University of Dayton

eCommons

Honors Theses University Honors Program

4-1-2023

Othering the Brother: Toward a Sibling-Oriented Ethics of Care

William Bryant
University of Dayton

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/uhp_theses

eCommons Citation
Bryant, William, "Othering the Brother: Toward a Sibling-Oriented Ethics of Care" (2023). *Honors Theses*. 389.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/uhp_theses/389

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the University Honors Program at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact mschlangen1@udayton.edu, ecommons@udayton.edu.

Othering the Brother:

Toward a Sibling-Oriented Ethics of Care

Honors Thesis

William Bryant

Department: English

Advisor: Dr. David Fine

April 2023

Othering the Brother:

Toward a Sibling-Oriented Ethics of Care

Honors Thesis

William Bryant

Department: English

Advisor: Dr. David Fine

April 2023

Abstract

This project is an examination of issues of childcare, gendered responsibilities, and family identity informed by feminist and queer theory. As the second oldest in a family of eight, I have always understood myself primarily as a big brother. Rooted in this experience, this project is an exploration of feminist care ethics as they pertain to existing family structures. I review and build upon feminist conversations surrounding the family, especially concerning motherhood. Then, working with more recent queer and trans discourse, I explore how different familial care practices have been limited, reconfigured, or erased under dominant cis-heteronormative notions of care. This complicates many of the mother-oriented feminist theories of care, while still accounting for the work that occurs within the family—however 'family' may be defined. Finally, I look at Virginia Woolf's "To the Lighthouse" to recover and rethink representations of sibling care, especially as an alternative to the reproduction of gendered roles which often occurs between parent and child. This project sketches a theory of sibling care practices, articulating what they have meant to me and what they can mean for our current social demands. Ultimately, I seek to understand how sibling relationships can forge networks of care beyond the typical family hierarchies and how the public sibling subject stands as a new ethical position which may attend to specifically queer needs.

Dedication

I dedicate this project to my mother, my siblings, and everyone who has ever graced me with their own familial love.

University *of* Dayton

Table of Contents

Abstract	Title Page
Introduction	1
Ethics of Care	6
Brotherhood	19
Siblinghood	22
To the Lighthouse	26
Conclusion	35

Introduction

I'll begin this project the same way I introduce myself in any social setting: I grew up as the second oldest in a family of eight children. This means a great deal to me. In the wide matrix of crisscrossing identities which I've grown to inhabit, 'big brother' is the one I have naturalized the most. The attitudes and practices which I consciously associate with the position of 'big brother' are something I bring to every social situation, whether I am around family or not. This position is also unique to me within my family—I enjoyed a great deal of privilege relative to my other siblings. I was one of the 'big kids'—the name we three oldest gave to ourselves. I was also the first male child—something that seemed to matter a lot to my Mormon parents. I was lucky enough that my family's middle-class status lasted long enough for me to live a comfortable, extracurricular-laden childhood in a suburb of Dayton.

As I grew up, however, I became aware that other kids my age did not have the same responsibilities I had at home. I spent more time cleaning than any of my friends. Kids are messy, and the correlation between the number of children in one house and the mess they produce is exponential. By the time I was eight, I took pride in my ability to clean our kitchen until it was absolutely spotless. I helped to make dinners whenever I was allowed, starting with Shepherd's Pie. This was the only meal I knew how to make until I was at least ten. Between ages nine to eighteen, I helped to take care of the rest of my siblings, especially the youngest three. For the most part, I found a lot of joy in this domestic work (of course, these acts only supplemented the unfathomable amount of care work performed by my mom, most of which I didn't see). My domestic care practices informed so much of my early life that I take their particularity for granted. This kind of

care work seems innately and obviously linked to the nostalgic recollections of childhood, to the point that my gut reactions toward single children tend toward pity and contempt.

My interest in siblinghood as an object of study began in a feminist theory course which I took in 2021. We read an excerpt from *Maternal Thinking* by Sara Ruddick in which she puts forth a theory of maternal care work based on the experiences of the vast majority of mothers. In it, she argues that mothers are formed through this work rather than through their relationship to a child. My first thought reading it was: *'Oh, was I a mother?'*. With this question I don't mean to inflate the work I did as a child into anything comparable to the more constant, and more difficult, work done by my own mother. Rather, I want to pay deeper attention to Ruddick's claim that the social and familial role of *mother* is not simply a biological or legal relationship, but one constituted by a body of maternal practices. I don't consider myself a mother, though I participated alongside my own mother in some of her maternal practice. However, that raises another question: What kind of role was constituted by the care practices I performed growing up?

I hold to the belief that my position within my family was unique. I believe the care work I did and the thinking it produced is worth analysis because so much of the foundational scholarship on the ethics of care attributes care to maternal, or more generally feminine, impulses. Its entry from the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy introduces the ethics of care by saying "although care ethics is not synonymous with feminist ethics, much has been written about care ethics as a feminine and feminist ethic, [especially] in relation to motherhood" (1). There exists a vacuum when it comes to

scholarship on male experiences of care, especially those which lie outside of the parental hierarchy.

I aim to elaborate on a brother- or sibling-oriented ethics of care for two major reasons: first, to more clearly see what kind of ethical identity was established by my brotherly practices in childhood; second, to put forward a more decentralized model of care which could speak to many of the needs which go unfulfilled, even in the most socially normative families. Building from the co-dependency siblings experience as objects as well as agents of care in the family, I will argue that siblinghood offers a particularly horizontal model for care that, moving out of the home into the world, can be used to attend to the diverse needs of queer youth, of children, of parents, and of the marginalized citizen. I offer the figure of Sibling as an alternative to both the Mother and the Brother, with their respective maternal and fraternal ethical identities (such as the 'mom friend' or the rhetoric of brotherhood embedded anywhere from monasteries to police unions to college fraternities).

Furthermore, the sibling position allows us to theorize a model of care in which *there is no necessary agent/object* duality such as exists in the mother/child relationship. Following the impulse in queer theory to challenge binaristic thinking, I believe a sibling-oriented model of care will more adequately speak to the realities of caring and being cared for as a human being and provide a model for consciously pursuing an ethical social identity.

I begin with a broad summary of how theorists have engaged with the issues at the heart of the ethics of care, particularly focusing on feminist and queer scholarship. I'll be using what seems to be a semi-standard definition of care which comes from Joan

Tronto and Bernice Fischer: care is “a species of activity that includes everything we do to maintain, contain, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (2. Definitions of Care). It is important to note the importance of that “we”—interdependence is key to understanding what comes from, what propels, or what constitutes care. It is also important to note that care is distinct from similar verbs-as-nouns: care is not love, nor service, nor affection. Furthermore, as will become more apparent over the course of this project, I also want to acknowledge the power of a care that is not based on reproduction (biological or social). For this, I appreciate Sara Ahmed’s description of care in *The Promise of Happiness*:

> Caring is anxious—to be full of care, to be careful, is to take care of things by becoming anxious about their future…Becoming caring is not about becoming good or nice: people who have “being caring” as their ego ideal often act in quite uncaring ways in order to protect their good image of themselves. To care is not about letting an object go but holding on to an object by letting oneself go, giving oneself over to something that is not one’s own. (186)

These two definitions of care are similar in that they both highlight the importance of a kind of work that sustains another’s well-being. Their differences, too, mark an important ambiguity around care. Why do we care? How does caring change who cares and who is cared for? Academic work on care touches on these questions in great depth, but the answers seem as varied and particular as the perspectives from which they come. I want to put forth this ambiguity as a strength to the field rather than a weakness, while attending to the commonalities across the literature of care ethics.

Some common themes in care ethics scholarship, such as family dynamics and the reproduction of gender norms within the family, are directly related to the questions of my thesis. Other issues worth consideration in the conversation of care ethics—such as race, disability, or transness—are crucial for my study, but not only to the extent that they provide new grounds on which to map the older foundational theories of care. Instead, the analysis of care with respect to the particularities of different identities provides a new dimension to care in which caring practices are tactics of counter-subjectification against the conferral of social identities (race, gender, class, etc.) that occurs in a world where certain lives are valued more at the expense of others. In other words, to care is to tell someone that they are a person worthy of care. A crucial point: there is no universal blueprint for care; particularity matters in the world we live in.

It should be noted again, however, that much of the scholarship in the theories of care I have selected focus almost exclusively on mothers or women in general as the agents of care. In aiming to look at the existence and possibilities of care within the relations of siblinghood, my choice to approach from the initial perspective of the mother is a conscious one. First, I believe I am following Sara Ruddick's foundational call to action: that fathers should divest from paternalism and instead become mothers. As a result of my own experience, I have an interest in examining the possibilities of a less hierarchical version of care than that which comes down from the parent. Furthermore, it is important to be aware of the implicit dangers of biological essentialism which emerge from marking care as a distinctly feminine, maternal trait. Secondly, to approach siblinghood from the opposite direction—say, to formulate a theory of care entirely

distinct from the family—would be disingenuous of me as a writer and run the risk of overlooking in family a radical potential which has not been fully explored.

Building from the calls of the earlier feminist theorists of care to redistribute expectations of care labor across gendered lines, I look to Virginia Woolf's depiction of siblinghood in *To the Lighthouse.* The novel has been extensively analyzed for its parental figures and the novel's connection to Woolf's own family growing up. More of interest to me, however, is her depiction of the reproduction of gender norms in the family, especially as it interrupts a moment of solidarity between two of the siblings. Using the work of care theorists and the account of siblinghood offered by Virginia Woolf in *To the Lighthouse,* I want to explore a scene of sibling solidarity—not just as a moment of insubordination to the father, but as an example of a caring sibling ethic poised against family's reproductive ethos. While it ultimately fails at the end of the novel, I will argue for practices which allow the sibling ethic to survive beyond the replicative impulses of adulthood.

Ethics of Care

Carol Gilligan, a foundational thinker for the ethics of care, puts care forward as a central component of women's moral development. *In a Different Voice,* published in 1982, wrote against the dominant findings in developmental psychology that the majority of women plateaued in development compared to men. In the chapter "Concepts of Self and Morality", she challenges not only the conclusion that women developed at a lower rate than men, but more importantly, calls into question the metrics of autonomy and independence used to measure development for all people. Instead, she argues that

"women's construction of the moral domain relies on a language different from that of men and one that deserves equal credence" (368). She argues this different moral domain results in a developmental path distinct from those measured by psychologists such as Erik Erikson or Lawrence Kohlberg (both of whom she worked with extensively) which were oriented toward masculine ideals, such as autonomy, justice, and independence. In other words, she sees a different kind of autonomy for women based on biological and social constraints.

Her elaboration of a feminine developmental path occurs in three stages. The first is characterized by self-interest and immaturity; the second by shame and self-sacrifice; the third by an understanding of human interdependence and the setting of stable boundaries. She names this as a development toward a decidedly feminine ethic, "which reflects a cumulative knowledge of human relationships [and] evolves around [the] central insight, that self and other are interdependent": that is, the *ethics of care* (370). A great 'thank you' to her! However, for the purposes of this project it is important to keep in mind that she links care to the particular biological capabilities of cisgender women as well as the ways in which they are uniquely socialized to perform care for others. It goes without saying that these expectations are socially bound and not universal. In addition, this chapter does not say much at all about whether those masculine metrics are useful, even for men. It would seem to follow from her argument that they fail to account for the real complexity of human interdependence, but the resulting ambiguity about the actual ethical possibilities for men when it comes to care remains a theme across many of the texts I have come across.

My own encounter with the feminist ethics of care began with Sara Ruddick, author of *Maternal Thinking* (an essay published in 1980 but elaborated upon in a 1989 book of the same name). She argues that mothers respond to the demands of maternal practice with the production of a specifically maternal body of knowledge. She coins this body of knowledge *maternal thinking* and defines it as "the intellectual capacities she develops, the judgments she makes, the metaphysical attitudes she assumes, the values she affirms" (Ruddick 69). Because raising a child requires that mothers balance multiple and sometimes conflicting impulses, and because maternal thinking cannot occur without the practice of maternal care, Ruddick describes this kind of thinking as an embodied philosophy which "responds to the historical reality of a biological child in a particular social world" (70).

While Ruddick addresses the limits of her perspective as a middle-class, white, American mother, she nonetheless attempts to sketch the universal interests which "seem to govern maternal practice throughout the species" (70). She identifies three: preservation, fostering growth, and ensuring the acceptability of her child. In her maternal work, the mother inevitably faces conflict. In the constellation of practices, roles, and responsibilities within the heterosexual nuclear family, conflict may arise between the mother and child, mother and father, and mother and society at large as a result of how she chooses to engage in her maternal work.

It is also important to note that a mother may engage in her work without any of the emotions which have historically been associated with motherhood. A mother does not need to be loving or kind to ensure the survival of her child, and often it is social pressure rather than individual love that influences how a mother raises her child to be

acceptable within society. However, Ruddick, building from the concept of *attentive love* laid out by Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil, argues that "the identification of the capacity of attention and the virtue of love is at once the foundation and the corrective of maternal thought" (78). In other words, attentive love serves as an impetus for a mother's care, but also as an ideal trajectory along which a mother may align her thinking. The regular practices of maternal care, of course, can become problematic in their own right; what she calls a mother's "inauthentic obedience" to social forces such as patriarchy may guide much of her maternal work. Ruddick argues "attentive love again and again undermine[s] a mother's inauthentic obedience" (78), serving as a corrective for care which orients it toward a more ideal form. While "much in maternal practices works against attentive love: intensity of identification, vicarious living through a child, daily wear of maternal work, harassment and indignities of an indifferent social order, and the clamor of children themselves" (79), loving a child is "not only the most intense of attachments, but it is also a detachment, a giving up, a letting go" (79). Becoming trained in attentive love through her maternal work allows a mother to see her children more clearly and therefore care better for them.

Ruddick goes on to consider the political and social implications male participation in maternal work would hold. In her view, the adoption of maternal practice by men would result in a social revolution in which the public good is oriented around children and the work done to sustain them. I will explore her thinking on this topic and its possible repercussions later in this paper.

In a similar challenge to subjectivities based around masculine ideals, Eva Kittay articulates in *Love's Labor* (1999) an extension of liberal Enlightenment theories of

autonomy and personhood. She argues that by taking into account the widespread reality of care work done for dependents—typically work done by mothers for their dependent children, but this dynamic is not the only case—we can see limits to liberal ideals of universal political equality. Kittay's answer to the gender inequality resulting from traditional liberal thinking on subjectivity is to"[consider] how being a mother's child gives one a claim to equality" (31). In saying this, Kittay is keenly aware of how the unequal division of labor can diminish the rights of dependents and those who care for them, even if their rights are unchallenged on paper. By basing claims to equality on the mother-child dynamic, Kittay is asking that we better acknowledge the labor which is required to make all of us healthy human beings. In her case, as mother to a child with a disability, Kittay is too familiar with strangers overlooking her daughter Sesha's dignity as a human, as someone whose existence is living proof of her mother's care.

This new model for equality is akin to Ruddick's in that it asks us to take a socially normalized view of the private familial sphere and project it outward into public life. Such a move would likely produce the systemic change they envision, but problems emerge when the structure of the family and the gender roles required to sustain it are taken for granted. For instance, I would like to raise concern over a potential danger with Kittay's proposed model for recognizing equality. Her claim appears to rely on a kind of economy of care—each person is the result of some kind of care *investment*; we are all the *products* of dependency work. A danger in her call to systematize a universal ideal of maternal care is that, without making significant changes to the gender binary which divides the majority of care work in the present, such a transformation could intensify the gendered binary of care. In other words, if women are presumed to be the agents of care

who are well-versed in the dispersal of empathy, who are we asking to care? Furthermore, according to this binary, who is helped by this petition? My worry is that finding equality on the basis of being "some mother's child" would establish women as society's mothers and men into its children. This is, of course, not what Kittay has in mind, but it is crucial to question the heterosexual binary at the heart of many theories of care. Such arrangements are obviously too common to be ignored, but we run the risk of foreclosing a wealth of other arrangements of care if we are to naturalize care standards based around gender or sex.

Similar to these early thinkers, bell hooks is concerned in a series of publications throughout the 1990s and 2000s with the importance the private sphere holds for families. In her 1990 essay "Homeplace", hooks focuses especially on the meaning of home for families who face oppression in society. Many of the early feminist conversations regarding the private sphere, especially those among white, middle-class feminists, focused on getting women *out* of the home and into the workplace, the voting booth, or the foxhole. However, bell hooks approaches the care work done in the domestic sphere with a consideration of how the state has limited care within Black families. Importantly, she begins her argument with a reflection *from her perspective as a child*. Ruddick, Gilligan, and Kittay each take care as a point toward women-as-mother's caretaking practices. However, hooks remarks how home for her, as a child, was a place "where we learned dignity, integrity of being, [and] to have faith" (99). Faced with a society built on the devaluation of Black lives, bell hooks pays heed to how Black mothers have historically used the home as a place to launch resistance against white supremacy. As a result of sexist divisions of labor, she says "it has been primarily the responsibility of

black women to construct domestic households as spaces of care and nurturance in the face of the brutal harsh reality of racist oppression, of sexist domination" (100). She argues not for a simple extension of the private sphere into the public, but for a recognition of the private sphere's importance for challenging the harmful ways society confers identities onto marginalized individuals.

Furthermore, though she begins with the mother-daughter dynamic which taught her so much, she does not take it as the ultimate point of arrival for ethical action. Instead, she focuses her attention on the home as a place for learning oneself, recuperating from the pains of the outside world, and building resistance to systems of oppression. As she says: "drawing on past legacies, contemporary black women can begin to reconceptualize ideas of homeplace, once again considering the primacy of domesticity as a site for subversion and resistance" (105). She does not overlook the role of men in this struggle; in focusing on the efforts of Black women and their potential to build resistance, bell hooks is realistically engaging with the challenge of resistance according to the particular struggles of Black women—having little room to maneuver in public political struggles as a result of sexism, hooks is instead building from a legacy of resistance which has proven effective against the joint forces of patriarchy and white supremacy.

A public ethic of care, in bell hooks' view, would emerge from allowing various kinds of care in marginalized private spheres to flourish, rather than through the naturalization and extension of the white heterosexual family hierarchy into the public sphere. hooks also challenges the naturalization of the maternal ethic into the public sphere by arguing for the importance of the home as a private site—something which was

not always afforded to Black or other racialized families in a white supremacist society, but which white liberal feminists have previously taken for granted in their analyses of the gendered private/public divide. With hooks, we can think more generally about the importance of family and the private sphere in cases where the state refuses to recognize forms which don't conform to white, cisgender, and/or heterosexual standards.

Judith Butler's "Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?" (2002) is useful at this point. While bell hooks attends to the importance of the private sphere according to a *particular* history, Butler explains how hetero-patriarchy normalizes certain arrangements of care by constantly foreclosing or making unrecognizable other, particularly queer arrangements of care. The ramifications of such erasure are commonly seen when the state attacks queer partnerships or child-rearing in the name of the 'traditional' heterosexual family. In anti-queer political rhetoric, the maternal figure is used to oppress and to limit the kinds of care which are socially legible. Butler asks us to consider whether making maternal thinking a public affair is worth the potential (and likely) damage to queer forms of care—especially if it requires petitioning the state for recognition.

Butler focuses on the contemporary debates over gay marriage, highlighting how proponents often threw other forms of queer kindship under the bus by conceding to heterosexist ideals of what the family should look like. According to Butler, the danger in political negotiations such as these lies in the implicit deferral of illegitimacy onto others, especially those who may lack the economic or political capital necessary to defend their lifestyles from attack by the state. In their own words (verbose but insightful as usual):

> To be legitimated by the state is to enter into the terms of legitimation offered there and to find that one's public and recognizable sense of personhood is fundamentally dependent on the lexicon of that legitimation. And it follows that the delimitation of legitimation will take place only through an exclusion of a certain sort...through producing and intensifying regions of illegitimacy. (17)

The danger of this struggle for legitimacy lies in the fact that certain people, practices, or ways of living will be rendered less than illegible according to the discourse of the state (and thus subject to an unrestricted crusade by both the legitimate and illegitimate fields).

In the case of gay marriage, Butler describes how the quest for legitimation "break[s] down almost immediately into the question of whether marriage ought to be legitimately extended to homosexuals", meaning that "the sexual field is circumscribed in such a way that sexuality is already thought of in terms of marriage and marriage is already thought as the purchase on legitimacy" (18). Therefore, gay couples who do not have marriage as their desire are overlooked in the push for equal rights, closing the door on them for things like visitation rights in hospitals or adoption.

Butler's argument holds great importance for my interest in the ethics of care, especially because I have chosen to work through the discourse granted by the family structure. However, in wanting to elaborate on the ethical positions made possible by siblinghood, I want to be aware of the ways in which any concessions made to the discourse of the family may defer illegibility onto others or limit the possible horizons of care. This limitation is obvious when considering those who may not have family, but also for those whose care practices are consciously divorced from the family as a result of abuse or neglect. More contemporary theorists of care deal with this limitation head-on,

especially in consideration of queer and trans needs. For the sake of my project, Butler's argument will be useful for understanding the important contributions made by these authors, as well as for the way it requires me to acknowledge the limitations to a sibling-oriented ethics of care.

Then, in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) feminist theorist Sara Ahmed critiques the imperative to live a happy life as it is used to promote certain ways of life centered around the reproduction of the family. For Ahmed, happiness has less to do with what we say it is—good feeling, good living—and more to do with the promise of fulfillment through associating oneself with what is socially considered respectable. Many of these associations begin in the family—you will be happy if you find a suitable spouse, if you have children, if you make a good home. She puts it succinctly: "The point of family is to keep family the point" (46). From a reproductive point of view, it seems impossible for family to do anything else. The heterosexual family's ultimate aim is to reproduce itself. Daughters become mothers and sons fathers, regardless of whether the practices necessary to reproduce those roles result in the fulfillment of what happiness promises.

According to Ahmed, happiness has become the intellectual justification for reproducing the heterosexual family—certain kinds of care work are instrumental to that reproduction. She uses her description of care which I touched on previously to describe a specifically "hap care rather than a happiness care" (186), which would be one open to happenstance, to chance, and to change done for reasons other than the scripts offered by happiness. In her view, not only are ways of living beyond the scripts offered in that model of family rendered as unhappy, those who choose not to reproduce the model laid before them by their parents are cast as obstacles to their parents' happiness. As Ahmed

says: “the obligation of the child to be happy is a repaying of what the child owes, of what is due to the parents given what they have given up” (59). What have the parents given up? Their time, to be sure—but also the particular value of that time as it corresponds to a free and happy youth. The pursuit of happiness is the deferral of an inescapable human lack bound up with our mortality. I know that I will die one day; I will never be at ease with that. So, my gendered happiness script tells me to find a suitable wife and to raise children to be happy because I cannot be. When they do not feel the happiness promised to them by my parentage, they in turn will seek to produce families of their own, chasing happiness across the horizon and never seeing any reason to deviate.

Of course, such deviation is not impossible; it happens all of the time. Lee Edelman, in *No Future* describes the ideological limits of a frame he terms *reproductive futurism*—in which “the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought” (2). He asks us to consider “the space outside the framework within which politics as we know it appears...the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism” (3). In other words, reproductive futurism refers to a way in which the totality of our thinking is oriented toward an ambiguous future in the name of the Child. By “politics”, Edelman refers to the publicly legible Left vs. Right conflicts which frame the bulk of our discourse. However, I want to push his description to the family, a zone (private but nevertheless political, as hooks and Butler demonstrate) where the Child is not only an abstract figure of discourse, but a set of expectations which becomes embedded and embodied in a parent’s actual child.

Queerness, as a break from the reproductive cycle of happiness, forces us to stare into the void of our own mortality and to find comfort despite, or even within, the lack at the heart of our desires. Edelman identifies the non-reproductive realities of queerness with a social death drive: "the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability" (9). In challenging the reproduction of heterosexual ways of living, queerness is figured to represent a lack of living. Edelman addresses the potential for liberation in leaning into this representation—living as if we are dead according to heterosexism allows us to explore ways of living which have been foreclosed under the hegemonic discourses of society.

These 'anti-happiness' discourses are vital to my project because they allow me to look beyond the idealistic promises of the family—after all, I was not raised as a *sibling,* but as a *brother,* a male in training to one day become a father. The gendered expectations which my early childhood care practices filled (and sometimes subverted) were nonetheless bound up in reproductive expectations—I was raised to be 'the man of the house' once my father moved out; I was prided for my innate fatherly talents when I cared for my younger siblings. I am concerned with the limits this upbringing may have placed on me—in terms of how I think about care in my day-to-day life but also how I think about my own pursuit of happiness and the ends to which it is oriented. In other words, my interest in siblinghood and the ethics of care is a vocational question.

In *Trans Care* (2020)*,* Hil Malatino similarly extends the critique of a maternal-oriented feminist ethics of care by considering how heterosexual families often fail to meet the demands of queer and trans youth. Rather than extend the traditional familial

care arrangement, with the mother at the top and the child at the bottom, Malatino argues for consideration of trans care as a decentralized matrix in which care is practiced mutually outside of the family to meet specifically trans needs. As he says, “We [trans theorists of care] wanted to think about what care labor and ethics looks like if we started from a different set of locations and relations. We tried to begin not with the family but instead from the intricately interconnected spaces where trans and care labor occurs” (42). I am indebted to Malatino for the idea of a mutual, horizontal theory of care in which there may not be a clear giver and recipient of care.

Drawing from his work with Aren Aizura on the “communization of care”, he describes “care around those with whom we are socially consubstantial” (43). For my own purposes I want to push his critique back toward the family, focusing on the care that happens around siblings (siblings being the first consubstantial relationship in one’s life) . There are many factors which make it difficult to truly dismantle hierarchy among siblings—age, gender, adoptive or biological status, even personality. However, true sibling care begins where these differences are respected simply as difference, and not taken as markers of power, either by the siblings, parents, relatives, or society at large.

Furthermore, I return to the family, not as a site where care ought to occur, but simply as a place where it often does. I learned to care first in my family, regardless of whatever ethic it followed; I suspect this is true for many. With Ahmed’s critique of happiness in mind, I can see how many of my early care practices were geared toward the reproduction of our family form—how many times, after all, did I hear what a good father I would become? I believe her focus on chance or happenstance (hap-ness, perhaps) speaks well to the condition of childish siblinghood, in which we find ourselves

alongside others with no apparent choice in the matter. Writing from my perspective as a brother, I aim to articulate a sibling-oriented ethics of care which can complement as well as complicate maternal work.

My joy in being a brother is not divorced from these reproductive impulses. However, to theorize care without the gendered expectations of brotherhood requires that I understand where and whether my desire to care is tied up in a desire to defer feelings of unfulfillment. Furthermore, thinking through sibling care practices in a family where many of us have moved out of the childhood home or are preparing to do so has prompted me to think of myself as a receiver of care from my siblings—this is an alien concept to me! What will my sibling care practices look like when they no longer belong to me, but are something I share with others? What would sibling care mean if it did not attempt to reproduce the conditions that justify its existence? As an adult who lives further away from my family each year, what differentiates the ethical position I bring to the wider social world from a more recognizable, already gender-neutral ethical position: friendship? What does it mean that there might not be much of a difference?

Brotherhood

As I've made clear, I grew up as a big brother. The dynamics within my family are too much to write on here, but I will offer a brief account of what I believe my brotherly care has done for (or to) me psychically. My earliest memories as a brother—that is to say, as someone whose identity had begun to be figured in relation to my siblings—come from when I was four years old. My older sister (by 16 months, born in 2000) had started to go to preschool, leaving me without my best friend. I turned instead

to my younger sister (also by 16 months, born in 2003) as a playmate and we made a daily routine of playing with toys in a plastic castle. It was the last time I remember being fully immersed in play alongside another person. At around the same time, in 2004, my youngest brother was born. After he graduated from the crib and my parents' bed, we slept across from each other and I resented his bad breath in my face every morning. My sister, born after him in 2007, was the last sibling I felt truly consubstantial with (to steal a word)—I danced with her in the kitchen a lot.

The next two siblings were born in 2008 and 2010; a girl and a boy. For reasons I have not figured out, I felt an intense and anxious need to protect them from dying. I slept underneath a table in my room because I could more easily hear them crying at night. When they did, I paced with them in my arms until they fell asleep. These feelings were the most familiar to the hypomanic episodes I experience now as an adult; I felt like the purest version of myself when I was devoted to the well-being of these infants and was too excited or agitated to sleep these nights. I imagined robbers breaking into their rooms to strangle them, demons creeping in through the walls to poison them, or them crying so hard they choked to death. I talked out loud at night and imagined a deal with the devil to protect them from harm in exchange for me breaking a bone when I turned thirteen. This intense and irrational focus broke my solipsism and belief in God (I never did break my arm!), and it irreversibly shaped my relationship with my other siblings. I saw myself as the protector of all of them. My biggest anxiety attack to date came from watching them all play in the ocean at a beach in North Carolina and feeling certain one of them would vanish into the depths without me noticing.

When my final brother was born in 2017, I had stopped feeling quite so irrationally anxious, but still worried about him in the context of my parents' divorce (2013-2015) and the potential pain he would feel from being born into a dysfunctional family. This marks a change in maturity and a greater ability for me to understand our social relations to each other, but that did not stop me from leaning into the anxieties which propelled my care practices. I held a knife in bed to prepare to protect them from home invasion; I listened so intently for strangers moving outside the house at night that I could swear I heard them. My only comfort during these mild auditory hallucinations was that the dog would have been barking if someone broke in.

I give this history of my feelings about my siblings (and, perhaps of my mental illness) to de-romanticize many of the feelings which circulate around brotherhood. From the outside, I constantly heard I was a great big brother. These anxieties pushed me to be constantly attentive to them—not attentive in the way Ruddick describes, but focused rather on the needs I perceived them to have. I carried them so they wouldn't trip and fall, then I carried them because they asked me to. The darker feelings at the heart of my care practices never vanished, and I suspect never will, but I am able to face them more clearly now and see that the needs I perceive them to have are not always, or even often, located in reality. I try to balance my care now with a more self-aware humor—however, like anyone else (and perhaps especially so, given our history), I find it difficult to see my siblings as they actually are as opposed to how I want to view them.

As we all grow up, becoming adults or teenagers or kids able to form complete sentences, I am becoming acutely aware of the need to care for my siblings *as they are*. That means, not as I perceive them to be, not as I want them to be in the future, and

certainly not as I wish them to return to being. I say I love my siblings, but that is not the same as adequately caring for them. bell hooks, in *All About Love*, works from M. Scott Peck's definition of love as "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth" (4). Care may be defined as the work that goes into this nurturing. She goes on to distinguish the two specifically, saying "care is a dimension of love, but simply giving care does not mean we are loving" (8). With this in mind, hooks demands I invert my claim—I have cared for my siblings, but I was not actively loving them. To love my siblings requires first that I see them as they are, not as brothers and sisters; certainly not as our parents' daughters or sons.

Siblinghood

Before I take on the project of de-gendering the ethical position afforded to me in my role as a brother, I want to return to the question which prompted this project in the first place. *If I was not a mother, what was I?* And, strongly taking into account the dangers of a care focused on reproduction: *If I am not going to be a mother, what am I going to be?* In order to address these questions, I want to return to Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking* and begin with her image of the future. She answers the gendered inequality of care work within the family with the call to make men into mothers as well. As she says:

> When men and women live together with children, it seems not only fair but deeply moral that they share in every aspect of childcare. To prevent or excuse men from maternal practice is to encourage them to separate public action from private affection, the privilege of parenthood from its cares. (81)

Bringing men into the fold of motherhood, she argues, would have the effect of socially elevating maternal thinking and allowing for more sustainable matrices of care from the family outward. She goes on to say "assimilating men into childcare both inside and outside the home would also be conducive to serious social reform. Responsible, equal childcaring would require men to relinquish power and their own favorable position[s]" in society (81). However, she does little to describe what this transformation for men would actually look like or entail beyond experiencing a loss of power.

In fact, when describing the wide potentials of maternal thought, she is clear in saying it "exist[s] for all women in a radically different way than for men. It is because we are *daughters* (emphasis hers)" (80). The fullest form of maternal thinking, then, relies on the reproduction of maternal ideals within the family. Society expects women to care, but they learn to do it best from their mothers. If we are calling for men to take up the banner of maternal thinking, it is important that we imagine what that requires. By the end of the paper, she lays out an image of a world in which "there will be mothers of both sexes who live out a transformed maternal thought in communities that share parental care...such communities will have learned from their mothers how to value children's lives" (82). In this post-paternal vision, it is unclear whether men are ready to be included in the primary cohort of mothers who taught this transformed maternal community how to care.

In any case, I want to pay special attention to how she imagines the mechanism of inheritance for maternal thinking—mothers pass it to their children, who become mothers who pass it down to their children. She does not remark on whether the gender-neutral transformation of maternal thinking will have any effect on how the child is figured in the

maternal model of care. However, given her choice to argue in favor of ‘motherhood’ as opposed to the already neutral ‘parenthood’, I want to put forth the possibility that, in her post-paternal world, sons also become daughters. Given her particular insistence that maternal thought flows strongest from mother to daughter, I don’t think it is that far-fetched. What would it mean for sons to become daughters, especially if the onus of transformation lies on an adult caretaker and not the child as object of care? The most obvious answer seems to be that mothers ought to learn to raise their male children to be caretakers, to take on the social expectations with which women are currently overburdened.

However, without a sufficient idea of what constitutes the ideal daughter-figure according to maternal thought, I want to attempt to apprehend her without relying on maternal discourse. What is the shape of her experience before she takes on the expectation to reproduce and to mother? It would probably look the same as the son’s experience before he takes on the expectation to provide for, to dominate, and of course to reproduce. These are children prior to a gendered interpellation. We might as well imagine them as siblings. Without betraying my disinterest in the stages of childhood development, how do these children view each other? There is, I believe, an ethical impulse within this relationship, though it is overshadowed by the ethical identities introduced through the reproduction of gender roles within the family. These siblings have no agency over each other. Neither one called the other into being, and—presuming they are both receiving the levels of care at least necessary for survival—neither one relies on the other for care.

Still, there is a great potential for solidarity in the experience of finding oneself accidentally thrown into the world, and then finding oneself thrown alongside another with equally as little say in the conditions of their existence. This solidarity is not erased in the process of conferring gender onto children—I would argue it exists among any siblings who have spent a great deal of time together in the early years of their lives. It can be seen in the ungendered commonalities between siblings. For us in my family, this solidarity bares its head anytime there is more than one of us in a room together and varies greatly in the stakes. We babble without making much sense; we strategize how to access privileges like Wi-Fi when grounded; we talk in mostly unfinished sentence fragments about our parents' perceived flaws and the best ways to work through them. This solidarity doesn't transcend discomfort, nor do I wish to place it above or below the counterweight of gender conferral. The relative influence of either has never been fixed, in my experience.

However, the solidarity of siblinghood is one which requires sustained, purposeful, loving and attentive participation. There are times when the compact of sibling solidarity is betrayed, or seems to be. An older brother moves out of the childhood home into his girlfriend's house; a daughter scolds her siblings as she has seen her mother do before; a sibling refuses to accept their sibling's change in gender identity. These have all happened in my family and I suspect the reproduction of gender norms in the family has significantly altered the relationships between siblings more times than not. There are rarely moments where we are explicitly taught to be siblings. There is little difference in practice between being taught to be a brother or sister and being taught to be a father or mother. How would the ethical bond between siblings look if we are to take it

seriously, if we make the conscious decision to learn and to teach others how to be siblings at times when it may be easier to act in the ways family gender scripts ask us to? This is my proposed ethical model of siblinghood: a relational (but not biological or even necessarily familial) position built on happenstance but nourished with attentive love; the sibling is in constant conversation with the conferrals of gender often attempted by parents or society at large, but resists them in solidarity with one another. We know what happens when the conferral of gender succeeds—the attempted replication of the nuclear family continues *ad infinitum*. What would happen if sibling solidarity won out, or at least managed to engage with the conferral of gender to the extent that it can never fully extinguish siblinghood? To answer that question, I would like to move finally to the tragedy at the end of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and attempt to imagine the implications for the novel if the ethical compact of siblinghood were upheld in the end.

To the Lighthouse

Woolf's novel focuses on the Ramsays—a large family vacationing in their Scottish summer home. The main characters I will focus on are Mrs. Ramsay, a domestic mother; her husband Mr. Ramsay, a renowned philosopher; and their two youngest children, Cam and James. The novel unfolds in three sections. In the first, the children are young, and the parents appear as the fullest versions of themselves. One of the major plot points of this section is James's wish to travel to the Lighthouse and his parents' mixed views on such a trip. It takes place over the span of roughly half a day. In the second, a ten-year exposition unfolds over twenty pages, marking the death of Mrs. Ramsay as well as her two oldest children, Andrew (dead by war) and Prue (dead by childbirth). In the

third, Mr. Ramsay forces Cam and James to accompany him on a trip to the symbol-laden Lighthouse, a trip which he had denied them so many times as children. This section, like the first, takes place in under a day.

James's view of his father shifts over the course of the novel from extreme hatred to admiration; from alienation to total identification. However, it is not that James is fickle, a hypocrite, or entirely irrational. In focusing on his admiration for Mrs. Ramsay and his wish to visit the Lighthouse during the first section, Woolf demonstrates the importance of distance and desire in shaping James's character from childhood. James's changing demeanor toward his father can be understood as a search for praise mediated—and complicated—by distance. Cam's inner world, on the other hand, is not available to the reader until the final section when she is already an adult. One of the most important pieces of information about the two children in their childhood is, perhaps unsurprisingly, given by Mrs. Ramsay:

> Oh, but she never wanted James to grow a day older! or Cam either. These two she would have liked to keep forever just as they were, demons of wickedness, angels of delight, never to see them grow up into long-legged monsters. Nothing made up for the loss […] [James] was the most gifted, the most sensitive of her children. But all, she thought, were full of promise. Prue, a perfect angel with the others, and sometimes now, at night especially, she took one's breath away with her beauty. Andrew—even her husband admitted that his gift for mathematics was extraordinary. (58)

It is a shame to me that it isn't helpful to include her meditations on all eight of her children (I cannot, of course, help imagining them as my own siblings), but it is crucial to

note the difference between the oldest and youngest pairs of siblings. Calling Prue "an angel with the others" seems to indicate her talent in emulating her mother's childcare practices. Furthermore, noting her beauty implicitly signals her future value as a wife. Andrew's mathematical talent compares with Mr. Ramsay's career as an intellectual. Mrs. Ramsay remarks on the two eldest for their gendered resemblance to her and her husband, implicitly mediating on her parenting practices toward those two as ones geared toward such replication.

On the other hand, she has no interest in watching Cam or James grow up to replicate their parents. She holds them with a different kind of vision in her mind, one poised to apprehend them in the moment as opposed to some future, more familiar image. She doesn't expect them to become their parents, but neither does she want them to become whatever they are likely to become. In the moment, Mrs. Ramsay sees them as they are and loves them for it, but as they grow older that clarity will likely transform into a nostalgia that smothers.

In terms of sustainability, it is worth noting that Andrew and Prue are the only children to die prematurely. Woolf possibly means this as a critique on the futility of self-replication through one's children (that is, in any case, how I am choosing to read it). The burdens and benefits of gender conferral (at least one based on the parents' identities) are not relegated to Cam and James to the same extent as their older siblings. This lays the ground for their unique relationship in the novel which is explored and extinguished in the final section.

Before analyzing that relationship, I want to examine the conditions which lead to James's ambivalence toward his father (and Cam in inverse, as a result). In the beginning

of the novel, Mrs. Ramsay's observation on his character is incredibly useful for understanding his transformation. She thinks "he belonged, even at the age of six, to that great clan which cannot keep this feeling separate from that, but must let future prospects…cloud what is actually at hand" (3). We can infer that his thoughts indicate a preoccupation with something he does not outright realize (and therefore is not even revealed in his inner thoughts). Woolf's use of several narrators and their streams of consciousness is then necessary to understand what James thinks, feels, and wants. When Mr. Ramsay interrupts James and his mother for the first time, James believes that "had there been…any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it" (4). James hates his father for several reasons—he is annoying, domineering, and tyrannical. In comparison with Mrs. Ramsay, he is also entirely devoid of affection, so much so that he begs his wife for sympathy like a child (38). I don't mean this as *just* an insult—it is important to note that James and Mr. Ramsay (Oedipal as it sounds) rely on Mrs. Ramsay for the same emotional support and expect her to be able to devote herself fully to them.

Furthermore, Mrs. Ramsay feels a similarity between the two in relation to herself. When Mr. Ramsay becomes a supplicant for sympathy, "she stroked James's head; she transferred to him what she felt for her husband" (35). She must comfort them both, albeit for very different reasons. Mr. Ramsay is anxious about his intellectual legacy, and James is sad that he cannot go to the Lighthouse. In fact, "She was certain that [James] was thinking, we are not going to the Lighthouse tomorrow; and she thought, he will remember that all his life" (62). With Mrs. Ramsay's earliest observation in mind,

I would like to posit that James's preoccupation with the Lighthouse speaks a great deal about his unrevealed thoughts about his father.

To start: What characterizes a Lighthouse that might capture the young James? A Lighthouse is phallic, to be sure. It cares for others, in the sense that it cares for sailors who ought not to drown on unlit rocks. It is distant, and in fact it is only able to care for others *because* it is distant. A lighthouse beam requires space in order for its beam to do any good. It is possible that James views the Lighthouse as an abstracted version of his father through which he can read Mr. Ramsay's cold distance as a kind of care. In this first section, Mr. Ramsay is withholding love as well as a trip to the Lighthouse—he maintains a distance that Mrs. Ramsay doesn't, and James hates him for it. At the same time, this hatred masks a desire to be close to his father, which in turn sublimates into the desire to visit the Lighthouse.

In order to see whether this determination holds any water, it's important to note what happens when Mr. Ramsay takes James to the Lighthouse. Ten years later, Mrs. Ramsay proved correct in thinking James would remember his father denying the trip: "'It will rain,' [James] remembered his father saying. 'You won't be able to go to the Lighthouse'" (186). James compares his childhood image of the Lighthouse with the one standing before him—he remembers it with fantastical language: "a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye, that opened suddenly, and softly in the evening" (186), but now it appears white, barren, lifeless. So how does James contend with this difference? He does not recognize the first as an illusion and the second as an utter disappointment. No—"the other Lighthouse was true too" (186). He preserves his early admiration for the Lighthouse while acknowledging that his desire to visit is due to the

fantasy produced through distance. The Lighthouse can only hold him in its light from across the bay. It is just as Lily Briscoe—the young artist living in the village—remarks, painting back on land: "so much depends, she thought, upon distance" (191).

So how does this observation map upon James's shift in feeling toward his father, if at all? James and Cam are at first completely disinterested in visiting the Lighthouse. Ten years is a long time to wait for something that seems out of reach. But their shared disdain for Mr. Ramsay strengthens their disinterest: "In their anger, they hoped that the breeze would never rise, that [Mr. Ramsay] might be thwarted in every possible way, since he had forced them to come [to the Lighthouse] against their wills" (162-163). James and Cam join in a compact to "resist tyranny to the death" (163), making the trip to the Lighthouse a torturous affair. Mr. Ramsay's constant demands for sympathy are almost impossible to refuse. These demands are always gendered: Mr. Ramsay turns to Cam, expecting her to be able to replicate the care practices of her mother. She struggles not to respond, but James sees on her face the same look Mrs. Ramsay wore when speaking to her husband (168-169). The compact then breaks along two lines: James becomes convinced that Cam cannot uphold the compact; the conferral of gender by way of the demand for sympathy makes James see Cam as a woman (like Mrs. Ramsay), not a sibling. Cam's identity as a woman in the family is now more fully formed, though she has had little say in it.

The compact's second fault line logically continues as the situation diffuses. James, thinking through family now with the lens of gender, begins to identify with Mr. Ramsay. As they near the Lighthouse, in all its symbolism, the sense of identification strengthens. James's hatred gradually is displaced by this feeling of masculine sameness.

While he concludes, "They alone [himself and Mr. Ramsay] knew each other", he struggles with the shift in emotional extremes he felt toward his father and wonders, "what then was this terror, this hatred?" (184-186). It is here that he accepts the dual view of the Lighthouse. He hates the tyrannical Mr. Ramsay who he would have killed, but sees him now as just a simple man, a *man* who is his father who has been only difficult to get along with. And, immediately as they arrive at the Lighthouse, James's desire for it flips into a desire for closeness with his father. I cannot say whether the desire for closeness, or the praise Mr. Ramsay gives him, comes first. In either case this desire is realized as soon as James feels it.

Cam, having not yet actually abandoned the compact against tyranny, watches this displacement conclude with disgust:

> [Mr. Ramsay says] "Well done!" James had steered them like a born sailor.
>
> There! Cam thought, addressing herself silently to James. You've got it at last. For she knew that this was what James had been wanting, and she knew that now he had got it he was so pleased that he would not look at her or at his father or at any one…He was so pleased that he was not going to let anybody share a grain of his pleasure. His father had praised him. (206)

As James receives his praise, he is left to contend with the bareness of experience in front of his father and the Lighthouse compared to the richness of images he held in his childhood. Cam is rightfully annoyed that she must play by different rules from the men in her family—Mrs. Ramsay gave all of herself in love, but James becomes devoted to Mr. Ramsay only after receiving a previously-withheld morsel of affection. As Mr. Ramsay's emotional distance becomes shamefully justified in James's mind, Woolf

depicts the reproduction of masculine detachment as well as the care labor Mrs. Ramsay—and now Cam—are expected to do in order to sustain their family's gender dynamics.

The compact between Cam and James Ramsay exemplifies the image of sibling solidarity against the reproductive impulses of the family. These are in turn exemplified in the psychic traces of Mrs. Ramsay after her death and Mr. Ramsay's relentless demand for sympathy. However, the benefits of accepting his father's conferral of a masculine identity prove too strong to James as he faces the Lighthouse and contrasts it with the fantastical image he held of it in his childhood.

With my research questions in mind, what conditions would have helped the sibling compact survive in the face of Mr. Ramsay's desire to mold James in his image? James is not only accepting the conferral of gender; he is accepting the deferral of happiness. Older now, the characters are more aware of Mr. Ramsay's mortality. The question of legacy has been hot on his mind since the first section, and with Andrew and Mrs. Ramsay both dead, he turns to his youngest children to provide him with a legacy in the future and sympathy in the present, respectively. As the inheritor of her mother's role, Cam is afforded no choice in determining her future. It seems as though Mr. Ramsay's and James's closeness by the end of the novel is driven by a reproductive futurism emboldened by the perceived closeness of death. Death is present in Mrs. Ramsay's absence, in Mr. Ramay's age, and in the perceived sterility of the Lighthouse.

James betrays the sibling ethic out of a discomfort with loss; an enduring sibling ethic is found through finding comfort with loss instead. That is not to say James should be comforted by the actual or impending loss of his family members. Rather, being

comfortable with loss means finding life in the present, refusing the happiness and futurity offered by reproduction and the investment in gender. Cam had little problem accepting this. As they row toward the Lighthouse:

> [She] could see nothing. She was thinking about how all those paths and the lawn, thick and knotted with the lives they had lived there, were gone: were rubbed out; were past; were unreal, and now this was real; the boat and the sail with its patch […] Thinking this, she was murmuring to herself, “We perished each alone”. (167)

Cam is able to apprehend death more clearly in all its closeness, but to Mr. Ramsay and his philosophical outlook (described by Andrew in the first section of the novel as “Subject and object and the nature of reality [...] think of a kitchen table then [...] when you’re not there” [23]), Cam’s affect appears as stupidity, a lack of object permanence. It’s more fair to say that Cam is actually more able to perceive reality as it is—fleeting and temporary and mottled with loss—whereas Mr. Ramsay and James become caught up in visions of the past and future in their melancholia for happiness. Despite James’s paranoia, Cam never betrays the compact against her father and his demand for sympathy; the forces which bring it down are all thrust upon her in the name of reproductive futurism.

It does not feel sufficient to say that the compact would have survived if only James had learned to mourn better. Nor do I focus on James to downplay Cam’s role in their sibling relationship. Rather, I intend to illustrate the consubstantial nature of siblinghood. It doesn’t matter how good a sibling Cam is if she is alone in being a good sibling. The factors which led to James’s betrayal seem caught up in his propensity to

“cloud what is actually at hand”, as Mrs. Ramsay had earlier remarked. What Cam requires from him is the capacity to see those around them as they are: that is, she needs from him the cultivation of an attentive love. Were James able to more clearly engage with his father, not as an older version of himself, but perhaps more like a sibling, the replicative impulse would be, almost literally, neutered. Attentive love could prepare him to view his father alongside neither the bareness of the Lighthouse nor the fantasy of his childhood image, but the richness of the fleeting present. To love his father even as he knows he will die, to love Cam even though she is not the mother he misses, and to love himself even though he does not live up to the fantasy of childhood, James would be better served to see himself as a sibling in accidental relation to those around him and make the choice to love them regardless.

Conclusion

To the Lighthouse offers us a familiar, if bleak, vision of the replication of gender roles within the family. I have argued that the mechanism for this replication is entirely at odds with a sibling ethic, yet I don’t believe either are entirely vanquishable. I have not offered any strategies for contending with the conferral of gender in the family beyond gesturing toward attentive love; there is no grand strategy. Martha Nussbaum, in “The Window: Knowledge of Other Minds in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*”, writes of the difficulty for theorizing such a strategy, though she is concerned with familial love at large: “the concrete pursuit of that particular philosophical investigation [of the minds of others] requires narrative depiction of individual lives and their interplay” (752). Nussbaum argues that narrative is the best way to gain insight into another’s mind (the

author's), while it is also the best mode in which an author can share knowledge of others. I am not offering a narrative.

However, she is clear that the difficult task of reading the ones we love as if they were a text to be interpreted according to our own particular lenses is only possible "by working patiently to defeat shame, selfish anxiety, and the desire for power…some people [can] get knowledge of one thing or another thing about some other people; and they can sometimes allow one thing or another thing about themselves to be known" (752). Attentive love, as a vision of others that does them justice, is vital to attaining this knowledge of others. Simone Weil gives her foundational description of attention in "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God" as "negative effort" (61), in which "the soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at" (65). It is predicated on the emptying of the self so that our visions of others are not ego-driven or fantastic.

At the risk of simplification, I want to center this metaphor of emptying: we are vessels, disjunct and incongruous inside though we may be. In emptying ourselves, we are making room for knowledge of another. In the same way, the process of emptying ourselves is one in which we open the possibility to be known, as an other, as well. Attentive love then presents a possibility for sharing in the experience of life, even as our experiences differ radically. Siblinghood offers a starting place of similarities, though I do not mean to suggest that such sharing is easiest in the family. Rather, to view others as though we are siblings, thrown together by chance but kept together through choice, offers a possibility for the mutual recognition of the blessings of chance. If I love you as a sibling, then I love you because I feel fortunate to have been thrown with you. The

radical possibilities of such a statement aren’t possible to unpack here, but I see hope in it as an impulse of care, from which such possibilities must surely flow.

Works Cited

Ahmed, Sara. *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke University Press, 2010.

Butler, Judith. "Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?" *Differences*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2002, pp. 14–44.

hooks, bell. "Clarity: Give Love Words." *All about Love: New Visions*, William Morrow, an Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2022, pp. 1–14.

Gilligan, Carol. "Concepts of Self and Morality." *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Harvard University Press, 2016, pp. 368–372.

Edelman, Lee. "The Future Is Kid Stuff." *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Duke University Press, 2004, pp. 1–31.

Kittay, Eva F. *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency*. Routledge, 1999.

Malatino, Hil. *Trans Care*. University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

Norlock, Kathryn. "Feminist Ethics." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 27 May 2019, plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-ethics/.

Nussbaum, Martha. "The Window: Knowledge of Other Minds in Virginia Woolf's T*o the Lighthouse*." *New Literary History*, vol. 26, 1995, pp. 731–753.

hooks, bell. “Homeplace: A Site of Resistance.” *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings*, by Andrea O’Reilly, Demeter Press, 2021, pp. 99–106.

Ruddick, Sara. “Maternal Thinking.” *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings*, by Andrea O'Reilly, Demeter Press, 2021, pp. 69–86.

Saunder-Staudt, Maureen. “Care Ethics.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, iep.utm.edu/care-ethics/.

Weil, Simone. “Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God.” *Waiting for God.* Harper Perennial, 2009. 57-65

Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*. Penguin Books, 1927.