The women in Joyce’s own life definitely played a significant role in the creation of his female characters. According to Scott, many of the Irish Catholic households in his fiction are modeled after his own: “a long procession of births, a pious and compliant mother, and a garrulous, frequently drunken, free-spending father figure” (Joyce 58). His mother, Mary Jane Joyce, bore thirteen children, and although she had thoughts of leaving her alcoholic husband, never seriously considered it, believing it her duty to stay and look after the household. Joyce was close to his mother and she was very involved in his academic and artistic life. Although she was the glue that held the family together, the household was male-centered and run by the patriarch, John Joyce. There was also a lot of abuse in the home due to alcohol, and everyone suffered at the violent hands of John, especially the women. After their mother passed, the eldest female, Poppie, was burdened with the responsibility of caring for and looking after the household. Years later, Poppie left to go to Melbourne to become a nun, distancing herself from the family. Scott reveals how “Joyce seems to resist seeing female celibacy as a solution to family problems or seeing the church as a refuge for women” (Joyce 61). Joyce does not seem to be very sensitive toward his sister, but this is because of his belief that it would be more beneficial to women to find other means of escape instead of turning to an institution that is so ready to indoctrinate and judge.

Also in Joyce and Feminism, in referring to the unhappy marriages in Dubliners, Scott argues that women were also partly responsible for the unhappiness in their domestic situations. She claims that although James and his brother, Stanislaus, recognized that their father was the main source of the difficulties in their parents’ marriage, they “sensed sources of trouble in women as well” (63). She even includes a line from a letter Joyce wrote to Stanislaus: “I am no friend of tyranny, as you know, but if many husbands are brutal the
It is apparent that Joyce is depicting domestic life in Ireland as realistically as possible, and in this quote he suggests that a fulfilling life does not necessarily include marriage and children. As Scott also points out, Joyce associated and was friends with very intelligent, powerful women. She articulates,

> During his Trieste, Zurich, and Paris years, by mail and through literary and publishing circles, Joyce formed relationships of great benefit to himself with cultured, intellectual women attuned to his works. They not only fostered him; they provided an enriched human context for, and a new range, to his conception of woman and feminism. (Joyce 85)

It is important to take this fact into account when reading Joyce. The female figure in his works is usually ambivalent and reacts to her environment, revealing her discontent. I believe that through an aggressive character like Molly, for instance, he is trying to portray a woman who, although she is not educated, rebels against what society expects from her and instead chooses to act natural.

Scott also reveals that it was these intellectual women who actually published Joyce:

> “In publishing, Beach and Monnier joined other avant-garde women publishers of Joyce—Dora Marsden and Harriet Weaver of The Egoist and Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap of The Little Review” (Joyce 103). The fact that Joyce’s publishers were mostly women speaks volumes about the environment he had created for himself in Europe and reveals his high regard for the female intellectuals and friends in his life. According to Scott, Maria Jolas, a student and friend of Joyce, notes, “Joyce’s attitudes varied from ‘his appreciation of the fact that biological difference need not exclude common interests and parallel action’ to his instinctive embracing of Hamlet’s ‘Frailty, thy name is woman’” (108). Again, this sense of ambivalence can be seen in his creation of Molly, but also in the Blooms’ marital crisis, in
which although they have a high regard for one another, Molly and Bloom are unable at this moment to communicate their needs and desires. As W.Y. Tindall, in *James Joyce: His Way of Interpreting the Modern World*, articulates,

> Nowhere is Joyce’s understanding more apparent and nowhere his mixture of humor, irony, and compassion. Mrs. Bloom is a triumph of that static art of which Stephen dreamed. Fully created, she invites neither desire nor loathing but contemplation alone. Her final “Yes” is ours as, affirming life and art, it was Joyce’s too. (38)

By giving Molly her own monologue, which also constitutes the end of *Ulysses*, Joyce pays homage to the female figure, giving her the last word. Despite the appearance of uncertainty and vacillation, Joyce is deliberate in his depictions of women, and he attempts to portray them as realistically as possible.

In *My Brother’s Keeper*, Stanislaus Joyce recounts his brother’s early years and the difficulties they faced as a family. He spends some time discussing the disintegration and financial distress of the family: “In Dublin the steps of our rapid downhill progress, amid the clamour of dunning creditors on the doorstep and threatening landlords, were marked by our numerous changes of address. I have before me a list of nine addresses in about eleven years…” (50). He reveals the chaotic and turbulent life they led because of their father’s alcoholism and his lack of responsibility and concern for the family. It is interesting that Stanislaus refers to his brother, amidst all of this disorder, as a blooming flower, “the vigorous offshoot of a withering stock” (21). It is especially curious since Joyce named the main character of his epic novel Bloom. When residing at Millbourne Lane, the Joyces lived next to a family who lost their baby boy a few weeks after his birth; the incident had an impact on the Joyce family and perhaps inspired James to make his “hero” a father who has lost his only son. It was also here that their father, John, made an attempt to strangle their
mother. Stanislaus recalls, “My brother was less affected by these scenes than I was, though they certainly influenced his attitude towards marriage and family life” (56). He also recounts how “In love, my brother was a realist, and even then in outlook a ‘married man’; women did not constitute his chief interest in life, nor did he expect to be the main purpose of any woman’s life” (152). For Joyce, sex was a necessity and he made no apologies for his view on something so natural and instinctual. This attitude is reminiscent of Molly, who also refuses to deny her sexuality, instead choosing to live her life according to her natural inclinations.

Although he rarely discussed marriage, when he did it was in completely negative terms because of its connection to the Catholic Church. According to Stanislaus, Joyce felt that “To make the heavy burden of marriage the exorbitant price of coition, was, in his view, to sow the seeds of discord, while at the same time it debased what might be a franker and freer relationship between men and women” (S. Joyce 155). This harsh critique of marriage can be seen in the Blooms’ bleak marital state and in the disconnect between husband and wife. At the same time, Molly and Bloom do not allow for the institution of marriage to hinder them from what they desire. The fact that they are married only makes it more shocking since they refuse to let their relationship be governed by marital restraints; Molly and Bloom instead choose to live freely, never encroaching on the other’s actions despite thinking about one another constantly.

Just like Stephen Dedalus, Joyce’s exile from Ireland and his separation from the church was a necessity in order to become an artist. As Tindall points out, “In order to create he needed freedom. This meant not only freedom from the restrictions with which Ireland surrounds her writers, but that detachment from a subject which is necessary in order to
master it” (8). The need for freedom was a recurring theme in Joyce’s life—freedom from school, religion, and Ireland, which were all part of the system that crushed individuality and uniqueness of character. According to Stanislaus, Joyce’s break from Catholicism was an important moment in his life: “He felt it was imperative that he should save his real spiritual life from being overlaid and crushed by a false one that he had outgrown. He believed that poets in the measure of their gifts and personality were the repositories of the genuine spiritual life of their race, and that priests were usurpers” (S. Joyce 107). With the realization that art and creation are what lead to a fulfilling life and true spirituality, Joyce abandoned his faith and followed his own individual and creative path. According to Tindall, because Joyce lost his faith, he needed to create a new system to replace Christianity: “Joyce found what he wanted in history. The pattern of events in time gave him the sense of order and of belonging to a whole which, although in time, suggests eternity. Cyclical recurrence became his substitute for metaphysics” (65). Cyclicality is a major theme in Joyce’s works, but is especially prominent in *Ulysses*. The novel, covering one whole day in the life of Leopold Bloom, ends exactly where it began.

As mentioned earlier, Joyce raises valuable and profound questions about gender and identity. According to Ross C. Murfin, gender criticism, as opposed to most strands of feminism, is not focused on women only, but instead on both the male and female sexes and the masculine and feminine genders (133). In the same vein as Judith Butler, Murfin claims that “Gender is…a construct, an effect of language, culture, and its institutions” (134). Joyce challenges the notion of gender as stable by creating characters who defy norms and complicate the idea of what it is to be a man or a woman. In “*Ulysses* and the End of Gender,” Vicki Mahaffey calls attention to the fact that Joyce “repeatedly traces many
apparently different failures of communication—between Irish and English, between men and men, between women and men, between women and women, between parents and children—to the fault line of sexuality as it has been socially and historically defined” (152). Joyce’s focus on the failures of communication raises important questions about how people interact with one another, and also how they react to those who are different. Bloom, because he is culturally and emotionally different, is constantly ridiculed, mocked, and emasculated by other men and women. Molly, because she is so open and direct about her sexuality and desires, is marginalized and degraded by both sexes as well. Mahaffey also claims,

In designing *Ulysses*, Joyce first identified what the socially conditioned reader is most likely to want and expect from male and female characters of different ages, and then he provides his readers with characters who frustrate and implicitly challenge that desire. The bewildering friction that results is designed to expose the gender system itself as an arbitrary and inadequate fiction, to measure its isolating mechanisms against the urgent complexity of personal desire. (153)

Mahaffey’s profound observations reveal Joyce’s ability to complicate what the reader expects from certain characters, which in turn calls attention to gender and identity issues, dismantling society’s unrealistic expectations of how men and women should behave and feel. By creating androgynous and confusing characters like Molly and Bloom, Joyce not only explores the convoluted relationship between men and women, but he also affirms the fact that the rejection of people who are different is generated by society’s fear of that which is foreign and distinctive. These people are therefore ostracized, implying that if one’s desires and identity stray from the standard, they are immediately viewed as abnormal and eccentric.
HENRY FLOWER: “THERE IS A FLOWER THAT BLOOMETH”

From the first moment we meet Leopold Bloom, it is apparent that he is not an ordinary man, nor is his outlook on life and on fellow human beings typical. Immediately, Bloom is depicted as extremely earthy and somewhat uncouth, hungry with a hankering for the innards of some animal. According to Mahaffey, “The reader’s expectation clashes loudly with the actual experience of reading Ulysses, and the cacophony that results brings the currency of our cultural definition of gender categories comically into question” (158). At Dlugacz’s, along with admiring a kidney which “oozed bloodgouts,” Bloom also regards a curvy woman ahead of him in line (J. Joyce 59). Since Joyce chose to reveal these specific details about him, there is an implication that Bloom has an appreciation for the natural, even if at times he seems carnal and animalistic. The fact that he prepares a tray for Molly, who is still in bed, should not be overlooked either—this is just one example of how he is always thinking of her. Even though Bloom is interested in vulgar, and seemingly ignoble, pleasures, he is very experienced, wise, caring, and sympathetic. Tindall argues, “Whereas Stephen is only a son as yet, Bloom is son, father, husband, cuckold, and friend....If he were perfect in anything, he would cease to represent mankind” (35). Bloom, because of his age and experience, has a profound appreciation for life, something that Stephen lacks because of his inexperience. Tindall refers to Bloom, because of his contradictions and imperfections, as a kind of representative of mankind, which is affirmed at the end of “Ithaca” when he is referred to as “Everyman or Noman” (727). It is apparent that Bloom struggles with his identity, and Joyce makes this literal by having him take on another persona, that of Henry Flower, which he
constantly refers to in order to assuage his guilt. Bloom is able to dismiss his actions by becoming this other person; he makes a conscious effort to emphasize that “Henry wrote” those letters, not Leopold Bloom (J. Joyce 280). In describing the country’s political unrest, Stanislaus articulates, “In Ireland, a country which has seen revolutions in every generation, there is properly speaking no national tradition. Nothing is stable in the country; nothing is stable in the minds of the people” (S. Joyce 185). Ireland, a country of so much chaos and turmoil, struggles with its sense of identity; therefore, Joyce makes Bloom a figure of ambiguity and uncertainty, implying that he is a product of his environment. By giving Bloom a Jewish background, though, Joyce makes him even more complex and socially alienated.

There is no denying that the Blooms’ marriage is strained, but through their reminiscing it is apparent that they were once happy. Bloom thinks, “I was happier then…Twentyeight I was. She twentythree when we left Lombard street west something changed. Could never like it again after Rudy” (J. Joyce 168). It has been 11 years since Molly and Bloom have been intimate, revealing their sexual crisis and the deepness of their emotional wounds. It is evident that they both have greatly suffered with the loss of Rudy and that, instead of bringing them closer together, this tragic event has created tension and stress in their marriage. Although Molly is not heard until her monologue at the very end, Bloom is constantly thinking of her throughout his journey. Bloom, in contrast with Molly, is extremely sensitive and has a good understanding of women. Joyce emphasizes his sentimentality and his androgyny by associating him with flowers. The pen name, Henry Flower, created for his clandestine letters to Martha, also implies a delicacy and softness about Bloom. It seems that Joyce may have been familiar with the Turkish selam mentioned
earlier in this text since he strategically uses flowers as a means to conduct a secret love affair. In his essay “Androgyny and (near) Perfect Marriage: A Systems View of the Genders of Leopold and Molly Bloom,” Piotr Sadowski claims that “An interesting and important thing about the androgynous personality is that both the feminine and masculine traits underlying this type are toned down, so to speak, being equally removed from the two extreme gender poles” (144). Bloom seems to have the perfect balance of masculine and feminine traits, allowing him to be sensitive and sympathetic toward others, while at the same time remaining assertive in his beliefs and morals.

In “Lotus Eaters,” Joyce uses the language of flowers to indirectly communicate Bloom’s desires. Along with her sexually aggressive and direct letter, Martha includes a flattened yellow flower as a symbol of her passion and desire. The fact that the flower is flattened suggests a lack of sexual intimacy and fecundity—in this case, flatness implies a sense of disinterest or coldness. To be flat also signifies to be prostrate or recumbent, suggesting a sexual readiness and willingness. The language of flowers is clearly employed when Bloom reveals his interpretation of the letter:

Language of flowers. They like it because no-one can hear...Then, walking slowly forward, he read the letter again, murmuring here and there a word. Angry tulips with you darling manflower punish your cactus if you don’t please poor forgetmenot how I long violets to dear roses when we soon anemone meet all naughty nightstalk wife Martha’s perfume. (J. Joyce 78)

It is interesting how Bloom has strategically interposed these specific flowers in the letter. According to Seaton, tulips signify “declaration of love;” it is curious, though, that Joyce makes them angry tulips, implying that Martha may be angry that her feelings are not reciprocated (J. Joyce 197). The cactus signifies “feminine modesty,” which Martha seems to be lacking entirely (171). In addition, the cactus, because of its structure, and the
“manflower,” which also conjures the image of the phallus, both represent masculinity and virility. Violets are a symbol of “modesty” also, as well as “love,” while roses symbolize “beauty” (197, 190). And finally, anemones represent “abandonment” or “expectation,” which characterizes Martha’s unhappiness and her feelings of being forgotten by Bloom.

In “‘They Like it Because No-one Can Hear’: A Derridean Reading of Joyce’s Floral Language in ‘Lotus Eaters,’” Hsin-yu Hung considers the floral motif at the center of Bloom’s and Martha’s correspondence and invokes Derrida’s “postal principle” of *envois*. He explains how for Derrida, “the word *envois* – ‘to dispatch’ or ‘to send off’—describes the way senders express their desire under the stamp of the pleasure principle. Postality remains open in order to keep the desire in circulation, with the result that no letter ever truly arrives at its destination” (348). This Derridean reading reveals the correlation between the idea of the pleasure principle, which guides the letter-writing process, and the technique assigned to the chapter, narcissism. Hung believes that Bloom engages in this epistolary affair as “an act of dispersing his traumatic loss of love,” which seems an appropriate verdict considering Bloom’s sensitive nature (353). He seems to be crying out for any kind of attention and derives the most pleasure from receiving the letters, more so than being the sender. Bloom’s narcissism, along with his sadness and loneliness, is what ultimately guides his decision to continue this clandestine, unrealized love affair.

Hung also argues that “Though Joyce was hardly unusual in identifying flowers with women or erotic love, he is one of the few writers to condense the consecrated and the blasphemous in such floral imagery” (348). He goes on to explain how the chapter title, “Lotus Eaters,” aside from its Homeric reference, has both “divine and secular significations. To most Hindus and Buddhists, the lotus is the symbol of spiritual fulfillment, for it ‘rises out
of darkness to blossom in full sunlight’ and is uncontaminated by the grubby world below” (349). But, the lotus is also the “archetypal sexual organ or vulva, pledge of the continuity of birth and rebirth” (349). With this observation in mind, Joyce fuses religion with sexuality, two very intimate and valuable experiences of humanity which, for him, were utterly incompatible. In discussing the interposition of tulips in the letter, Hung acknowledges the flower’s signification of “declaration of love,” but also calls attention to how “the flower’s name...sounds like ‘two lips.’ Lips have a similar shape to ‘petals’...and are thus associated with ‘vulva.”’ He also suggests that tulips are associated with royalty, which implies “the possibility of arrogance and aloofness.” Hung also alludes to Martha’s “how I long violets to dear roses” and how it can be read as “how I long for your violation” (350). Hung’s interpretation certainly highlights Martha’s sexual aggressiveness while underscoring Bloom’s own perverse fantasies. The use of flowers allows Joyce to approach more sensitive subjects with tact, but I believe that he is also poking fun at the rigidity of Victorian customs and ideals. In fact, Martha’s letter becomes more explicit and erotic after Bloom’s interposition of the various flowers.

In the envelope, Bloom finds a pin which fastened the flower to the letter, and thinks about how women always have pins on them to hold articles of clothing together. And then he thinks, “No roses without thorns,” which is an interesting observation since women are being directly correlated with flowers (J. Joyce 78). As mentioned earlier, roses represent beauty, and it is clear that Joyce is insinuating that although a woman may have beauty, she may also be harmful and injurious. Just as Woolf associated her male characters with flowers, Joyce does the same. Not only does he assign his hero a name that is affiliated with flowers, but he also makes Bloom conscious of the connection between women and nature,
endowing him with a profound understanding of the cosmos and the universe. Bloom also
seems to have a significant revelation when he is in the bath at the end of “Lotus Eaters”:

He foresaw his pale body reclined in it at full, naked, in a womb of warmth, oiled
by scented melting soap, softly laved. He saw his trunk and limbs riprippled over
and sustained, buoyed lightly upward, lemonyellow: his navel, bud of flesh: and
saw the dark tangled curls of his bush floating, floating hair of the stream around
the limp father of thousands, a languid floating flower. (J. Joyce 86)

In this passage, there are many allusions to the stream and the cycle of life and nature. Here,
we see how philosophical and poetic Bloom is while also being crude. By describing the
bath as a womb in which he feels warm and safe, it is evident that Bloom values motherhood
and recognizes his origin. He refers to his navel as a “bud of flesh,” which not only alludes
to an unbloomed flower, but also to the origin of life and being born. It is also interesting
how he refers to his flaccid penis as a ‘languid floating flower,” again suggesting the close
relationship Bloom has with nature. Once again, as in his interpretation of Martha’s letter,
Bloom’s penis is referred to as a flower, feminizing his most masculine feature.

Throughout the day, Bloom is haunted by thoughts of Rudy, Molly, Paddy Dignam,
Mrs. Purefoy, and his epistolary affair with Martha. Although his affair with Martha never
materializes, Bloom still feels guilty, which is apparent when later in the day, he thinks,
“Henry. I never signed it” (J. Joyce 285). In thinking about Dignam’s death, Bloom
contemplates, “Your heart perhaps but what price the fellow in the six feet by two with his
toes to the daisies?....Broken heart. A pump after all, pumping thousands of gallons of blood
every day....Lots of them lying around here: lungs, hearts, livers. Old rusty pumps” (105).
Here, we are able to look into Bloom’s mind and see how he views the cycle of life. To push
daisies signifies to be dead and buried, but daisies also symbolize “innocence,” “patience,”
and “sadness” (Seaton 176). In thinking about the broken heart, Bloom tries to look at it
scientifically, instead of romanticizing the idea. He also alludes to the cyclical nature of life and the finality of death. Reminiscent of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Bloom thinks, “In the midst of death we are in life. Both ends meet” (108). It is clear that he understands how life comes full circle. In referring to the graves at the cemetery, Bloom calls them “flowers of sleep,” suggesting that the dead enrich the soil by serving as manure for new life to grow. The fact that Bloom associates death with flowers reveals his realistic and quasi-scientific outlook on life. His genuine and honest character sometimes makes him seem crude, but he is also extremely sympathetic and understanding of others.

When Bloom runs into Molly’s friend, Josie Breen, he notices, “See the eye that woman gave her, passing. Cruel. The unfair sex” (J. Joyce 158). His perceptiveness of something so brief and minute again reveals his understanding of the opposite sex. When Mrs. Breen tells him about Mina Purefoy’s long and painful labor, Bloom is at once extremely concerned and thinks about her for the rest of the day. It is evident that he comprehends women’s hardships and values their strength and their contributions to society. Bloom’s sensitivity is also apparent when Blazes Boylan’s name is brought up at Davy Byrne’s and “A warm shock of air heat of mustard hauched on Mr Bloom’s heart” (172-73). Although he knows that Molly is having an affair with this brutish man, he tries to push it out of his mind all day, refusing to meddle in her extramarital affairs. The refusal to meddle, though, does not imply a lack of love or concern on his part. In reminiscing about the time he made love to Molly on Howth Head, Bloom associates his feelings for her with flowers: “Flowers her eyes were, take me, willing eyes....High on Ben Howth rhododendrons a nannygoat walking surefooted, dropping currants. Screened under ferns she laughed warmfolded” (176). According to Seaton, rhododendrons signify “danger,” perhaps
foreshadowing Molly’s future betrayal (191). Ferns symbolize “discretion” or “secrecy,” accurately describing the plant’s role in concealing this moment of passionate love (176-77). In associating Molly with flowers, Bloom simultaneously reveals his close relationship with nature and his awareness of the affinity between women and nature. As seen in this romantic encounter between Molly and Bloom, plants serve to conceal sexuality as well. Later on, as Father Conmee is walking around Dublin, he sees that “A flushed young man came from a gap of a hedge and after him came a young woman with wild nodding daisies in her hand. The young man raised his cap abruptly: the young woman abruptly bent and with slow care detached from her light skirt a clinging twig” (224). The close affiliation between plants and sexuality suggests that the latter is something natural and normal, while it also emphasizes the purpose that the language of flowers serves. It is apparent that Joyce employs flowers and plants as tools for concealing, literally and figuratively, sexual desires and acts.

Bloom, because of his Jewish ancestry and the fact that he is more emotional and perceptive than the common Irishman, is considered an anomaly and an outcast by his fellow Dubliners. Bloom’s ethnic and religious background, along with his sensitive nature, also makes him an androgynous figure compared to the other males. After Lenehan and M’Coy sexually degrade Molly and make fun of Bloom’s cuckoldry, they acknowledge that there is something different about him. It is M’Coy who realizes that “He’s a cultured allroundman, Bloom is, he said seriously. He’s not one of your common or garden...you know...There’s a touch of the artist about old Bloom” (J. Joyce 235). According to Mahaffey, “Joyce endows Bloom with Odysseus’ more unconventional characteristics—his adaptability, his taste for disguise, and above all his capacity for survival—but he translates Odysseus’ bloody slaughter of the suitors into Bloom’s rational dismissal of his scruples in ‘Ithaca’” (156).
Despite Lenehan’s and M’Coy’s blatant disrespect toward Bloom, they still perceive that he is a rare and special breed of man. Except for when he is in the company of the other men, who are much harsher, Bloom seems to feel comfortable in his own skin. Sadowski articulates,

The gentle and agreeable manners of this man “of inherent delicacy” (Joyce 708), his warmth and sympathy for fellow humans and especially women, meet with little understanding with the often rough, tactless, prejudiced, and narrow-minded “patriarchs” of the colonized city, with their conventional ideas of what it means to be a man. (149-50)

The fact that Bloom, despite his rarity, is mocked and ridiculed proves Foucault’s and Butler’s ideas that those who cannot easily be categorized or understood are instead marginalized and isolated. While the common man is able to see that there is some depth to Bloom, they are incapable of fully understanding or appreciating it.

Bloom also spends some time contemplating women and their issues. He thinks to himself: “Besides they say if the flower withers she wears she’s a flirt. All are” (J. Joyce 369). Here, flowers embody what women are feeling or doing. Bloom, of course, looks at this rather cynically since he resents Molly’s promiscuousness and his cuckoldry. After his orgasmic moment with Gerty, he recognizes how “Still it was a kind of language between us,” suggesting that, just as the language of flowers, sexuality and desire are a silent communication between lovers (372). When Bloom visits Mrs. Purefoy at the hospital, it is apparent just how much he understands women: “he felt with wonder women’s woe in the travail that they have of motherhood” (386). It is clear that Bloom has a deep respect for women and for the pain they undergo in order to become mothers. In contemplating this pain, Bloom thinks of Molly and her miscarriage. He refers to Rudy, buried in lamb’s wool, as “the flower of the flock,” which reveals his desire to have a son (390). Bloom, out of
respect for what Mrs. Purefoy is going through, is later referred to as “the flower of quiet,” again associating flowers with an unspoken language. By being silent, Bloom communicates his acknowledgment of the gravity of the situation and his value for life and motherhood.

Joyce makes Bloom’s androgynous qualities literal in “Circe” during his hallucinations and mock trial. During this trial, a fictitious Dr. Dixon diagnoses him as “the new womanly man,” implying that Bloom’s androgyny is a sexual and mental oddity that should be examined by doctors (J. Joyce 493). As more people begin to confront Bloom, he gradually transforms and changes genders. Bella, because of her aggressiveness and masculinity, becomes Bello and emasculates Bloom who is now identified by feminine pronouns. According to Sadowski, at this point, “Bloom’s complete identification with the female body and the feminine condition at its most humiliating has a cathartic effect on him, becoming a turning-point in his relation to gender; after hitting the absolute bottom of degradation, he begins to recover and reassert his masculine side” (153). It is only after this transformation and the appearance of Blazes Boylan during his hallucination, that Bloom is able to come to terms with his jealousy about Molly and recover his dignity. At the end of “Ithaca,” Bloom imagines “Flowerville,” a sort of utopian world for himself, in which he is surrounded by beds of flowers (J. Joyce 714). Joyce again reveals Bloom’s close affiliation with nature, and more specifically, flowers, which tend to be associated with women. Bloom’s experiences throughout the day finally culminate in this imagined “Flowerville,” a place of sympathy and appreciation, surrounded by nature, where he finally feels at peace with himself and the world around him. Bloom is able to balance perfectly the feminine and masculine sides of his character, finally achieving a peaceful and harmonious equilibrium.
MOLLY BLOOM: THE ROSE OF CASTILLE

There is no denying that Joyce’s brilliant creation, the ambivalent and sexually aggressive Molly Bloom, is unique and thought-provoking, revealing the deep complexities of gender and raising important questions about the convoluted relationship between men and women. Just as Bloom is androgynous and associated with flowers, so is Molly who, albeit having masculine qualities, is surrounded by floral imagery. In *Joyce and Feminism*, Scott argues that Molly is “intensely female, a factor that makes her relevant to real women only if she is taken as a concentration of specific elements that, in any real woman, would be mixed with asexual and male identity elements” (162). Scott’s observation not only assigns her androgynous qualities, but it reveals how Molly is completely in touch with her sexuality and evades classifications. Sadowski also describes Molly as “womanly in her erotic appeal and voluptuousness, and yet manly in her sexual assertiveness, infidelity, and general dislike of domestic tasks” (148-49). The androgynous qualities that Joyce assigns Molly make her a parallel to Bloom, even though they are still very different. Molly is able to criticize sexually forward and tactless men, such as Blazes Boylan and Bartell d’Arcy, while still asserting her right to sexual freedom, making her an extremely complex character who is full of contradictions.

Molly is the ultimate symbol of freedom and independence. Because of this freedom, though, she runs the risk of being scorned by society, which she does not allow to restrain her in any way. Mahaffey articulates,

> Given the premium placed on physical strength in men, it is perhaps surprising that cultural prescriptions for women demand an erasure or concealment of the body and of sexual power. If male heroes should be strong and active, female heroes should be aesthetically pleasing and passive; moreover, they should be immature, the innocent cause and reward of man’s desire. (158)
According to Mahaffey, the ideal female hero is someone like Gerty, who uses her feminine wiles and strives for the image of perfection as prescribed by her culture. Mahaffey implies that Molly, then, is a sort of anti-Gerty, “not beautiful in the cosmetic sense, although she is powerfully attractive in the gravitational sense” (163). Therefore, if Gerty is the image of ideal femininity, Molly represents the masculine and aggressive side of women, the side that tends to be criticized and mocked. Molly is especially masculine in that she is unabashedly direct and anti-marriage. She even goes so far as to say, “I’d rather die 20 times over than marry another of their sex” (J. Joyce 744). She also addresses the notion that women lose value once their physical appearance diminishes: “as for being a woman as soon as you’re old they might as well throw you out in the bottom of the ash pit” (759). As Scott articulates, “Molly exposes the cultural bias against aging (especially females), which has been the subject of recent feminist attention, but she still clings precariously to the youth that the dominant society celebrates in the media, and preserves with potions like the lotion she uses” (Joyce 164). Molly’s ambivalence underscores the fact that she is full of contradictions, just as Bloom is, and that while she rejects societal norms for the most part, she is also susceptible to society’s influence. Despite this susceptibility, though, she still lives her life as she chooses, not allowing her culture or her marriage to prevent her from attaining what she desires.

While Bloom is extremely sensitive and understanding of women’s issues, thus feminizing him, Molly is portrayed as aggressively desirous and curious—she thinks about how she wants to shoot a gun and wishes she could make love like a man. Scott claims, “Molly’s sexual concentration has both a liberating force and a severely limiting quality, especially in the confines of her culture” (Joyce 168). Molly is extremely defiant of the
restrictions placed upon women and resents the fact that men “can pick and choose what they please a married woman or a fast widow or a girl for their different tastes…but were to be always chained up theyre not going to be chaining me up” (J. Joyce 777). Molly’s direct and candid statement reveals the double standard and how women at this time were viewed as disposable objects whose only purpose was to provide pleasure for men. Carol Shloss, in “Molly’s Resistance to the Union: Marriage and Colonialism in Dublin, 1904,” argues that “Ultimately Molly’s rambling thoughts and reflections raise a question that is central to all people to whom effective political self-definition is denied: what strategies of resistance can be used when the means of redressing perceived inequities are not immediately at hand?” (106). Shloss raises an important question here: Molly, in the only way she knows how, fights back against a society that wants to keep women deaf, dumb, and blind.

While Molly is an extremely progressive female figure, I believe Joyce was not celebrating her sexual freedom, but rather criticizing the culture that has controlled, objectified, and suppressed women to the point of creating a Molly Bloom who does everything in her power to defy the system. Mahaffey argues that “Joyce’s attack is on the unreality and counterproductiveness of ideals in general, as well as on specific, mutually exclusive ideals for men and women, in particular” (166). Joyce therefore defies and complicates gender classifications through the characters of Molly and Bloom. Shloss argues that Ireland’s status as a colonial nation “affected the institution of marriage within Ireland where questions of autonomy within partnership could also be at issue” (105). Molly’s thoughts and reflections reveal that she is resisting the inequities and injustices of society in the only way she knows how: through her sexuality. In fact, she reveals how women also have strong, lustful desires: “so long as to be in love or loved by somebody if the fellow you
want isn't there sometimes by the Lord God I was thinking would I go around by the quays there some dark evening where nobody'd know me and pick up a sailor off the sea that'd be hot on for it” (J. Joyce 777). Molly makes no apologies for her sexuality or her desires and yearns for lustful, intimate encounters, just as men stereotypically do. Shloss reveals that there is really no other way for Molly to assert herself in such an oppressive culture: “Molly would not have been allowed…to get a separation order; she would not have been given custody of Milly, had divorce been possible; she had no right to the money she earned by singing in concert, nor could she have invested money or held property in her own name” (113). With all of these restrictions and limitations placed on women at the time, it is no surprise that Molly is so willing to rebel against the institution of marriage.

It is also interesting that Joyce does not really focus on the fact that Molly is also a mother. In fact, this detail is easily forgotten since Molly is so focused on herself and her own desires. According to Sadowski, “Her maternal instincts...are largely underdeveloped, as she views her pubescent daughter, very much her own image, with womanly jealousy and even bitchiness rather than with tenderness” (156). But Molly’s character is not so cut-and-dried either; Scott argues that “Motherhood is an important, if subordinate, part of her identity. She is proud of her firstborn, Milly, and still deeply grieved over the loss of her baby son, Rudy” (Joyce 168). In fact, Molly only briefly acknowledges the vital role that mothers play, unlike Bloom, who spends a substantial part of his day contemplating this. Molly thinks to herself: “sure they wouldn’t be in the world at all only for us they don’t know what it is to be a woman and a mother how could they where would they all of them be if they hadn't all a mother to look after them what I never had” (J. Joyce 778). Molly, in a feminist stance, accuses men of not understanding or appreciating women the way they
should. At the end, though, she does recognize that Bloom is different from the other men. She acknowledges, “yes that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is” (782). It is in this moment that we really see just how highly Molly regards Bloom and how she accredits him a deep understanding of and appreciation for women. In *Joyce and Feminism*, Scott argues, “At times, Poldy represents the worst aspects of male tyranny and pride, but, on balancing things, Molly sees his unusual qualities and considers him superior to mankind in general, a judgment that has been expressed in feminist Joyce criticism” (177). Scott’s observations again point out how Bloom is a man who is full of contradictions and ambivalence, which humanizes him and makes him the image of “everyman.” The fact that Molly sees what Bloom is really like suggests that there is a hope for this emotionally and physically distant couple. Through their thoughts, though, it is apparent that they have a profound respect and admiration for one another.

Molly also contemplates the pain of childbearing, just as Bloom does earlier in the novel. She resents the fact that men cannot fully understand motherhood since they are unable to experience the actual physical process of giving birth. She thinks, “but if someone gave them a touch of it themselves theyd know what I went through with Milly” (J. Joyce 742). Molly also echoes Joyce’s own sentiments when she criticizes Mina Purefoy’s husband for “filling her up with a child or twins once a year as regular as the clock,” revealing her defiance of the Catholic notion of procreation as a duty of marriage (742). Molly does not think about Milly much, but she does resent her for sending Bloom a letter—Milly not sending *her* a letter of course hurts Molly’s feelings and makes her jealous, implying that maybe their mother-daughter relationship is also strained. The fact that she has no mother is important because, as mentioned earlier, a mother’s role is vital to a person’s
life; Molly not having a mother could explain the strained relationship with her daughter. Also, the fact that she was raised by her father could be a logical reason for her aggressive and masculine inclinations, falling in line with the social constructionists’ view that gender is learned.

There is abundant floral imagery that surrounds Molly throughout *Ulysses*, even when she is not physically present. In “Sirens,” she is identified as the “rose of Castille,” emphasizing her Spanish background and the fact that she, like Bloom, is a transplant (J. Joyce 256). When reminiscing about her youth and Gibraltar, Molly remembers telling Mulveys that she was engaged to the “son of a Spanish nobleman named Don Miguel de la Flora.” She acknowledges that there was truth in her joking and that “there is a flower that bloometh,” referring to Bloom. Her jest also coincides with her first sexual experience—Mulveys became so excited that “he crushed all the flowers on my bosom he brought me” (759). The fact that Mulveys crushed her flowers represents a deflowering, a violation of sorts. Even though Molly was a willing participant, the deflowering imagery signifies every young female’s first sexual encounter. Reminiscent of *Mrs. Dalloway*, flowers are present during some of the most sexually charged scenes, again emphasizing flowers’ connection with love and desire.

It is in the final pages of *Ulysses* that Molly is most identified with flowers. She thinks about how she would like her house completely adorned with flowers in case Bloom brings Stephen back. She contemplates wearing a white rose, which, according to Seaton, signifies “silence” (J. Joyce 192). The signification of the white rose is important since the language of flowers is based on a silent exchange. It is also interesting because Molly wears flowers in order to convey her sexuality and desires. Flowers as accessories are supposed to
be enticing, which is exactly what Molly wants to convey to Stephen. She, like Bloom, also recognizes the importance of nature and appreciates it in her own way: “I love flowers Id love to have the whole place swimming in roses” (781). According to Seaton, roses signify “ephemeral beauty,” which reveals the value that Molly places on the body and physical appearance (190). She specifically mentions primroses, which, in Seaton’s dictionary, signify “hope, first flower,” and violets, which symbolize “modesty” (188, 196). These significations could represent Molly’s hopes for the future. It is ironic, though, that violets represent “modesty” since Molly is anything but that. She, too, imagines a utopian, flower-filled world for herself, directly connecting her to Bloom.

Echoing Bloom, Molly reminisces of the day that he proposed to her on Howth Head. She is again associated with rhododendrons, which, as mentioned earlier, signify “danger.” She thinks about “the day we were lying among the rhododendrons on Howth head....the day I got him to propose to me yes first I gave him the bit of seedcake out of my mouth....after that long kiss I near lost my breath yes he said I was a flower of the mountain yes so we are all flowers all a womans body yes that was one true thing he said in his life” (J. Joyce 782).

The danger that rhododendrons symbolize suggests that love is dangerous since all lovers run the risk of having their hearts broken. It is apparent that flowers are very closely connected here with women, their bodies, and their sexuality. Sadowski claims, “Molly’s gesture of feeding her male partner with a seedcake can thus be interpreted as an androgynous act, whereby the woman inserts her seed in the man” (158). Sadowski’s interpretation of this scene highlights Molly’s aggressive and direct sexuality while emphasizing Bloom’s passivity. The fact that Bloom is associated with flowers again emphasizes his understanding of and appreciation for women and their desires.
By the end of the novel, Molly is completely surrounded by floral imagery. When she thinks about Gibraltar, she remembers it as a kind of “Flowerville,” again echoing Bloom: “the rosegardens and the jessamine and geraniums and cactuses and Gibraltar as a girl where I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used....and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another....and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower” (J. Joyce 783). All of the floral imagery surrounding Molly suggests that she, too, is close to nature and that she is only acting natural and being true to her desires. She has now become a flower and even capitalizes the word as if to affirm her identity. Sadowski articulates, “In the end, all Molly’s lovers, real and imagined, blend into one heightened erotic experience focusing on Bloom, a flower like her, as her mind is carried away by the love ecstasy of the two androgynous, passive-active lovers” (158). Since Molly’s monologue ends with her thinking of the night Bloom asked her to marry him, there seems to be hope for them in the future. This optimism is skewed, though, as soon as she says, “well as well him as another,” suggesting an emotional detachment. In saying that, Molly reveals her ambivalence toward marriage; she respects and admires Bloom, but she does not care much for what the institution of marriage stands for. Her attitude again reflects Joyce’s own view on marriage—he did not think it fair for marriage to be the price of sexual intimacy, and he believed that it limited the more genuine and open relationship that could potentially exist between men and women.

Joycean females, though not always central to the story, tend to have very strong personalities, definitely having an effect on the reader. The unique way in which Joyce portrays wives and mothers, specifically, reveals the dissatisfaction and resentment most
women probably felt due to being restricted to the confines of the household. In exploring the deplorable situations of women and the limitations placed on them, Joyce criticizes the male-dominant society that has kept them subjugated. Joyce, drawing from experiences in his own life, examines the inequities between men and women present in early twentieth-century Ireland and condemns the society and culture that has propagated these injustices and antiquated notions. According to Mahaffey, “Ulysses affirms ‘the fact of vital growth’...not artificial categories such as gender, a word with an ‘end’ in it” (168). Molly and Bloom do not allow their gender to guide their actions or govern their feelings and desires. Molly, especially, reveals the strong desire to escape from the realm of domesticity and to achieve a state of independence in which she is the author of her own life. Through his depiction of Molly, Joyce ultimately reveals that women are capable of being more than just wives and mothers and, in turn, attacks the system that tries to imprison them. According to Scott, “Molly’s ability to play so many roles, and to range in attitude from conventional matron to liberal feminist makes her a useful representative of the spectrum of female types” (Joyce 162). Just as Bloom represents “everyman,” Molly, because of her contradictions, ambivalence, and complex nature, comes to symbolize everywoman. She is the perfect image of the androgynist, constantly vacillating between femininity and masculinity. Joyce ends Ulysses with Molly’s affirmation of life, allowing her the last word and making her the image of autonomy, power, and the creator of her own destiny.
Early twentieth-century modernism, although rooted in history and past literary genres, attempted to change the course of literature in profound and ground-breaking ways. The concept of nature representing temptation and erotic love has its Biblical foundation, and it is not surprising that nature came to signify earthly pleasures, specifically sexual passion and desire. Because Christianity scorned the symbolic nature of flowers, it seems only natural that a secret language emerged. The language of flowers served as an appropriate medium for the Victorians, in which they were able to communicate their most intimate thoughts and feelings without explicitly stating these sentiments. Virginia Woolf and James Joyce explored the possibilities that the secret language of flowers opened up for them, and it is through the use of flowers that they were able to add more depth and meaning to the ideas of sexuality, identity, and desire. It is in the presence of flowers and through the use of floral language that each character’s “melancholia” is brought to light; all of the characters discussed in this text long for a lost love or a lost time in their lives, which can never be regained. Also, none of the characters ever achieve a normative performativity, suggesting that there is no established standard or norm when it comes to one’s identity and sexuality. Through their use of flowers, Woolf and Joyce raise valuable questions concerning gender identity and desire while implying that sexuality is natural and an inherent part of all living creatures.
What sets humans apart from animals, as many belief systems claim, is the soul. Foucault attributes a whole chapter in *The History of Sexuality* to examining the soul and its relation to the body. He argues, “For it is the soul that constantly risks carrying the body beyond its own mechanics and its elementary needs; it is the soul that prompts one to choose the times that are not suitable, to act in questionable circumstances, to contravene natural dispositions” (133). According to Foucault, passion, love, and desire lie within the soul, and if the body and soul are not in tune with one another, the latter can bring pain to the former, placing the individual in a precarious situation. However, Foucault does not argue that desire should be eliminated: “Nature herself placed it in all the animal species as a spur for exciting both sexes and for attracting them to one another” (134). His argument substantiates the idea that desire is natural and that the body and soul should maintain a healthy balance in order for the individual to lead a fulfilling life and remain true to themselves.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Peter intimates that Clarissa’s soul had died long ago. Clarissa has strategically annihilated her own soul, that is, suppressed her desires, to the point that she has lost sight of who she really is. With no soul, her passions and desires cannot carry her away; through eradicating her soul, she is able to maintain control over her own passions and life. Since her body and soul are not in accordance with one another, and because she is too concerned with propriety and appearances, she feels the need to suppress her desires in order to fit the mold of the perfect Victorian woman. However, the fact that she resents Peter calling her the “perfect hostess” reveals that she lives an unfulfilling life due to the rejection of her true identity. Clarissa, though, is extremely concerned with Septimus’s suicide and is able to empathize with him, admiring his courage to carry out his own death. While Clarissa represents the rejection of nature and natural inclinations, implying that she is unnatural,
Septimus has an extremely close bond with nature. Clarissa and Septimus are parallel characters since they are both surrounded by floral imagery and they both recognize the fleetingness of life. They are also both, in their own way, only a shell of a human being—Clarissa, because she has no soul, and Septimus, because of the psychological and physical effects of the war. Despite being surrounded by so much life, Clarissa and Septimus concern themselves with death, making it so that they are not really living.

Foucault’s theory of the soul and its relation to the body evokes Woolf’s feminism and her emphasis on the androgynous mind. Marder explains how “Her novels are a kind of record of this search for wholeness; each new experiment is an attempt to embody and express this elusive unity of being” (108). The fact that all of her characters have androgynous qualities affirms Marder’s claim that Woolf’s novels were an embodiment of the quest for this ideal. Woolf assigns Doris Kilman, Lady Bruton, and Elizabeth more masculine traits and has them reject and refuse flowers in order to reveal their reluctance to be the ideal Victorian woman. Richard, like Clarissa, has allowed his fears to stand in the way of what he wants. His fear has handicapped him to the point of being unable to communicate with his wife. He even fails in his attempt to communicate with flowers, using them as a kind of protective shield rather than as an expression of love. Clarissa, too, has allowed her fear of rejection to control her life, leaving her soulless and unable to reconcile her inner and outer worlds. Sally, because she is sexually liberated and has accepted her close affinity with flowers, is a parallel character to Joyce’s creation, Molly, while Peter and Septimus, because they are associated with flowers and have a good understanding of nature and women, are parallel to Bloom.
In discussing the “cycle of prohibition,” Foucault criticizes the society that renounces sex and forces people to exist in “darkness and secrecy.” He articulates how the law of prohibition demands one to “Renounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed; do not appear if you do not want to disappear” (84). Clarissa definitely fears the rejection of society and, therefore, rejects her own identity and desires. On the other hand, Septimus cannot hide the fact that he is different and sees the world for what it really is, which leads to figures of authority trying to kill his individuality and force him to lead a lobotomized life. In *Ulysses*, Bloom, because he cannot be categorized easily, is the perfect example of a social outcast. According to Marder, Woolf believed that “Joyce was aware...that life is composed of something more than externals; he was striving to capture the whole of experience, not just a part” (120). Woolf admired Joyce’s techniques and his ability as a writer to portray life as realistically and profoundly as possible. We can see Joyce’s intention of a genuine and complete portrayal of life through Bloom and Molly. They both are a kind of representative for mankind and their respective sexes.

Joyce depicts Bloom in an interesting way by choosing to assign him the less manly characteristics of his counterpart in the *Odyssey*. According to Mahaffey, “Joyce’s most sympathetic male characters see themselves, painfully, as fallible; their heroism grows not out of boundless confidence in the rightness of physical might, but out of what might be called the moral courage to imagine freshly the perspectives of people they have wronged” (157). Bloom faces his past mistakes and guilt head-on in “Circe” when he is confronted by a number of people, especially women with whom he may have been inappropriate or too forward. The fact that he has to confront these past incidents signifies that although he has made mistakes, he sees the error of his ways. Bloom’s respect for and admiration of women,
though, is never really at question. It is apparent throughout the novel that, although he likes to admire a woman’s curves in public, he has a profound appreciation for and understanding of the female figure. Bloom’s androgynous qualities are also made physical in “Circe” when he undergoes a symbolic sex-change, suggesting that he now truly and physically understands what it is to be a woman.

Through his portrayal of Molly, Joyce mainly criticizes the society that has created her. According to Shloss, “what remains in *Ulysses* is evidence of the double alienation that history has generally bestowed upon women under colonial rule, where gender has established yet another mode of dispossession from the political and cultural arena” (112). It is evident that Molly uses her sexuality in order to rebel against the restrictions placed upon her by society. Molly also embodies the image of the androgynist—while she is sexually alluring, she is also very aggressive and masculine. Being attuned to these two sides, the feminine and masculine, Molly is a symbol of independence and sexual liberation. According to Scott, *Ulysses* reorders “a male-centered, rational world, and make[s] a female ‘other’ an immediate, insistent presence” (*Joyce* 183). In contrast to Baudelaire, who associated flowers and the world in general with evil, Mahaffey argues that “Joyce sees woman as powerful; where he differs radically from the culture at large is that he does not brand female sexual power as evil” (166). Joyce allows Molly to speak for herself and not only gives her the last word, but acknowledges, in all of his works, the power, the beauty, and the travails of women.

Woolf and Joyce have not only innovatively employed flowers in their texts, but they have also brought to light issues of sexuality, identity, desire, what it means to be a man or a woman, and the complex relationship that exists between both sexes. These issues are still
relevant today, exposing the delicate and ambiguous nature of gender identity and sexuality. In addressing issues of identity, Butler argues that “the ‘coherence’ and ‘continuity’ of ‘the person’ are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility” (23). Woolf and Joyce, in creating characters who defy categorization and who reject societal norms, affirm Butler’s theory that gender is not stable and that identity is influenced by one’s environment. *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Ulysses* both challenge the gendered norms and defy the reductive process of classifying sexualities and identities. Ultimately, it is through the use of flowers, because they are a part of nature, that Woolf and Joyce are able to affirm that sexuality is natural and that people should act according to their inherent desires, which will then lead to a harmonious life of fulfillment, self-acceptance, and peace.
WORKS CITED


