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That Virginia Woolf was a London writer is a well-established cliché. As her diaries and letters evince, she had an intensely personal relationship with the city—a relationship which marked her oeuvre considerably. London features prominently in Woolf's texts; what it means, however, is hardly straightforward. According to Jean Moorcroft Wilson, the city functions as 'a symbol of what [Woolf] variously calls "life", "truth", "reality", a quality she is trying to identify in her life and capture in her work'.¹ Conversely, Susan Merrill Squier, as well as Anna Snaith and Michael Whitworth, see Woolf's depictions of London as politically charged, a means of exploring a woman's place in patriarchal society (Squier) or investigating the politics of space (Snaith and Whitworth).² London in Woolf's writing also serves as a formal device. For Lisbeth Larsson, it is integral to the way the author creates her characters seeing as it provides the context within which they come into being.³ The metropolis is also a key element of Woolf's modernist vision—understandably so, seeing as modernism itself has been called 'an art of cities'.⁴ Andrew Thacker contends that Woolf's 'mature fiction' of the 1920s is preoccupied with the 'division between inner and outer space', which it effectively

¹ Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Virginia Woolf. Life and London. A Biography of Place* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1987), p. 9.

² See Susan Merrill Squier, *Virginia Woolf and London. The Sexual Politics of the City* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), p. 3; Anna Snaith and Michael Whitworth, 'Introduction: Approaches to Space and Place in Woolf', in *Locating Woolf. The Politics of Space and Place*, ed. by Snaith and Whitworth (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 1.

³ Lisbeth Larsson, *Walking Virginia Woolf's London. An Investigation in Literary Geography*, trans. by David Jones (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), eBook version, loc 12.2.

⁴ Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Cities of Modernism', in *Modernism 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 96.

collapses; novels like *Jacob's Room* or *Mrs Dalloway* 'constantly play across the spatial borders of inner and outer, constructing a fiction that shows how material spaces rely upon imaginative conceptualisation, and how the territory of the mind is informed by an interaction with external spaces and places'.⁵ Moorcroft Wilson, on the other hand, regards London as an organising principle in Woolf's modernist novels. She argues that, from *Jacob's Room* onwards, Woolf used the city as a formal substitute of a contrived plot which she eschewed in favour of a stream-of-consciousness narrative: in her mature, modernist novels, the *récit* is ordered not according to novelistic conventions but through the urban spaces, which furnish the texts with shape and coherence they would otherwise run the risk of lacking.⁶ Although both critics apply these insights to Woolf's so-called 'mature' works, I would argue that the seeds of such an approach to London are already present in her second novel, *Night and Day*, commonly denigrated as a Victorian relic at odds with its author's avant-garde aesthetic.

Set in the Edwardian period, the novel follows four principal characters—Katharine Hilbery, Mary Datchet, William Rodney and Ralph Denham—and their shifting romantic attachments, reminiscent of a Jane Austen novel on the one hand, and a Shakespearean comedy on the other.⁷ Admittedly, the carefully orchestrated plot of *Night and Day* roots it within the very tradition Woolf subsequently departs from. Nevertheless, I would suggest that she deploys London in a way similar to what Moorcroft Wilson identifies as a hallmark of her modernist style, that is, to 'help her shape her material'.⁸ More specifically, in *Night and Day*, the city is an instrumental force in driving the marriage plot. As Lisbeth Larsson aptly points out, '[e]verything that matters in this novel takes place outdoors', and the unlikely couple, Katharine Hilbery and Ralph Denham, are drawn to central London 'almost obses-

⁵ Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity. Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 152-53.

⁶ Moorcroft Wilson, p. 130.

⁷ For an analysis of *Night and Day* as a parody of the two writers, see Jane de Gay, *Virginia Woolf's Novels and the Literary Past* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 44-66.

⁸ Moorcroft Wilson, p. 130.

sively time after time, as though every change in their relationship must involve a walk to and in this area'.⁹ Indeed, the shift from animosity to tentative friendship to desire and love is contextualised within the urban scenario, creating a link between spaces/places and emotions, which Thacker identifies as inherently modernist.

The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate the crucial role London plays in facilitating the romance plot by analysing the development of Katharine's and Ralph's relationship over the course of significant urban scenes. Because it is precisely the 'happy ending'—the couple's engagement and the prospect of a wedding service at Westminster Abbey—that constitutes the 'most representative aspect of [the novel's] deliberate traditionalism',¹⁰ it is impossible to consider this topic without also questioning the conventionality of the conclusion; to this end, this essay will consider the portrayal of Denham to show that the marital union between him and Katharine—and, by extension, the depiction of London, which makes it possible—remains ambiguous.

Katharine and Denham meet for the first time in the 'sophisticated drawing-room' of the Hilberys' house in Cheyne Walk, and to say that they do not exactly see eye to eye would be a euphemism. For Katharine, the poor, middle-class Ralph stands out, and not in a favourable way: stirring her tea, she wonders how to 'keep this strange young man in harmony with the rest' of the party and decides that 'he would not be easily combined with' the other guests.¹¹ Not only is Ralph branded as an outsider among the Hilberys' genteel acquaintances, (implicitly) on the grounds of his inferior social standing, but Katharine's first impression of him as an individual is decidedly unflattering: 'in his spare build and thin, though healthy,

⁹ Larsson, 113.4, 104.4.

¹⁰ Janis M. Paul, *The Victorian Heritage of Virginia Woolf* (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1987), p. 80.

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 9. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

cheeks, she saw tokens of an angular and acrid soul.’¹² Rather than ‘a breath of fresh air’, as Jane Marcus suggests,¹³ Ralph initially invades the Hilbery household more like putrid smoke. On his part, Denham finds Katharine ‘oblivious, supercilious’ and makes a point of being unpleasant, deriving satisfaction from his ‘power to annoy’ her.¹⁴ He accuses her of being ‘cut out all the way around’ and leading a sheltered life of privilege, and declares his hatred of ‘great men’ in front of the painting of her eminent grandfather, the great poet Richard Alardyce.¹⁵ Significantly, the hostility Katharine detects in him is directed ‘at her surroundings’;¹⁶ the antagonism motivating Ralph’s personal assault on her is bred by the atmosphere of the Cheyne Walk house.

It is therefore hardly surprising that the first candid conversation between the two takes place on an omnibus they take after a chance encounter at Mary Datchet’s office in Russel Square. Katharine, guided by her sense of duty rather than a desire to talk, mentions Venice, and the exchange that follows makes Ralph consider ‘whether he should tell her something that was quite true about himself; and as he wondered, he told her’, admitting that he struggles with a fear of ‘missing something’, which Katharine avows to share.¹⁷ This forces Katharine to reconsider her impressions of Denham: she ‘hastily recalled her first view of him, *in the little room where the relics were kept*, and ran a bar through half her impressions, as one cancels a badly written sentence, having found the right one’.¹⁸ The fact that Katharine’s misguided opinion about Ralph is linked to the relic room in the Hilbery household, where her adverse view of him was formed, highlights the interdependence of emotion and setting the first scene of the novel gestured toward. Just as Ralph’s antagonism towards

¹² *Ibid*, p. 14.

¹³ Jane Marcus, *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 30.

¹⁴ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 85-86.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 86, added emphasis.

Katharine is an extension of his enmity towards her surroundings, so her own hasty judgement is directly related to the way he appeared to her in the spatial context of her house. That this revelation takes place on an omnibus is equally as notable. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Elizabeth Dalloway's bus journey is invested with the connotations of 'a sense of liberty and the advancement of women in society'.¹⁹ Speeding down the Strand, Elizabeth is transformed into an urban 'pirate', experiences the thrill of freedom, and resolves to 'have a profession'.²⁰ The journey in *Night and Day* is not nearly as subversive: whereas Elizabeth mounts the omnibus on a personal whim, Katharine passively follows Ralph into one;²¹ and as the former plots her professional career, the latter makes a discovery which is arguably the first step on the road to her eventual engagement—that it might be possible to like Ralph. Nevertheless, I would argue that the bus, rushing Katharine and Ralph through the streets of London, is also linked to freedom—the freedom to say something 'quite true' which was impossible in Cheyne Walk. The omnibus, a symbol of modernity, is the antithesis of the Hilbery household, and as such it allows for a shift in the couple's attitudes towards one another.

Following this initial breakthrough, the next crucial moment takes place in chapter 23, when Ralph declares his obsession with Katharine as the two of them wander the streets of London. At this point, Denham is bursting to say something consequential. However,

the determination that when he spoke he should speak worthily, made him put off the moment of speaking till he had found the exact words and *even the place that best suited him*. The Strand was too busy. [...] Without a word of explanation he turned to the left, down one of the side streets leading to the river.²²

This passage explicitly associates what is said to where it is said: Ralph cannot profess his feelings in the Strand. Although he objects to it on seemingly practical grounds—it is understandable that a conversation like the one he has in mind requires a degree of privacy the

¹⁹ Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity*, p. 170.

²⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 181-82.

²¹ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 85.

²² *Ibid*, p. 274, added emphasis.

Strand cannot provide—it is also possible to draw a parallel between his decision to go down to the Embankment and Katharine’s hesitation between these exact two routes in chapter 21, which endows this scene with additional meaning. For Katharine, choosing one or the other concerns ‘not different streets so much as different streams of thought’:

[i]f she went by the Strand she would force herself to think out the problem of the future, or some mathematical problem; if she went by the river she would certainly begin to think about things that didn’t exist—the forest, the ocean beach, the leafy solitudes, the magnanimous hero.²³

In Katharine’s mind, the Strand and the Embankment are symbolically charged. The former is associated with rational problem-solving, while walking along the river conjures up dreams: the places she enumerates correspond to her day-dreams, always set in open, outdoor spaces—‘the American prairies’; the ocean during a hurricane; a ‘bleak northern moor’; ‘a road in Northumberland in the August sunset’; ‘the top of a high hill’.²⁴ However, the mention of the ‘magnanimous hero’ tinges these visions of solitude with romance, which Katharine escapes by choosing the Strand.

Not only does this distance her from the world of illusions, including romantic ones, but the rational aura of the Strand allows her to (at least temporarily) break out of the marriage plot she is entangled in: she considers her feelings towards her fiancé Rodney, realises beyond any doubt that she is not in love with him and decides to communicate this fact to him.²⁵ Thus, this passage implies that walking along the Strand is conducive to approaching life from a practical angle, making it possible for Katharine to reject a marriage proposal she has no wish to accept; on the contrary, the Embankment is endowed with a potential to induce dream-like thoughts, including those of romance. In this light, Ralph’s determination to abandon the Strand in favour of the more secluded riverside walk appears not simply as a decision motivated by practical concerns, but one that fits in with the emotional map of the

²³ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 250.

²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 40, 224, 403-04.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 259.

city that is being constructed in *Night and Day*. Indeed, as the couple walk along the Embankment, they are both lost in dream-like worlds. Once Ralph has made his declaration, Katharine becomes to him ‘not so much a real person, as the very woman he dreamt of’;²⁶ his fantasies find a physical incarnation in the person walking by his side.

Whereas Ralph at long last succeeds in consolidating the two Katharines, the real and the imaginary, Katharine herself is described as splitting into separate entities, one of which ascends into the celestial realm which so fascinates her. She feels ‘herself possessed of two bodies, one walking by the river with Denham, the other concentrated to a silver globe aloft in the fine blue space above the scum of vapors that was covering the visible world’, and experiences intense happiness even though there has been no change in her circumstances that could justify such elation: ‘she was not free; she was not alone; she was still bound to the earth by a million fibres; every step took her nearer home. Nevertheless, she exulted as she had never exulted before’.²⁷ What she is liberated of, however, is the ‘feeling of annoyance’ with Ralph as she realises that ‘he certainly did not hinder any flight she might choose to make, whether in the direction of the sky or of her home’.²⁸ What brings these disparate elements together—Katharine’s associations with the Embankment, and this curious image of her as a silver globe—is the notion of freedom, which will subsequently come to define the relationship Ralph offers her when they meet in Kew Gardens to discuss his future prospects.²⁹ That Denham chooses Kew as a suitable place to debate the matter is significant. As J. H. Stape argues, Kew ‘is a genteel version of the forest world that Katharine conjures up in

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 279.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 279.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 279.

²⁹ Kew also provides the setting for one of the short stories published, like *Night and Day*, in 1919. ‘Kew Gardens’ is one of Woolf’s narrative experiments of this period; in it, the Botanic Gardens become the stage for a number of characters—including a snail—whose lives the reader glimpses through fragmentary descriptions and snatches of conversations. ‘Kew Gardens’, along with ‘The Mark on the Wall’, is considered to anticipate Woolf’s subsequent modernist aesthetic. See Nóra Séllei, ‘The snail and “The Times”’: Three Stories “Dancing in Unity”, *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 3.2 (1997), pp.189-198.

her dream states'.³⁰ The theme of freedom hinted at in the previously analysed scene is therefore carried into this one, finding a climax in Ralph's proposition of a 'perfectly sincere and perfectly straightforward friendship' which 'must be unemotional' and not constrain the parties in any way: '[n]either is under any obligation to the other. They must be at liberty to break or to alter at any moment. They must be able to say what they wish to say'.³¹ Despite Katharine's initial scepticism, she is eventually persuaded because she comes to consider the offer as an actualization of the freedom she enjoys in her mind:

[a]nd further, she meditated [...], as in her thought she was accustomed to complete freedom, why should she perpetually apply so different a standard to her behaviour in practice? Why [...] should there be this perpetual disparity between the thought and the action, between the life of solitude and the life of society [...]? Was it not possible to step from one to the other, erect, and without essential change? Was this not the chance he offered her - the rare and wonderful chance of friendship?³²

To accept Denham's proposal in the 'broad green space' of Kew Gardens, where the sound of the wind seems to Katharine 'wafted from fathomless oceans of sweet air in the distance' (note the oceanic imagery, and the openness this image creates),³³ is to live the liberty she had henceforth experienced only in her thoughts, and never within social structures.

Unsurprisingly, Denham's scheme of an unemotional relation between the two of them fails miserably. Katharine is made aware of her feelings when she impulsively decides to meet Ralph 'out of doors' because she cannot stand the thought of seeing him under the watchful eyes of Rodney and Cassandra who would, she imagines, judge 'their exact degree of intimacy, so that they may fix the wedding-day'.³⁴ She rushes to Lincoln's Inn Fields, where she discovers that

[t]he square itself [...] spoke of him. Here was the fit place for their meeting, she thought; here was the fit place for her to walk thinking of him. She could not help

³⁰ J. H. Stape, 'Introduction', in Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), p. xvi.

³¹ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 313-14.

³² *Ibid*, pp. 314-15.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 306-07.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 407.

comparing it with the domestic streets of Chelsea. With this comparison in mind, she extended her range a little, and turned into the main road.³⁵

Ralph's presence may be jarring in Cheyne Walk, but he belongs in central London. If in the geoemotional scheme of the novel the Strand stands for reality and the Embankment for dreams, then Lincoln's Inn Fields and Kingsway, where Katharine subsequently turns, represent Denham himself. Given that the "externalities" of "social space" are 'crucial for an understanding of human character' in Woolf's writing,³⁶ the fact that he is associated with this particular area of the metropolis ought to tell us something about him—or at least the way Katharine perceives him, since the passage is focalised through her, reflecting her feelings, as Moorcroft Wilson observes.³⁷ Thus, to understand Ralph—or, rather, what he means to Katharine—one must first understand the historical context of the development of Kingsway which, although 'not explicit in the text', would have been 'available to Woolf's readership in 1919'.³⁸

Kingsway 'was an important element in the slum clearance project to modernise London at the turn of the century', which put an end to what Larsson describes as 'Charles Dickens's London'.³⁹ Consequently, the critic reads it as an architectural expression of urban modernity. In this vein, she interprets not just Kingsway, but central London more broadly, as 'paradoxical spaces', where '[t]he gender order [...] is suspended, but not, however, replaced by a new one, and there is diversity and the possibility of something new'.⁴⁰ Following Larsson's reading, Kingsway can be seen as yet another iteration of Katharine's desire for freedom, this time a distinctly urban one. This impression is amplified by the use

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 407-08.

³⁶ Andrew Thacker, 'Woolf and Geography', in *A Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Jessica Berman (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), pp. 411-26 (p. 411).

³⁷ Moorcroft Wilson, p. 126.

³⁸ Snaith and Whitworth, p. 9.

³⁹ Larsson, loc 65.4, 31.5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, loc 31.5.

of aquatic imagery deployed in its description through Katharine's eyes, which links it to the image of the ocean featuring in her day-dreams. Woolf writes:

[t]he great *torrent* of vans and carts was sweeping down Kingsway; pedestrians were *streaming* in two currents along the pavements. [...] The deep roar filled her ears: the changing tumult has the inexpressible fascination of varied life *pouring* ceaselessly with a purpose which, as she looked, seemed to her, somehow, the normal purpose for which life was framed [...]. They [the people] tended the enormous *rush of the current* - the great low, *the deep stream, the unquenchable tide*.⁴¹

Rather fittingly, Kingsway liberates Katharine from the 'million fibres' which she previously felt connecting her to her everyday reality by making her just another face in the crowd. The street's 'complete indifference to the individuals, whom it swallowed up and rolled onwards, filled her with at least a temporary exaltation' as she is transformed into 'an invisible spectator', standing 'unobserved and absorbed, glorying openly in the rapture that had run subterraneously all day'.⁴² The fact that she is the granddaughter of Richard Alardyce, impossible to forget in Cheyne Walk, is irrelevant in Kingsway. However, as she manages to shake off the burden of the Hilbery name, she tumbles into a different set of social relations, for, as she later declares, it is there that she becomes aware of her love for Ralph⁴³—the love that will eventually lead her down the aisle. In the symbolic layering of this scene, this realisation is combined with the newly opened Kingsway which, as Larsson argues, carries connotations of modernity and potentially suggests the promise of 'something new'. In this case, the novelty could perhaps be a relationship based on liberty implied by the imagery of currents, streams and tides related to the ocean, which functions in *Night and Day* as one of the metaphors for Katharine's desire for freedom.

Following their engagement, Katharine and Ralph take to the streets once more in the final scene of the novel; they step out into the 'still and moonlit' night, 'desiring more than

⁴¹ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 408, added emphases.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 408.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 468.

anything movement, freedom from scrutiny, silence, and the open air'⁴⁴—in short, the sort of liberty they have been progressively moving towards throughout the novel. They take the omnibus to Temple Bar; walk to Mary's rooms in Bloomsbury; get on the bus back to Chelsea; disembark and follow the river 'which bore its dark tide of waters, endlessly moving, beneath them', back to the house where they say their good-nights.⁴⁵ Moorcroft Wilson contends that 'the river [...] symbolizes, for Ralph at any rate, the unknown'.⁴⁶ This resonates with the partly indeterminate ending of *Night and Day*. Although Ralph and Katharine make plans for the future during this last nocturnal city haunt, when the novel concludes, they remain just that: plans 'sketched [...] upon the outline of the great offices in the Strand', an ephemeral projection of what is yet to come woven—unsurprisingly given the distinctly urban nature of their relationship—into the very fabric of the city.⁴⁷ The reader never sees these aspirations come to fruition; they never even witness the wedding and are left instead with a puzzling image of Katharine and Ralph bidding each other 'Good night' on the doorstep of the Hilbery house. The conclusion of the novel raises a number of unanswered questions pondered by Steve Ellis: '[w]ill Katharine pursue mathematics as a married woman? Will Katharine and Ralph actively support Mary Datchet's political movement?'.⁴⁸ Ellis's interrogation of what happens beyond the page suggests *Night and Day* refuses narrative closure by not tying its loose ends together; despite its ostensible conclusion, the novel leaves ample room for speculation. An 'open-ended narrative form' is what Joseph A. Boone identifies as 'the modernist writer's answer to the closed system of Victorian thought and litera-

⁴⁴ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 465.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

⁴⁶ Moorcroft Wilson, p. 168.

⁴⁷ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 470.

⁴⁸ Steve Ellis, *Virginia Woolf and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 39-40.

ture'.⁴⁹ In the context of the conventional marriage plot the critic is specifically concerned with, this strategy becomes a tool to 'expose irresolvable conflicts built into a code of conjugal love', that is, the dichotomisation 'uphold[ing] as "natural" mutually exclusive definitions of masculinity and femininity that inevitably fall into a hierarchical pattern of dominance and subordination supporting patriarchal values'.⁵⁰ By '[r]efusing to lay issues to rest because irresolution is part of the meaning,' Boone argues, 'the open-ended text passes its tension on to the reader, who must actively struggle with the unsettling questions raised but left unresolved by the prior narrative'.⁵¹ The reader then becomes

a critic of, rather than a complicit participant in, the conventions residing in the romantic marital ideal. Such a narrative strategy, moreover, deflects attention from whatever hidden (and unknowable) personal ideal of love the writer might harbor to the more tangible contradictions of patriarchal marriage that the concrete format of the text offers up for critique.⁵²

If Boone's insight is applied to *Night and Day*, the novel can be said to step away from the Victorian tradition at the very moment when it seems to be pulled back towards it. Although Denham and Katharine concede to marry in what at first glance seems to be a disappointingly conventional resolution in a text which hitherto appeared to be invested in working out an alternative model for male/female relationships, the fact that its ending—unfinished and inconclusive—conveys almost a sense of interruption makes it, in Boone's terms, modernist rather than Victorian; provocative rather than complacent.

Such an interpretation would be consistent with the fact that, throughout the novel, Ralph is positioned in stark contrast to the domestic setting of Cheyne Walk, which has led critics like Hermione Lee to read him as 'a spokesman for modernism, who will enable

⁴⁹ Joseph A. Boone, 'Modernist Manoeuvrings in the Marriage Plot: Breaking Ideologies of Gender and Genre in James's *The Golden Bowl*', *PMLA*, 101.3 (May 1986), 374-88 (p. 377).

⁵⁰ Boone, pp. 377, 375.

⁵¹ Boone, p. 377.

⁵² *Ibid.*

[Katharine] to move into the twentieth century'.⁵³ When he calls Katharine on the phone, the sound of his voice 'reck[s] nothing of Uncle James, of China teapots, or of red velvet curtains'—that is, tokens of the Victorian and imperial past—and as Katharine speaks to him, her mind wanders to 'her own upper room, with its books, its papers pressed between the leaves of dictionaries, and the table that could be cleared for work', which implies she associates him with intellectual pursuits.⁵⁴ Furthermore, when Denham eventually confesses his love, Katharine muses: 'Can one be in love with pure reason? [...] Because if you're in love with a vision, I believe that that's what I'm in love with.'⁵⁵ If, as Janis M. Paul argues, '[t]he question of Katharine's independence resolves into the question of whom she will marry',⁵⁶ then the fact she chooses Ralph appears to be a step away from convention towards what Marcus calls 'a new experiment with an old institution, a marriage that will provide peace and respect, a mutual silence so that both can work'.⁵⁷ According to Marcus, the marital union in *Night and Day* is simply a way to achieve 'the female utopia' of having a profession, and will produce books rather than babies.⁵⁸

Although compelling, such a reading of *Night and Day* is at fault for glossing over the dubious aspects of Ralph's personality which undermine this idealistic vision. When he gives in to Mrs Hilbery's desire for a service at Westminster Abbey, he does so motivated by the wish not simply to 'be with' Katharine, but 'to dominate her, to possess her'.⁵⁹ This challenges the idea of marriage as a companionship of equals which affords both parties the freedom to pursue their individual ambitions, posing the threat of Katharine being expected

⁵³ Hermione Lee, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (London: Methuen & Co, 1977), p. 63.

⁵⁴ Woolf, *Night and Day*, pp. 288-89.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

⁵⁶ Paul, p. 84.

⁵⁷ Marcus, p. 27.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27. See also Squier, p. 76.

⁵⁹ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 454.

to submit to Ralph's authority according to the stereotype of a dutiful Victorian wife.⁶⁰ This scene, moreover, parallels the beginning of the novel, when Ralph leaves the Hilbery house following his first meeting with Katharine, and imaginatively claims her, deciding that 'Katharine Hilbery would do; she would do for weeks, perhaps for months. In taking her he had provided himself with something the lack of which had left a bare place in his mind for a considerable time'.⁶¹ This 'something', as Kathy J. Phillips argues, is social standing—'[h]is resentment of her rank goads him to substitute her person for the money and status he lacks'.⁶² Although it would be an exaggeration to suggest that Ralph's actions throughout the novel form part of a mercenary scheme to ascend socially, the fact that Woolf insists on this possessive streak of his personality problematises his relationship with Katharine. Is he, as Phillips and Larsson suggest, a 'social climber',⁶³ concerned chiefly with his own advancement? Will the marriage allow Katharine to maintain the freedom and independence she expects Ralph to provide her with? Will their union be as unconventional as the friendship Ralph offered in Kew Gardens, or will it replicate old forms? Or perhaps Ralph's objectification of Katharine draws attention to, rather than embrace, the patriarchal model, provoking the reader—as per Boone's suggestion—to reflect on it critically? These questions remain frustratingly unanswered despite the novel's ostensible sense of closure.

How, then, are we to read London in *Night and Day*? In some ways, the novel's treatment of the metropolis anticipates Woolf's subsequent texts. The prominence of the city, the crucial role it plays in driving the plot forward, as well as the fact that the characters' emotional lives are played out within—and influenced by—the urban space connects the novel to the experimental approach of a modernist text like *Mrs Dalloway*. Even so, the

⁶⁰ See de Gay, p. 55.

⁶¹ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 22.

⁶² Kathy J. Phillips, *Virginia Woolf Against Empire* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), p. 80.

⁶³ Larsson, loc 165.6.

ambiguities concerning the romance plot the city facilitates render its portrayal abstruse. If London helps bring Katharine and Ralph together, what sort of a relationship is it that it makes possible? Is it a companionship that would allow both parties their individual freedom, or is Katharine reduced to a coveted possession Denham eventually makes his? If it is the former, then the city can be read as progressive, providing Katharine and Ralph with an open space unburdened by the tradition weighing down on them in Cheyne Walk, where they can move past their initial prejudices, recognise each other as individuals and attempt a relationship on their own terms.

However, if by the end of the novel Katharine has been dominated by Ralph, then the city is complicit in making her enter into a relationship of subordination reminiscent of the sexual politics of the Victorian era, in which case the formal modernism of its portrayal stands in opposition to the retrograde conclusion it brings about. The novel provides evidence for both alternatives, and the unresolved ending—which, in itself, can be read as both an espousal and subtle critique of conventional models regulating male/female relations—makes them equally plausible. *Night and Day*, then, concludes on a ‘gesture of ambivalence’,⁶⁴ leaving both its protagonists and the reader ‘grop[ing] in this difficult region where the unfinished, the unfulfilled, the unwritten, the unreturned, came together in their ghostly way and wore the semblance of the complete and the satisfactory’.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Paul, p. 98.

⁶⁵ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 470.

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