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**DOWN THE STREAM:
THE EVOLUTION OF QUEER STREAM-OF-CONSCIOUSNESS NOVELS THROUGH
THE WORKS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF AND ALI SMITH**

Master of Fine Arts

Department of English Literature

Turner Nat Byrd

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to understand the evolution of the stream-of-consciousness genre as it applies to, is written by, or centers queer people. Through generous Marxist-feminist readings of the works of Virginia Woolf and Ali Smith—used in this project as exemplars of the genre—it attempts to understand the differences within both the formal and philosophical/political outlook of the two authors. Specifically looking at Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* and Smith’s *Hotel World*, *The Accidental*, and *Girl Meets Boy*, this project posits that Smith, intentionally or not, has effectively re-written the basic narratives and re-visited the same themes as Woolf, but with different philosophical/political outlooks and forms. Additionally, it posits that within the stream-of-consciousness genre form and philosophy/politic inform one another in counterintuitive ways and, furthermore, that the genre is uniquely capable of speaking to how members of the queer proletariat might understand themselves both as people and as political agents.

Dedicated to...

William “Wahoo” Scruggs, who talked me through every thought, no matter how misguided

Scott Parent, who always answered

Andreea Popa and John Nolan, who told me to write

Terri Byrd, who reads every manuscript and still believes

And to Paul Byrd, who loves me and taught me to read

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Introduction

Standpoint and Connotation

This project started five years ago when I was hungover one Saturday morning in Atlanta, GA. I was sitting with my roommate Andreea—the night before we had been drinking with a group of our core friends and I had put on her bikini¹ before we had all snuck into our apartment complex's pool after-hours—drinking Irish coffees (if I remember correctly) and talking about books. Our friendship had started similarly our freshman year of college when we sat at the same table during lunch and kept making sexual innuendos and literary references that no one else cared for or thought funny. And here we were again, significantly older and, despite what our current situation might imply, basically having gotten our shit together. She was a manager at a dental office and I was about to become the head of the HR department at an engineering firm. We were still writing and creating art in our spare time, but otherwise we were simply happy to have enough money to live, eat, and enjoy some basic luxuries. She asked me what I was reading at the moment and I began to speak about Ali Smith's first novel *Like*. I had recently read the section of the book where the second section's protagonist, Ash, burns her best friend's (and unrequited love interest, Amy's), books and dissertation in an effort to hurt her (304). I talked for over an hour and a half, with her prompting occasional questions, about Smith and Woolf's connections, the way that stream-of-consciousness techniques worked in their

¹ I wasn't even thinking that they/them pronouns might apply to me yet. Sometimes you really should be able to see things you're completely oblivious to.

novels, and essentially outlined a very primitive version of this project's proposed argument: that the political, philosophical, and ethical underpinnings of these two writer's novels were evident not only in their narrative arcs, but within the formal prosaic decisions used to portray those narratives; down to the sentence structures they used.

Andreea made the point that I should probably write a paper or something to get these observations down and I quickly realized that I would need time, funding, and academic support in order to do the project justice. In the time since a lot has changed: not just within my understanding of myself and my politics, but within this project's scope and understandings. Originally, I wanted to talk about not just Woolf and Smith, but also about Joyce and McEwan and potentially other authors writing stream-of-consciousness fiction I hadn't yet discovered. Additionally (and frankly incorrectly), my original proposition was that Smith's novels fit more comfortably within the standard narrative of Modernist/Post-Modernist discussions in that her work was much more pessimistic than Woolf's, with *Girl Meets Boy* functioning as a delusional, if euphoric, fantasy needed to keep our morale up as the reality of our depressingly doomed fight against the heteropatriarchy² trudged on in the face of global fascism's rising tide. All was lost, a fascist was in the White House, Marine Le Pen had almost won an election in France, and while fighting the evil of neofascism was important, it was ultimately hopeless and doomed and my understandings of the stream-of-consciousness genre and of its philosophical development were filtered through this perceived reality. So while the core understanding of my ideas have roughly remained intact throughout the half-decade it has taken to get here, make it through graduate course study, and write this mammoth—which I originally thought would be a single 50 page

² Please notice that the word "capitalist" is missing from the initial version of these ideas. While far from an economic conservative, I was a self-proclaimed "Left-wing Keynesian" not yet ready to confront the exploitative and abusive nature of capitalism's existence.

paper (with the original scope mind you)—much has changed in the scope, theory, and philosophy of this project.

Stream-of-Consciousness Literature

As a young, angry, suicidally depressed, and socially ill-adapted child of two ordained ministers, stream-of-consciousness literature has always spoken to me in a unique way. From the first lines of Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, I felt uniquely seen and enraptured by what is inherently expressed through the formal decision to portray the human consciousness as it occurs: that the interior life, struggles, and experiences of a person are just as meaningful and important as the external or material ones³. This fascination was infinitely heightened when I first read *Mrs. Dalloway* in college. Finally, being introduced to Ali Smith through *Hotel World* cemented my adoration for the genre and caused me to question what had changed within this type of novel and why I felt that it was so capable of, or invested in, examining and portraying the experiences of the marginalized. Which brings us to the first major complication for this project: that of defining what stream-of-consciousness literature is and how it functions.

There is a trouble with defining the “Stream-Of-Consciousness Novel” in that it is really two things at once, a cyborg literary term that is both a collection of stylistic/formal techniques as well a genre of fiction that deals with a specific issue. This is evident even in the critical work that best explains the specific type of Modernist-invented novel, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* by Robert Humphrey. While Humphrey pointedly and enthusiastically states that the “stream-of-consciousness novel is identified most quickly by its subject matter” (Humphrey 2), that being the consciousness of the human mind, his second chapter moves directly to

³ map that onto gender dysphoria.

speaking of the specific formal techniques used in this type of novel to express its specific subject matter. This seemingly dissonant understanding of what stream-of-consciousness is directly relates to the pop understanding of what it means within literature; ask anyone what a stream-of-consciousness novel is and they will instinctively revert to speaking about formal techniques or functions. So, despite the fact that Humphrey's book/research is over 60 years old, this definitional dissonance is pervasive and fairly unique; as such, for our purposes we need to have two seemingly independent working definitions for the type of novel discussed heretofore: a formal/stylistic definition and a genre definition. While acknowledging that both of the following definitions are useful in that one encompasses the other—much in the same way that a square is technically a rectangle, but a rectangle is not necessarily a square—dealing with the actualities of this dichotomy between style and form does create problems. For a more thematically appropriate literary analogy, we may compare these interlocking definitions of stream-of-consciousness to the way that Lukács' definition of a Historical Novel operates. For Lukács, whose research and philosophical reasonings will play a not insignificant role in this project, a historical novel was not simply a novel that used the “purely external choice of theme and costume” (*Historical Novel* 19) from a different time, but a novel that showed “how important historical changes affect everyday life, [and] the effect of material and psychological changes upon people who react immediately and violently to them” (*Historical Novel* 49). Here again we see how a larger genre as it is acknowledged within the popular mind does not truly encompass that which scholars might consider to be truly what defines that genre. Stream-of-consciousness fictions function in a similar manner as people will refer to their own stream-of-consciousness, or to the stream-of-consciousness of a character, but will rarely, if ever, grasp that

the existence of the genre's formal/stylistic tools, or their "purely external choices" of techniques, in a novel does not itself mean that a novel fits within the genre.

In order to mitigate the confusion that might arise due to this dissonance, below are the two separate working definitions of stream-of-consciousness that will be used in throughout this project:

1) Stream-of-consciousness (form/style) - A set of four formal techniques used in writing to express the inner workings of a character's mind. These techniques are individually Direct Interior Monologue, Indirect Interior Monologue, Soliloquy, and Description by Omniscient Author⁴, with the latter two often supporting the primary use of the former two. While both Soliloquy and Description by Omniscient Author are used in ways that are not always consistent with the formal stream-of-consciousness techniques, their usage within the context of the stream-of-consciousness form is unique in that they are used to convey the immediate consciousness of whichever character is the subject at the time: though these occasionally include the consciousness of inanimate objects, such as the Ramsays' beach house in the "Time Passes" Chapter of *Two the Lighthouse*.

2) Stream-of-consciousness (Genre) - The genre of the stream-of-consciousness novel is a novel that primarily uses the techniques listed above but one that also focuses on *how* consciousness functions. While there are often other themes within such novels, the cognitive process of the human mind must take a large thematic role within the novel.

These disparate definitions are vitally important for the understanding of this project because it will consistently refer to the stream-of-consciousness of a character—referring to the

⁴ These techniques are pulled directly from *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* by Robert Humphrey, specifically chapter 2 "The Techniques".

formal techniques used to portray the consciousnesses depicted there-in—while also focusing on and discussing the evolution of the stream-of-consciousness novel’s evolution and how that reflects changes in philosophy and politics for marginalized people, particularly the queer proletariat.

Why Virginia Woolf and Ali Smith?

I have opaquely alluded to the fact that the subject of stream-of-consciousness literature being primarily a focus of the more critical and formally enthusiastic analytical perspectives of traditional modernist scholars. In fact, when reading criticism about Smith and other contemporary authors who contribute to the genre presently, it is exceptionally rare to see these novels referred to as “stream-of-consciousness” works⁵. I believe that Dr. Adam Guy from the University of Oxford provides a cogent and articulate diagnosis for this predicament in his article “Who cares about the stream of consciousness? On Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*”:

Questions of categorization and value often end up defining discussion of the stream of consciousness in relation to the modernist novel. The stream of consciousness is often seen as evidence of the modernist novel's innovations. But once recognized, such evidence is rarely conveyed in value-neutral terms. The stream of consciousness can confer critical value on a novel because of its relation to modernism: a novel is either stream of consciousness ergo modernist ergo good, or stream of consciousness ergo modernist ergo bad. Though Lawrence's reception history took a different path, Woolf's as much as Richardson's novels have routinely been read along such lines in the past hundred years. The problem with this routine process of evaluation is that it leaves the

⁵ In fact, when looking through recent literary criticism I could only find four or five articles describing contemporary novels or writers using the term.

stream of consciousness as a vanishing mediator between an individual text and a broader conception of modernism as such. Therefore, perhaps intermediary terms are needed in critical writing on narrative representations of the stream of consciousness in order to hold off the leap to literary-critical and literary-historical abstraction. (Guy)

This description of how the categorization and focus on technique and its quality within the larger study of modernist literature perhaps explains the lack of substantial criticism on the genre's continuation use within contemporary literature. Furthermore, it might give some credence to the idea that when formal analysis of contemporary stream-of-consciousness literature is given there is a reluctance to assign the experimental form to a category that has been consistently used as a means of evaluating "value" rather than analyzing how its use affects the narrative or its philosophical/political utility or purpose. This project, in many ways, seeks to reject this prevailing assumption in an attempt to understand how formal decisions in literature can affect or reveal the different ways that queer and marginalized characters have understood their place as political beings within the larger fictional world and thereby better understand how we, as queer people, might understand ourselves within the actual world. I fundamentally believe that there is power in this type of formal understanding because, as the political video essayist Shaun points out when discussing trans inclusive narratives in Terry Pratchett's fictions, prosaic decisions can reveal what a narrative leaves open to interpretation:

At the start of the conversation Jackrum is still referred to in the conversation as 'he'... [but] as he tells his story... Jackrum follows the pattern of the other characters and becomes a 'she' in the narration.... There's no legal reason for Jackrum that he would need to pretend to be a man anymore.... Other than because he wants to do it.... As Jackrum is considering this idea an interesting thing happens; Jackrum's pronouns change back.... In pitching the idea to keep living as a man, Polly frames it for Jackrum as a bit of cheeky deception.... Whether she actually

believes this... is up to the reader here, **but the narration knows the truth**. Jackrum isn't a woman pretending to be a man at this point. He's just a man. (Shaun 14:32-16:34) [bolding by me].

Therefore, I posit that if we accept that the personal is political, that the history of queer political perspectives is important and useful to our current movement, that formal prosaic decisions can be illuminating to the political/philosophical arguments within a fiction, and that stream-of-consciousness novels are particularly well suited to formal experimentation and the examination of a character's internal life; then analysis of the genre's development from an expressly queer feminist perspective becomes useful.

Woolf and Smith's works are particularly useful in this endeavor not only because of a similarity in their surface level biological profiles⁶, but because of the similarities of narrative and thematic plot structures and the fact that Smith seems incredibly reflective of the Modernist authors she is indebted and responding to. This relationship between the two is most obvious when looking at the four novels discussed in the first two chapters of this work. Both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Hotel World* focus on a series of characters walking around London through a series of vignettes where, while some of the characters have very clear connections to each other, others are only tangentially connected and those tangential connections are dwelt upon through the themes of the book. Additionally, both novels' primary protagonist's (arguably) are queer women whose romantic connections are never fulfilled and for whom a "plummet" is a central concern. *To the Lighthouse* and *The Accidental* are both war novels told through the perspective of a dysfunctional heteronormative nuclear family that falls apart through the interjection of a

⁶ Both are lesbian/queer writers from the UK who were widely read and critically praised during their lives. [Though Ali Smith's extreme Scottishness does provide some distance between them geographically].

spectral figure into the domestic space. The destroyed family unit then attempts to find a new, less abusive, status quo through a queer reconstruction without the presence of its matriarch. Furthermore, the connection between the two is also highlighted by how often Smith is compared to Woolf in reviews of, and critical responses to, her work⁷. These similarities work together to make an examination of their works' formal and narrative structures a particularly fertile place to examine the progression of queer stream-of-consciousness' political/philosophical perspectives and ideologies.

Generous Readings: Critical Lenses and Perspectives

Amongst my greatest disappointments upon re-entering the halls of the academy is the nearly ubiquitous hyper-critical skepticism that writing, ideas, and their authors are treated with. Rather than a community of peers ecstatically discussing the values held within bound pages and the lessons capable of being learned within them, I have largely found people who claim to be adherents to communitarian ideology driven by exorbitant ego and a capitalist environment to critique and deride any flaw within a work of criticism or fiction read through only the most pessimistic and poor-faith perspective possible. Even amongst colleagues I admire and generally agree with, the echos of this type of competitive engagement with the written word or literary discussion continue to make its presence known. This is not universal, particularly within queer spaces, communal conversation and trust are capable of being found within academia; they are simply less prominent. In hope of deviating from what I view as an insidious and

⁷ “a more direct influence upon Smith’s style has been the work of Virginia Woolf” (Ranger 46); “Since Virginia Woolf... there has not been another writer who can make a little do so much” (Warner ix); “Smith’s work reflects a Modernist sensibility, particularly in its concern for formal consciousness and experiment... Smith has also recognized the influence of... Virginia Woolf... on her work” (Germanà and Horton 5); etc... (this list could go on for quite a long time)

counterproductive method of engaging with art and community, this project will seek to draw from different philosophical models to create a generous approach modernist criticism. This generous approach will define itself by seeking to read good will from any given text and draw valuable and useful perspectives from all sources found within; hopefully, creating space for a truly productive and joyful conversation around well loved literature that is capable of helping to enable a queer proletariat revolution.

This perspective relies upon the foundational works of the Marxist-feminist literary and cultural critics that have come before me. Namely, I will be using philosophical and political ideas gained from the works of Donna Haraway, Heather Love, and George Lukács in order to lead me throughout this endeavor. From Haraway, I will be borrowing specifically from her works “A Cyborg Manifesto” and *Staying with the Trouble*, namely her notions of irony being “about humor and serious play” (Cyborg 5), a lack of fear around “contradictory standpoints” (Cyborg 15), “generative joy” (*Staying* 31), and staying with the trouble. These points remind me of the value of looking for connections with odd pairings as well as my unflinching belief that *joy* is hope in action and that the only way to combat the nihilistic, apocalyptic policies and conclusions of a racist, misogynist, capitalist society is to approach knowledge creation with an eye to problem solving and with a goal of yoking our humanity to those most oppressed by such machinations. When looking towards this project, Haraway’s ability to pull from all manner of visions, disciplines, and stories affects the way that this work seeks to be not just a theoretical work confined to literary criticism, but a political work that might be helpful to those of us who enter into the world through stories and words.

From Love, this project will gain an understanding of queer history and the way that a history of oppression affects our ability to “dream a better life for queer people” (3). Specifically,

Love's book *Feeling Backward* offers many questions and ideas that are useful to the framework of this project. The book focuses on how historical queer narratives embrace feelings of “nostalgia, regret, shame, despair, resentment, passivity, escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism, and loneliness” which are “hard” to apply to “any recognizable political praxis” (4). Additionally, it offers a warning about how we can be “ruined by” (9) clinging to the past while also advocating the necessity of dealing with the complex histories and legacies of queer stories that embrace or cling to “backward” feelings. As this project deals explicitly with the lineage of a specific genre of queer fiction, these ideas are very present and useful frameworks with which to think through the political/philosophical transformations that happen between these two writers.

From Lukács this project gets its notion of a politically useful form of literature as well as the philosophical/critical support for the notion that “what appear to be purely formal, compositional problems...so obviously conceal ideological and political problems of the highest importance” (*Historical Novel* 332). Furthermore, Lukács insistence on thinking about literature and politics through a solid Marxist political foundation without ascribing ill intention to differing, but sympathetic, political movements—insisting on their usefulness while criticizing their conclusions—has a great philosophical impact on the outlook of this project. Between these guiding critical and philosophical presences, I attempt through these following pages to present something joyfully troublesome that presents the formal experimentations of the stream-of-consciousness novel and the narrative choices it expresses as having changed in ways that ironically flip the formal emphasis from the collective to the individual while changing from an individualist philosophical and political perspective to a communal one.

The Chapters

In the first chapter, “Generous Dissonance and Wanderings: Characters, Consciousness, and Politics in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Hotel World*,” I investigate the inner workings of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Hotel World*, focusing on the ways that the different characters’ consciousnesses in these works are presented organizationally and the different ways that the use of direct interior monologue and indirect interior monologue are utilized by Woolf and Smith. I argue explicitly that there is a dissonance between the styles utilized by the individual novels and the political philosophy that they advocate for. Additionally, I begin the process of analyzing the way that the capitalist heteropatriarchy functions and is depicted within each author’s individual works and plant the seed for how suicidal ideation and depression within queer consciousness is handled, emphasized, and dealt with by these authors as well as how alienation impacts these themes.

In the second chapter, “Queer Kin, Impersonal Intimate Devastation, and War: *The Accidental* and *To the Lighthouse*,” I dive deeply into the ways that domestic sexual violence contributes to each of these works and how formal experimentation within these novels accentuates different ways that this abuse functions psychologically for characters. This being the longest chapter within the piece, the focus becomes much broader while continuing to stress the ways that heteropatriarchal capitalism functions in the narratives. For instance, I work to show how the sexual and gendered violence depicted in these novels is linked narratively to nation-state violence and imperialism. Furthermore, I address the way that queer spectrality helps to disrupt the deteriorative nature of the patriarchal family unit: formally and narratively. Finally, I focus in on the different optimisms within each of these works, how they function in a generous, historically minded, reading of these texts and how a queer reconstruction of the

individual family unit within each novel supports the political, philosophical, and formal perspectives posited in the first chapter.

Finally, in the third chapter, “Love, Joy, and the Queer Proletariat Revolution: *Girl Meets Boy* as an argument for the political nature of queer art and life,” I argue that Smith’s novel actively uses form as a way of responding to her feminist and experimental literary predecessors while explicitly calling for queer anti-capitalist political action. Within this final chapter I also discuss the ways that Smith’s response to Woolf within *Girl Meets Boy* emphasizes the continuous themes found in both author’s works and remarks upon the difference active political repercussions of queer stories broadly and the inherent power of releasing queer joy and love into the wider world.

Chapter 1

Generous Dissonance and Wanderings: Characters, consciousness, and politics in *Mrs.*

Dalloway and Hotel World

Both Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Smith's *Hotel World* center their narratives around a fall, or rather a "plunge," towards death. *Mrs. Dalloway* follows several protagonists—most notably Septimus Smith, Peter Walsh, and the titular Clarissa Dalloway—as they go about their lives around Hyde Park on a single day that ends with Mrs. Dalloway's dinner party. During the course of the novel Septimus struggles with insanity and ultimately commits suicide, Peter deals with his lack of success in love and ideology, and Clarissa struggles with the decisions she's made in the past and her own mental health. Meanwhile, *Hotel World* follows five⁸ women through their experiences around the Global Hotel in the wake of Sara Wilby's death: "the story of Sara's unfortunate fall catalyses the remaining four narratives, each echoing her plummeting out of language" (O'Donnell 92). In *Mrs. Dalloway* the critical plunge is taken by Septimus Smith, who, plagued with shell-shock, desperately and purposefully leaps to his death in order to escape the physicians/psychologists who are (disastrously) attempting to treat him. In *Hotel World*, this plunge towards death is taken accidentally by the teenager Sara Wilby, who climbs into a service elevator, essentially on a dare, and falls for "less than four seconds" (*HW* 221)

⁸ I'm counting Sara Wilby's ghost as a woman here.

down the shaft after the wires malfunction and break. These plunges are critically important to the narratives of their respective novels, the politics they engage with, their understandings of consciousness, and Smith's placement of her own work within the lineage of the stream-of-consciousness novel.

This lineage between Woolf and Smith — one that Smith is clearly aware of both within the novels discussed here and within her other works, particularly her more academic projects— is marked by dissonance much in the same way that *Mrs. Dalloway* is marked by the dissonance of the chimes of Big Ben and the other unspecified clock that tolls some “two minutes after” it (*Mrs. Dalloway* 93). This dissonance between and within the novels, and perhaps throughout their works as a whole, comes in two specific varieties that are irrevocably interlinked: the dissonances of political/philosophical outlook and formal experimentation. I seek to prove that these seeming paradoxes can give us insight into the lineage of the queer stream-of-consciousness novel, from its early forms to its current existence within the modern novel. By looking closely and generously at two novels, we can find a connection between formal choices within these novels and the ways that our own political/philosophical outlooks affect how we view the marginalized, particularly the queer proletariat, within society.

Within Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, the essential philosophical outlook is that there is no way for marginalized people to “fit within the world,” in that, while they are largely accepted or tolerated by the social order, it does not care for them and there is seemingly no way for them to find consequential communal purpose within it, much less exist as their fullest selves. Furthermore, the characters can take no meaningful political action and their successes are almost always individual and internal. When systemic structures are brought up in *Mrs. Dalloway* they have a minuscule effect on the narrative because, though they have negative

impact, they are essentially unchangeable. Conversely, in *Hotel World* the social systems that oppress the marginalized underclasses are obviously prominent and vicious, but consequently they are much more vulnerable and the individuals within them are shown as being capable of enacting change by engaging meaningfully with community. While the dissonance between these two philosophies is self-evident, there is a compounding dissonance in how they are formally expressed. Both authors work, for Smith almost exclusively, within the stream-of-consciousness genre with its inherent call for formal experimentation. However, the manner in which form and style functions to present their narratives is strange when examined closely. While Smith is formally more experimental in her writing, the speaker of her monologues is rarely, if ever, in question. For instance, while Else's speech within her own mind is composed of nearly incomprehensible consonants—"Sht, Else says out loud. The girl's gone. She spits the catarrh she's been holding on her tongue out beyond the lining of her coat" (*Hotel World* 55)—and while Sara's ghost is literally losing her ability to comprehend language—"Seeing fires. Seeing grass. Seeing birds. Their wings. Their beady . . . The things they see with. The things we see with, two of them, stuck in a face above a nose. The word's gone. I had it a moment ago" (*Hotel World* 8)—, neither of these dramatic formal experimentations ever confuse the reader as to whose mind they are currently perceiving. Contrast this with Woolf's version of formal experimentation where the grammar is nearly perfect, following the strictest formal rules, but the character whose mind is being occupied is often the best guess of the reader, if not wholly indecipherable. This dissonance between experimentation and comprehension is easily seen within the technical choice displayed through the types of monologues and narrators the authors use to deliver their narratives. Woolf primarily uses an omniscient third person narrator with an indirect interior monologue to enter into the consciousness of her characters, giving directly the

names of whose mind is being translated: “But Lucrezia Warren Smith was saying to herself, It’s wicked; why should I suffer? She was asking, as she walked down the broad path” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 49). Meanwhile, Smith much more frequently uses a first person narrator with a direct interior monologue to portray her narrative: meaning that the reader is given hints as to whose monologue is being portrayed either through narrative clues, diegetic character choices, or careful use of the indirect interior monologue. For instance, we never learn Sara’s name throughout the entirety of her chapter, rather we only learn the name of the first chapter’s “speaker” through its use by other characters in other chapters. While both types of monologue are essential tools in creating a stream-of-consciousness novel, and both authors utilize each, that each author’s primary monologue and narrator type contradicts the intuitive comprehension of the narrative for the reader is an interestingly dissonant mark in looking at the legacy created between these two authors. One that directly correlates to the dissonance created in the philosophical/political outlooks portrayed in their narratives.

Looking first at the way that Woolf uses the indirect interior monologue in order to both create the sense of experiencing the consciousness of a single individual and then confusion by abandoning it within *Mrs. Dalloway*, it is possible to see the way that the technique is used to a counterintuitive effect. The manner that the indirect interior monologue typically functions within the narrative form is clear from the opening lines of the novel:

Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.

For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer’s men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning — fresh as if issued to children on a beach.

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 3).

Here, at the beginning of the novel (one of the first major experiments with the stream-of-consciousness style/genre) we see how effective the indirect interior monologue is at portraying the individual consciousness clearly to the reader. The clarity of whose stream-of-consciousness is being transcribed for the reader is obvious due to the omniscient third person narrator giving the name of the protagonist twice within the first three paragraphs and declarative verbs tensed to give ownership of the consciousness conveyed to Clarissa: “thought Clarissa,” “seemed to her,” “which she could hear now,” and “she had burst through the windows” (3). All of these verbs perform essentially two functions, the first to adjust the reader to the fact that we are primarily experiencing Clarissa’s thoughts as the means of moving the narrative — the actions that she takes are given both after her thoughts are given but also in the past tense as if they are literally an afterthought for the movement of the novel — as well as providing a feeling of distance between Clarissa and the physical world. Note how the sound of squeaky hinges brings about Clarissa’s memory of opening the French windows at Bourton is depicted to the reader; they are a sound “which she could hear now” (3). The use of the determinative “which” giving literal space between the protagonist and the physical events around her, the indefinite nature of “could” presenting the possibility that Clarissa (despite her ability to hear) might not allow herself to hear the hinges, as well as its previously mentioned nature as a past tense verb, all serve to create distance between the material world and the actors who live, and think, within it; signaling to the reader that Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway might not actually fit within the world she inhabits, while the prose is still being incredibly clear as to who is in fact thinking.

However, we can see how Woolf uses the indirect interior monologue within *Mrs. Dalloway* to ironically make the knowledge of whose consciousness is being transcribed more difficult to comprehend when looking at a passage just a few pages later, describing the aftermath of an important dignitary driving by a crowded street. Here the perspective or consciousness being portrayed via the indirect omniscient narrator passes from Lucrezia Smith to Septimus Smith and finally to Clarissa Dalloway, but there are two primarily confusing moments during these transitions when the owner of the consciousness is at best unclear:

...Only last autumn she [Lucrezia] and Septimus had stood on the Embankment wrapped in the same cloak and, Septimus reading a paper instead of talking, she had snatched it from him and laughed in the old man's face who saw them! But failure one conceals. She must take him away into some park.

'Now we will cross,' she said.

She had a right to his arm, though it was without feeling. He would give her, who was so simple, so impulsive, only twenty-four, without friends in England, who had left Italy for his sake, a piece of bone.

The motor car with its blinds drawn and an air of inscrutable reserve proceeded towards Piccadilly, still gazed at, still ruffling the faces on both sides of the street with the same dark breath of veneration whether for Queen, Prince, or Prime Minister nobody knew. The face itself had been seen only once by three people for a few seconds. Even the sex was now in dispute. But there could be no doubt that greatness was seated within; greatness was passing, hidden, down Bond Street, removed only by a hand's-breadth from ordinary people who might now, for the first and last time, be within speaking distance of the majesty of England, of the enduring symbol of the state which will be known to curious antiquaries, sifting the ruins of time, when London is a grass-grown path and all those hurrying along the pavement this Wednesday morning are but

bones with a few wedding rings mixed up in their dust and the gold stoppings of innumerable decayed teeth. The face in the motor car will then be known.

It is probably the Queen, thought Mrs. Dalloway, coming out of Mulberry's with her flowers; the Queen. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 12-13).

Throughout this section we are given the stream-of-consciousness of at least three separate characters and there are two paragraphs here where the speaker is, at least initially, unclear. The first of these happens during the transition between Lucrezia and Septimus' cognitive processes: the paragraph beginning "She had a right to his arm" (12). This paragraph is disorienting due to the fact that the pronoun "she" had been used in the preceding paragraph to indicate the omniscient narrator's conveyance of Lucrezia's internal monologue, where in this paragraph it comes first as a seemingly intentional misleading introduction to Septimus' interior monologue about his wife and his duties towards her. This confusion carries into the following long paragraph about the nature of time and death within the context of the British monarchy. This paragraph seems to have no direct character's consciousness that it is tied to. While we might posit that the paragraph is Septimus' stream-of-consciousness, we cannot say for certain due to the lack of any clear noun or pronoun connecting the monologue to one of the three characters whose consciousness is currently in circulation through the section, rather the section seems to most readily adhere to some form of collective consciousness. As such, we can posit that the passage is simply description given to us via the narrator or even the thoughts of Mrs. Dalloway herself. Thus the confusion of the passage serves dual purposes in that it connects the thought processes of Clarissa and Septimus, our two plunging protagonists, making their mirrored connection concrete early in the novel as well as disorienting the reader in the same way that all three characters are currently disoriented by the dissonant cacophony within their own consciousnesses and within the street: Pawlowski notes in their "Introduction" that Clarissa

and Septimus 'connection within the novel is purposeful and that "Woolf supports this notion of [their] interdependency" (XIII).

This transitional move of creating uncertainty of the point-of-view consciousness within transition points between them is a common move that Woolf makes with her stream-of-consciousness literature and it is a technique that highlights the dissonant logic that leads both her and Ali Smith to choose different primary modes of interior monologue throughout their literature. The fact that all of the characters are named and that their actions are given frequent possessive pronouns throughout the narrative should, in theory, make the novel easier to follow than one in which the actions of the protagonist are given fewer possessive descriptors, but instead, the omniscient third person narrator of the text gives Woolf's novel the ability to obscure and confuse its characters both from the society they are placed within and from people who read their narrative. In effect, the style/technique, as it is used by Woolf, seems to imply some sort of collective consciousness; a dissonant idea within a novel so heavily concerned with the belief that only individual visions can be revelatory in a harsh and careless world.

By contrast, Ali Smith's extensive use of the direct interior monologue is highly experimental, but easily followed. Take for instance the way that Smith lets the reader know of Clare's relationship to Sara in the penultimate section of the novel: "& she hadn't told anyone in case it didn't happen because she said it might jinx it I haven't told anybody I haven't told a soul sub that means substitute imagine Sara my sister Sara Wilby might have been a sub for a national team that is fucking amazing" (*Hotel World* 186). Ignoring the more overtly experimental moves of the ampersand and the lack of any punctuation relating to sentence structure within the monologue, we can see that the relationship is clearly defined by and within the stream-of-consciousness of the character giving the monologue. Despite the relatively subtle nature of the

characterization of the speaker as Sara's sister, the audience is never as confused as they are when experiencing the intentionally tricky "she" on page 12 of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Even when Smith does make use of the indirect interior monologue, it is surrounded by an approach that accentuates the feeling of following a direct interior monologue: "After this she would cross out the word nice, and write above it the word sick.... That's what she would do.... In a minute. How many minutes were there in an hour? That's something she used to know, to just know.... How many hours in a day, and weeks in a year?..." (*Hotel World* 81). In this passage from the beginning of Lise's monologue, we are given several third person pronouns in relation to the actions that Lise is going to take. However, due to the context within the passage, that of figuring out how to deal with the healthcare bureaucracy while being debilitatingly ill, there is a feeling that this technically indirect interior monologue is in fact a direct interior monologue in that the third person pronoun usage in the monologue seems to be an unconscious effect of the bureaucracy's ability to depersonalize the lived experience of the people it is supposed to care for.

While Woolf seems largely disillusioned with the idea that political activism has the ability to change lives—even for those who engage within explicit political action or for people to live up to their own ideals—she embraces the idea that people are capable of embracing their vision in spite of their own inability to fit into the world. At the end of *Mrs. Dalloway*, as with *To the Lighthouse*, every character has failed to live up to their potential⁹, either professionally or

⁹ At the end of *Mrs. Dalloway* Septimus is dead (having "flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs Filmer's area railings" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 108)), Reza is grieving (due to her husband killing himself), Richard has failed to obtain a cabinet position ("Yet, there was Richard Dalloway not in the Cabinet. He hadn't been a success" (136)), Sally has married a man and is raising a collection of the next generation's capitalist owners (with "five sons!" (136) and being married to a "miner's son" who had earned "every penny they had" (138)), Peter is a divorced

personally, and any meaning that they are able to exact from life comes from the internal ability to find ecstasy within minor moments. It is fitting that flowers are the most powerful symbol within Woolf's novel; they are inherently temporal things of beauty, doomed to be swallowed up quickly by the unforgiving weight of a largely meaningless world.

The optimism found within *Mrs. Dalloway* is powerful and revelatory, but it is through the outlook and acceptance of individuals as the way of the world is unchangeable, bleak, and ultimately debilitating. Clarissa's outlook on life, related to us via Peter, seems to describe this perspective:

As we are a doomed race, chained to a sinking ship... as the whole thing is a bad joke, let us, at any rate, do our part; mitigate the sufferings of our fellow-prisoners...; decorate the dungeons with flowers and air-cushions; be as decent as we possibly can. Those ruffians, the Gods, shan't have it all their own way — her notion being that the Gods, who never lost a chance of hurting, thwarting and spoiling human lives, were seriously put out if, all the same, you behaved like a lady. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 58)

In short, while the machinations of the world within Woolf's literature disallow her characters from obtaining a meaningful place within it—and her characters find hope within life in direct contradiction to that larger systemic world failure—those systems are rarely, if ever, explicitly called into question, just as readers are not called to examine harshly the machinations of those systems because they are largely unchangeable or unworthy of focus: “conversion so far the

romantic who searches hopelessly for a position within a Tory government that he will never acquire (“[Peter Walsh] had come back, battered, unsuccessful, to their secure shores. But to help him, they reflected, was impossible; there was some flaw in his character.... [Hugh] might write to the heads of Government offices about ‘my old friend, Peter Walsh’, and son. But it wouldn't lead to anything” (79)), and Clarissa narrowly escapes Septimus' fate of suicide, is married to to an ineffectual politician, and achieves purpose only through temporary marks of entertainment or joy.

norm that even Sally succumbs, and Septimus's death a silent testimony that leaves even the fictional world unchanged—while the actual world grinds on toward the revenge tragedy for which Versailles set the stage, horrendously enacting Hitler's 1922 vow" (Froula 125).

So, while an observant reader might be meant to see Richard and Hugh's work within a Tory government to be actively detrimental to the lives of people within the British Empire and the larger world¹⁰, those ills are not brought into sharp focus. This effect, where observant readers are privy to many of the minor ways in which the Tory government is terrorizing the country and the world without the novel explicitly commenting on the political issues of the time, happens in a couple of ways. The first is by experiencing the novel primarily through the minds of characters like Peter Walsh and Clarissa Dalloway, who admire and glamorize the days when members of the old friend group were "radical[s]" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 112) reading socialist literature—like William "Morris" and Percy "Shelly" (25)—together, it is rare that those political ideals are brought sharply into view. The second is by giving us negative interpersonal perspectives on more conservative characters. For instance, after Richard comes home for lunch to attempt to tell Clarissa that he loves her with a bouquet of roses we experience the following exchange at the end of the meal:

'Some Committee?' She asked, as he opened the door.

'Armenians,' he said; or perhaps it was 'Albanians.'

¹⁰ Emre makes extensive notes on the political situation that *Mrs. Dalloway* is set in noting that "Lady Burton [Hugh and Richard's aristocratic connection who helps them strategize towards conservative means] is bracing herself for the rise of the first Labour government in Jan 1924" (146). She continues her commentary on the novel's implied politics by noting that Bradshaw's politics (and therefore Richards as shown through their conversation at the party) of Proportion and Conversion stand for "individual and national wealth greedily generated through institutionalization..., eugenics..., censorship..., imperialism..., vanity..., and misogyny" but that the novel "does not use [its] art of proportion to oppose everything" that it those politics represents" (136).

And there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect, thought Clarissa, watching him open the door; for one would not part with it oneself, or take it, against his will, from one's husband, without losing one's independence, one's self-respect — something, after all, priceless.

He returned with a pillow and a quilt.

'An hour's complete rest after luncheon,' he said. And he went.

How like him! He would go on saying 'An hour's complete rest after luncheon' to the end of time, because a doctor had ordered it once. It was like him to take what doctors said literally; part of his adorable, divine simplicity..." (*Mrs. Dalloway* 88).

In this exchange we are given a combination of three negative traits that Richard Dalloway brings into the novel, his politics, his inability to express his emotions, and his compliance with doctors¹¹. While there is a humanizing aspect in Richard's attempts to show his wife is feelings via flowers and his inability to express his love in clear words, it should be noted that the reference to bed-rest and psychological doctors—who have already been shown as a crushingly oppressive force within the novel in the scenes with Septimus—comes directly after the mention of Tory foreign policy, which the footnote in the 1996 Wordsworth Classics edition explains is a reference to the Armenian Genocide and the country's subsequent absorption into the USSR (145). Emre documents the complexity of this situation, in the novel and in history, in *The Annotated Mrs. Dalloway*. First she notes that "Clarissa's confusion over the Armenians and the Albanians is a more naive and ethically reprehensible version of Woolf's own inability to imagine genocide" (156), a confusion which emphasizes the lack of care that is held for the colonized both within the bourgeois cast of characters in the narrative and the lack of care for

¹¹ We can make the inference with fairly complete certainty that the doctor referred to in this passage is Dr. Bradshaw.

that the author had for them as well. However, Emre continues by noting that, as the totality of the genocide's effects became clear "the plight of the Armenians was frequently discussed by parliamentary committees dealing with the 'Near East,' though little was done to intervene or help resettle the Armenians" (156). While this lack of action is similar to the actions of present day superpowers in the face of horrifying human rights conditions, the context does give us some understanding as to the harm wrought by Richard Dalloway and his politics; his ambivalence and inability to actually express meaningful care is endemic and corrosive. So, while readers might not know exactly what the foreign policy of the time was, it is telling that the political actions of Richard are combined with his failures as a husband, even if he is well intentioned in both.

Looking closely at the scene where these structural issues are brought into clearest view, during a conversation between Richard and Dr. Bradshaw about Septimus' death and the effect it should have on legislation, we can observe how even when broad structures are brought into the narrative they are given very personal consequences rather than societal ones: "They were talking about this Bill. Some case Sir William was mentioning, lowering his voice. It had its bearing upon what he was saying about the deferred effects of shell shock. There must be some provision in the Bill" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 133). This quotation comes from Clarissa's perspective and directly precedes the passage where Clarissa internalizes Septimus' suicide and considers jumping to her own death, however briefly: "a reader could surmise that Clarissa may be contemplating suicide herself; Woolf later revealed that Mrs. Dalloway was originally meant to die that night" (Henry 33). That moment, Clarissa's consideration of a purposeful plunge towards death in the wake of a similar decision by a perfect stranger is, I would argue, the climax (if *Mrs. Dalloway* could be said to have one) of the novel's narrative:

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? / Then (she had felt it only this morning) there was the terror.... / Somehow it was her disaster - her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress.... / She pulled the blind now. The clock began striking. The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on, There! the old lady had put out her light! the whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 134-5)

Here, with the dissonance of the bells, the novel's formal structure of time literally imposing itself into the passage and consciousness of the novel's central protagonist and titular character, we receive an acknowledgement of Clarissa and Septimus' mirrored connection as well as a chance for a second, and perhaps even greater, tragedy and not even a page after the most politically prescient passage within in the novel—politically prescient in that it combines the main political issue of the novel (how the mentally unwell are treated within society) with the clear weight of how events of the narrative affect them. Even as we are attempting to give a generous and politically minded reading to this novel, we must acknowledge that this emotionally, formally, and thematically dense scene greatly overwhelms the political commentary given in the one directly preceding it: as Smith notes in *Artful*, “Does sequence mean that things mean? Sequence will always be most of the word consequence” (21). While the political devastation being wrought by Richard and Sir William in the room next to Clarissa might be important, as readers we are seemingly meant to focus instead on Clarissa's internal life

and the purpose that she and her friends manage to find within one another's company: even if they are incapable of saying "I love you" with anything other than flowers.

Conversely, in Ali Smith's works, systemic issues are consistently brought to bear *as systemic issues*. The evil that is encountered within her works (other than death, and even sometimes that) nearly always has some systemic source that is brought to direct focus in her fiction. But, despite the distinct prevalence that these larger-than-life societal issues take in her fiction, Smith's characters always have at least the opportunity to challenge the systems involved or to find a place for their own personhood within the wholly detrimental system of the capitalist heteropatriarchy. In *Hotel World*, Lise is able to subvert the wills of the capitalist system she works for by putting a homeless woman (Else) up for the night (even if she ends up flooding the room and leaving), Penny writes a check to Else and commits to writing her story (though she goes back on this commitment and cancels the check as soon as she returns to the bourgeois super structure¹² of the hotel she is meant to be reviewing), and Clare Wilby subverts the capitalist understanding of life by throwing money down the shaft (*Hotel World* 146) her sister fatally fell down to count the seconds that it took for Sara to fall—"listen Sara... you were fast you were really really fast I know because I went there to see tonight I was there & you were so fast I still can't believe how fast you were less than four seconds just under four three & a bit that's all you took I know I counted for you" (*Hotel World* 221)—in order to understand the same joy that Sara's ghost finds in their experience of the plunge.

¹² This is the main conceit of the novel. The physical structure of the "Global Hotel" is a metaphor for the philosophical understanding of the superstructure of global patriarchal capitalism. As Mary Horgan puts it, "The Global, then... is a physical manifestation of late capitalist society, an example of postmodern hyperspace" (157).

Of these three characters, Clare Wilby's arc and rebellion against the systemic issues that hurt, spoil, or otherwise thwart human lives is the most pronounced. Notably, it is within Clare's monologue that the connection between the formal and philosophical dissonances between the two novels comes into sharpest focus. As usual, Smith's experimentation with the formal elements within her novels is much more pronounced than Woolf's, but Clare's chapter is unique in how it uses a single direct interior monologue as a way to display not only how a young teenager (relatively uncorrupted by the machinations of capitalism) thinks, but how connected things can be without the corrupting influence of capital. Integral to the way that the form influences the politics of this monologue is Smith's continual use of the "&" (*Hotel World* 185) to show the way that Clare connects all of her experiences, in fact the chapter/monologue begins with the symbol: "& since the main thing is I counted I was there" (*Hotel World* 185). While the exact scene where we learn that Clare was throwing money down the lift-shaft comes from Penny's chapter—"Now she was throwing coins in, one by one, dropping coins out of her hand. Money fell into the dark, inaudible" (*Hotel World* 146)—Clare's monologue consistently reminds readers of the fact that she has little to no need for the capitalist system of value.

For instance the beginning of the chapter's third paragraph tells us of "the five pound note," the breakfast that "was really good," and "the most fucking amazing new shoes" (*Hotel World* 185), which we learn later are given to her by Lise and along with the coworker who witnessed Sara's plunge. Important to the anticapitalist nature of Clare's monologue is the fact that these things are given to her in a way that represents their caring for, or settling unfinished business with, Sara: the fiver was what Sara had bet her coworker (Duncan) that she could "get into the lift" (204). While these gifts being material, and in fact partly capital itself, they do not endorse the "reduction, under capitalism, of all human relationships and identities to monetary

exchange” (Horgan 159). Rather, when giving the fiver to Clare, Duncan is attempting a form of communal care that does not go unnoticed by her as she “permanently removes it from circulation and inserts it into an alternative economy of remembrance and intimacy, altering its meaning and transforming it from currency into talisman, or totem” (Horgan 160). So, while these materials matter and have the ability to help Clare in material ways, they are not important because of those material impacts, they are important because of the way they show a community of care that echoes Clare’s continued caring for Sara’s memory. This is echoed in the thoughts that she has about the classmate who wants her to sell her mother’s medication: “I told him to fuck off he said if it’s a good dosage I’d get a good price on it fuck off fucking wanker” (*Hotel World* 194). The profanity given in the monologue emphasizes both the individual nature of the direct interior monologue, but also the rejection of the capitalist market that the Hotel and Penny’s preceding chapter revolve around. Clare dumps money into the dark abyss and values material only when it allows her to connect with either her community or Sara’s memory. While Clare’s individual consciousness is centered in the formal techniques of Smith’s chosen genre, the communal is consistently coming sharply into focus in order to philosophically counter the capitalist logic that allows the hotel (and the world at a large) to function in such a clearly unjust and exploitative way. The telling dissonance between the formal and the philosophical moves made within Clare’s chapter are echoed in its title “future in the past.” While clearly a reference to the fact that Clare is finding a way into her own future by finding closure for Sara’s ghost and her own grief, it also seems a clear reference to a version of Lukács’ notion of why the historical novel is important and how history has the ability to sweep people up into its larger movements: “how important historical changes affect everyday life, the effect of material and psychological changes upon people who react immediately and violently to them, without understanding their

causes” (*Historical Novel* 49). Heteropatriarchal capitalism’s failure to provide an infrastructure where her queer sister can exist leads Clare to an act of anti-capitalist protest, literally forcing capital itself to serve her sister’s memory by making the same fall she did, displaying a violent reaction to the psychological harm imposed on her and her sister through historically based class conflict. In *Artful* Smith makes an argument for the novel being fixed by its chronological confinements¹³. With Clare’s monologue the future, past, and present all collide in shockingly beautiful waves of sound that seem to beg being read aloud; with the individual and the community simultaneously connected through the perspective of a young woman struggling with time, capital, and community in the face of her grief.

The most obvious critical rebuttals for the argument that *Hotel World* displays characters who are capable of affecting their own social world come in the forms of Sara Wilby and Else because, while their individual existences create the inciting incidents for the other characters within the novel, they seem to have little agency within the world at large. But, while Sara is a dead queer teenager whose ghost is literally losing capacity for language, her ghost is elated by her brief memory of experiencing life, even potently forcing the reader to imagine her own fall to death as her diving into water that makes room for her body: “Imagine diving into water, water breaking round your shoulders to make room for you in it” (*Hotel World* 9). The profundity of imagining the literal plunge towards death as the world itself making room for the soul in the same way that the water in a pool makes room for a diving body is echoed in Sara’s sister

¹³ “And the novel is bound to be linear, even if it’s a rearranged BS Johnson work—even when it seems to or attempts to deny linearity. Even Woolf, who knew the novel form differently, being one of the few people successful in remaking it (interestingly enough via a great deal of initial help from the critical eye and advice of her friend and rival, the short story writer Mansfield), depends on chronology. The wanderings in time of Mrs. Dalloway have to be held in the matrix of a single day. The flow of time and change in *The Waves* must still be held in a fundamentally consequential chronology between birth, death and birth in nine gestative sections” (*Artful* 31).

Clare's metaphorically anti-capitalist response to her grief. This symbolic action seems to create a loop of meaning where people are able to understand how others are able to fit into the world even after their death purely by following their passion or being elated by their own experiences. Clare acts out her grief by honoring her sister in the most meaningful way that she can imagine, by caring for the things that her sister had cared about and counting how long the fall that Sara made by accident took. Notable in this context is even though Sara Wilby's ghost is literally leaving the world is that she had a place within it and rather than being temporarily impactful to the people who knew her best—as is the case for the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*—her life and death have ripple effects that set off nearly all the events within the novel. In the final chapter we are even given a clear sense that Sara's queerness would have had a place in the world had she lived, and that even that potential romance has had beautiful and lasting positive effects: "It's embarrassing now, when she thinks about it, and when she does she can feel small wings moving against the inside of her chest, or something in there anyway, turning, tightened, working" (*Hotel World* 235). Important here is that Sara's crush and admirer helps her family fix watches and that they meet because Sara brought her watch into the shop: "It is a really nice watch... and it's keeping good time since it mended.... Look it's keeping good time, she is planning to say. And listen, no charge. It's on me" (234-6). This bit of time-keeping seems to re-enforce a reading of *Hotel World* as a direct response to *Mrs. Dalloway*; the lives of the characters here aren't controlled by the structure they walk around or even the movement of time. Instead the specter of a proletariat queer romance revives time itself and cancels out any payment that such a service should have cost under capitalist reason. Sara is dead and will never come back to this earth, but the effects of her life still linger in time and within her community and no amount of capital is capable of sully that hope or joy. Sara's plummet never causes someone else to consider

flinging themselves from a window or an elevator shaft, there is no dissonance between bells, here time on earth is shown to have been all too short, but worthwhile, beautiful, impactful, and, importantly, well suited to her community even in a broken heteropatriarchal capitalist society.

The second major issue for my argument is Else, or Elspeth Freeman, the homeless woman who begs outside of Hotel World. Even though her character is used as one of the primary, if not the primary, narrative tools for bringing the failures of the capitalist patriarchy within into perspective, she is still seen as having both agency and an ability to impact the lives of others. This ability is seen most potently in her interactions with Penny, who is given the opportunity to be transformed by her interaction with Else, but actively rejects such a transformation for her own comfort. Notably while from Else's perspective, her speech is nearly unintelligible, "(Spr sm chn?)" (*Hotel World* 35), when we hear Else speak from Penny's perspective she is almost completely coherent—"There *is* a drug element, the woman said. Everyone takes them. Everyone on the street takes stuff, we all do" (*Hotel World* 170)—making interesting and pointed observations about her own situation and the status of others in society. Penny, the most selfish and detestable named character in the novel, is so affected by her interaction with Else that she temporarily is moved help her monetarily. Though Penny ends up cancelling the check she had given to Else—"By the time she was back at the hotel Penny had become anxious about having written a cheque for so much" (*Hotel World* 174)—, the agency and impact that Else has on her, as well as the logic that Else presents, shows that she is not inherently fated to live life on the margins, it is literally money that keeps her in the marginalized situation that she is in. So, while the systemic forces of the world constantly attempt to bring the characters of Smith's novels to heel, those same characters are given, at the very least, the opportunity to affect the broader world if not actually find a place within it.

Which brings us to why these two novels are linked within this chapter: both deal with the flurry of individuals working within and around a larger societal structure. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, that structure is the great clock at the top of Big Ben and in *Hotel World* it is the Global Hotel itself; a metaphor for a structure that encompasses the whole of the world. In the next chapter, where *To the Lighthouse* and *The Accidental* are examined, both authors will speak more directly to community, specifically family, and the way that the nuclear family as an institution functions within the larger societal structure, but in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Hotel World* Smith and Woolf both focus primarily on the individual's responses to living within the oppressive systems that they interact with. The dissonance between their formal techniques and the philosophical/political perspectives that they represent engage directly with the ways that individuals adapt to and think about their place with the larger social order. Which brings us back to the problem of the plunge towards death and how language affects the way the individual is thought of in the two books. Notably, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus takes the plunge to his own death intentionally, just as Clarissa actively refuses the plunge towards death in the climax of the novel, but in *Hotel World*, Sara falls accidentally. While her ghost is elated in having lived even for a moment—much in the same way that Peter ends up filled with “extraordinary excitement” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 141) in the presence of Clarissa—the fact that her death is directly caused by a failure in the structural integrity of the building that she works in forces us to look deeper into the philosophical implications within both the language and plot of Smith's reworking of a stream-of-consciousness novel focused on individual characters.

It would be easy to say that Smith intentionally refusing to have a gay character commit or even contemplate suicide is a political commentary on the nature of an unabashedly queer life being worth living; that it is the capitalist heteropatriarchy's literal structural failings that cause

the deaths of queer teens the world over. This is a fair reading, and one that I think is correct, but we must remember that a stream-of-consciousness novel is not simply about the use of formal techniques, but a combination of those with a thematic centrality of how consciousness functions. The plunge in these novels is central both to how the formal techniques function within them and how that form speaks to diametrically opposing views of how consciousness functions within the lives of individuals moving about in modern society. It is important here that Septimus' and Clarissa's suicidal inclinations are obscured. Septimus' plunge feels sudden to the reader and Clarissa's contemplation of such an act is so opaque as to be easily missed by a reader not looking for it¹⁴. The functionality of Woolf's indirect interior monologue in these instances, its ability to obfuscate and depersonalize the consciousness of her characters, reflects a firm belief that the consciousness of a person is largely instinctual and that while an individual might create a beautiful philosophy, their solutions and reactions to the understanding that they will never be able to permanently fit into their society results in the impulse towards an ultimate plunge. Smith's use of the direct interior monologue functions conversely, providing a unique voice to every character and maintaining that they largely have control over their own consciousness such that even in a plunge towards death, room can be made toward the specter of queer joy in that process. As Mark Currie describes Smith's formal experimentation in *Hotel*

¹⁴ There is an extended footnote that Dr. Merve Emre puts in this section after the words "Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that?" (Emre 226) that supports this argument. It follows: "Is Clarissa's reaction to Septimus's death sympathetic? Or is it an extension of snobbery? In his very moving reading of the novel's ending in *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur suggests that Clarissa's intuition of Septimus's motivation for his suicide joins three voices—hers, his, and the narrator's—in a single voice that judges and condemns English civilization in times of war and peace.... This voice places Clarissa 'on a crest between the two extremes' of temporal existence: life and death. Yet she redeems Septimus's death by continuing to live, instead of killing herself, as Woolf initially had planned for her to do" (226). Clearly, this notion of standing "on a crest between" emphasizes her own feelings of empathy towards Septimus and her own suicidal impulses.

World, “the graphic and grammatical forms of completion and incompleteness, make the physical marks of writing into a philosophical inquiry” (60). Haraway asserts that “cyborg politics are the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly” (*Cyborg* 57). It is on with foundational understanding, with the help of Currie’s more specific one, that I suggest that it is only when we piece together the formal readings with the plot driven readings that the full scope of the political/philosophical lineage of these two works is truly visible.

Thus, if we are speaking to the lineage of the queer stream-of-consciousness novel and how that genre treats the marginalized, we are faced here with contradiction and dissonance. However, it is important to note what Froula points out, that “Precisely because its characters defect, convert, fail of speech, die, lie, and ‘go under,’ *Mrs. Dalloway* carries the ‘fight’ to rebuild civilization on firmer ground into a future that is always becoming in. The wake of the work of art: the future of its readers” (126). This bleak form of optimism fits neatly into Heather Love’s understanding of queer progress in that there is a “need to resist damage and to affirm queer existence” (3). The bourgeois heteropatriarchy’s systematic oppression might not be challenged by these characters, but the queer coded women, Sally and Clarissa, do remain alive and existing within the narrative. In ironic dissonance, Smith’s work functions as a continuation of that fight. Formally, the style has inverted, the emphasis on truncated words and lists—symbols replacing the formally correct grammar of Woolf—has diluted the individual’s emphasis within the narrative; all characters are nearly nameless within their own consciousness, but their identity has become more distinguished. In Smith’s *Hotel World*, characters not only are differentiated by the subjects that they fixate on or the minute grammatical mannerisms that they project, but by the ways in which they think: symbols, abbreviations, lists, even the way that the

characters interpret their own speech can be individually attuned. Not only this but the larger societal super-structure is less linguistically apparent; no bells interject themselves into the narrative to signify a change or remark upon time passing in *Hotel World*, all of the characters simply exist within its presence. Dissonantly, these formal techniques allow for a political transformation within the genre: the queer and the poor have a place in the world, despite their abjectly depressing surroundings: with capitalism being portrayed as an actively harmful systemic structure. Much like in *Mrs. Dalloway*, few if any of the characters in *Hotel World* end up in an internal place where they are capable of being qualified as successful by the superstructure's definition. However, the lives lived under clearly more antagonistic forces creates a clear understanding that the people fighting against those forces, even if they are only doing so on small scales, have the ability to live their lives within some sort of communal hope that things can be changed for the better by individuals like themselves.

Chapter 2

Queer Kin, Impersonal Intimate Devastation, and War: *The Accidental* and *To the Lighthouse*

Whereas *Hotel World* and *Mrs. Dalloway* deal with individuals walking within and around broad societies, the characters in *The Accidental* and *To the Lighthouse* are defined primarily by their familial bonds. The formal techniques of these novels reinforce the narrative fact of this notion, with Woolf embracing the collective subconscious through an omniscient narrator in an even more drastic way than she does in *Mrs. Dalloway* and with Smith all but abandoning her use of the direct interior monologue in favor of an alienating indirect interior monologue. Here we have two narratives about the destruction of the nuclear family, surrounded by the specter of England's imperialist wars, that speak to how traditional notions of patriarchal leadership enable that destruction. With *The Accidental*, in perhaps a much more direct way than with *Hotel World*, Smith comments on and clearly uses Woolf's work as a basis to frame her socio-political commentary and formal stylistic choices. In both *To the Lighthouse* and *The Accidental*, the primary family uses a vacation house as a means to nominally escape their more hectic lives while the primary bread winner attempts to produce a work of genius (a job that they are clearly failing at), when an unexpected external force exploits the failings of the status quo and destroys both the physical home and the family's ability to continue on as both a unit and as

a structural force. Throughout this destruction a young, queer coded woman uses the power of observation to provide the ethical and artistic heart of the story. There are many, many, more plot similarities between the two novels, but importantly for this chapter, Smith appropriates the themes that *To the Lighthouse* engages with and makes what is subtext in Woolf's novel explicit. The professor/father having routine affairs with his students and the issues of questionable consent that exist just below the written words within *To the Lighthouse* are vividly and viscerally shown in *The Accidental*. While the philosophical/political stances of the novels are far apart, the general crux of the issues presented within the works and the societal norms viewed as problematic within them are largely the same. Despite all that is wrong within the family structures of the novels, both works end with some level of hope that they can be reconstructed into something better. Strangely, the notion of family ends up becoming a site for communal healing and change, a tiny microcosm of national community writ large where both rejecting and embracing such structures can be empowering. By creating more explicit understandings of Woolf's troubling subtexts and formally separating the characters—making the “collective” nominally harder to achieve while also making it possible to both point out and address the issues at stake—Smith creates a vision that emphasizes the need and difficulty of making internal change external and how the external change can create space for communal reconning and redemption: as Mitchell puts it, “*The Accidental* [is an] interestingly queer deconstruction of the post-9/11 family” (72). Meanwhile, Woolf uses an indirect interior monologue to portray a collective unconsciousness within *To the Lighthouse* that intrinsically connects all of the characters, but ultimately finds the separation between people to be largely too great to surpass, once again emphasizing the individual's creative/intellectual expression as the solution to a world gone mad. Both novels queer the family, but Smith calls for a more active queering of

what should be accepted and again, sees individual political action, particularly when done by queer characters, as being capable of creating lasting change

Ali Smith's *The Accidental* is a difficult novel to read and one that is uncomfortable to reckon with. The novel revolves around the Smart family as they spend a summer in a Norfolk vacation house, ostensibly to allow Eve (the matriarch) to "break from routine" (*The Accidental* 84) and work on the next book in her series. In tow with Eve are her two children from a previous marriage, Magnus and Astrid, and her husband Michael. Each member of the family is dealing with their own personal crisis that they cannot seem to communicate to each other when a stranger named Amber arrives and begins to stay with the family and disrupt the existing status quo. There are many reasons for the novel's difficulty, but the most obvious one is the sheer amount of sexual/gender violence that is perpetrated throughout the novel. In fact, it seems that Astrid is the only major character who is not either complicit in or actively guilty of sexualized violence. Michael Smart, step-father and stand in patriarch for the family, habitually and seemingly compulsively has sex with his students and with young women in general: a clear abuse of power that eventually leads, presumably, to a lawsuit—"the legal department's involved" (*The Accidental* 269)—and him being forced to take leave from his job as an English professor¹⁵. More terrifying still is the fact that he is depicted as a rapist to the reader, sleeping with a child that we are lead to believe is only 15 years old who works at a supermarket that Michael patronizes. Meanwhile, Eve is well aware of the fact that he sleeps with his students and

¹⁵ Notably though he is not fired. Michael's ending is complex and the novel's messaging on redemption is nuanced. As such, while Michael faces consequences for his actions, they are mild. Smith's novel, perpetually reminding its reader of the machinations of the capitalist heteropatriarchy, refuses to allow anything as cathartic as true repercussions for Michael's criminal behavior. Instead after being "warned" several times by his department head he is placed on "a stoppage of tenure and a half-pay" because they've "pull-out-all-the-stops" for him despite the "seven complaints" that have been filed against him (*The Accidental* 265).

does nothing to prevent his grotesque abuse of power. Magnus, the sensitive and mathematically minded teenage son, is guilty of creating a deep-fake pornographic image of one of his underage classmates and emailing the image to the rest of the school: a modern form of sexual violence so horrific in its effects that the classmate in question kills herself. Finally, Amber/Alhambra has sex with Magnus, a suicidally depressed 16-17 year old child, as a 30-something year old, and while age of consent might differ from country to country, the relationship intentionally blurs the lines between what is or isn't statutory rape. *The Accidental's* form both puts us into the minds of these characters as they perpetrate and are victim to these acts of sexual violence and seems to beg us to consider what we are or are not willing to forgive them for.

Furthermore, the formal techniques that Smith uses in *The Accidental* encourage this discomfort amongst her readers. As with *Hotel World* Smith's chapters are divided by which character's stream-of-consciousness the narrative follows. Unlike *Hotel World*, which relied heavily on the direct interior monologue, Smith employs an indirect interior monologue almost exclusively throughout the novel. As seen in the few instances of the indirect interior monologue present in *Hotel World*, Smith's use of the technique is strange in its ability to apparently distance the character from their own actions/thoughts. In *The Accidental*, this effect is exponentially magnified through its consistent use over the course of the novel. Take for instance part of Magnus' section in the "Beginning" chapter where he is dissociating and on the brink of attempting suicide:

He is so fucking monstrous. He can't stop. He has tried. Try harder, ha ha. It was hilarious. The way her head was on the neck. The way the breasts were angled. The way hardly anybody knew. But he knew. Now he is laughing again, stiff as hell. He is foul. He changed himself when he changed her. He snapped his own head off without even knowing it. It transplanted itself on to a body he doesn't know. If he looks in the mirror

he looks the same as before. But he isn't the same. It is a shock to see how like himself it looks. She saw herself changed too. She never knew who did it. It was him. He did it. Magnus is God. There is actually no God. There is only Magnus. Hologram Boy believed God probably existed. Hologram Boy saw God as more human than Human, moving among subhuman beings like the weekly celebrity among the Muppets on The Muppet Show. Hologram Boy was the form captain, He made the speech in Assembly on Remembrance Day for the dead soldiers in the world wars. It was Hologram Boy's job to lay the wreath, lead the squeaking prayers, lest we forget. But Hologram Boy was all forgetfulness. He was lucky. Hologram Boys brain was all blank light. There will be no forgetting now. There will be no forgetting ever again. The remembering is like the darkening. (*The Accidental* 40)

Here we see how sentence by sentence the structure of these short statements seem to make the omniscient narrator feel like Magnus' own thoughts, to the point that when Magnus begins referring to his past self as "Hologram Boy" it seems that there is no actual narrator and that we are in fact reading a direct interior monologue through the psyche of someone who is truly disconnected from themselves and their own actions.

However, the contents of this section of Magnus' interior monologue are key to the ways in which we can approach the ubiquitous sexualized violence that we find within the novel in a generous way. While his little sister Astrid, our queer-coded semi-innocent obsessed with documenting the human power of observation, is clearly meant to be the reader's respite from the horrors that weave throughout the novel, Magnus is special in that he is explicitly guilty of committing a sex crime, but the reader seems meant to empathize with and forgive him his astounding faults. At the beginning of the novel Magnus is a pro-war, imperialist, third way neoliberal misogynist who has committed a sex crime (something akin to what we would call

deep-fake revenge porn) in order to attempt to fit in with the popular patriarchal bullies in his school: “he had though it was well cool, to be part of it” (*The Accidental* 41). What sets him apart is the obvious remorse that his actions have spun him into. By the time we reach the end of his section and he attempts suicide in an obvious, if incredibly juvenile, effort to find atonement—“It’s my. Fault...I have to” (*The Accidental* 55)—, the reader is both mortified by his crime and convinced of his capability for redemption. Unlike Michael, Eve, or Alhambra/Amber, Magnus’ interior monologue again and again gives us explicit details of his crime, being *portrayed as a crime*, with specific emphasis on how his actions have affected another individual. In its detail the form of the indirect interior monologue allows Smith to emphasize the power of observation. Magnus sees that what he has done is wrong and it is in viewing himself as if he were another person that provides him both with the ability to understand what he has done wrong as well as, in his final section, a form of empathetic observation through a cinematic experience that allows himself to examine his internalized misogyny¹⁶.

Which brings us to Magnus’ final realization of his own internal complicity in the type of flimsy logic that allows members of the patriarchy to commit such sexual crimes without thinking them through, as he has done in the past. That Magnus’ full re-examination of his ideologies happens during his viewing of *Love, Actually* becomes critically important through this reading of the novel’s use of form and its understanding of true redemption. *Love Actually*, for those who have not experienced its unique brand of popcorn terror, is a movie that seeks to preform an examination of love by displaying several different types of “loving” relationships

¹⁶ And through that examination through which the reader is given hope that he will re-examine the rest of the faulty neoliberal ideology he has been raised with.

within a large cast of superficially connected characters. As a whole, its understanding of “love” re-enforces patriarchal heteronormative gender roles whilst exalting austerity politics and waving away any notion that uneven power dynamics within relationships should be frowned upon. Notably, and quite predictably, casual misogyny is pervasive throughout the film; as Magnus puts it, the “only message, as far as Magnus can make it out, is not to be too fat if you’re a girl or everyone will think you are laughable and no one will want to marry you” (*The Accidental* 248). It is this misogyny, which echoes Magnus’ own internalized prejudices, that allows him to understand the root cause of his crimes and the ways he has viewed women: “Magnus finds himself hoping that Astrid has a friend like this, who will put her arm round her if she is one day sitting crying in a cinema.../But What if Astrid came to a film like this one and was reduced by it, like this girl along from him?” (*The Accidental* 248). It is here where his ability to abstract himself within his own mind meets with the power of viewing and Magnus is capable of comprehending his own complicity in a societal trend of harm. We are shown this intersection when we are given Magnus’ post theater experiences through his perspective as he goes home and “tells it all to Astrid through the opened door” (*The Accidental* 258). It is also during this confession, through the opened door to Astrid’s room, where the two children discuss how grateful they are both for the summer with Alhambra/Amber and for coming home to a house devoid of any material goods: “It was really good, too, he says, when we got back here and there was like nearly nothing left” (*The Accidental* 257). These things—freedom from commodity fetishization, acknowledgement of internalized harmful societal prejudices, confession, and seeking forgiveness for specific crimes—pose a powerful argument about the interlinked nature of capital and misogyny as well as the nature of reconciliation and kinship within contemporary life. Supporting this notion, Horgan states that Smith’s “exploration of money is often highly

spatialized... reflecting the ongoing erosion of the public sphere” (Horgan 157). Though Horgan is largely talking about austerity politics here, it is clear that the house’s physical space being robbed of its consumer goods is what frees up the Smart family to begin actually creating a community of care within it. So, while it is clear that Astrid admires Magnus throughout the book, they never really share ideas or emotions, their connection seemingly more based on the random nature of being within the same family group than a choice to create connection. However, in this scene, and in the final scene of Michael’s last section, we see them intentionally choose to connect to one another through acts of observation, active listening, and care.

However, Magnus’ redemption within the eyes of the Reader brings us to the crimes committed against him by Alhambra/Amber; which are difficult to unpack within the context of the book itself for several reasons, not the least of these being the fact that her chapters are given through an entirely different technique of stream-of-consciousness prose that the rest of the characters within the novel. Rather, her consciousness is presented to the reader in the form of soliloquies that open the novel and close each of its three sections. Each of these sections revolve around her more mystical persona as a seemingly specter-like embodiment of the history of cinema. In fact, the opening soliloquy of the novel is reminiscent of the opening to Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, a novel published nearly twenty years before *The Accidental*, where the protagonist/narrator holds telepathic super-powers that mimic his role as the magical embodiment of India’s promise as a newly independent nation. Both of these novels are obsessed with story as a means of understanding the present and use their narrators¹⁷ in order to embody

¹⁷ *The Accidental* arguably doesn’t have a narrator. However, as Alhambra/Amber’s consciousness is the first and last transcribed for the reader and her dictation is given a more overarching and direct voice that focuses on history and the mediation through which that

the multitudinous nature of their stories: as Head puts it, “there is something more self-conscious about the topic of mediation” in *The Accidental* (107). Saleem’s declaration that “there are so many stories to tell... such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumors, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just one of me, you’ll have to swallow the lot as well” (Rushdie 4) matches excessively well with Alhambra’s notion that her mother “began her” (*The Accidental* 1) rather than conceived her and her declaration at the end of the prologue: “I am Alhambra, named for the place of my conception. Believe me. Everything is meant. / From my mother: grace under pressure; the uses of mystery; how to get what I want. From my father: how to disappear, how to not exist” (*The Accidental* 3). I bring up *Midnight’s Children* now because I think that Rushdie’s novel is a good comparative entry point when examining the mystical nature of Alhambra/Amber, a fact that is important when examining the predatory acts of sexual abuse she commits within the novel.

That Alhambra/Amber is potentially not entirely human helps us to understand both our lack of insight into her actions within the novel, but also the fantastic sexual attraction that she holds for everyone within the Smart family. Enhancing the validity of this reading is the soliloquy form of her interior monologues, an inherently performative and dramatic expression of the mind that is meant to be understood as such by an audience. More specifically her soliloquies often mimic the cinematic technique of the montage, giving the reader some feeling that her narratives are connected to the story being told to us¹⁸. Viewed this way,

history’s stories are consumed, there is a strong argument to be made that her perspective is the one valued by the narrative

¹⁸ Note that this is a different utilization of the soliloquy than that explored in the next chapter that discusses *Girl Meets Boy*. While the books’ messages about art and political action are

Alhambra/Amber's sexual relationship to Magnus is perhaps easier to understand, particularly Magnus' incredibly positive view of the relationship: "Amber = angel" (*The Accidental* 142), "Amber = genius" (143), "If Amber is a piece of broken-up jigsaw too, Magnus thinks, then she is several pieces of blue sky still joined up. Maybe she is a whole surviving connected sky" (139), "Amber = everything he didn't even know he imagined possible for himself" (153). By thinking of Amber/Alhambra as a specter of the type of story each member of the Smart family imagines themselves to be in, we can read an answer into why Magnus' relationship to the repeated assaults would be positive for him even after coming to a greater understanding of the truth of his experience in his final section: "Magnus thinks of Amber, taking and taking from him in the attic, in the garden, in the church. St Magnus. He thinks of her taking his clothes from him that first night, after she bathed him. He thinks of himself, lost after Amber had gone, wandering..." (*The Accidental* 255).

Looking at Magnus' story in the first two sections as a standard coming of age narrative for teenage boys, we can see Magnus' image of Amber/Alhambra role as a savior figure and sexual object at play throughout his growth in the novel. This dichotomy, essentially the whore/Madonna trope, played out as a fantasy or story that Magnus is allowing himself to live into forces us to reckon with the internalized patriarchal myths that are both extremely harmful to Magnus, but also the fact that without his embrace of this misogynist understanding of Amber/Alhambra, he likely would have died. As we see Amber/Alhambra through Magnus' chapters, we see a woman who witnesses the pain within this young man literally dying for redemption, and who brings joy and "knowledge" into his life. Importantly, this knowledge ends

similar, Alhambra/Amber's form emphasizes the act of viewing a filmic performance while Anthea's form emphasizes the active/physical nature of a theatrical performance.

up being more than the base-level metaphor¹⁹ that Michael would have tried to wax lyrical about. Magnus is led by Amber/Alhambra's nickname for him, St. Magnus, to the public library in London, where he ends up noticing the ability to continue within the history he reads: "Instead, he finds, he is totally fascinated by a single word. The word is: and. / Virtue *and* piety. / *And* other churches bear his name. / *And* is said to have lived" (*The Accidental* 154). While it turns out that there is nothing special about the historical Saint—meaning that Amber/Alhambra has not found something special or holy in Magnus, just an easy reference—this idea of the ability to continue is directly tied to his sexual encounters with Amber/Alhambra: "they'll be making that breathing noise they helplessly make again, the noise that he hadn't realized was even a word... / *And* / and / and" (*The Accidental* 156). By tying the experience or knowledge Magnus gains from Amber/Alhambra's nickname for him to their sexual experiences, the novel clearly implies that within Magnus' consciousness his ability to continue on living after committing a horrible crime is connected with a redemption he found through his sexual relationship with Amber/Alhambra. Therefore, in this reading of the text, where we examine Amber/Alhambra's actions through the viewpoint of Magnus' internalized story, we can view the sex between the adult and child as a consensual act between two people—one of whom has trouble seeing women, others, and even himself as fully human—that allows the younger of the two to gain a new, more hopeful, understanding of how he can exist within the world.

Unfortunately, this reading is lackluster. In fact, it perpetuates the horrifically stable notion that adult women having sex with male minors is somehow acceptable and not statutory rape. This is a point seemingly missed by Head, who sees Amber as teaching Magnus "emotional

¹⁹ Referring here to the idea of growing up being symbolized through the loss of virginity that is a staple of many heteropatriarchal bildungsroman.

literacy” by seducing him to give him “a lesson in the difference between vital consensual sex, and the dehumanized image viewed without consciousness of its possible emotional connotations” (106-7). Rather, I posit that *The Accidental* intends for us to recognize this clichéd story happening and filter it through the complex understanding that Alhambra’s soliloquies give to the nature of film’s power; after all, Magnus’ true epiphany occurs after critiquing the flawed message of “really rubbish film” (*The Accidental* 256). Looking closely at Alhambra’s third soliloquy, which chronicles the history of the theater she was born and conceived inside, there are two moments that are indicative of this complexity: “*The pagan Ch*nk²⁰ will taste the result of two thousand years of civilization*” (*The Accidental* 208) and “The Great Dictator. Boy Meets Girl. The manager of the Alhambra, Mr O.H. Campbell, walks onstage in the middle of a Frank Sinatra film. Victory in Europe. Everybody cheers. Victory over Japan. Great expectations. Gone with the Wind” (*The Accidental* 209). In this passage, placed side by side, at the same site, is racist imperialist propaganda, antifascist comedy, joyous news of the defeat of fascism, and, finally, more racist propaganda meant to glamorize the era of chattel slavery. Acknowledging that *The Accidental* is intended to be a difficult book, a book that intends for its reader to grapple with the fact that lots of the mass media that is consumed in our society is, and always has been corrosively harmful, but also that it does produce a lot of good; a fact that Alhambra herself seems to understand both about her own nature and her role within the novel. She both knows “how to not exist” (*The Accidental* 3) and yet is “everything you’ve ever dreamed” (306). Bringing this understanding to the previous reading of Amber/Alhambra’s sexual crimes, we can accept that the relationship was a crime, but one committed by someone who fundamentally and concretely helped her victim in other ways within a relationship that, while harmful in this

²⁰ edited slur, because, while Smith’s artistic license is one thing, I’m not doing that.

regard, was formative and productive to the at risk child. It's both/and, uncomfortable and unsatisfying as that is.

Importantly, this reading of Alhambra/Amber's relationship with Magnus leads us back to the intentional discomfort of the novel. Ironically, through the the distance provided by the direct interior monologue that we are able to feel a voyeuristic complicity in the crimes being committed in the narrative. By being both an interior monologue, as well as an abstracted self-conscious look at the functioning of those mental processes, we as readers are able to both feel the actions taken by the characters as well as understand how complicated and horrible they are. So that when Magnus is about to have his virginity²¹ taken from him and he feels like he has "done something wrong" (*The Accidental* 141) when Amber/Alhambra leaves momentarily or when he embraces the physical and emotional joy that he feels at her "add[ing] herself to him" (142) we feel complicit in these actions while aware of their problematic, potentially criminal, implications. Even the incredibly visceral and eloquent language used during the encounter — "Inside her was like going inside a boxing glove, or a room made of pillows, or wings. Magnus

²¹ The concept of virginity is one that I feel to be exceptionally complicated both when speaking about this novel (and similar narratives) and real life. On one hand I readily and enthusiastically support the notion that we, as a society, should be moving towards the language of "sexual debut" as a means of devaluing purity culture and the concept of our first interpersonal sexual experiences as something inherently sacred (a concept that is explicitly tied to misogyny and the perception of women specifically as sexual objects to be owned by male counterparts). On the other hand, understanding our own sexual experiences as decisions made with that language in mind, we have to acknowledge that to recreate that language means a certain retroactive loss of agency for those who understood their virginity as something lost via a specific form of penetrative sex. Understanding that those flawed conceptions created very real emotional weight to the decisions made by those who accepted these common perceptions of sexual agency/value means that we, in some cases, might be embracing the power of the individual by trusting the language that helped create those decisions/situations, at least in the past-tense. As such, though Smith does not include the word "virginity" within the context of Amber/Alhambra and Magnus' relationship, I am using this flawed and treacherous terminology in hopes of capturing what seems to be the emotional/philosophical core of what Magnus' cinematic/narrative understanding of the situation asks us to grapple with.

exploded into a billion small white feathers” (*The Accidental* 142) — adds to the effect of the passage. We are simultaneously aroused and disgusted by the events that we are witnessing.

Alhambra/Amber’s soliloquies emphasize the ability for media to do this by having her simultaneously place her experience within familiar cinematic narratives and historical events:

They shot the king in Memphis, which delayed the Academy Awards telecast for two whole days, He had a dream, he held these truths to be self-evident, that all men were created equal and would one day sit down together at the table of brotherhood. They shot the other brother at the Ambassador Hotel. RIGHTEOUS BROS it said in lights, above the hotel car park. Meanwhile my father was the matchmaker and my mother could fly using only her umbrella. When I was a child I ran the Grand National on my horse. They didn’t know I was a girl until I fainted and they unbuttoned my jockey shirt. But anything was possible. We had a flying floating car. We stopped the rail disaster by waving our petticoats at the train; my father was innocent in prison, my mother made ends meet. I sold flowers in Covent Garden. A posh geezer taught me how to speak proper and took me to the races, designed by Cecil Beaton, though they dubbed my voice in the end because the singing wasn’t good enough. (*The Accidental* 104)

This soliloquy informs our understanding of the sex scene being discussed in that it reminds us of the ways that we actually live in narratives, just like Magnus is living into his coming of age story when he has sex with Amber/Alhambra. Seemingly, Smith’s narrative and form are asking us to evaluate our own complex understanding of what it means to consent to experiences, sexual and narrative, and acknowledge that our understandings of such things are informed by our age, knowledge, history, and narrative sympathies.

Comparatively, Michael and Eve’s sex crimes are much easier to read critically because they are much more reprehensible. Michael Smart, in this respect, is the most repugnant

character within the novel, using his station of relative power in order to sleep with his young college students and (we are led to assume) committing statutory rape against the aforementioned checkout girl Miranda—which the narrative presents as a routine action for Michael. It is nigh-impossible to understate how uncomfortable it is to read his sections, which are obsessed with the cultivation of his clearly pseudo-intellectual literary aspirations and sexual appetites. It is easy to feel profound disgust when Michael begins leering at women or playing out his well rehearsed script for how to take sexual advantage of the students that are under his care: “He liked to give the little speech about Agape and Eros. He liked to tell the story, how he had admired her in class when she’d said ‘ . . . how he’d been pacing his study, preoccupied, unable to sleep for nights on end because the witty or clever thing she’d said” (*The Accidental* 69). Obviously, this character, as well as the discomfort that the reader feels when engaging with the emotional depths of his psyche as he commits these highly immoral actions, can be read as Smith forcing her readers to engage with the flip side of the works produced by many highly acclaimed poets and writers who have made their careers romanticizing their toxic sexual conquests: authors like Ted Hughes, Charles Bukowski, Jack Kerouac, and John Updike all come to mind quickly. It is no mistake that the student he has sex with during his first section is writing her thesis on Philip Roth. However, as she does with Alhambra/Amber’s dubious relationship with Magnus, Smith refuses to let this relationship, and the relationships he has with his students in general, to be purely accounts that acknowledge the fact that these young women are victimized. After having sex with Philippa, Michael is taken aback by how forward she has been during this encounter, notably by the lack of agency he feels to have had, asking “had he had her or had she had him?” (*The Accidental* 71). Further complicating the “relationships” that Michael has with his students is that, we learn in Eve’s section, many of his past student

“conquests” still send him letters/postcards, signaling that not all of them viewed their sexual encounters with him to have been predatory and, in fact, seem to look back upon their experiences fondly²²: “*a mosaic of postcards, literally hundreds... and that probably every one of these postcards was from some girl he’d been fucking....* On the back in handwriting was a tawdry message from a girl who spelled Freudian freuedian, who called herself his ‘jaguar’” (*The Accidental* 96). While his actions towards his students are abhorrent no matter what, this complex nature to the evidently abusive sexual encounters continues the trend within the novel of forcing the reader to feel complicit in the acts of sexual abuse that occur within it and to question the agency that they have had within episodes of questionable consent that they have doubtlessly been privy to during their lives.

Related to how that form influences the ways we read the sexual violence within this novel is the manner in which Michael’s section in “The middle” is told uniquely through a series of poems. The poems that make up the section actually oscillate between nominally Shakespearian sonnets, prose poetry, free verse, and ottava rima. The hyper stylization of this section does several things, which include creating some empathy for Michael while also alerting the reader to his profound inability to engage within productive introspection. The emotional connection that is enabled through the experimental form of these “sonnets” is due both to form and content. As sonnets are traditionally used as powerful statements of poetic language meant to convey an emotional truth, readers are primed to see the thoughts Michael is given more generously than those in his narcissistic and condescending first segment. Supporting this,

²² This is not to state that sexually abused people do not continue to correspond with their abusers after their abuse. Nor is it to say that some initial positive response to such abuse negates that abuse. Simply that Smith’s novel consistently presents complications and a blurring of consensual moral quandaries that this wall of seemingly complementary or positive postcards continues.

Michael seems to be much more emotionally earnest within this section, portraying his elation at Alhambra/Amber's presence while also displaying his consistent despair within his life: "A family that / wasn't fragments soul. / deceptively splayed dead gone things denied²³" (*The Accidental* 171). By giving the reader some sense that Michael is actually connected to his family emotionally and feels some level of distress at its disfunction, the poetics of the passage give a level of compelling complexity that ingratiates some sympathy.

However, this connection that the reader feels for/towards Michael is severely undercut in the same ways that it is built up, via both form and content. Notably, Michael's interior monologue given to us through sonnets that are formally incorrect, consistently failing to follow either the meter or the rhyme scheme that poems are meant to follow: most notably when they are meant to be following iambic pentameter. Take for instance one of the sonnets that precipitates Michael's mental breakdown:

But sonnets shouldn't be so damned one-sided.
They implied, at least, dialogue. He found that
no one spoke back. No one. Michael persuaded,
argued with, no one but himself, looked round at
a family that wasn't his and saw
a lot of faded color, then he sat
in his car, stared at an empty field, raw,
stony bleached, like he was; sat in the heat
watching it dry up. He was such a sucker.
He knew her turn of head, her hands, her laughter.

²³ This passage is extremely stylized. However, I don't know how to translate that stylization onto this type of project.

He realized that he would never fuck her.

He realized that he would never have her.

He was a very ordinary bloke.

He turned from sand to glass and then he broke. (*The Accidental* 167)

Obviously, this is quite bad poetry. Its failure on every conceivable level is so profound that even a casual reader would be able to notice, which is the point. However, looking deeply at the poem helps to prove how the formal failures of Michael's internal poetics force the reader to acknowledge the philosophical and ethical failures that encapsulate Michael's personhood. First, note that the first actual line of iambic pentameter we get is the sixth line and that, while the end of the poem much more consistently follows the intended meter, there is something pathetic about trying the rhyme "sat" and "heat." Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the formal failure of having the "e" and "f" lines all rhyme with each other as these lines are meant to lead up to the ultimate point of the poem and the consistent rhyme undercuts any possible momentum within the sonnet. So, while outwardly the form of the sonnet prepares the reader to experience well thought through and intense emotions, its failure to follow the basics of that form accentuate Michael's narcissistic and misogynist outlook—unsurprising as the poem's big revelation is that Michael won't be able to literally own or "have" Amber/Alhambra through sexual domination—to reveal his immaturity and a toxic inner life.

Once again, the theme of observation, artistic recording and the power of the viewer becomes incredibly important. More than any other section given to us through an interior monologue, Michael's incorrect sonnets remind the reader that we are bearing witness to Michael's own interpretation of his consciousness and internal life. It is clear that Michael understands himself to be artistically noble, romantic, brilliant, and irresistible, while the reader is consistently reminded though the formal failures of his poems that he is a self-aggrandizing,

pretentious, pseudo-intellectual incapable of understanding the ethical and philosophical faults that cut to the structural core of his being. Reinforcing this point is the fact that his section in “The beginning” follows Michael as he thinks seriously about the artistic viability of clichés: “Deeply exciting, though, cliché was, as a concept” (*The Accidental* 59). Michael believes that he is unveiling the beauty at the core of romantic clichés without realizing that he is playing into the very clichéd “stereotype” of the “lecherous,” misogynist “lecturer in English literature” who is not nearly as intelligent or wise as he believes himself to be (Head 106). This is brought to a head in the final section of his monologue where he engages in the ottava rima form and commits a presumed statutory rape against Miranda, the checkout girl at the supermarket he patronizes. While this section is clearly his most capable poetically, it is still filled with utter failure amid his crushing honesty. For instance rhyming “did” with “did” twice in a row and trying to rhyme “Smart/.... Sartre/... thart” (174) in the very next stanza (174). The latter is particularly appalling as “Sartre” is not pronounced ‘Sart’ but ‘Sart-ra’ and “thart” isn’t even a word. Less than a page later, after admitting that this is what he “always [does] when he [feels] down” he goes out and ‘picks up’ the “likeliest recruit,” Miranda, and “seduces” her (175).

The framing of this crime is important and interesting in that it manages to contextualize the act within Michael’s pain and his own self-awareness of his wrongdoing: He “wept for five hours” (*The Accidental* 176) directly after the act. Michael’s crime is framed as a compulsive action that he regrets, or at least does from a place of pain: at least within his own mind. Coming home after his crime, Alhambra plays a game with the Smart family where she gains access to the keys to their house, which she later uses to rob them of every earthly possession they have other than a single “answerphone” (*The Accidental* 176). This perspective brings to mind Vanessa Springora’s memoir *Consent*, which was credited with bringing the “Me Too”

movement to France. In it, Springora recounts her experience of being groomed, raped, and abused for years by a famous middle-aged French author when she was 14. When speaking of her abuser, Springora consistently expresses the idea that she believed that she was “in love” (45) and consenting to all of the sexual acts she engaged with throughout the several year long relationship with her abuser. She additionally, in a moving part of the memoir, explains that, at the time, she “didn’t know there was such a thing as a person for whom the Other does not exist” (116) and that understanding the narcissism of her abuser, how he essentially saw her not as a person but as a thing to use, helped her to come to terms with the nature of their relationship; helping her to begin the process of healing from it: “I didn’t care about him and his escapades anymore. It was my redemption I was seeking, not his” (134). Obviously, there is no way for a 14 or 15 year old child to consent to sex, but Springora’s assessment and emotional engagement with the psychology of the abuser and the abused give us some idea as to how to begin engaging with Michael’s crimes. As readers witnessing Michael’s consciousness, we understand that he both sees his conquests as human and holds little thought for the young women and girls he has “sex” with beyond what they can provide for him. Much like GM, Springora’s abuser, Michael, particularly early on in the novel, seems to have a hard time understanding that the other people he interacts with exist for a purpose beyond his own gratification: “Ten years ago it had been romantic, inspiring, energizing (Harriet, Ilanna, that sweet page-boyed one whose name escaped him now but who still sent a card at Christmas). Five years ago it had still been good (for instance, Kirsty Anderson)” (*The Accidental* 70) or “They used to like that kind of thing more” (*The Accidental* 70) and “He’d just had a girl!” (*The Accidental* 74). However, in his final section, after the bottom falls out and Michael attempts to put his life back together, we see that status quo introduced in “the beginning” is not inherent to his character.

The redemption(-ish) arc that Michael is given in the novel is, like most things in this narrative, complicated and full of trouble that we must stay with. In his final section of “The end,” we find Michael clearly depressed and physically unwell evidenced by the fact that when he calls Astrid to let her know when he will be home and asks if she has eaten she responds “Have you eaten?... You’re the one who’s got thin” (*The Accidental* 267). In coping with the consequences of his actions, while haphazard and starting, Michael has begun to question his culpability within them—“ So Michael liked sleeping with girls. Was it a crime? They like him back. Was it a crime? They were all consenting adults.... Was it a crime?” (265)—as well as take up a caregiver role and parental role within the family. This change in character and acceptance of a caregiver role is shown throughout the section, but particularly through a few small moments and one large one. The first notable small moment comes when he seemingly acknowledges his character flaws by remarking that he, “Dr. Michael Smart, [is an] official campus cliché” (*The Accidental* 260). The second comes when he calls his long left behind therapist to talk about his issues: “He hung up and scrolled down to Charis Brownlee. Her office answerphone came on.... It’s.... Michael Smart.... I just found myself wanting to, uh, ask your advice about something.... Her husband was a psychotherapist too” (*The Accidental* 266). Another comes when he displays some form of parental affection and care revolving around Magnus’ friend Jake, who, unbeknownst to Michael, was an accomplice in the sex crime Magnus committed and also the one who confessed to the crime, outing Magnus to the authorities:

Jake was round a lot these days; he stayed over a lot. Michael had begun to wonder if... they might be experimenting with dope... but after half an hour of listening outside of Magnus’s bedroom door... and hearing them holding forth to each other about Pascal and Teihard de Chardin and what to do about your parents’ imminent divorce, he’d stopped saying to Jake at

midnight, won't your mother be wondering where you are at this time of night, Jake?" (*The Accidental* 260)

Finally, after the larger moment that will be mentioned right after this, when Astrid sits beside him on a chair with "the words on her t-shirt... inches from Michael's mouth" and he notices her "open mouth, her tongue and her little teeth," he "close[s] his eyes" to prevent himself from sexualizing her showing a conscious effort to change his way of observing young women as sexual objects (*The Accidental* 281-2). Obviously none of these are large steps toward moral life, nor anything we would expect less of from a child's guardian. But for Michael, they display an active change of character that seems to choose a more productive roll within the family unit, if a far from perfect one.

The large moment that displays Michael's growth happens when he allows his children to care for him and then watches a movie they picked out. During the scene Michael walks into the family home to find the kids watching history channel programs about Nazism and WWII (277-8). Physically sick, having nearly passed out on the floor of the bookstore (269), Jake tells him that he needs "a hot drink and something to eat, and people round you need to give you moral support" (279). On the loving advice of the children under his care, Michael curls up into a "foetal position," eats an egg sandwich Magnus makes because Astrid tells him that "eat[ing] an egg... [is] eating beautifulness itself," and watches Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* with the children (279-80). While all of these moments are mundane in every way possible, within the context of Michael's consciousness and the way we've been observing it, these moments collectively create a functional redemptive arc for Michael. He accepts help, acknowledges his harm, seeks healing, and commits himself to change. While Smith's narrative never lets us forget that Michael is an incredibly flawed person with narcissistic instincts, his acceptance of acting as a nurturing and committed provider for the family allows for some sense of hope. Modeling Dr.

Angela Y. Davis' model of reparative justice where the "justice system [is] based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance" (Davis 107), Michael manages to commit himself, and is allowed to commit himself, to a queer family structure devoid of a matriarch where he is an equal with his non-biological children while also caring for and enabling their creative and spiritual pursuits. Later, Davis quotes Herman Bianchi stating that within a reparative model "[the lawbreaker] is thus no longer an evil-minded man or woman, but simply a debtor, a liable person whose human duty is to take responsibility for his or her acts, and to assume the duty of repair" (113-4) which matches well with how the novel asks us to view Michael towards the end of the novel.

Which finally brings us to Eve, arguably the center of the Smart family and the most ethically complex and troublesome. On one hand, Eve does little actively wrong or morally dubious; she commits no acts of violence and does not engage in any sexual acts that could be considered non-consensual. In fact, she is only shown to be sexual through reference to her having mediocre sex with her husband (*The Accidental* 83 & 97). However, the novel frames her as being explicitly aware of, and therefore complicit in, her husband's predatory sexual behavior. She cleans the "usual condoms" (181) out of his pants when washing the family's dirty laundry and seems to have no qualms or ethical hesitations about the clear power fantasies that her husband plays out on women just out of their adolescence and under his direct tutelage: "She was also one of the... ones... brave enough or stupid enough to come to the house (89). Here, once again, the indirect interior monologue that Smith employs as a means of increasing awareness in the reader that they are observing the inner thoughts and lives of her characters works itself into essentially a meta-commentary on how society functions because the reader is essentially engaging with the sexual crimes committed in the novel in the same way that Eve is; we are

explicitly aware that they are happening, but are doing nothing to stop them. Looking again to Springora's *Consent*, she speaks about the pain and anguish that was caused by her mother's active role in facilitating her abuser's access to her: "It was utter madness" (Springora 52)²⁴. Through this conversation Springora exposes the fact that we intuitively understand that adults are supposed to protect children from predators and that those who do not are guilty, at the very least, of neglect and at worst conspiracy to endanger the child. While Eve is not nearly as active as Springora's mother and the ethical questions of a 20 year old sleeping with their professor are much more complicated than a 14 year old being raped, some dynamics of the situation hold true. By allowing Michael to continue his abuses of power unchallenged, Eve is guilty of some manner of culpable neglect; or she is an accomplice to Michael's horrifying behavior.

Eve's neglectful attitude towards her relational responsibilities is a persistent theme that is explored throughout the text and is probably better understood as her being alienated from reality. Her book series, which is based on imagining fictionalized histories of an "ordinary life of a living person who died before his or her time in the Second World War" (*The Accidental* 81), seems to emphasize that her attentions are not on what is actually happening within the lives of the people whom she claims to care about in the novel, but rather on some fictionalized version of what those lives could look like: the appearance being the most important thing. This is seemingly reinforced through her conversation with Amber where Eve explains how she met her first husband Adam, a story which causes Amber to tell Eve that she is so "boring" (*The*

²⁴ "It was utter madness for her to give us her absolution. I think, deep down, she knew that. Did she also realize that she risked one day being severely criticized, first and foremost by her own daughter? Was I so fiercely obstinate that she was unable to stand up to me? Whatever the reason, her only intervention was to make a pact with G. He had to swear that he would never make me suffer. It was he who told me this. I can just imagine the scene, the two of them looking each other straight in the eye with great solemnity. "Say it: 'I swear!'" (52).

Accidental 196). This scene is supportive of Eve having distanced herself from her own life in two important ways, the first being that Eve is excited by a previous event in her life and not by any of the familial relationships that she currently has and secondly through its ability to seemingly fit into the meet-cute narrative of a stereotypical rom-com. Amber/Alhambra is correct in assessing the “boring”-ness of Eve’s tale because it is abstracted from anything real in her emotional or internal life.

Finally, in the penultimate section of the novel, after the kiss that Alhambra/Amber gives Eve that moves her “beyond belief” (*The Accidental* 202)²⁵, Eve leaves her family—presumably for good—first traveling the world and drinking “Coke” (287) in every country she visits, and then assuming the role that Amber/Alhambra played for her family for one in the US: “She decided she’d sleep in the car” (303). Eve’s actions at the end of the novel are confusing and unsatisfying. On one hand, here is a catharsis for the reader when Eve confronts the bourgeois woman whose house she enters at the end of the novel: telling her that the way she behaves is “unforgivable” (302). On the other hand, Eve’s ability to leave her family, particularly her children, without any justification or notice—the answering machine message lets her know that it had reached the “end of the allocated speaking space” (289) long before she is able to inform them of her intentions—is difficult to ethically rationalize or accept. This problematic exit from gendered capitalist expectations leaves us with much to untangle, or rather tangle ourselves

²⁵ “Amber, standing so beautiful in the doorframe of the shed, was made dark by the sunlight behind her. She came towards Eve... stood in front of her with her hands on Eve’s shoulders as if to give her a good shaking. / Then she kissed Eve on the mouth. / Eve was moved beyond belief by the kiss. The place beyond belief was terrifying. There, everything was different, as if she had been gifted with a new kind of vision, as if disembodied hands had strapped some kind of headset on to her that revealed all the unnamed, invisible colors beyond her eyes had slowed its pace especially to reveal the spaces between what she usually saw and the way that things were tacked temporarily together with thin thread across these spaces” (*The Accidental* 201-2).

into²⁶. Clearly, what Eve is trying to do is to continue the disruption of capital and misogyny that has dictated the stereotypes she has attempted to follow throughout her life, much in the same way that Amber/Alhambra clearly revealed lesbian tendencies within her desires and disrupted her petite bourgeoisie lifestyle. While reacting against these oppressive systems is admirable and just, her leaving dependents in the hands of a more complicit actor within those systems is not excusable, nor is trying to dodge consequences for crimes against the dead and marginalized. As such, Eve's final chapter reminds the reader that Amber/Alhambra's brand of anti-capitalist activism is lackluster, haphazard, and un-compassionate. Effectively, Amber/Alhambra's methods produce new radicals who, through the deprivation of their material possessions, embrace the freedom enabled by a rejection of consumerist values. Eve attempts to continue this work through the methods Alhambra/Amber examples for her, but by using a chaotic and self-centered approach to their goals both women neglect to provide any substantial means of care or guidance for the people they have impacted. They do harm to others, ostensibly for good reasons, but in refusing any responsibility towards the communities they hope to change they reproduce an individualistic approach that fails any notions of solidarity: committing themselves to figures of transience and ambiguity. Eve's consciousness does have a pathetic excuse for her actions—her mother died when she was 15 and she remembers Michael saying to her that she was “old enough to be okay” (289)—and there are valid critical readings that posit either that she has decided that she cannot provide useful guidance to her children and leaves on their account or that her chapter being the one that ends the narrative portion of the novel “suggests that Smith regards this function of narration as an ethical imperative” (Levin 42). However, the fact that she

²⁶ “Make a critical and joyful fuss” about (*Staying with the Trouble* 31).

does so in part to avoid confronting the wrongs she has done in the world²⁷ leaves the reader questioning what to make of her narrative arc. Here, comparing her story to that of Mrs. Ramsay becomes helpful.

Eve's leaving her family before the third and final section mirrors Mrs. Ramsay's life and death within *To the Lighthouse*. As such, examining the ways that they differ might be worthwhile. Essentially the matriarch in both novels, through her capitulation to and reinforcement of the expected bourgeois social order, creates a movement that her inheritor (Astrid here/Lily in *To the Lighthouse*) must contend with and reject through artistic vision. The differences are two-fold. First, by actively rejecting her family, Eve forces Astrid specifically to deal with the philosophical balance of security, responsibility, and personal agency provided by the bourgeois model of motherhood, all while also coming into her own sexuality and desire for a future worthy of imagination. Secondly, by continuing to live and attempting to disrupt (while actively being witness to the extreme cruelty of the end results {imperialist violence} of) bourgeois capital's interests, Eve's narrative reflects the ways that even rejection of the status quo can breed harm while creating necessary disruption. In dealing with these complicated moral questions revolving around Eve's leaving the family unit at the end of the novel it is helpful to point out that *Medea* is referenced early in the narrative (*The Accidental* 9)²⁸. In the play referenced, Medea kills her children while the chorus begs her not to, but ultimately ends the play riding in Helios' chariot high above everyone in "a bit of stagecraft usually reserved for the

²⁷ "Instead of going to the press conference [where she would meet and answer questions from the people whose ancestors she had reimagined for profit], Eve had gone to her doctor's surgery and booked herself for injections [for vaccines needed to travel the world]" (*The Accidental* 287).

²⁸ I don't put the quote here intentionally, because I will use it later when discussing the ways that this reference impacts Astrid's arc and character.

gods” (OSP 11:30). This duality of condemnable actions, while also ultimately retaining the “approval of the gods” (12:32) gives us insight as to how we might understand or imagine Eve in all of her complexity. When compared to Mrs. Ramsay, despite the essentially similar state that their absence leaves their families in, Eve’s agency in her act of leaving produces a complexity that both readers and her family must grapple with. When speaking about the “transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities, which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work,” Haraway talks about how our greatest technologies are “made of sunshine” at the cost of “immense human pain in Detroit and Singapore” (*Cyborg* 13-4). As we think about Eve’s choices, their anti-capitalist potential, and the harm they’ve caused, it is important attempt to view the narrative from more than one perspective. Trouble that we must stay with and acknowledge ourselves observing.

All that said, Eve’s role within the narrative brings us to an interesting point when looking at *The Accidental* as a re-examination of Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, as her lack of commitment to her family is directly at odds with the characterization of the mother figure, Mrs. Ramsay, in the *To the Lighthouse*. While both novels position motherhood as the center of the traditional nuclear family structurally creating the basis from which they can begin to examine, criticize, and eventually queer the family, the polarization of the matriarch’s personalities within the two novels is something to examine. Given the characters’ relatively similar situation as the central figure of the nuclear family, the easiest explanation for their temperamental differences is the difference in their era’s expectation for women and what labor they are expected to accomplish within society and within the family. While both the Smarts and the Ramsays are members of the petit bourgeoisie, the expectations for members of that class have come to mean widely different working expectations as societies have moved farther away from what Dr.

Kristen R. Ghodsee terms the “family-centered approach” (72) in which societies form labor relations that relegate women to the work of the house whilst men are expected to provide for their families, and towards a more neoliberal version of those expectations where both parents are expected to labor for capital.

Both Smith and Woolf’s novels speak to these expectations when it comes to what it means to be a mother and therefore the expectation of labor required of the matriarchs in each family changes the way that they interact with their roll. As Ghodsee puts it,

the perception of women’s comparative inferiority as workers is linked to their biological capacity for child bearing and nursing.... our [women’s] supposedly innate caring nature also makes us perfectly suited for nursing other sick, weak, or aged relatives. And since women are at the home anyway, so the argument goes, we might as well do all of the shopping, cooking, cleaning, and emotional labor required to maintain a household, right? (Ghodsee 52)

Mrs. Ramsay, as indicated by the fact that she has no first name in the novel other than the honorific deeming her a married woman, is largely content with these expectations for her to be the nurturer of the family unit. Other than her charity work, Mrs. Ramsay’s entire life is based around her joy at being a mother. Eve Smart, on the other hand, seems resentful of her position as a mother and alienated from the role she is expected to take as the nurturer of her family: “the very notion that Eve Smart (42) could be something other than what she seemed was making her heart beat more than anything had... for years” (*The Accidental* 184). It is these differences in personality that best explain why they leave their families in extremely different ways: Eve by running away to America and Mrs. Ramsay through an untimely death. If, as I posit, Smith’s narratives make the underlying issues at play within Woolf’s work more explicit, it would make sense that the alienation that the Ramsay family feels at the end of the novel, after the First World War has decimated their ability to continue under the previous status quo, would be

mirrored within *The Accidental* through the alienation and disillusion that is placed upon the Smart family by the loss of private property and stability. In *To the Lighthouse*'s final section, Lily reflects on the ways that things have changed since she was last at the house and how her desires for life differ from what Mrs. Ramsay desired and expected from life while also commenting heavily on how Mrs. Ramsay's plans for others led to tragic ends: Prue dying in childbirth along with Minta and Paul's marriage turning out less than perfectly. Rather than continuing to approach the issue from the sidelines, Smith's version of a nuclear family deteriorating begins with the disappointment of the societal expectations that Mrs. Ramsay's hopes represent.

Similarly, when representing the threat of force that happens underneath patriarchal society, Smith's narrative is both much more explicit and devoid of the most troubling indications of violence. In the first section of *To the Lighthouse*, Mr. Ramsay's presence shadows over the other figures vacationing at the Isle of Skye with the family and the threat is seemingly not idle. Woolf consistently uses physical expressions to represent how other characters feel in the presence of his anger, jealousy, and sorrow: "Mr. Ramsay slammed out of the room" (*To the Lighthouse* 24); "Mr. Ramsay glared at them. He glared at them without seeming to see them" (18). His need for "sympathy" (36), which runs throughout the entirety of the novel, is consistently equated with the international metaphor of imperialist, military action. Particularly troubling is that Mrs. Ramsay herself is not immune to the fear equated with the threat of violence that the others in the novel feel. This is most explicit when she doubts her decision to pressure Minta and Paul into marriage, because "whatever she might feel about her own transaction, she had had experiences which need not happen to every one" (*To the Lighthouse* 60). The implication in this passage is particularly troubling both because it hints not

only at the physical violence that is felt through the aforementioned physical language that accompanies Mr. Ramsay's displeasure, but because within the context of marriage and weddings the thought process takes upon a sexual nature, therefore the understanding of Mrs. Ramsay having been subjugated to marital rape is at the very least a plausible reading of her internal monologue. Similarly, it is implied through Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts that Mr. Ramsay is prone to cheating on Mrs. Ramsay with young women:

...he liked these girls these golden-reddish girls, with something flying, something a little wild and harum-scarum about them.... There was some quality which she herself had not, some lustre, some richness, which attracted him, amused him, led him to make favourites of girls like Minta. They might cut his hair from him, plait him watch-chains, or interrupt him at his work, hailing him (she heard them), "Come along Mr. Ramsay; it's our turn to beat them now," and out he came to play tennis. (*To the Lighthouse* 99)

While subtle, the emphasis on words of play — "amuse," "wild," "beat," and (obviously) "play" — mix with the mentions of jewelry and intimacy — "cut his hair from him," "make favourites of," and "plait him watch-chains" — that imply that Mr. Ramsay's relationship to these young women is more sexual/romantic in nature than one of mentorship or friendship. Mrs. Ramsay claims that she is "not jealous" of these relationships that her husband has with young women as they make him seem more like a "young man... not weighed down with the greatness of his labours" (99), but the inappropriate nature of a married 50-ish year old man regularly romancing young women remains disturbing: particularly as late Victorian era Britain was a much more prudish society than the one we exist within today. Eve's negative experiences of marriage are not nearly as dramatic as those that Mrs. Ramsay experiences. Her emotionally distant and sexually deviant husband is a definitively lesser issue than the threats of physical and sexual violence Mrs. Ramsay lives under. However, as previously noted, Smith's prosaic form in *The*

Accidental accentuates the observational quality of the reader's experience. Therefore, I posit that Smith intentionally focuses not on the overt abuses that occur within the capitalist heteropatriarchy, but rather on the intimately banal abuses that nearly everyone has encountered within their own lives. Not to say that direct and physical violence against women doesn't happen with disturbing regularity in our society, but that it is these banal and questionable instances of abuse that are widely observed but not commented on, that Smith is attempting to draw focus onto. In the same way that Woolf directly equates masculine violence with imperial violence and the coming of the First World War, Smith equates sexual exploitation with capitalist exploitation; which, while clearly gendered, is not universally so.

Clearly, these subjects are inherently connected; as Lukács notes, imperialism is a sign of late capitalism's need for the "exploitation of the whole world" (*History & Class Consciousness* 46)²⁹ and as Ghodsee notes, "capitalism thrives on women's unpaid labor in the home" (Ghodsee 3). However, there are clear ways that the time periods of these interlocking critiques affect the ways that Smith and Woolf address them within their fictions. Women's position within society during Woolf's time was explicitly one that was subordinate to men, something Woolf noted explicitly in her non-fiction writings, speaking to the inability for women to gain an equal access to education during her time³⁰ and dwelling on the fact that the fight for women's suffrage and other basic rights were still being fought during the period she was writing in. Additionally, the

²⁹ Marx makes a similar point saying "Imperialism is, at the same time, the most prostitute and the ultimate form of the State power which nascent middle-class society had commenced to elaborate as a means of its own emancipation from feudalism, and which full-grown bourgeois society had finally transformed into a means for the enslavement of labour by capital" (Marx 631)

³⁰ "you sisters, as Mary Kingsley indicates, made their contribution. Not only did their own education, save for such small sums as paid the German teacher, go into it; but many of the luxuries and trimmings which are, after all, an essential part of education—travel, society, solitude, and lodging apart from the family house—they were paid too" (*Three Guineas* 5).

imperial wars being fought during Woolf's time were incredibly different than the ones that have occurred in the period since the end of the Cold War. *To the Lighthouse*, for example, focuses in on the way that the First World War's senseless push for continental dominance mirrored the way that the familial patriarch sought dominance over women. As Froula puts it, "From the novel's stereophonic standpoint, what makes civilization impossible is the barbarous system of masculine domination and feminine sacrifice" (12). While this is a valuable critique, and immeasurably it is, it is not a perfect one. Woolf neglects both race and class with a "patronizing irony" that is "convenient for a white Englishwoman" by "essentializing the barbarous imperialist 'instinct' as male; forgetting, too, her own notorious banknote-breeding purse, bequeathed by a colonial aunt in 'Bombay'" (Froula 31). The critiques that Froula makes here are indicative of many of the failures exhibited throughout Woolf's political criticisms within her fiction. While Woolf might have ideologically called for a "socialist/feminist revolution" (Carlston 7) and been, like her husband, an "anti-imperialist" (Froula 31) her fictions—through the vagueness of their references, limited nature of their examinations, and a patronizing tone taken towards other oppressed groups—present a limited worldview. Which frankly makes sense. Woolf saw vividly the devastation of the First World War, the struggles of the women's suffrage movement, the terror of patriarchal violence, and her well documented struggles with mental illness— including the treatment methods she was subjected too. In knowing this personal and historical context, ignorant or under-evaluated critiques of class, race, imperialism, and their complicated nexus are capable of being contextualized and understood; even as it is important for us to point them out and critique them. Woolf's work, and *To the Lighthouse* particularly, makes a valuable point about the subjugation of women and the way that the patriarchy seeks to control and contain social interaction in order to validate itself as well as how

these attitudes lead to nationalist sentiments and expansionist wars. As these subjects were her focus and the things that brought her life the most suffering, engaging with them meaningfully and understanding why they are so poignantly criticized within her work is important.

Smith, arguably, commits similar failings through her focus on capitalist exploitation. In all of Smith's novels discussed in this work, capitalist exploitation is found to be foundational to sexual, imperialist, and racist exploitation. However, as *The Accidental* is “a war novel” (Levin 37), by Smith’s admission, these critiques and foundational ideas are more potent, if less explored, here than anywhere else. A complicated, yet overarching, issue within the novel is the backdrop of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These wars, entered into by the UK during PM Blair’s “Third Wave” Labour government but instigated by the American George W. Bush presidency, were clearly imperialist in nature and caused untold harm and devastation to those countries and the region in general. Notably, unlike WWI, which Woolf is specifically commenting on in *To the Lighthouse*, these wars were explicitly racialized. The war is dealt with in *The Accidental* in two explicit ways. The first being “Hologram Boy”’s explicit support of the war in Magnus’ first section³¹; the second being how the racist harassment that the Indian restaurant in the village is portrayed. “Hologram Boy,” as mentioned earlier in this chapter, is Magnus’ dissociated name for his personhood before he committed his sex crime. This dissociate personhood is envisioned in the text as being the perfect version of Magnus, essentializing and accomplishing the societal expectations he was taught. Within the narrative this support of the wars is connected to the speech he gave for “the dead soldiers of the world wars” (*The Accidental* 40). By associating support of the war on terror both with commemoration of

³¹ “Obviously some countries knew more about good order than others. But if Anna Leto was anti-war then it wasn’t all wasters desperate to get off classes on protests” (*The Accidental* 50).

historical world war soldiers and with the indoctrinations of Neo-liberal ideology, Smith both pays homage to the critiques that Woolf made of the Great War and associates involvement in these unjust imperialist conflicts with capitalist market understandings that conflate success and personhood with profit and consumerism.

The way that the racist abuse at the Indian restaurant in town is addressed is more complicated. We first are given reference to this racism when Astrid and Alhambra/Amber see that “the only ethnic restaurant in the village” has had black paint thrown on its “door and windows” (*The Accidental* 31) near the beginning of the novel. When this abuse is revisited they first attempt to get permission to film the graffiti itself when they encounter the neofascists responsible. Here, Amber/Alhambra stops Astrid from filming the innocuous “car park” (*The Accidental* 242) and instead makes Astrid join her in physically and presently confronting the vandals with the use of her artistic medium, which subsequently forces them to leave:

Astrid tries to imagine a person... in the dusty-looking places from tv, dying because of a bomb or something...but it is hard to know how to make it actually matter inside your head, how to make it any more important than thinking about the colour green. The Curry Palace i.e. it was easy to make that matter because here it is, right here in front of them. But when she and Amber went and asked the Indian man he shook his head and said it was just local high spirits having a bit of fun and not vandalism at all and certainly not racist and there was definitely nothing he wanted them to film and asked them to go away. The whole time he did he was looking over their shoulders at the boys standing watching them outside the chip shop across the road from the Curry Palace. Amber looked across at them and said she thought those boys were the local high spirits.... A man came out of the chip shop and stood behind the boys, watching her and Amber.

...Film them, Amber said looking at the people standing with their arms folded across the road.

When Astrid started filming them one of the boys started coming across the road, probably to get her to stop, and Amber stood right behind Astrid with her hands on her shoulders, but the man called him back and the boys and the man went inside the chip shop and shut the door. (*The Accidental* 128-9)

Given its context as a war novel, these events within the narrative serve to remind the reader of England's history as a racist, imperialist country and that the current wars are both founded on the same ideology and encourage racist abuse towards even vaguely connected minority groups at home. Astrid and Amber/Alhambra's physical confrontation of these perpetuations of the imperialist war at the time display a commitment to non-violent resistance towards oppressive systems and a belief that white people must show up and be present physically in order support the marginalized within their communities. However, this critique, like Woolf's, is still lack-luster when concerning the racial nature of imperialist conquest. First, it must be noted that India, Afghanistan, and Iraq are all different countries and that one version of racism does not entirely match with another. Additionally, while these passages implicitly acknowledge the racist natures of these wars, they do not dwell significantly on that racism. While this might be explained by Smith acknowledging her inability to comment on such issues adequately within a novel thematically focused on other issues, we must acknowledge that this critique or acknowledgement of racism playing a part in these imperialist wars is insufficient, particularly given the way that Marxists have been given to "emphasize worker solidarity over issues of race and gender" (Ghodsee 33) without engaging critically with the nefarious and complex ways that racism functions outside of class/monetary issues. However, the acknowledgment and prominent placement of this racist and imperialist component inherent to heteropatriarchal capitalism is a significant improvement from Woolf's "patronizing irony," as is the notion that white allies must physically show up and stand against such actions rather than simply make art depicting them.

This improvement, however modest and incomplete³², leads us to the question of continuation and difference between the two authors. Why is Woolf’s work centralized on patriarchal violence and war whereas Smith’s is focused on consumer capitalism and questionable consent? While the answer is obviously temporal, it is worth stating out loud. Particularly in the aughts, the conflicts of the cold war—and with them the threat of nuclear annihilated—had ceased to be threatening within the public imagination. As such, capitalism’s “defeat” of communist/socialist economic principles led to a change in the political calculus of Western capitalist democracies. Ostensibly, gender and LGBTQ+ issues had gotten much more attention and succeeded in achieving some legal guarantees of their rights; but women, queer folk, and poor people’s disenfranchisement and access to rights still remained tenuous—though obscured. So, whereas Woolf’s novel functions to highlight explicit discrimination and horrific activity through implicit language, Smith’s novel explicitly exposes less obvious oppressions and horrors. Replaying the formal contradictions emphasized in the first chapter, and mentioned within this one, Woolf and Smith’s fictions ideologically agree on issues of concern, but disagree in practice on how and what to do in the response to these issues.

Within the context of *To the Lighthouse* as a whole, these implied violences and sexual improprieties have very little effect on the explicit/immediate plot of the novel; rather, they affect how the reader feels about the characters in the novel. Whether or not we pick up on

³² I want to acknowledge that the subject of racism within capitalism as depicted in literature is extremely complicated and that I have only breached the surface of the topic. As a white American (particularly one raised in the South), I need to emphasize the incomplete nature of the critique I have made here and point you toward *Women, Race, & Class* and *Are Prisons Absolute* by Dr. Angela Y. Davis, *How to be an Anti-Racist* by Ibram X. Kendi, *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon and *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander for more in-depth non-fiction critiques of the intersection between capital, misogyny, imperialism, and race. Also, I’d highly recommend reading some of Che Guevara’s speeches to the UN.

the idea that Mrs. Ramsay is physically and sexually abused by her husband and whether or not we understand Mr. Ramsay to be serial philanderer does not severely affect the general dynamics of the novel; the Ramsays' dysfunctional and abusive relationship remains the foundation through which the nuclear family's failures are explored, the family as a microcosm of society at large remains clear, and the traumatic and lasting effects of violence for those who experience it are all felt and explorable even if the extent to which abuse is hinted at in the novel remains unrecognized. What Smith does with these hinted-at abuses is choose the most mundane of them and make them graphically explicit so that the power dynamics and grotesque crimes that are mundane within our society are unavoidable.

Thus-far in this chapter we have, rightfully I hope, directed most of our attention towards the violence, exploitation, and abuse that occurs within these novels and how, as both Woolf and Smith use the site of the family as a microcosm for society as a whole, these acts ultimately are what tears the family unit apart. However, these novels do more than simply depict the destruction or dissolution of the family; they also emphasize how queerness exists within that family, disrupts it, and ultimately reshapes it for the better. In both works queerness enters into the family in two ways: through actual queer coded characters and through the disruption that ultimately breaks the family unit apart. Functionally, the disruption takes a very different form within the two novels, but the formal elements that are used to personify that disruption reveal both their similarity and queerness. In *The Accidental*, the disruption takes the form of Amber/Alhambra — the titular accidental — who, as Amber, is consistently physically present with the family for the first two sections of the novel. In *To the Lighthouse*, the disruption takes the form of the First World War which is dictated to the reader from the point of view of the Ramsays' vacation house on the Isle of Skye. Notably, there is a problem with

describing/labeling/categorizing both of these disruptions as queer: Amber only has sex with Magnus and, at least ostensibly, seems more interested in how her personal desires can disrupt the Smart family's status quo, while the First World War, as depicted in *To the Lighthouse*, is clearly seen as an extension of the patriarchal violence that is endemic throughout the first section of the novel.

However, I argue that the formal methods through which the reader is given view into the thoughts and perspectives of these disruptions reveals a mystic nature to the world at large and to disruption itself. Ultimately, the repercussions of the disruptions and the mystical nature of the world that enabled through them allow the queerness present within the narratives to take center stage and redefine the kinships within their respective worlds. As noted earlier when discussing the cinematic qualities of Alhambra's soliloquies, Alhambra's sections both switch formally from the rest of the novel and reflect a more mystical nature within the narrative at large. This mysticism—which ties her to the idea of narrative itself via her connection to cinematic history—helps to explain the fact that she is seemingly irresistible to every member of the Smart family. In fact, it is only when Alhambra/Amber makes the implicit homo-erotic nature of her relationship to Eve explicit by kissing her that she is evicted from the Smart's vacation home. Furthermore, moving from the idea that the untenable issue that plagues the Smart family is their commitment to consumer capitalism that alienates them from each other and the world at large, the fact that Alhambra/Amber is notably lacking in property becomes an important point that accentuates her mystical/queer nature: by lacking in property she symbolically bucks all foundational expectations of the social order. Reinforcing this reading is Alhambra/Amber's inherently dual nature. Beginning with the fact that she has two names within the novel, her fairly explicit bi-sexuality, the contradictions of her mystical nature with the emptiness of her

comparisons of Magnus to a Saint, and her symbolic representation of de-commodification with her exploitation of the Smarts, Alhambra/Amber's duality accentuates and exposes the contradictions and alienations present within the Smart family, thereby exposing the queer possibilities present within the situation that can redeem the unit as a whole and the relationships therein. That her final physical mark left on the narrative is to deprive the family of all their commodities save for the answering machine that holds the members accountable for their misdeeds, makes clear that her presence has slowly but dramatically been detaching the family from their commodity fetishes and their exploitations of others.

More complicated is the queer nature present within the disruption that occurs in *To the Lighthouse*. The disruption being the First World War that is consistently equated to or foreshadowed by the aggression that the male characters, particularly Charles Tansley and Mr. Ramsay, display in the first section of the novel; it seems strange that a section like "Time Passes," which describes the events of the war through the perspective of the Ramsays' vacation house, would inject queerness into the novel. However, the section, perhaps the most beautiful piece of prosaic writing produced in the twentieth century, continually personifies different ethereal aspects related to the house in floral and loving language that intentionally queers the landscape of the home:

Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds, came into bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin, there a bowl of red and yellow dahlias, there the sharp edges and firm bulk of a chest of drawers. Not only was furniture confounded; there was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say, "This is he" or "This is she." (*To the Lighthouse* 127-8)

This passage, near the beginning of the section, describes the loss of gender that occurs as night spreads over the vacation house after the dinner party depicted in "The Window." However, the

genderlessness, or rather the ambiguity of gender, that surrounds the house as it begins its attempt to remain through the terror of night that is brought along with the war, is maintained throughout the chapter. While seasons and other personified notions are gendered throughout the section, the house and the ethereal concepts that exist within it remain reliably androgynous.

Take for instance this passage from the section:

Loveliness and stillness clasped hands in the bedroom, and among the shrouded jugs and sheeted chairs even the prying of the wind, and the soft nose of the clammy sea airs, rubbing, snuffling, iterating and reiterating their questions—"Will you fade? Will you perish?"—scarcely disturbed the peace, the indifference, the air of pure integrity, as if the question they asked scarcely needed that they should answer: we remain.

Whilst speaking to the danger inflicted by the weather and the threat of non-existence, a threat that increases for the house as the section goes on and as members of the Ramsay family die, the integrity of the androgynous forces of loveliness and stillness that personify the internal nature of the home remain intact. If we continue to view the Ramsay family and their close friends as a microcosm for society at large, then we must then see their home and its ethereal qualities as the core elements that make society itself possible. Note again that the language used in this section emphasizes the collective unconscious that has been present throughout Woolf's prose thus far. The stream of consciousness flows between entities, stretching even to the environmental and nebulously ethereal aspects of the house. Importantly, the greatest example of this formal and philosophical principle occurs when gender is obfuscated and the inherent goodness of the spiritual aspects within the family are allowed to take prominence. Central to the support of this reading is that, when the house is remade after the war is over by the working class people the Ramsays' employ, this strange and queer nature—that does not match the normative structure of the heteropatriarchal nuclear family—is what prevails and begins to offer some semblance of

peace within the household. This queer restructuring of the familial home, and thus symbolically its relational center, is evidenced in the text not only in the house's ability to be reconstructed at all, but also through Lily Briscoe being the first of the "family" to arrive back at the house: "(Lily Briscoe had her bag carried up to the house late one evening in September)" (*To the Lighthouse* 141).

This point brings us finally to the queer characters, or rather queer coded characters, within each narrative. Both novels hold their souls within the young, queer coded, female artists who center their moral and philosophical lenses. In *The Accidental* this role is played by Astrid Smart and in *To the Lighthouse* the role is played by Lily Briscoe. Both of these young women are not simply coded as queer within their texts, but create visual art and espouse the power inherent in observation. While these two characters' similarities are important, there is a profound difference when considering the dynamics at stake with the queer characters and how they are capable of interacting with and existing within the families that they are a part of, not to mention the political nature of the art that each creates. While I have posited that Smith makes the themes within Woolf's novel's more explicit in her works, there is an argument to be made that the homoerotic subtext—and homosexuality in general—that exists within *To the Lighthouse* is both more central to the narrative and more heavily dwelt upon; this makes its vague descriptions of queer love and attraction more obvious than the more physically blatant, but less dwelt upon, lesbian desires in Smith's novel. While I concede this point, I argue that the effect that queer characters within *The Accidental* can have on the world around them functions to display a more obvious or forceful understanding of how queer people can be active members of society.

Lily and Mrs. Ramsay's relationship with one another is, perhaps, the strangest within *To the Lighthouse* as they seemingly have little in common and their connection appears at once both distant and exceedingly intimate. This dynamic is most clear within Lily's thoughts of Mrs. Ramsay. Take for instance Lily's memory of Mrs. Ramsay coming to her room late in the evenings:

(of course, Lily reminded herself, I am thinking of her relations with women, and I am much younger, and insignificant person, living off the Brompton Road)... (So she tried to start the tune of Mrs. Ramsay in her head.) Arriving late at night, with a light tap on one's bedroom door, wrapped in an old fur coat (for the setting of her beauty was always that—hasty, but apt), she would enact again whatever it might be—Charles Tansley losing his umbrella; Mr. Carmichael snuffling and sniffing; Mr. Bankes saying, “The vegetable salts are lost.” All this she would adroitly shape; even maliciously twist; and, moving over to the window, in presence that she must go, —it was dawn, she could see the sun rising,—half turn back, more intimately, but still always laughing, insist that she must, Minta must, they all must marry.... An unmarried woman has missed the best of life. (*To the Lighthouse* 49)

Indicated here is both the intimacy of their relationship, with its highly homoerotic undertones—the night-time setting in the bedroom; the inside jokes; the anticipation felt in Lily's thoughts of the events; the carefully placed use of the word “intimately”—and Mrs. Ramsay's adherence to the status quo in regards to motherhood and family. Lily's desire for intimacy with Mrs. Ramsay is even more clear in a passage just a few pages later while resting her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee:

Smiling to think that Mrs. Ramsay would never know the reason of that pressure, she imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of the woman who was, physically, touching her, were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out, would teach one everything, but they would never be offered openly, never

made public. What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? Could the body achieve, or the mind, subtly mingling in the intricate passages of the brain? or the heart? Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee. (*To the Lighthouse* 51).

This is gay. While nominally focused on Lily's desire to achieve Mrs. Ramsay's ethereal nature, it is hard to ignore the homoerotic desire described in this passage. When mentioning that the queerness in *To the Lighthouse* is fairly explicit, this is what I was speaking to. However, simply pointing out the queer nature of the relationship between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe does nothing for our reading of the novel's efforts to queer the family. What is important in pointing out the homosexual nature of the relationship is how it changes the way that the end of the novel functions given Lily's prominence in the final section "The Lighthouse."

This final section begins with Lily questioning "What does it mean then, what can it all mean? ... For really, what did she feel, come back after all these years and Mrs. Ramsay dead? Nothing, nothing—nothing that she could express at all" (*To the Lighthouse* 145). These questions of what it means and how to express both the end of the War and of the known family structure permeate the final section of Woolf's novel. As Cam, James, and Mr. Ramsay prepare for and then make their journey to the lighthouse several years too late for it to truly matter, the novel fixates primarily on Lily remembering her artistic efforts from all those years ago and then finally painting her vision. This fixation on Lily as she processes her experience and paints her picture reveals a few important things that are relevant to reading a queer reconstruction of the family within the narrative.

The first of these is Mr. Ramsay coming up and attempting to gain sympathy from Lily as she sets up to paint, much in the way that he used to from his now deceased wife. In fact, there is some indication that he sees Lily as a potential future Mrs. Ramsay: “There had been some talk of her marrying William Banks once.... His wife had been fond of her....this was one of those moments when an enormous need urged him... to approach any woman, to force them... to give him what he wanted: sympathy” (*To the Lighthouse* 151). However, Lily refuses to give Mr. Ramsay the sympathy that he so clearly desires: “But, no. They stood there, isolated from the rest of the world... and all she did, miserable sinner that she was, was to draw her skirts a little closer round her ankles, lest she should get wet. In complete silence she stood there, grasping her paint brush” (*To the Lighthouse* 153). Instead, she remarks upon his “beautiful boots” (153). From his characterization within “The Window” we would expect Mr. Ramsay to respond in the most toxic way possible. However, Mr. Ramsay responds to Lily’s rejection by explaining how he ties his shoes and then kneeling down and tying her shoes for her in the same way. At the end of this reaction Lily thinks that Mr. Ramsay “had become a very distinguished, elderly man, who had no need of her whatsoever. She felt snubbed” (154). This surprising interaction engages us with the possibility of change and redemption. A queer interruption has happened and now Mr. Ramsay, while not entirely changed, interacts with his familial surroundings in a profoundly different way. This change puts the fact that Lily is there at all and the fact that he is taking his children to the lighthouse into a new context for the reader entirely. We can now see these actions as something other than self serving. That the explicit recognition of that change occurs within an interaction with a queer woman displays a certain political/philosophical understanding that the family structure, with its emphasis on control, violence, and patriarchal supremacy can

be subverted and made kinder when forced to be reimagined by, and centered within, a queer perspective.

The second notable thing is temporal and scenic: Lily's painting of her landscape as Augustus Carmichael reads poetry on the beach. Throughout the novel, Lily's attempts to create art that is true to her observations is a tension within her narrative arc and as she stands on the beach looking out upon the Ramsays' journey to the titular lighthouse she questions the value and meaning of life, Mrs. Ramsay's understanding of familial construction, as well as her relationship with Mrs. Ramsay. Emphasized here is the queer nature of her relationship with Mrs. Ramsay through the presence of Augustus Carmichael, the other queer coded person in the Ramsay family circle, being on the beach with her. Carmichael, a poet who seemingly just languishes about while at the Ramsays' beach house, is heavily implied to have been in a sexual/romantic relationship with the eldest Ramsay child Andrew as he was "devoted... to Andrew, and would call him into his room and, Andrew said, 'show him things'" (*To the Lighthouse* 96) and "after he had heard of Andrew Ramsay's death... Mr. Carmichael had 'lost all interest in life'" (194)³³. Mr. Carmichael's presence on the beach with Lily is important because it solidifies and reinforces the fact that the family, and by extension society, has been reconstructed queerly. More directly, Lily's observation and questioning, allows her to clearly see the reconstruction and change within the Ramsay family. While they might be without the

³³ Importantly, the age difference within this implied relationship brings up the issues of questionable consent brought about by Magnus and Amber/Alhambra's relationship within *The Accidental*. However, there is a well noted history of young gay men being "taught" the ropes of living a closeted, undercover life, by older gay men. This dynamic is complex, troublesome, and mired with discussions of the ethical dilemmas that surround the historic oppression of homosexuality. As such, while I want and need to remark on the similarities of the narrative situation, I do not feel as if I have the adequate time to properly parse the matter within the confines of this thesis.

matriarch holding them together, in her absence, and perhaps without her stability and internalized reinforcement of the heteronormative patriarchal status quo, the family has become a stranger and kinder place: “Lily Briscoe completes her painting; art puts the world together again” (J. Love 162). That Lily can now “have... [her] vision” (*To the Lighthouse* 209), one in which the family is capable of making it to the lighthouse and, importantly, where she can witness and express that vision, displays Woolf’s fundamental belief in the power of internal life and artistic observation to hold power for queer people within the world.

While this is incredibly uplifting, it is important to note that the power of observation is the most external power Woolf is willing to imagine as far as queer political power within the world is concerned. While the family might be reconstructed in a queer way, it is not through the direct action of queer folk that this occurs. The ethereal forces within the house simply “remain.” They hold out. They bear witness. But they do not directly reshape the external world that they live in. Nor can their observations, however much they might wish it, change the fundamental structure of the house’s function writ large. Mr. Ramsay might now check his anger and tyranny, but he is still the indisputable leader of the household. Paul and Minta’s familial structure might buck traditional Protestant family construction, but it is still a bourgeois patriarchal fantasy of the husband as head of the family with a mother/wife to care for the home and a mistress to care for his sexual desires: “They were ‘in love ’no longer; no, he had taken up with another woman...who went to meetings and shared Paul’s views.... Far from breaking up the marriage, that alliance had righted it. They were excellent friends, obviously” (174). And while Lily might see the kinder, queerer vision of the family and bring about art that helps accentuate that vision within the internal lives of those around her (similar to the way that Mr. Carmichael’s poetry strikes an emotional chord with the nation), she still stands essentially alone, creating her art. It is

not a mistake that Mrs. Ramsay and Andrew die; no queer couple may survive together and happily open within this familial construction—echoing Heather Love’s assertion that “those who are directly identified with same sex desire most often end up dead” (1). After all, it is patriarchal violence and entitlement, not queer activism, that brings about the events that spur the queer reconstruction of the family. Here the collective subconscious nature of Woolf’s formal approach becomes exceedingly important to recognize. As James and Cam sit in the boat with their father thinking about his “tyranny” (*To the Lighthouse* 164) and the ways he has changed—how he “is now” (190)—and as Mr. Ramsay and Lily have their mini confrontation/understanding about their relationship and shoes their consciousnesses weave in and out of each other seamlessly. It is their internal lives that are interconnected, and only their internal lives that are affected by queer observation and expression. While those observations and expressions might remake the family into a more generous construct, the oppressive superstructures that govern their lives remain unchallenged: “we perish[ed], each alone” (191). Re-centering our queer artists on the beach, Heather Love’s observation that “While contact with the dead is impossible, queer history is marked by a double impossibility: we will never possess the dead; our longing for them is also marked by the historical impossibility of same-sex desire” (21) becomes poignant. In this narrative, even as it is more hopeful and optimistic that the ones that Love is directly speaking to, the foundational social order is impossible to topple; no matter how much restructuring is done the foundational corner stones remain. As such, the proletariat still do the real work of rebuilding the house, queer love cannot live fulfilled, and the patriarchy—for all the disaster it has wrought upon the world—remains only vaguely humbled and questioned.

Astrid's character in *The Accidental* seems to be a clear response to these themes and philosophical implications. Like Lily, Astrid provides the clear juxtaposition to the familial matriarch and is a queer coded young woman obsessed with creating visual art. However, the medium has changed; she holds a camera rather than a paintbrush. There are notable problems with this framing. Astrid is a prepubescent girl rather than a romantically aware 30 something consciously untangling the philosophical ramifications of her desires within a patriarchal society and, as such, her homosexuality much more implicitly hinted at. While her entire relationship with Amber/Alhambra reads like a child's first crush on their babysitter, her only explicitly queer moments are when Amber/Alhambra is shown laying down in her bed. The first time that this happens is particularly revealing:

The bed shifts as she gets into it. Astrid keeps her eyes shut. She pulls in closer, slides in close to Astrid's back. She blows warm breath into Astrid's hair, right into her head. She wraps her arms one around Astrid's middle and the other over her into the back of Astrid's neck.

Astrid feels her own bones underneath the warm breath, thin and clean there like kindling for a real fire. She thinks her heart might combust right out of her chest in the happiness. (*The Accidental* 135)

While you could probably read Astrid's reaction to Amber/Alhambra's physical affection in this scene as a daughterly response to the first time she is shown maternal affection, it seems easier to read it queerly as a romantic and sexual awakening. So, though Astrid's queerness can be disputed as her preteen assumptions of gendered desire are fairly innocent, it would be hard to argue for her heterosexuality. After all, the worst insult that Astrid can think of is "wankstain" (*The Accidental* 242); an insult that displays both a distain for heterosexual objectification of women within a capitalist economic system as well as a distain for male sexuality and desire in

general. Rather, what is particularly explicit in *The Accidental* is Astrid's desire to observe everything and to overturn the systems of abuse that surround her as she sees them.

Amongst the first thoughts we receive from her consciousness are her questioning the nature of her change in last name—“(Astrid Smart. Astrid Berenski....)” (*The Accidental* 7); a semblance of the patriarchal structures that determine her life. Additionally, in these first thoughts we are shown Astrid thinking about observation and sight: “Possibly the real beginning is when you are just forming into a person and for the first time the soft stuff that makes your eyes is actually made, formed, inside the hard stuff that becomes your head i.e. your skull” (8). Shortly after this she thinks about two plays she has seen with her family: *Oedipus Rex*³⁴ and *Medea*³⁵. Through these thoughts and references, we are shown that Astrid, even before she encounters Amber/Alhambra and is changed by her, is thinking deeply about the connections between observation, art, and justice. That said, like her brother Magnus, Astrid is also shown at the beginning of the narrative to have been indoctrinated into capitalist, neoliberal, ideological thought: “It is obvious. Some people are naturally not as suited to living the same way as other people, so they make less money and live a different, less good kind of life” (16). However, a change happens during the middle of the novel. After using the camera to confront the racist vandals at the Curry Palace, Alhambra/Amber “drops the camera over the side of the bridge” (119), destroying it. Obviously, this shocks, angers, and confounds Astrid. However, “When Astrid gets home... she catches sight of herself in the mirror and.... She stares at herself. / The part of herself that wants to laugh feels separate, seeing herself like that. It feels i.e. completely

³⁴ “Like the play she saw with the man in it whose eyes were gouged out....It was one of Michael's tragedies. It was quite good though” (*The Accidental* 9).

³⁵ “Like when Michael and her mother made her go to the other tragedy that was completely insane about the woman who loses it and kills her children” (*The Accidental* 9).

unbothered, or like a whole other different her” (119-20). After noticing this difference, outside the next day she notices “how green things are” (127), indicating that there is a presentness that Astrid has been missing about life through her commitment with the camera. Clearly, the camera is a useful tool, as is art generally, but focusing on that solely has prevented Astrid from examining her own personhood and how she might be capable of working within the world in front of her.

In part because her art is violently ripped from her midway through the novel, Astrid’s role within the narrative is particularly strange and compelling when read through the lens of Lily in *To the Lighthouse*. At “The end” of the book we find our young queer heroine turning into an burgeoning anticapitalist feminist agitator, who actively seeks to disrupt and disturb the capitalist heteropatriarchy with her presence, much in the way that Amber/Alhambra does, but without the anti-social streak. Rather than the self-serving nature that Alhambra/Amber uses to approach her anti-capitalist sabotage, Astrid listens to Magnus’ confession and, in Michael’s final section—the last where we see the family together (sans Eve)—we see her supporting Magnus’ re-entry into society and Michael’s efforts to become a better father—even as he struggles against sexualizing her. While she has stopped allowing her camera to effectively mediate her life experiences, she still creates art. We are told that she is “writing a manifesto” for some sort of “alternative school newspaper or something” with friends she has made and handing out handcrafted badges that read either “Imagine or afraid” (*The Accidental* 291). When viewing Astrid through the lens of a response to Lily Briscoe, the message is fairly clear: Art and observation are not enough, queer people must go out into the world and directly disrupt the political status quo. By forcing her artistic queer protagonist to function as both the site of redemption and queer restructuring of the family and as an agitator in the novel, devoid of her

optical artistic outlet, Smith argues both that art is important and that direct political action is necessary to pry society from the capitalist heteropatriarchy. Once again, form becomes important here. Instead of the collective subconscious displayed in Woolf's use of the indirect internal monologue, Smith separates the characters, consciousness and uses the indirect monologue to enhance the observational experience of the novel to draw attention to its complications and inadequacies. Smith's form accentuates the profundity of observation and witnessing while also demonstrating why it is not enough to enact real political change. The queer proletariat must see and be seen in order for their direct actions to mean anything.

In conclusion, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Accidental* are both complex and difficult novels that deal with the abusive and corruptive nature of the heteronormative nuclear family. Both novels use that abuse as the basis of depicting the dissolution of said unit and imagine a queer reconstruction of its form based around the vision of young queer-coded women. However, the novels handle these themes and narrative structures in very different ways. Unequivocally, the violence, both within the family structure itself and within the context of the First World War, depicted or hinted at in *To the Lighthouse* is much more visceral and horrifying; from hinting at spousal abuse and possible marital rape to the fact that nearly a third of the Ramsay family dies within the war, the violence in Woolf's novel is fairly astounding to try and conceptualize. However, through the gentle nature of the language, the way that the indirect internal monologue functions to obfuscate the horrific, and the experimental way that the consciousnesses of the characters weave in and out of each other, the violence within the novel purposely feels more ethereal and harder to grasp. Seemingly in direct response, Smith's version of the narrative explicitly deals with the gendered and sexual crimes, using the indirect internal monologue to enhance the reader's feeling of watching the events unfold before them and

making those crimes viscerally upsetting; pointing out that we “see” these same crimes often in our own lives. Similarly, the different ways that the novels portray their artist characters dealing with the queer reconstruction of the family reveals a perspective on how queer people can deal with and change the violence that surrounds them. Through Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse*, art is presented as a philosophical answer both to the violence and patriarchal oppression that surrounds her as well as the inconceivability of functional queer love. The interior life and artistic expression of that inner life is presented as a balm to the exterior that leads to a more gentle, proletarian, and queer understanding of kinship that greatly relieves the suffering of the individual. However, this expression and inner peace has little chance of affecting the overwhelming superstructure of those oppressive forces. In *The Accidental*, by having the artist’s medium taken away, without depriving her of the ethos endowed by that art, Astrid’s narrative and internal process directly argues that art is important only when it can be abandoned and its lessons put into direct political disruption of the status quo; namely the consumerist commodification that encourages interpersonal exploitation and objectification. Ultimately, it is this active agency that combines with a willingness to forgive and bear witness to others that allows a queer reconstruction of the family to truly take hold.

Chapter 3

Love, Joy, and the Queer Proletariat Revolution: *Girl Meets Boy* as an argument for the political nature of queer art and life

In the March of 1941, Virginia Woolf snuck out of her house, walked down to the river, filled her pockets with rocks, and drowned herself.

Suicide is a shadow that hangs over the heads of all queer folk. Rates of depression, self-harm, and suicide attempts are all higher for queer people, particularly for non-binary and trans people, than for the cis-het public (Trevor Project). Beyond the threats of social isolation, discrimination, and external violence, the possibility that one day we will inflict violence or death upon ourselves is an aspect of queer life that we ignore at our own risk. Still, I feel trepidation and hesitancy bringing up Woolf's biographical end, for the same reason that I hate the most common image of her³⁶. There is a pervasive popular understanding of queer artistic life that romanticizes Woolf's suffering more than her literature, illness, and her philosophical and political work. However, it is important to bring up because, thus far, the novels discussed in this thesis have been concerned with either the threat of suicide for queer people or the violence inflicted on queer women by the capitalist patriarchy. As much as we might love and adore these

³⁶ A portrait taken of her when she was in her early twenties, several decades before she would write her most important works.

novels, finding solace in their narratives, they are not happy stories. *Girl Meets Boy*'s narrative begins with our protagonist Anthea walking down to the river Ness and wishing that her "bones were unbound... mingling, picked clean by fish" and thinking that she could "just walk into the river" and "let the fast old river have" her (*Girl Meets Boy* 26-8). Sitting down by the river bank, she notices a small stone by her foot. She throws the stone "in instead" (28). This is a different kind of queer story, one of queer joy and love; openly anti-capitalist and very aware of the literary lineage it comes from. With *Girl Meets Boy* Ali Smith uses both form and narrative to give credit and appreciation to the queer and feminist works that have preceded her narratives while arguing for the inherently radical and transformational power that can be harnessed through queer joy, love, and art.

Girl Meets Boy: The Myth of Iphis, is Smith's retelling of Ovid's myth, follows Anthea and Imogen Gunn, two sisters from Inverness, as they come to terms with Anthea's queerness when she meets and falls in love with Robin, an activist who was assigned female at birth, but who truly occupies some gender-queer space: consistently being referred to as "him/her" (*Girl Meets Boy* 149) throughout the novel. Through the course of the narrative, both sisters grapple with their individual romantic pursuits, the strained relationship they have with each other, and the oppressive, exploitative, nature of the heteronormative capitalist patriarchy. What is particularly useful about *Girl Meets Boy* for this project is how explicit Smith's themes and influences are both narratively and formally. Both sisters begin the narrative working for a company called Pure, a corporation who has gained access to the river Ness' supply of fresh water and is seeking to capitalize on an image of health and connection to the land—"Purely. Clearly. Highland. Nature. Power" (*Girl Meets Boy* 38)—while selling access to a resource that should be a basic human right. The work culture and higher ups favor strict adherence to

“traditional” gender norms and hierarchy all while giving lip service to vaguely progressive causes: “we suggest our bottled water takes and makes a stand, it’ll become bottled idealism” (41). Themes of adherence to ones’ self and accepting loved ones as they are run through Imogen’s internal monologue. The capability of art to change perspective and have direct political impact is key to every relationship—familial, romantic, and platonic—throughout the narrative. Additionally, formal experimentation and augmentation are equally explicit. Using allusions to influential texts that occasionally border on direct quotation, Smith gives her readers a clear path to follow when directing and analyzing her text in relation to the literature that has come before. Important to notion and to the idea that this novel is a part of the evolution of queer-stream-of-consciousness narratives, is a point that Holly Anne Ranger brings up in their Master’s thesis, that, after writing her PhD thesis, Smith “lectured on Woolf’s use of water imagery in her writing” and that “this is of particular note due to the use of water imagery throughout *Girl meets boy* in a way that recalls Woolf and adds layers of meaning to Smith’s words” (46). As water is built into two of the the foundational symbols in the novel, the river Ness and Pure bottled water, understanding Ranger’s point allows us to clearly see Woolf’s influence throughout thee novel.

As discussed throughout this project thus far, Smith’s narratives consistently blame heteropatriarchal capitalism for the oppressive nature of the social order. *Girl Meets Boy*, in this aspect, does not differ. However, *Girl Meets Boy* both disguises this contempt less and displays the interconnectivity between the oppression of women, LGBTQ+ folk, the lower classes, and capitalist exploitation much more clearly than in her more complex and subtle novels. Sure, *The Accidental* displays the loss of personal property as a means of crippling the nuclear family and its abusive patriarchal power structure, forcing its most culpable benefactors to accept blame and

attempt acts of contrition and meaningful development; sure, *Hotel World* revolves around a literal superstructure that kills young queer women and features a morally bankrupt woman named Penny; but both of these novels deliver their symbolic messages subtly in the background of the narrative or through means that take the dramatic elements of the story away from the machinations of capital itself. In contrast, *Girl Meets Boy* bluntly ties the exploitative nature of toxic masculinity and capitalism to Pure, creating a villain that cannot be obscured or missed. Pure is an international company dedicated to exploiting a natural resource—which they openly accept is a human need—and desires to market this exploitation as being beneficial to humanity; co-opting language in an attempt to convince people that their product is “the most open-minded on the market” (*Girl Meets Boy* 38). But rather than letting this discussion of how best to sell an essential resource go unnoticed, hidden in a marketing meeting where Anthea loses her job, the narrative quickly and devastatingly points out the despicable nature of the company’s capitalization of a human need through Robin—arguably the novel’s hero/ine—who graffiti’s the words “DON’T BE STUPID. WATER IS A HUMAN RIGHT. SELLING IT IN ANY WAY IS MORALLY WRO[NG]” (*Girl Meets Boy* 43) on the sign advertising the company outside of their Inverness headquarters. This act of activism around the human right to water by Robin, our gender non-conforming character, echoes Woolf’s use of water as noted by Ranger; an echo that emphasizes the clear reference to Woolf’s biographical end at the beginning of the narrative, informing the reader of this novel’s literary lineage: “In Woolf, water imagery has philosophical and political connotations as well as being an aesthetic choice; Woolf uses her watery style to breakdown the phallogocentric order” (49). Importantly though, this type of overt anti-capitalist commentary is not unique to this section of the book, as seen through the retelling of the narrative’s mythic inspiration in the center of the narrative.

In the chapter entitled “Us,” we are given two versions of the myth of Iphis through Anthea’s perspective. The first is a short and direct summary, the second is the truth, or at least Anthea’s true experience, of Robin’s retelling with all of the interrupting commentary of two lovers actually having a conversation. In the latter we are told that Iphis is born into a family where the father has to go to his pregnant wife to tell her, despite the fact that he is a “good man....[,] that [they]’ll have to put it [the baby] to death if it’s a girl” because they “can’t afford a girl... it’s the way of the world” (*Girl Meets Boy* 90-1). Here, at one of the key moments—and certainly one of the most metaphorically rich—within the story, we see access to capital as one of the primary threats to queer existence. It feels slightly too obvious to point out here, but clearly this detail is an overt critique of capitalism’s failure to protect the lives of the proletariat and particularly the lives of queer proletariat women.

These overt critiques of capitalism are similarly expressed through more subtle, formal, means throughout the book; for instance, the alienation inherent to Imogen’s existence within the world, or at least the way that her consciousness has adapted to cope with that alienation. The experimental form through which Imogen’s consciousness is displayed emphasizes both the alienation and anxiety that have been ingrained within her by the capitalist system. The first lines we get from her perspective are:

(Oh my God my sister is A GAY.)

(I am not upset. I am not upset. I am not upset. I am not upset.)

I am putting on my Stella McCartney Adidas track-suit bottoms. I am lacing up my Nike runners. I am zipping up my Stella McCartney Adidas track-suit top. I am going out the front door like I am a (normal) person just going out of a (normal) front door on a (normal) early summer day in the month of May and I am going for a run which is the kind of (normal) thing (normal) people do all the time. (*Girl Meets Boy* 49)

This opening passage to the second chapter of the book, “you,” is far from the most profound way that Imogen’s consciousness expresses the connection between her anxiety, her self-alienation, and the ways that those mental struggles are connected to heteropatriarchal capitalism, but it does display a very clear connection between them that is useful for dissecting the way that the formal stream-of-consciousness methods accentuates Smith’s themes and political philosophy. Several things happen within this section that I want to parse individually. First, notice the way that the parentheses are used in this passage to express anxiety. These anxious thoughts are separated from Imogen’s tactile existence not only in a categorical sense, but in a physical one itself. These parentheses occur throughout both of Imogen’s chapters and they are often separated spatially into a separate paragraph, alienated from the life she is physically living. Imogen’s tactile life is determined not by the primary concerns of what she believes or how she feels, but how she looks; her internal life, the core of her existence and personhood is alienated from her physical interactions with the world. Instead, her actual life is dominated by product and what is visible to others. For instance, when she talks about the physical actualities of her weight loss—“I am down to just over seven stone. / I am doing well” (*Girl Meets Boy* 53) and “I’m waiting for the taxi, I throw up. Luckily I am adept at throwing up” (126)—her thoughts are not alienated from her tactile existence, but when she anxiously confronts the purpose and horrors behind her fixation on weight—“(I have thought for a long time that the way my clothes hang on me is more important than me inside them.)” (140) and “(But it is the second time for months and months, I realise... that I haven thrown up on purpose.)” (126)—they are.

This formal presence of alienation never truly leaves Imogen's consciousness for the rest of the book, no matter how much better she gets mentally and physically³⁷. She can never fully lose the damages that the destructive social order has wrought on her mind and body. It is important to note here too, that the way that the hegemonic understandings of economics and gender suppress and deeply harm Imogen evokes the state that we find Mrs. Dalloway in throughout her novel. Despite the quiet and elusive nature of Clarissa's consciousness, the reader understands that both her sleep and appearance are controlled by the bourgeois patriarchal powers that determine her life; that her focus on and love of creating physically beautiful spaces is an outward attempt to cope with her suppressed queerness and the unmentionable nature of her depression. Smith here, evoking Woolf's work from the very beginning of this novel, seems to be commenting on, and perhaps even critiquing, the necessity of access to capital and private spaces necessary in Woolf's understanding of how to create a meaningful inner life as a queer woman within the capitalist heteropatriarchal social order.

When reading Imogen's parenthetical thoughts as formal evidence of her self-alienation it is important to note that the alienation depicted through her parenthetical thoughts are not limited to negative expressions of her self-image or anxieties about her inner life. Rather, they are often the important, substantive intellectual and ethical concerns Imogen has as she goes about living her life. It is the hegemonic social order's suppression of these issues' importance that induces Imogen's self-alienation and makes her parenthetical thoughts problematic for her. As the novel progresses and Anthea and Robin's generative relationship provides a positive example for her to compare against the oppressive coercion of patriarchal capitalism, Imogen's parenthetical

³⁷ Its frequency is, however, severely reduced as she begins to live life more as herself than as who she believes she needs to be to exist within the world.

thoughts become more positive, shorter, and easier for her to express. For instance, while early in the section “you” Imogen thinks “(It said in the paper this morning that teenagers who are it are six times more likely to commit suicide than teenagers who aren’t it.) / (I don’t know what to do with myself.) / ... (Anyone looking at me will think I’m really weird.)” (*Girl Meets Boy* 62).

While these thoughts all, in some way, are based around her anxieties about how she is perceived, there is also a clear concern for her sister’s health and happiness. When we are given her thoughts again in the chapter “them,” Imogen’s consciousness provides her with comments pertaining to what is ethically happening in front of her as she is given a promotion at Pure: “(He wants me to do — what?)” or “(But it’s — wrong.)” (*Girl Meets Boy* 123). And much later, after she has rejected the company’s promotion, we get the particularly moving section:

(I feel like we should always be meeting each other off trains, I think inside my head.

That’s if we’re not actually on the same train, going the same way.)

I say it out loud.

I feel like we should always be meeting each other off trains, that’s if we’re not actually on the same train, going the same way. Or am I saying too much out loud? I say.

You’re saying it too quietly, he says. I wish you’d shout it. (*Girl Meets Boy* 123)

These passages that display positive self-awareness, ethical reasoning, and joy being parenthetical—rather than contradicting the assessment of these parenthetical thoughts as evidence of Imogen’s alienation from herself—reinforce the reading of Imogen’s parenthetical thoughts being a display of “heterosexual dollar[’s]” (Ginsberg 14) ability to influence the very mentality with which people interact with the world. What is so moving, and useful, about the romantic quote above is that it shows very explicitly how heteropatriarchal capitalism’s focus on how things are perceived by others has made it difficult for Imogen to express real intimacy and love with another person. When she is capable of immediately rising above that alienation, we

are provided with the physical proof of that ability through the thought's repetition out loud, along with her trepidation at expressing herself, and the positive affirmation that comes with entrusting her joy to another person—once again displaying the novel's belief in "celebrating the redemptive power of language and self-fashioning" (Germanà and Horton 2)

This formal choice that Smith makes in Imogen's chapters underlines one of the more coercive ways that capitalism achieves its goals. By alienating workers from the products and effects of their labour people are alienated from themselves, which damages their ability to communicate and, in turn, alienates them from communion with others³⁸. *Girl Meets Boy* knows that capitalism's foundational need to exploit humans for monetary gain necessitates the maintenance of the white heteropatriarchal social order and that the integration of exploitation into every aspect of life manifests as a direct threat to the lives of women, particularly queer proletariat women. In perhaps the novel's, and Ali Smith's, most explicit denunciation of this system of control Keith, the corporate executive of Pure present in the narrative, gives a speech about the company's ultimate goals right before offering Imogen a promotion:

My ambition, Keith says is to make Pure oblivion possible.

Right! I say.

(I hope I say it brightly enough.)

What I want, he says, is to make it not just possible but natural for someone, from the point of rising in the morning to the point of going to sleep again at night, to spend his whole day, obliviously, in Pure hands.

³⁸ Marx addresses the historical ways that labour has functioned and been objectified or alienated from the labourer in the section "Development of Exchange and of Capital" of *The Grundrisse*. Near the end of the section he states, "Hence, just as the worker relates to the product of his labour as an alien thing, so does he relate to the combination of labour as an alien combination, as well as to his own labour as an expression of his life, which, although it belongs to him, is alien to him and coerced from him" (Marx 260-1).

So, when his wife turns on his tap to fill his coffee machine, the water that comes out of it is administered, tested and cleaned by Pure. When she puts his coffee in the filter and butters his toast, or chooses him an apple from the fruit bowl, each of these products will have been shipped by and bought at one of the outlets belonging to Pure. When he picks up the paper to read at the breakfast table, whether it's a tabloid or a Berliner or a broadsheet, it's one of the papers that belong to Pure.... And we've only touched on his wife, only the surface of his infant. We haven't even begun to consider his ten-year-old son, his teenage daughter. Because Pure Product is everywhere. Pure is massive throughout the global economy. (*Girl Meets Boy* 116-9)

As if this horrifying aspiration to world domination was not clear enough commentary, what Keith wants Imogen to do in her new role is to essentially run image marketing for Pure when the worst of their atrocities come to light. As Keith puts it, Imogen's first responsibility in her new job will be to "Deny Disparage [and] Rephrase" because a "Small body of irate ethnics" are protesting a "planned filter-dam" Pure is constructing as the "dam blocks their access to fresh water and ruins their crops" (*Girl Meets Boy* 123). He instructs her to say that "they're ethnic troublemakers who are trying to involve us in a despicable religious war" and demands that she "Use the word terrorism if necessary" (*Girl Meets Boy* 123). Importantly, Keith has an erection while he gives this speech.

Ultimately, these disturbing demands, aspirations, and the way that Keith presents them to Imogen mix with the positive influence that comes from Robin and Anthea—specifically the "glass of water given in kindness" (144) that Robin gives Imogen when she comes home drunk after her night out with Dominic and Norman—, giving Imogen the strength to turn down the promotion, quit her job, and begin being true to herself and her ideals: "despite [the] focus on solitude as a fundamental aspect of contemporary experience, where again... agency is curtailed by consumer capitalism, community... takes on a key role in shaping meaning as it awakens the

narrators to the importance of social involvement” (Horton 16). While narratively this is important, and a display of how Smith makes explicit the implicit themes within Woolf’s works, I have used extensive quotes from this one five-page section of the novel because it shows, in words, what I have been arguing the form of Imogen’s monologues implicitly argues: That the white capitalist heteropatriarchy’s desire is to monetize all aspects of life, that to do this means exploiting human beings and the natural environment, which necessitates forcibly maintaining the status quo, which requires alienating people from themselves while creating social divisions and animosities amongst the proletariat in order to prevent them from organizing for their communal good³⁹. While this fairly basic understanding of Marxist political philosophy is evident within the narrative’s critiques of the social order, its primary focus is on the ways in which these corrosive systems (intentionally) cause particular harm to queer women and other marginalized groups.

Clearly colonialism and racism are a part of the way that this system functions and Smith acknowledges that more explicitly here than she does in *The Accidental*. Part of why I took so much time to introduce the section of Keith’s speech into the body of this paper is because it clearly addresses the fact that the worst forms of capitalist exploitation are visited upon colonized communities of color. However, much in the same way that colonialism is discussed in the novels of the previous chapter, Smith’s commentary here leaves something to be desired.

While you could compellingly make the case that Scotland is a colonized state and that Smith’s

³⁹ “But this tendency in capitalism goes even further. The fetishistic character of economic forms, the reification of all human relations, the constant expansion and extension of the division of labour which subjects the process of production to an abstract, rational analysis, without regard to the human potentialities and abilities of the immediate producers, all these things transform the phenomena of society and with them the way in which they are perceived” (*History & Class Consciousness* 9).

fictional narratives routinely depict the ways that Scottish folk are still seen as second class citizens within the UK, I doubt any reasonable person, much less Smith herself, would attempt to compare that subjugation to the sublime quantities of evil inflicted on black and brown people in countries that were colonized by “Western” industrial powers. Therefore, the complications of how Smith comments on colonialism and racism in her fiction, particularly when focusing on how she addresses these topics in the wake of Woolf’s commentary on them in her’s, are many. So, while this short novel does explicitly tie racism, capitalism and imperialism together, it also runs the risk of implying that racism and imperialism are only the products of intentionally bad actors by creating such an obviously evil villain. Arguably, by focusing on the discrimination and violence enabled and reinforced on women by the capitalist heteropatriarchy, Smith is capable of creating narratives with clear political focus that create devastating effects. On the other hand, to bring up such issues but not spending the time to deal with them complexly and deeply, she sidelines racism as a sub-category of capitalist exploitation. And while the two work in tandem, similar to my critique in the previous chapter, they are obviously separate issues and racism cannot be confined or fully explained by capitalism. However, I do want to point out that the handling of race and imperialism here is more complex than within *The Accidental* by portraying Imogen’s parenthetical thoughts and the intense pressures she faces to continue working for a company she knows does evil in the world. The acknowledgement that racism and imperialism are largely popular because the white bourgeois heteropatriarchy is capable of successfully playing the marginalized and lower classes against each other and preventing common cause and solidarity is significant. By clearly defining working for enterprises that commit such crimes as wrong, while also offering an explanation, however implicit, of how

exploitative systems are perpetuated, *Girl Meets Boy* offers a significant improvement in engaging with the subject of racist imperialism.

Nowhere in *Girl Meets Boy* is the oppression of women more narratively evident than through the ways that heteropatriarchal oppression is shown through the threat of sexual violence as a means of maintaining the status quo. While no actual sexual violence occurs within the novel, it is endemic to the way that the men within the Pure company interact with the women on the novel's pages. Of course the way we, as readers, first know that the company men are going to be the villains is through the fact that Anthea hates them, derides them as "shaveys," and cannot tell them apart. While Anthea's story arc within the novel is much less complex than Imogen's, from early on in her chapter it is evident that the reader is meant to trust her judgement and deeply empathize with her, as is the norm for protagonists within novels. However, things get truly horrifying when looking at the ways that these men act towards Imogen. For instance, when Imogen goes out to the pub with her coworkers, Dominic and Norman, the statements they make to sexualize and degrade women generally combine with how they coerce her into progressively more uncomfortable situations to create a real sense of danger throughout the scene. First, they trick her into coming out to the bar with them by making her think many more people will be there. Then, they pressure her into getting drunk when she doesn't want to, as they proceed to sexualize every woman in the office—beginning with the "work experience girl" Chantelle who is only "sixteen"⁴⁰—before they move on to explicitly

⁴⁰ And whom one of their coworkers Brian is supposedly dating. Which, as mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, while possibly not legally problematic, is at the very least severely fucked. Don't worry though, Chantelle meets Artemis (the Greek god) and swears herself to "eternal celibacy" at the end of the novel (*Girl Meets Boy* 154).

sexualizing Imogen and Anthea to Imogen's face: "I'd like to see her gregging⁴¹, Norman says looking at me. You and that good-looking little sister of yours" (*Girl Meets Boy* 63-7). All of these individual actions add up to create a fear for Imogen within the reader that reminds them of the very real harm that these attitudes lead to in real life. When she successfully hides to get away from them at the end of the night there is a relief that comes knowing that the night has simply been crummy.

While all of the things that Dominic and Norman do during this scene are horrible, they do give an almost explicit threat of violence during this scene, which must be discussed. It comes when Imogen finally stands up for her sister, ever so slightly, and notes that "the paper this morning [said] that teenagers who are gay are six times more likely to kill themselves than teenagers who aren't" (69). This gives Norman and Dominic the opportunity to express their feelings about queer sexuality explicitly and when they do, it is bone-chilling: "Good. Ha ha! Norman says. / Dominic's eyes cloud. Human species, self patrolling, he says" (69). Going further, they speak directly about lesbians: "I mean, when men do it... it's fucking disgusting and it leads to queer paedophilia and everything, but at least it's real sex they have, eh? But women. It's like, how can they? I just don't get it. It's a joke" (70). Here, we are faced with the very real attitude that the heteropatriarchy uses to approach homosexuality: simultaneous disgust and fetishization. As all of the business bros from *Pure* are essentially indistinguishable, Dominic and Norman stand as symbols for patriarchal corporate culture writ large. The social order they represent wants queer people dead. Period. But they will tolerate the existence of lesbians as long as they can imagine them as sexual objects whose erotic actions are performed purely for the

⁴¹ an unfortunate pun they use to describe the act of lesbian sex based off of the name of a BBC reporter "Greg Dyke" (*Girl Meets Boy* 68).

pleasure that they gain in exploiting them. In this attitude we see echoes of Mr. Ramsay's quest for sympathy in *To the Lighthouse* and the way that he treats both his wife and the young women whom he has access to. While Mr. Ramsay's change within the final section of Woolf's novel compels me to view him with kinder eyes than I view the faceless corporate goons of *Girl Meets Boy*, the shadow of his violence that hangs over the house, his perception of a woman's presence existing to satisfy his own desires regardless of their own, and his ultimate attraction to two queer women in this way throughout the course of the novel all point to similar impulses that are shared here, much more perversely and disturbingly, through Dominic and Norman.

Finally, however bad this scene in the bar might be, it pales in comparison to the threat of violence, and arguably just outright violence, inflicted on Imogen during her private meeting with Keith. As mentioned earlier, Keith's pitch to Imogen is deplorable on its face, but the fact that he has an erection during it, and the way that he uses his body during the interaction is horrifying: "(Keith's midriff is close to my eyes. I can see that his trousers are repressing an erection. More, I can see that he wants me to see it. He is actually showing me his hidden hard-on.)" (*Girl Meets Boy* 123). Combining this with the violent way that Keith reacts to Imogen questioning the morality of his goals and the responsibilities of her new position—"Keith spins the chair round with me in it until it's facing him. He stands with his hands on the arms and leans over me so I can't get out of the chair. He looks at me solemnly. He gives the chair a playful little warning jolt" (*Girl Meets Boy* 125)—it is easy to argue that what Keith is doing in this scene is sexual harassment, if not assault. Keith uses his body, and specifically his sexually masculine body, to attempt to force Imogen to comply with the system of control that benefits him and the other white men who control Pure. While all of these instances of corporate men using their gender and sexuality to intimidate, denigrate, and subdue women clearly display the ways in

which women are targeted by a system that sees them more as objects than as people⁴², it is also clearly a way of marking the ways that sexuality and can be corrupted into something extremely toxic. Luckily, the antithesis to this corruption, the ways in which gender and sexuality can be joyful and liberating, is where *Girl Meets Boy* truly shines.

The sex, specifically the queer sex, that occurs in the novel shows the ways that people can come together and embrace themselves as they are in their most joyful form. As hinted at earlier, Imogen's relationship with Paul helps her to overcome some of the self-alienation that she has acquired by buying in to the capitalist social order. Notable here is how Paul is gendered throughout the novel. In some radical way, Paul, despite being a nominally heterosexual man, is queered within the text. First by being called "gay" by Dominic and Norman during Imogen's night out at the bar, but also when Imogen confesses her feelings for him over the phone saying, "you seem quite female to me, I don't mean that in a bad way, I mean it in a good way, you have a lot of feminine principle, I know that, I know it instinctually, and it's unusual in a man, and I really like it. I love it, actually" (*Girl Meets Boy* 130). The joy that Imogen has in this confession and in this moment of queering, is subversive, but important. For a woman who is so concerned about her sister's queerness just a short couple of chapters ago, her elation in admitting that one of the things that has drawn her to Paul is his queer nature is both surprising and a validation of the meaningfulness and joy at allowing such a thing as malleable gender identities to be observed and accepted. After they have sex Imogen reflects on Paul's reaction to their getting together: "I feel met by you, he says afterwards. It's weird. / (That's exactly what it feels like. I felt met by

⁴² "'...sin young man, is when you treat people as things. Including yourself. That's what sin is' / 'It's a lot more complicated than that—' / 'No. It ain't. When people say things are a lot more complicated than that, they means they're getting worried that they won't like the truth. People as things, that's where it starts'" — Granny Weatherwax to the Priest Mightily Oats (Pratchett 438).

him the first time I saw him. I felt met by him all the times we weren't even able to meet each other's eyes.)" (*Girl Meets Boy* 138). Here, queerness and joy are equated with clarity and community: the idea that we are our best selves when we are joyfully in communion with one another.

Anthea and Robin's sex scene makes this point even more beautifully and bluntly: "Because of us, things came together. Everything was possible. / I had not known, before us, that every vein in body was capable of carrying light.... I had not really known I could be so much more than myself. I had not known another body could do this to mine" (*Girl Meets Boy* 81). I'm not sure that there is much to say about this quote. Frankly, I think it says in a few sentences what I've been trying to describe for pages. The impossibility and the actuality of communal solidarity being tied together with queerness, joy, self-acceptance, and love creates the foundational premise for the politics and thematic thrust of the book. Throughout their sex scene, Anthea describes their bodies mingling and love-making in increasingly fantastical terms: "were a knife that could cut through myth... were arrows fired by a god, we hit heart, we hit home, we were the tail of a fish were the reek of a cat.... God knows how many other things including a couple of fighting stags" (103-4). This concept of strange, life-giving, metamorphosis seems to fit well into what Levin carefully notes about Smith's fiction: "Smith invokes spectrality as a means of disclosing the multiple temporalities that constitute the present..., and of rendering new modes of attachment and redemptive love (recalling Marx's interest in futurity and redemption" (Levin 37). By describing queer sex as a fantastic, almost spectral experience; Smith directly refutes the misogynist idea about queer existence that Dominic and Norman exalt just a chapter before.

Just as compelling is this chapter's explanation of Robin's gender: "It had been exciting, first the not knowing what Robin was, then the finding out. The grey area, I'd discovered, had been misnamed: really the grey area was a whole other spectrum of colours new to the eye.... She made love like a boy. She made love like a girl. She was so boyish it was girlish, so girlish it was boyish" (*Girl Meets Boy* 83-4). Smith takes time here, when discussing Robin's gender to impart joy into the nature of something undefinable. As Robin says after caring for an intoxicated Imogen, "the proper word for me... is me" (77). That there is joy in the indescribable, that which has no words, or that does not want to be defined because it seems to purposefully obfuscate and defy definition is radical, even today. This joy, seems to be a perfect response to an observation made by Haraway, "There is nothing 'female' that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as 'being' female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices. Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism" (*Cyborg* 16). In responding with joy to Robin's ambiguous and fluid gender both Anthea and the narrative reject the social structures that would force her to find a firm definition for her "other half[s]" identity (*Girl Meets Boy* 136). More importantly, in the context of what a stream-of-consciousness novel is, these ruminations on both sex and gender ask us to consider how the physical interacts with the cognitive and how the ethereal nature of sex interacts with the ways that we perceive the world around us. Ultimately, the proposition made within this text is that when sex is good—good here almost exclusively meaning that it is disengaged from the capitalist heteropatriarchy with its inherent proposition of treating people as things—it allows us an opportunity to be our truest selves and to embrace a joy that actively impacts the world. That consciousness and

physicality, much like form and narrative, inform and shape each other. Experiencing love and acceptance allows us to impart them into the world; that in romance, infinite energy replication is possible, nothing lost in its giving, only things gained.

When telling the myth of Iphis, Robin informs Anthea of the context in which the “story of the boy-girl” (*Girl Meets Boy* 90) gets told. As she/he puts it:

Metamorphoses is full of the gods being mean to people, raping people then turning them into cows or streams so they won't tell, hunting them till they change into plants or rivers, punishing them for their pride or their arrogance or their skill by changing them into mountains or insects. Happy stories are rare in it. But the next day dawned, and the whole world opened its eyes, it was the day of the wedding. Even Juno had come, and Hymen was there too, and all the families of Crete were gathered in their finery for the huge celebration all over the island, as the girl met her boy there at the altar. (*Girl Meets Boy* 100)

Here, we get a kind of thesis statement from Smith on why *Girl Meets Boy* exists. Smith's works, by and large, as has been seen in this thesis, are filled with stories colored by tragedy. Even this story begins features two women on the verge of death due to their mental illnesses: Imogen with her eating disorder and Anthea with her suicidal ideation. But here, here is a happy love story. A utopian vision, where the world can and will bend to the necessities and ideals of queer love. As Robin tells it, even Iphis considers suicide—“I wish I'd never been born! You've made me wrong! I wish I'd been killed at birth! Nothing can help me!” (95)—because in the context of the capitalist heteropatriarchy “It's easy to think it's a mistake, or you're a mistake. It's easy, when everything and everyone you know tells you you're the wrong shape, to believe you're the wrong shape” (97). The placement of this conversation about the harsh nature of society between the two sex scenes that open and close “us,” is important. Mitchell, contending with this section of

the novel and that the story of Iphis is given within it, notes that “Myths cannot be dodged, but they can be reworked, reinterpreted. Agency is here reintroduced in the act of storytelling and this self-reflexive avowal... might stand as a comment on Smith’s own practice of reinvention in *Girl Meets Boy*” (Mitchell 63). While clearly Mitchell is making an argument about the way that Smith transforms narratives into “something much more joyous, affirmative, and forward looking” (62) within the context of the myth of Iphis, it is easy to see how it might apply outside of this specific instance too. In noting that Iphis in *Metamorphosis* is one of few happy tales, Smith seems to be commenting also upon the fact of modern queer stories that offer hope. Furthermore, by beginning the narrative with Anthea contemplating suicide in the way that Woolf did and reminding us of that context on the penultimate page with the line “Rings that widen on the surface of a loch above a thrown in stone” (*Girl Meets Boy* 160) we can understand *Girl Meets Boy* as a response to queer/lesbian literary fiction generally, and Woolf’s work specifically. By writing this story, Smith allows us to focus not on the horrors inflicted on queer women by the social order, but embraces the good queer women can do society by embracing themselves and in doing so creates an unambiguous candle of hope and joy within the caverns of queer fiction.

With this being the vision for the story, it, of course, ends in a wedding: “Reader, I married him/her. / It’s the happy ending. Lo and behold” (149). In the final chapter of *Girl Meets Boy*, titled “all together now,” Robin and Anthea’s wedding is described explicitly to the reader in wildly fantastic terms. Like in the myth of Iphis, the whole town shows up to their wedding—including gods and Anthea and Imogen’s dead grandparents—and the provost of Inverness reveals that Robin and Anthea’s vandalism that called attention to social justice issues has changed the town completely:

Inverness, she said, once famed for its faith in unexpected ancient creatures of the deep, had now become famous for something new: for fairness, for art, and for the art of fairness... Inverness art may have spawned copycat art in other cities and towns, she said, but none so good as in the city whose new defining motto... would be... *A Hundred Thousand Welcomes And When You See A Wrong, Write It! Ceud Mile Failte! Còir! Sgriobh!* (*Girl Meets Boy* 153).

While Anthea's utopian vision of Inverness after her marriage to Robin is not reality, the way that it is dwelt upon and vividly imagined in the text is important. If we consider this wedding scene a vision of how art changes the personal and the communal, then comparing it to how Woolf deals with a queer artistic vision in Scotland becomes logical—particularly given that the narrative begins with an allusion to Woolf's suicide. Looking into this, while much time in *To the Lighthouse* is given to Lily's contemplation of her artistic vision and how its creation is paralleled with the queer reimagining of the family, the reader has little to no idea what kind of future she imagines through her art. Though her subconscious is inherently linked to the other characters within the novel (and arguably even with the non-human environment), her experience and internal solace is ultimately hers alone, disjointed from the community that surrounds her. Thus, in the end, while things have changed and Lily lives on, we have no idea as to how she will live on or how her vision will impact others beyond the fact that it fulfills her personhood. Anthea's vision, however, creates real change. While it might not be as dramatic or perfect as she might desire through her wildest dreams, she and Robin do "what is still impossible after all these centuries" (*Girl Meets Boy* 149). And, in living that impossibility, Inverness does change, however slightly: Imogen and Paul's lives have certainly changed. Again, we see a philosophical argument for queer political activism. However, unlike in *The*

Accidental, Smith explicitly states that art can actively be key, rather than just accessory, in changing things for the better⁴³.

This argument for art having the ability to have a substantial impact upon the political landscape and its creation being potentially transformative is again seen through the formal choices made throughout the novel. Anthea's consciousness is primarily given to us as a soliloquy with the events of the novel given to the reader in the past tense, similar to Alhambra's sections in *The Accidental*. This is true for everything other than the very beginning of the novel where Anthea narrates a scene of her grandfather telling her and Imogen about "the time [he] was a girl" (3), which is narrated in the present tense. The story her grandfather tells in this section is of him, as a young woman activist, helping a feminist arsonist named Burning Lily escape state violence. This memory, given before the beginning of the actual narrative, is the only thing in the present tense we receive from Anthea's stream of consciousness. As such, Anthea's formal expression might, under an overly skeptical and ungenerous reading, be interpreted as being about memory. However, I posit that Smith's formal decision to impart Anthea's monologues as soliloquies of effective activism and love that she has lived out as a queer woman is meant to mimic the artistic form of the theater with its present physicality. As if this narrative functions not as a memory, but as a performance being played out in front of the reader, which, given the political nature of the novel's message and its last lines—"there's always a whole other kittle of fish, our grandfather said in my ear as he reached down and tucked the warm stone into my hand, there it was, ready for me to throw. / Right, Anthea? / Right,

⁴³ Once again, by advocating for living presently into an attempt to create a better, more communal, world the narrative seems to be visualizing a point Haraway makes: "The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present. Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places" (*Staying* 1).

Grandad, I said” (*Girl Meets Boy* 160)—function as a political message about how to think about queer people’s role within the larger world and how “to bring about change” (Mitchell 70). The final line’s callback to Anthea throwing a rock through her grandparents’ window in the introductory memory suggests an immediate call to action, a desire for the reader to go outside and literally break windows. The inherent performative nature of the form combining with its past tense nature to create an instruction to the audience to commit direct non-violent political action⁴⁴ as a means of enacting an actual queer proletariat revolution. Be your queer self proudly and openly, live into joy, make puns, write wrongs, remember who has come before you, the struggles they faced, and actively reject the systems that seek to rob you of your humanity.

⁴⁴ Property destruction being defined here as non-violent because what kind of wank-stain would you have to be to construe the destruction of property to be equivalent to even the threat of the destruction of life?

Conclusion

In *Looking Backward*, Love posits that while “there are crucial differences between life before gay liberation and life after, feelings of shame, secrecy, and self-hatred are still with us. Rather than disavowing such feelings... we need to understand them as indications of material and structural continuities between these two eras” (20-1). While I do not believe that Woolf’s fictions dwell on feelings of shame or self-hatred in response for the desire for queer romance, I want to suggest that Woolf’s fictions do adhere to an individualistic optimism based upon the understanding that open queer life would be impossible within a communal or political setting. Additionally, I want to see continuity between historical understandings of how we might perceive our personhoods as political within fiction; that the struggle to express our interiority formally has a political/philosophical history worthy of exploring and understanding.

The final pages of *Girl Meets Boy* always make me cry when I read them:

What I mean is, we stood on the bank of the river under the trees, the pair of us, and we promised the nothing that was there, the nothing that made us, the nothing that was listening, that we truly desired to go beyond our selves.

And that’s the message. That’s it. That’s all.

Rings that widen on the surface of a loch above a thrown-in stone. A drink of water offered to a thirsty traveller on the road. Nothing more than what happens when things come

together, when hydrogen, say, meets oxygen, or a story from then meets a story from now, or a stone meets water meets girl meets boy meets bird meets hand meets wing meets bone meets light meets dark meets eye meets word meets world meets grain of sand meets thirst meets hunger meets need meets dream meets real meets same meets different meets death meets life meets end meets beginning all over again, the story of nature itself, ever-inventive, making one thing out of another, and one thing into another, and nothing lasts, and nothing's lost, and nothing ever perishes, and things can always change, because things will always change, and things will always be different because things can always be different.

And it was always the stories that needed the telling that gave us the rope we could cross any river with. They balanced us high above any crevasse. They made us be natural acrobats.

They made us be brave. They met us well. They changed us. It was in their nature to. (159-60)

In some ways the crux of this passage is what, in part, this project is trying to do: to argue that there is a purpose in trying to understand what it is about these stories that meet us well or gives us the rope to cross the river with. I mentioned, at the beginning of this chapter, that suicide, self-harm, and depression all affect queer folk at higher rates than the cis-het population. Like many of the people reading this, I am among that number. Some cynical readers might construe it as selfish to have spent so much time and ink attempting to understand the literature that has helped me personally. I think it human. We, as people, communicate through stories and the ones that we are affected by are the ones it is in our nature to study, retell, and critique. I believe that stream-of-consciousness fiction has a capability to speak to the existence of marginalized folk and their experiences in ways that few other genres can claim. That by examining the internal lives of queer and proletariat characters, stream-of-consciousness novels can provide solace and give direction to their readership; that it inherently confirms the human-ness of our internal struggles and provides a roadmap as to how we might exist and matter within a social order that

desires our extinction. Furthermore, I believe that the formal decisions in these novels matter; that the experimentation inherent to this genre is indicative of political and philosophical notions that might help us better examine our existence or make a difference in how our introspection directs our political actions and beliefs.

Pretty explicitly, one argument of this project is that Ali Smith is the inheritor of Virginia Woolf's legacy. From the flowery style of her language to the genre she works in, to her location and open queerness in real life, Smith's fiction evokes Woolf's legacy. In the first two chapters of this thesis, I have argued that, intentionally or not, Smith has written narratives that mirror some of Woolf's most famous works and that by analyzing them side by side we can understand how time has changed both the genre of stream-of-consciousness fiction as well as the political and philosophical stances that those narratives encourage; that by doing so we might better understand why and how these narratives move us as well as contribute to the understanding of queer literary history. In this final chapter, I have argued that Smith has written a fiction that encourages generous reflection upon that literary history as well as joyful political action to back that reflection in the material world.

May the gods not have it all their own way; may you remember you must live, may you remember you must love, may you remember you must leaf; may you have a vision; may you imagine rather than fear; may you write wrongs, break windows, do what is still impossible, and read stories that meet you well. May you live and work to witness the queer proletariat rise!

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VITA

Turner Nat Byrd was born in Louisville, Ky. They graduated from Hoover High School with Honors in 2011. Following that, they enrolled at Emory University, graduating with a Bachelor's Degree in English and Creative Writing in December 2014. In August 2018 they enrolled in the Master's Program at UM in the English department, earning their degree in May 2022.