

## **“And still she asked, where, in this system, was there room for a studio?”: Reading Gender and Lesbian Space in Vita Sackville-West’s *All Passion Spent***

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### **Abstract**

*In my essay “And still she asked, where, in this system, was there room for a studio?: Reading Gender and Lesbian Space in Vita Sackville-West’s All Passion Spent,” I investigate the construction of lesbian space in the context of both the historical reality of a patriarchal society, and, within it, a patriarchal literary tradition. I place this text in the context of recent theoretical work by Adrienne Rich, Terry Castle, Judith Butler, Sharon Marcus, and Luce Irigaray, among others. My argument, influenced by Adrienne Rich’s idea of the lesbian continuum, investigates the ways in which widowhood opens up a lesbian/woman-centered space for Lady Slane in Sackville-West’s novel. Lady Slane’s newfound independence creates a subject position that allows her to make a space for herself away from patriarchal control. I focus on female autonomy in All Passion Spent, in particular, the creation of a female identity and female space that develops within a feminist discourse. This novel challenges traditional representations of the lesbian; consequently, it has been praised for creating alternative lesbian images as well as criticized for producing stereotypes. I break new ground by positing that the novel is a lesbian one. Sackville-West’s novel might not be labeled as such by some because it does not appear to present a lesbian identity. However, within an inclusive lesbian theoretical perspective, the novel fits easily, if rather differently from other novels (such as Radclyffe Hall’s The Well of Loneliness (1928) and Virginia Woolf’s Orlando (1928), into the lesbian continuum.*

Vita Sackville-West's *All Passion Spent* (1931) portrays the life of an elderly widow who desires a space of her own. As Carol Ames writes in her essay "Nature and Aristocracy in V. Sackville-West," the novel "posits that it is never too late to free oneself by declaring oneself independent of society's pressures and expectations" (19). Indeed, Sackville-West's work depicts an aristocratic woman breaking away from traditional and social expectations after the death of the family patriarch. After the death of her husband, Lady Slane, the protagonist<sup>1</sup>, embarks on a new path in life, separate from her family. She realizes how much she has sacrificed for her marriage and her family; earlier in her life, she had wanted to be an artist, and now that she is in control of her own life (much to the dismay of her children), Lady Slane separates and isolates herself from the family that controlled her for so long. She recognizes that her marriage trapped her in the role of "the good wife" (Ames 19). Providing a retrospective analysis of her married life, Lady Slane recognizes that she ultimately played a passive role in her marriage; she lost herself and betrayed her own desires in a rushed marriage in order to adhere to tradition and respectability. Not until her husband's death does she begin to notice that a world of independence and freedom awaits her in a lesbian space<sup>2</sup> that we can now recognize as such.

In this essay, I draw upon Adrienne Rich's idea of the "lesbian continuum" to argue that Lady Slane and her maid, Genoux, create a lesbian space in Lady Slane's new home in Hampstead, a space that counters the heteronormative spaces she inhabited throughout her life. Focusing on the role of the narrator, I show that the novel ridicules Lord Slane, whose masculine gender position affords him control over Lady Slane. I provide an analytical perspective on Lady Slane's marriage to show that the novel views marriage as a hindrance to her development as a woman due to her family's expectations and assumptions. In addition, I argue that the protagonist creates a lesbian space void of male control after having gained a clear view of her married life and the institution of marriage.

I situate my argument theoretically with critics such as Adrienne Rich, Terry Castle, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. These writers and critics/scholars have helped me to recognize the concepts of the "lesbian continuum," lesbian identity, and homosocial bonds, which provide an understanding of a lesbian space that emerges from Sackville-West's novel as the protagonist gains agency and begins to control her own life. The characters in the novel are historically situated in gender roles that provide clear definitions of what it is to be a man or woman. Lady Slane ultimately rebels against these established gender identities in order to carve out a space for herself. My argument concerning lesbian space in *All Passion Spent* is based on Adrienne Rich's idea of re-envisioning texts through what she calls the "lesbian continuum," a concept that emerged during second-wave feminism and focuses on a vast range of woman-identified experiences, both sexual and non-sexual, in order to broaden our sense of the full range of women's experiences. Woman-identified experiences

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1 Before the protagonist's marriage to Lord Slane, the narrator sometimes refers to Lady Slane by her first name, Deborah.

2 I define lesbian space as a space void of male presence and male control. Lesbian space can be the location of exclusive female friendship or female sexual relationships that males do not inhabit.

are women-centered experiences articulated from the perspectives of women rather than men. Indeed, Rich's concept brings to the foreground hitherto largely neglected experiences and removes them from the normative heterosexual context, which normally evaluates and ranks experiences. This continuum goes beyond the narrow heterosexual construct of the clinical definition of lesbianism, as essentially sex between women. Rather, Rich wants the term "lesbian continuum" "to include a range—through each woman's life and throughout history—of woman-identified experiences, not simply the fact a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman" (349). Women's recognition of shared experiences, such as male oppression, resisting marriage, etc., draws attention to other woman-identified experiences throughout history as being lesbian regardless of whether or not a sexual component exists within the relationship.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) helps explain the marginalization of lesbian novels and reinforces the conceptual usefulness of the "lesbian continuum" even though she does not use the term. Sedgwick writes, "It is crucial to every aspect of social structure within the exchange-of-women framework that heavily freighted bonds between men exist as the backbone of social form or forms" (86). But this raises an interesting point about the limits of male bonds, as Castle points out, "How then to separate 'functional' male bonds—those that bolster the structure of male domination—from those that weaken it?" (69) Sedgwick's argument illustrates that functional male bonds are those that reinforce patriarchy through the "male-female-male 'erotic paradigm'" such as Charles Dickens' novel *Our Mutual Friend*. The male-female-male triangle is a "sign...of normative (namely, heterosexual) male bonding and of a remobilization of patriarchal control" (69). Thus, homosocial bonds are a slippery slope that requires erotic feelings between men to be absent because male homosexuality undermines the patriarchal super-structure. Traditionally, only those works of literature that undergird homosocial bonds and patriarchy are deemed worthy of the literary canon. Thus, the lesbian novel is marginalized.

Sedgwick's argument appears to reinforce the distinction (although sometimes blurred) between homosocial and homosexual bonds:

At this particular historical moment, an intelligible continuum of aims, emotions, and valuations links lesbianism with the other forms of women's attention to women: the bond of mother and daughter, for instance, the bond of sister and sister, women's friendship, "networking," and the active struggles of feminism. The continuum is crisscrossed with deep discontinuities—with much homophobia, with conflicts of race and class—but its intelligibility seems now a matter of simple common sense. However agonistic the politics, however conflicted the feelings, it seems at this moment to make an obvious kind of sense to say that women in our society who love women, women who teach, nurture, suckle, write about, march for, vote for, give jobs to, or otherwise promote the interest

of other women, are pursuing congruent and closely related activities. Thus the adjective “homosocial” as applied to women’s bonds...need not be pointedly dichotomized as against “homosexual”; it can intelligibly denominate the entire continuum. (2)

Indeed, the “lesbian continuum” captures the full range of differences in female bonding that the term homosocial does not. Sedgwick advances her argument concerning female and male homosocial experiences with a discussion on the establishment of patriarchal societies and the transfer of power to and from men via their homosocial bonds. The male homosocial relationship is “founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence” (Sedgwick 25). This relationship has historical purposes rooted in institutionalized prejudices. For example, the male homosocial bond “may take the form of ideological homophobia, ideological homosexuality, or some highly conflicted but intensively structured combination of the two.” Although lesbian relationships “must always be in a special relation to patriarchy,” these relationships are wholly different from male homosocial bonds because lesbian relationships are “on different [sometimes opposite] grounds and working through different mechanisms” (Sedgwick 25).<sup>1</sup> For example, men’s professional sports have been highly criticized for maintaining a high level of homophobia since the dominant image of masculinity perpetuated through competition is coded heterosexual. Female professional sports, however, have not been subject to the same scrutiny as male professional sports because female professional sports are not as privileged in society. The privileging of male professional sports, therefore, lends a hand to institutionalizing the homophobia that in effect maintains a certain level of power. This is key in differentiating male homosocial relationships and female homosocial relationships. Therefore, the term female homosocial relationship does not even begin to scratch the surface for conceptualizing lesbian relationships.

Terry Castle’s groundbreaking work *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993) is crucial to linking the theoretical and historical approaches on which I draw. Castle’s research is rooted in both critical theory and history in order to uncover lesbian identities. Castle comments,

Why is it so difficult to see the lesbian—even when she is there, quite plainly, in front of us? In part because she has been “ghosted”—or made it seem invisible—by culture itself. It would be putting it mildly to say that the lesbian represents a threat to patriarchal protocol: Western civilization has for centuries been haunted by a fear of “women without men”—of women indifferent or resistant to male desire. (5)

Indeed, the lesbian has been subject to being hidden away. She is seen as a threat to the patriarchal order because men in power cannot see women as being independent from male control. Castle makes explicit that she is arguing against preconceived notions of lesbian identity: “What the advocates of the ‘no lesbians before 1900’ theory forget is that there

<sup>1</sup> The point here is to present another argument for the preference of “lesbian continuum” over “homosocial.”

are myriad ways of discovering one's desire" (9). Historically speaking, the lesbian is not a twentieth-century invention. For example, nineteenth-century writer Anne Lister serves as a representation of a sexual lesbian. Castle points out that "sex between women was technically possible" (11). Although she focuses on sexual relationships between women, her argument concerning the covering up of lesbian identities or, more broadly, woman-centered ones, is valuable for my purpose.

The historical grounding of my essay begins with Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (1981). Faderman includes an historical outline of women's lives in Victorian England. Concerning women's roles, she comments,

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, women moved still farther from men as both continued to develop their own even more distinct sets of values. Men tried to claim exclusively for themselves the capacity of action and thought, and relegated women to the realm of sensibility alone. Women made the best of it: They internalized the only values they were permitted to have, and they developed what has been called the Cult of True Womanhood. The spiritual life, moral purity, sentiment, grew in importance. (157)

Faderman demonstrates how women have been subject to regulation, particularly in the Victorian era. Women were essentially seen as the weaker sex. This is well illustrated in works such as "Locksley Hall" (1842) by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (Faderman 158). In order to keep women under male control, female friendship was encouraged and seen as a "means of keeping women in their place by encouraging their self-image as primarily sentimental beings, too pure for the material world" (Faderman 162). Thus, female friendship was deemed acceptable because it was not viewed as a threat to the established patriarchy.<sup>1</sup>

Sharon Marcus's work *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (2007) explores the varied lives of Victorian women in England between 1830-1880. Her analysis of marriage and female friendship and desire draws upon the works of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Adrienne Rich, and as the title implies Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Marcus's research on female friendship draws upon a prominent conduct book published by Sarah Stickney Ellis in 1839. Ellis "identified *The Women of England* (1839) as daughters, wives, and mothers ensconced in a familial, domestic sphere" (Marcus 25). One of the prescriptions made by the writer in order to instill correct feminine behavior in girls was through a friend. Marcus points out that "contemporary scholars who cite [Ellis] as representative of Victorian gender ideology consistently overlook her articulation of female friendship as a basic element of a middle class organized around marriage, family, and Christian belief" (Marcus 25). Indeed, female

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<sup>1</sup> Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* can be seen in this context—when female 'friendships' go beyond 'acceptable' bonds.

friendship, which Rich sees as part of the lesbian continuum, would become one of the most fundamental bonds between women in the Victorian period.

As demonstrated by Adrienne Rich's lesbian continuum, bonds between women can be understood in two ways, either sexual or non-sexual. Marcus cites Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's "The Female World of Love and Ritual" (1975) as a starting point for identifying female friendships and credits this profound essay as shaping lesbian studies. But Marcus points out that although many critics cite Smith-Rosenberg's essay, many scholars of the Victorian family "have not heeded its call to incorporate the study of friendship into the history of family marriage" (Marcus 30). Many critics view female friendship as being an essential component of the Victorian family. Thus, an understanding of how female friendship functioned in Victorian England is necessary in conceptualizing its importance. For example, evangelical Christianity viewed female friendship as a way to "cultivate" key tenets of their religious doctrine (Marcus 65).<sup>1</sup>

For many followers of the Christian tradition, in particular Evangelical Victorians, female friendship held close ties to key principles of Christianity. For example, "Friendship became itself a form of religious training by helping women cultivate self-examination and worldly detachment. The philosophical discourse of male friendship had always emphasized the friend as a truth-telling critic; women similarly saw friends as agents of spiritual growth" (Marcus 65). In addition, "indifference to material gain, acceptance of death, and belief in an afterlife," were all major pillars of the Christian key in Victorian England that depended upon female friendship as a way in which women could "cultivate" these tenets (Marcus 65). Although Evangelical Christianity contained fundamentalist dogma, these Victorians "paved the way for understanding friendship as analogous to the most fundamental forms of kinship regulated by religious and civil law," but was "less physically intimate, more prone to be idealized as perfect than idolized despite their imperfections" (Marcus 66).

As the above discussion of my theoretical and historical contexts indicates, the feminist movement would enable critics to understand and discover neglected texts that scrutinize the institution of marriage from a woman's perspective. Faderman comments,

Society saw heterosexual unions in measuring stick terms: In a suitable marriage the male was more of everything—he was older, taller, stronger, richer, smarter. It was inculcated in a girl that she must be less of everything than the man with whom she would spend most of her earthly existence. Her daily life was to be a constant reminder of her junior status. A nineteenth-century woman with an ego strong enough to envision being an earthly success would have difficulty accepting an unexamined, a priori definition of herself as inferior to her lifemate. (205)

Faderman illustrates the heterosexual marriage paradigm well by portraying how women were submissive subjects. The "daily life" included the roles of both wife and mother, which

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<sup>1</sup> Although *All Passion Spent* does not explicitly mention religion, one could perhaps argue that religion could have been an important part of the patriarchal Slane household.

bound women to the home. The feminist movement gave women a sense of independence and freedom that a female network of support created. Heterosexual marriage was no longer the only option for women, and many chose to denounce the institution in favor of a career or education. But it is perhaps financial independence that paved the way for women to create varied lives without the presence of a man (Faderman 178).

In *All Passion Spent*, the third-person omniscient narrator serves as the moral center of the novel. Although Wayne C. Booth claims in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1983) that a narrator is unreliable “when he [or she] does not” act in accordance with social norms (159), the narrator’s rejection of these norms in *All Passion Spent* paradoxically constitutes the narrator’s reliability. In her introduction to Sackville-West’s novel, Victoria Glendinning summarizes the narrator’s thoughts about Lady Slane as a wife and mother: “[s]he recalls her role as loving ‘appendage’; she has been ‘a lonely woman, at variance with the creeds to which she apparently conformed’” (*APS*, x). Lady Slane’s position as an “appendage” illustrates the role she fulfilled in her marriage. Indeed, the idea of separate spheres clearly relegates woman to the home as both wife and mother. Lady Slane does not even have a self or any kind of separate identity, let alone a space of her own, simply because she is Lord Slane’s wife. The novel’s narrator is crucial to an understanding of the presence of irony. The third-person narrator’s sustained ironic undermining of Lord Slane’s character, activities, and position in society establishes an alternative basis for normative reliability. Crucially, the narrator tends to approve of Lady Slane’s views, which marks Lady Slane’s position a moral one. The ironic distancing from Lord Slane and his patriarchal position indicates a reevaluation of established patriarchal norms.<sup>1</sup> The narrator’s descriptions and comments about Lord Slane are ironic in the sense that the text appears on the surface to suggest he is a genuinely nice man and accomplished. However, the reader soon realizes that the positive comments about Lord Slane’s reputation as a politician are articulated from the perspective of those characters who share his values, not the narrator’s perspective. Indeed, the point is that the narrator does not share society’s gendered value system in which men are in control and women are not. The “public” and “colleagues” (read, men) heap praise on his life and his career accomplishments. Lord Slane’s professionalism and poise become part of a system of measure to indicate one’s greatness and success. The narrator eschews female commentary altogether in describing Lord Slane’s public position, thereby illuminating the silencing from patriarchal control of female voices who speak out on patriarchal figures. This becomes part of the larger issue throughout the text that gives the reader a sense of Lady Slane’s subjugation.

1 Similarly, Marilyn R. Farwell’s essay “Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Subtexts: Toward a Theory of Lesbian Narrative Space” develops an argument aimed at foregrounding the lesbian aspects of the novel. I employ Farwell’s approach for breaking down narrative codes in order to find lesbian subtexts in heterosexual plots. She points out that creating a separate space for lesbian identities is crucial in uncovering a history of lesbianism. Frequently, heterosexual plots occlude, or marginalize, lesbian desire; thus, lesbian desire never surfaces due to the implications that would arise if a female character were to identify as a lesbian. I posit that mainstream critics of the canon of English literature frequently neglect Vita Sackville-West’s affair with Virginia Woolf. Both women were married; thus, lesbian sexuality is rarely mentioned in the context of their lives, excepting a few biographies (most notably, Suzanne Raitt’s *Vita and Virginia*).

Once the narrator is seen as painting Lord Slane as a misogynist, casting him in a light wholly different from that of the initial descriptions by other characters, many readers will recognize him as being a hindrance to Lady Slane's independent development. Lord Slane may have been a force in the political arena and well-respected by other men; yet he is also sexist, particularly concerning the position of women in society. The narrator states, Henry was a "very masculine man; masculinity, in spite of his charm and his culture, was the keynote of his character" (*APS*, 219). Concerning women, he "had definite, masculine ideas" about their status in society, in particular their position in the home and motherhood: "[a]lthough secretly proud of his rising little sons, he pretended even to himself that they were...entirely their mother's concern." In an ironic tone, the narrator claims, "[s]o, *naturally*, [Lady Slane] had endeavoured to adopt those views" (*APS*, 182, emphasis added).<sup>1</sup> Henry also believes "[f]ew women...could be quiet without being dull, and fewer women could talk without being a bore" (*APS*, 207). He was only "satisfied" by Lady Slane; regarding other women, Henry holds a "low opinion of them" (*APS*, 207). He thinks of Lady Slane as a "simpleton" (*APS*, 22), mostly because she was a woman. Lord Slane's attitude exemplifies the typical patriarchal head of the family, which proves to be pervasive in influencing his children to adopt the same beliefs about their mother.

The narrator illustrates the patriarchal "dignity" Lord Slane has in the public sphere--so much so that the public regards Lord Slane as "another old landmark gone, another reminder of insecurity. The public, as a whole, finds reassurance in longevity, and, after the necessary interlude of reaction, is disposed to recognize extreme old age as a sign of excellence" (*APS*, 13). The public's perception of Lord Slane consisted of positive reflections: "Nobody had ever seriously attacked Lord Slane. Nobody had ever accused Lord Slane of being a back-number. His humour, his charm, his languor, and his good sense, had rendered him sacrosanct to all generations and to all parties; of him alone among statesmen and politicians could that be said" (*APS*, 15). Most importantly, his colleagues held him in high esteem. Lord Slane was agreeable with most everyone, which is why he was "destroyed as a statesman," but "when finally pushed into a corner, he would be more incisive, more deadly, than any man seated four-square and full of importance at a governmental desk" (*APS*, 16). Lord Slane relished the competition of being a politician, which seemed to be the ultimate expression of masculinity.

Mr. Bucktrout and Mr. Gosheron offer examples of masculinity that upset the patriarchal hegemonic order established by Lord Slane and his son, Herbert. Mr. Bucktrout and Mr. Gosheron do not display typical masculine characteristics, and it is important to note that Lady Slane does not interact with these types of men until after Lord Slane's

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<sup>1</sup> The narrator's ironic stance is particularly felt in Lady Slane's "natural" ability to "adopt [Lord Slane's] views" (*APS*, 182). A biological deterministic sentiment is expressed by the patriarchal culture that because Lady Slane is biologically a female, her "natural" position in life (that is, given by nature) is to care for her children and her husband, and that "naturally" she, too, should accept the patriarchal value system concerning woman's domesticity.

death.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bucktrout exemplifies Genoux's (Lady Slane's maid) idea of "un vrai monsieur" (a true gentleman) because he "had strange and beautiful ideas; he was never in a hurry; he would break off in the middle of business to talk about Descartes or the satisfying quality of pattern. And when he said pattern, he did not mean the pattern on a wall-paper; he meant the pattern of life" (*APS*, 115). Mr. Bucktrout does not express the misogynistic qualities that Herbert and Lord Slane articulate. Instead, he literally bucks tradition in order to make way for new varieties of masculinity in the text.

Mr. Bucktrout issues important statements on the patriarchal social order of their culture:

The world, Lady Slane, is pitifully horrible. It is horrible because it is based upon competitive struggle—and really one does not know whether to call the basis of that struggle a convention or a necessity. Is it some extraordinary delusion, or is it a law of life? Is it perhaps an animal law from which civilization may eventually free us? At present it seems to me, Lady Slane, that man has founded all his calculations upon a mathematical system fundamentally false. His sums work out right for his own purposes, because he has crammed and constrained his planet into accepting his premises. Judged by other laws, though the answers would remain correct, the premises would appear merely crazy; ingenious enough, but crazy. (*APS*, 121-2)

Lady Slane questions Mr. Bucktrout's claim by asking whether he believed that "anyone who goes against this extraordinary delusion is helping civilization on." His response, "I do, Lady Slane; most certainly I do" (*APS*, 122). Mr. Bucktrout continues his evaluation of civilization: "Other methods may earn you respect in the long run, but for a short-cut there is nothing like setting a high valuation on yourself and forcing others to accept it. Modesty, moderation, consideration, nicety—no good; *they don't pay*" (*APS*, 122-3, emphasis added). Indeed, it is the concern for profit in a capitalistic society that matters most. He relates to Lady Slane how he used to handle his business decisions: "[f]or my practice had always been a discipline rather than an inclination" (*APS*, 123). Indeed, Mr. Bucktrout's career required a discipline rather than instinct. He narrates how he "woke a free man" on his sixty-sixth birthday and realized what was truly important in his life (*APS*, 123). Mr. Bucktrout's analysis of patriarchal institutions, such as the business sector, is significant because he is no longer a part of the hegemonic masculinity that controls culture. Unlike the other masculine figures in the novel, Mr. Bucktrout realizes how power is structured and distributed amongst those who adhere to ideology and tradition. He is

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<sup>1</sup> Sedgwick's work on homosocial bonding could also be interpreted here to perhaps indicate that Lady Slane was only acquainted with men who conformed to the dominant notion of masculinity during her marriage. Considering her husband was an influential politician, she most likely only interacted with other men (not family members) in his presence. Lord Slane established friendships ("bonds") with men who shared his value system concerning woman's role in society.

outside of the established power; therefore, he is given a voice in the text that allows him to critique patriarchal power.

Mr. Bucktrout's leaves the world of competition behind; his choice parallels Lady Slane's choice to remain alone in her old age. In addition, Mr. Bucktrout's earlier characteristics resemble Lord Slane's demeanor in his marriage. Not until he "woke a free man" (*APS*, 123) did he shun capitalistic competition. Lady Slane and Mr. Bucktrout share similar experiences of adhering to socially constructed gender roles for women and men. Both experience an epiphany that a better life might exist beyond the ones they were currently living. Not until later in life are they afforded the insight brought through experience to make sound judgments that benefit their well-being.

A crucial aspect of the novel regarding the institution of marriage is Lady Slane's recollection of her husband's marriage proposal. Lady Slane's reflections portray a woman who was essentially lost in a robotic process. Before Henry proposes, Deborah reflects how Henry looked on that particular day and how she did not even want to touch him. Her thoughts reveal the separate realities each were in: "[h]e had gone. He had left her. Even while she conscientiously gazed at him and listened, she knew that he was already miles and miles away. He had passed into the sphere" of marriage, and he wanted Lady Slane to join him in that sphere. She remembers thinking that she should not accept his marriage proposal because it was not something she wanted to do, but rather something that was expected of her: "[s]he had heard her father say that young Holland would be Viceroy of India before they had heard the last of him. That would mean that she must be Vicereine, and at the thought she had turned upon him the glance of a startled fawn" (*APS*, 144). The protagonist realizes that she is about to become a minor character in someone else's plot. She is propelled by the requirement of the romance genre. Before Deborah was able to process being proposed to and her accepting the proposal, "there was her mother smiling through tears, her father putting his hand on Mr. Holland's shoulder, her sisters asking if they might all be bridesmaids, and Mr. Holland himself standing very upright, very proud, very silent, smiling a little, bowing, and looking at her with an expression that even her inexperience could define only as propriety" (*APS*, 144).

In addition to adhering to the convention, Deborah was faced with expectations. The narrator states:

She found herself suddenly surrounded by a host of assumptions. It was assumed that she trembled for joy in his presence, languished in his absence, existed solely (but humbly) for the furtherance of his ambitions, and thought him the most remarkable man alive, as she herself was the most favoured of women, a belief in which everybody was fondly prepared to indulge her. Such was the unanimity of these assumptions that she was almost persuaded into believing them true. (*APS*, 155)

This passage exemplifies how Lady Slane was expected to behave in a particular manner upon being engaged. The passage also illustrates how the discourse surrounding marriage

engagement should affect women. This is presented to us through the ironic tone of the narrator. Once again, the text reiterates the word “assumptions”; many in Lady Slane’s immediate community expect her to be lonely for Henry and missing him. This is echoed earlier in the novel when her children attempt to make living decisions for her in old age. They, too, assume what is best for Lady Slane rather than asking what she would like to do. Here Deborah is “surrounded by a host of assumptions” (*APS*, 155) that were not in the least applicable to her true feelings and no one asked how she felt, but rather expected her to feel a particular way about the upcoming marriage ceremony.

Lady Slane’s children attempt to control their mother through their discussion of her living arrangements, her possessions, and income. They discuss what they are going to do with her jewels, in particular, whether or not she should keep them. The children act in such a manner that one would think their mother had already passed away. They make assumptions about Lady Slane’s life. For example, they begin by discussing her living arrangements for her, even perhaps selling her home and making “her home among us” (*APS*, 31). Edith, the unmarried daughter, volunteers to live with her mother and take care of her: “. . .surely I ought to bear the brunt” (*APS*, 31). Carrie rebuts Edith’s remarks by saying it would be a “privilege” to watch (or rather, supervise), their “Mother in these last sad years of her life—for sad they must be, deprived of the one thing she lived for” (*APS*, 31). The children do not know that their mother is not sad at all or “deprived.” Rather, she was most alone and unhappy in her marriage. They also assume Lady Slane’s life is “shattered” because “she lived only for Father”; therefore, they expect her life must be one of “loneliness” (*APS*, 35). The new patriarch, Herbert, states, “We know how devoted you were to Father, and we realize the blank that his loss must leave in your life” (*APS*, 59). He and his siblings do not even consider the possibility that their mother is relieved that their father is dead and that she would now live for them. Indeed, the center of her life during her marriage was outside herself, but nevertheless his death leaves a “blank” in her life that will be filled with Lady Slane founding a new life.

Almost all of her children think of Lady Slane as submissive and frail, in particular, the patriarch in waiting, Herbert, who is the “true son of his father” (55). Lady Slane’s children frequently assume that she is not coherent and cannot be trusted to make sound choices regarding her well-being after the passing of her husband. This is ironic considering that her children are most out of touch with reality. Herbert exerts his masculinity by claiming the position of “head of the family” with his eldest sister, Carrie, as “his support” (*APS*, 58). A need to maintain power over his mother exemplifies his character. Herbert’s power stems from his wealth and his expression of masculinity. Herbert and Carrie essentially wish to become pseudo-parents in determining what is acceptable for their mother in terms of her living conditions, possessions, and income. They want to force their mother into their narrative. Yet, Lady Slane wishes to write her own plot, traditionally a male prerogative. Herbert and Carrie believe Lady Slane “had no will of her own; all her life long, gracious and gentle, she had been wholly submissive—an appendage.” Because she was simply an “appendage,” “[i]t was assumed that she had not enough brain to be self-assertive. ‘Thank

goodness,' Herbert sometimes remarked, 'Mother is not one of those clever women'" (*APS*, 24). He thinks of his mother as not possessing the capability of being assertive; therefore, he plans to do as he wishes for his own sake, regardless of his mother's own desires, which he believes she should not/does not have any. Her submissiveness would also reinforce his position and status. Instead, Herbert thinks of his own interests, but he never admits that. Much like his father, Herbert was "flattered by womanly dependence. Only for these three or four days...did he demand of his mother that she should hold opinions of her own. Yet at the same time, such was his masculine contrariness, he would have resented any decision running counter to his own ideas" (*APS*, 55).<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the "womanly dependence" reflects Herbert's power. Indeed, his sense of self develops not only from a privileged life but a masculinity that conforms to culturally constructed gender roles. Therefore, he has been inculcated with expectations to obtain and exercise power simply because he is wealthy and a masculine male.<sup>2</sup>

Herbert's remarks exemplify both an ageist and sexist rhetoric. As Luce Irigaray theorizes in her work *This Sex Which is Not One*,

The rejection, the exclusion of a female imaginary certainly puts woman in the position of experiencing herself only fragmentarily, in the little-structured margins of a dominant ideology, as waste, as excess, what is left of a mirror invested by the (masculine) 'subject' to reflect himself, to copy himself. Moreover, the role of 'femininity' is prescribed by this masculine specula(riza)tion and corresponds scarcely at all to woman's desire. (30, emphases added)

Indeed, the many assumptions Herbert makes about his mother emerge from a masculine discourse in conceptualizing female desire, not in the sense of sexuality, but rather in her personal desires concerning her well-being. His ideas about how to care for/control his mother are all merely "masculine specula(riza)tion." Herbert portrays a male who benefits from a socially sanctioned role. Although feminists might believe Lady Slane's son to be out of touch with reality, he is, in fact, most in touch with reality because he represents social convention. Heir to the family fortune, the new patriarch is most afraid of his mother posing a challenge: "That she might have ideas which she kept to herself never entered into [her children's] estimate. They anticipated no trouble with their mother...She was not a clever women. She would be grateful to them for arranging her few remaining years" (*APS*, 24-5). She has played her role in life and now she can die. Herbert's attitude toward his

<sup>1</sup> "Only for these three or four days" (*APS*, 55) refers to the days after Lord Slane's death.

<sup>2</sup> In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf eloquently points out the privileges that masculinity brings men, as she hypothesizes that if Mrs. Seton "had gone into business; had become a manufacturer of artificial silk or a magnate on the Stock exchange; if she had left two or three hundred thousand pounds to Fernham, we could have been sitting at our ease tonight and the subject of our talk might have been archeology, botany, anthropology, physics, the nature of the atom, mathematics, astronomy, relativity, geography" (35). Indeed, if Mrs. Seton were a man participating in masculine activities such as investing and studying hard masculine sciences, "We might have looked forward without undue confidence to a pleasant and honourable lifetime spent in the shelter of one of the liberally endowed professions" (Woolf 36).

mother is not one of concern for her well-being, but rather one of indifference. His feelings echo the sentiments that his father expressed toward Lady Slane.

The way in which Herbert and the other children feel that Lady Slane is lonely illustrates an interesting assumption that women must be in a heterosexual relationship in order to be happy or satisfied with life. Lady Slane derives her happiness from his happiness; hers is a secondary emotion that is dependent on his. The social construction of what constitutes happiness and fulfillment in life is implied in marriage as an institution. The children believe Lady Slane needs to be taken care of by a male. They do not even hypothesize independence for women, but rather, assume independence is only for the male sex. Consequently, they neglect to imagine Lady Slane's ability to carve out a space for herself.<sup>1</sup> Lady Slane is alone, but she is not *lonely*.

The narrator articulates how social acceptance and validation is brought to an individual through heterosexual marriage: "So now with Deborah and her parents, not to mention the rest of her world, she was made to feel that in becoming engaged to Mr. Holland she had performed an act of exceeding though joyful virtue, had in fact done that which had always been expected of her" (APS, 155). Indeed, the previous passage expresses how Lady Slane felt when Henry proposed marriage to her: like a "startled fawn" (APS, 144). Although she was obviously frightened of the idea of being engaged, Deborah did not diverge from what was expected of her because she could not imagine a different plot line.

Sackville-West's novel makes profound, radical statements on the institution of heterosexual marriage. In her article "Every Woman is an Island: Vita Sackville-West, the Image of the City, and the Pastoral Idyll," Louise A. DeSalvo argues that the novel "eloquently demonstrates...the life of a woman without a room of her own, without a work of her own, is the life of a somnambulist—is, in fact, no life at all" (97, emphasis added). Indeed, Deborah does not have a life to call her own, let alone a "room" (DeSalvo 97). The narrator articulates keen insight on the social reproduction of patriarchal marriage. For example, the narrator comments on how Henry would react if Deborah were a real artist:

"It would not do if Henry were to return one evening and be met by a locked door. It would not do if Henry...were to emerge irritably only to be told Mrs. Holland was engaged with a model...It would not do, in such a world of assumptions, to assume that she had equal rights with Henry. For such privileges marriages were not ordained" (APS, 162).

Indeed, she relinquishes her desire to become an artist in order to adhere to her roles in her marriage and society. Indeed, Deborah having her own occupation would not be acceptable.

Then, the narrator outlines what women can do in marriage:

But for certain privileges marriage had been ordained, and going to her bedroom Deborah took out her prayer-book and turned up the Marriage

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<sup>1</sup> This sentiment is also expressed in Ames' essay, in which she states that Lady Slane "cannot resist the assumptions of husband, children, grandchildren, and society that she exists to satisfy their needs" (20).

Service. It was ordained for the procreating of children...It was ordained so that women might be loving and amiable, faithful and obedient to their husbands, holy and godly matrons in all quietness, sobriety, and peace. All this no doubt was, to a certain extent, parliamentary language. But still it bore a certain relation to fact. And still she asked, where, in this system, was there room for a studio? (APS, 162)

This is one of the few passages in the novel where religious dogma manifests itself. Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" demonstrates how ideology operates within a society. For example, Althusser's concept of interpellation is useful for my purposes to foreground Lord Slane's position as a time-specific ideological one. Moreover, the numerous references to a woman's "natural" state in marriage is linked to a scientific argument describing the female sex as being passive creatures.<sup>1</sup> With regard to Sackville-West's novel, Deborah's position in her marriage is inculcated through the Church and the family. The Church-Family model operates not only within the religious arena, but also within the educational arena, "and a large proportion of the functions of communications and 'culture'" (Althusser 151). Established patriarchal religion constructs a masculine discourse to which society is expected to adhere. Therefore, religious norms bestow power to the male, while trapping the female in a role: "loving and amiable, faithful and obedient to their husbands, holy and godly matrons in all quietness, sobriety, and peace" (APS, 162). Deborah's early desire to become an artist did not have a place in her marriage, which the narrator questions, "where, in this system, was there room for a studio?" (APS, 162) The simple answer is nowhere.

Her actions exemplify the pressure from an ideology that controls the individual and confines an individual's will to move away from established cultural expectations. Lady Slane understands how marriage subjugates women into bearing children to carry the name of the father and for women to be submissive; what is difficult to understand is perhaps why she would follow through with an institution she might oppose. The legitimacy of marriage affords women the opportunity to be a part of society and a larger social ordering. Therefore, the only fully respected position is marrying and producing offspring, thus allowing an individual to gain some type of perceived power. The protagonist's actions illuminate the pervasiveness of ideology. Regardless of whether or not one accepts the paradigm, Lady Slane was not able to thwart tradition.

The discussion on appearance in *All Passion Spent* is a metaphor for the larger context in which the novel is presented. It is not only about maintaining a certain image for the public, but also physical appearance. The narrator states, "What a queer thing appearance was, and how unfair. It dictated the terms of people's estimate throughout one's whole life. If one looked significant, one was set down as insignificant; yet, one probably didn't look insignificant unless one deserved it" (APS, 26). Earlier in this essay, Lord Slane and Herbert's expression of their masculinity was foregrounded as a focal point in the novel.

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1 Evelyn Fox Keller also makes this point in her work *Reflections on Gender and Science* (1985) in which she posits that science is not objective, but rather is infused with cultural assumptions concerning gender.

Lord Slane's masculine appearance afforded him the ability to control both public and private spaces. He was able to manipulate his position as a politician in the public sphere while relegating Lady Slane to the home because she was his wife and mother of his children. Likewise, Herbert's masculinity allows him to fill the position of patriarch in the family. No one appoints him to this position, but rather, it is a "natural" position to fill simply because he is a man and the oldest child. Indeed, he is, in a sense, being "hailed" by ideology (Althusser 162).

Lady Slane's appearance is also significant in the novel. Earlier in the text, she is described as being "[v]ery quiet, very distinguished, very old, very frail" (*APS*, 58).<sup>1</sup> As she talks to her children, the narrator states how the children "took her appearance for granted, but strangers exclaimed in amazement that she could not be over seventy...Duty, charity, children, social obligations, public appearances—with these had her days been filled." Lady Slane had been "[s]uch a wonderful help to her husband in his career!" (*APS*, 58-9) She is portrayed as being the support of her husband and not having an active role in the daily concerns of the family. From the day Lady Slane accepted Lord Slane's marriage proposal, everything has been planned out for her. Essentially, she adheres to the cult of true womanhood and a domestic ideology that includes wifedom and motherhood. As Lillian Faderman puts it, this was the only ideology available to women in the narrative.

Through the analysis of appearance, her children express how poorly they think of their mother. Because she is female and elderly (eighty-eight), her children believe their mother to have gone "mad" when she articulates that she wants to live alone and independently of her children (*APS*, 68). Lady Slane, however, realizes that she can carve out a space for herself because widowhood is a respectable social position. This freedom is unavailable to girls and younger women. Much like their father, the children believe their mother to be "simple" and "decided that old age had definitely affected her brain" (*APS*, 68). Only Kay and Edith seem to have positive thoughts about their mother after she discusses her living arrangements. The narrator states, "[Kay] had taken her so much for granted; they had all taken her so much for granted—her gentleness, her unselfishness, her impersonal activities—and now, for the first time in his life, it was becoming apparent to Kay that people could still hold surprises up their sleeves however long one had known them" (*APS*, 69). Edith is also insightful about her mother's feelings: "It now dawned upon Edith that her mother might have lived a full private life, all these years, behind the shelter of her affectionate watchfulness. How much had she observed? noted? criticized? stored up?" (*APS*, 69) It is interesting to note that Edith and Kay are the two children who are excluded and discounted in the discussions about their mother. Both are unmarried, and they realize that their plot position is insecure.

The novel employs the traditional "marriage plot" in determining Lady Slane's life trajectory. As the passages quoted above well illustrate, the woman in the "marriage plot" is bombarded by a number of expectations and assumptions that ultimately lead to the

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that, later in the novel, Lady Slane is not thought of as being old and frail by other characters. Mr. Gosheron and Mr. Bucktrout see Lady Slane as an equal, regardless of her age and gender.

marriage ceremony: “It was *assumed* that she trembled for joy in his presence, languished in his absence” (*APS*, 155, emphasis added).<sup>1</sup> She is expected to be grateful to becoming married, bearing children, and submitting to the role of wife and mother. Sackville-West’s novel, however, provides the counter-narrative to the “marriage plot.” Although Lady Slane assumes a particular role in her marriage as “the good wife” (Ames 19) who does not thwart tradition, her conscious thoughts say otherwise about the gendered roles in marriage. To use Foucault’s theory of what is “*prohibited*” in society (216, original emphasis), culture projects a masculine discourse on what is deemed prohibited: “[s]uch was the unanimity of these assumptions that she was almost persuaded into believing *them* true” (*APS*, 155, emphasis added). Lady Slane never voices her opinions about marrying to her family and never objects to following through with the marriage because the ideology constructed through a masculine discourse does not allow her to do so. They do not envision Lady Slane possessing the ability to carve out a space for herself.

The gender differences found in the institution of marriage are foregrounded in Sackville-West’s text. The narrator relates how freedom and masculinity are inseparable components and that freedom is an essentially quality of masculinity.<sup>2</sup> In one of the most profound passages in the text, Lady Slane analyzes how freedom and masculinity afford men the ability to do as they please, both inside and outside of marriage:

She wondered sometimes what young men did, out in the world; she imagined them laughing and ruffling; going here and there, freely; striding home through the empty streets at dawn, or hailing a hansom and driving off to Richmond. They talked with strangers; they entered shops; they frequented the theatres. They had a club—several clubs. They were accosted by the importunate women in the shadows, and could take their bodies for a night into their thoughtless embrace. Whatever they did, they did with a fine carelessness, a fine freedom, and when they came home they need give no account of their doings; moreover, there was an air of freemasonry among men, based upon their common liberty, very different from the freemasonry among women, which was always prying and personal and somehow a trifle obscene....But everybody seemed agreed—so well agreed, that the matter was not even discussed: there was only one employment open to women. (*APS*, 153-4)

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1 Michel Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (1972) provides an analysis of the social construction of language and its power to shape both speech and behavior: “We know perfectly well that we are not free to say just anything, that we cannot simply speak of anything, when we like or where we like; not just anyone, finally, may speak of just anything...speech may well be of little account, but the prohibitions surrounding it soon reveal its links with desire and power” (216). Indeed, language is infused with cultural acceptability, and Lady Slane merely becomes a cog in the system by not speaking her opinion because it simply was not sayable within the culture.

2 In Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, Stephen, the protagonist, makes note of her gender role juxtaposed against Roger Antrim’s masculinity and the freedom afforded to him because he was a boy.

Unlike men, who are able to move in and out of spaces both public and private without needing permission, women are fixed in space, primarily in the domestic sphere.

Lady Slane not only takes note of masculinity and freedom, but surveys the role of women in marriage and their subjugation. She highlights how Henry's life does not change after their marriage; it merely adds a wife to it. By contrast, her life changes completely. Henry continues to enjoy the privileges of masculinity, his career being one of them: "he would continue to enjoy his free, varied, and masculine life, with no ring upon his finger or difference in his name to indicate the change in his estate." The narrator articulates the subservience that Deborah experiences in her marriage: "...whenever he felt inclined to come home she must be there, ready to lay down her book, her paper, or her letters; she must be prepared to listen to whatever he had to say; she must entertain his political acquaintances; and even if he beckoned her across the world she must follow" (*APS*, 160). Lady Slane is clearly a victim of structural violence. It is the structure of the institution of marriage that allows Lord Slane to live a free life; Lady Slane's life, however, contrasts from his because she is a wedded woman and a mother. The social norms concerning marriage do not allow for any degree of separation from her family. And as this passage indicates, she bows to convention in her marriage because not to do so would be deemed unacceptable by society.

With gender aside, Lady Slane's class position affords her the ability to have her own home away from her family. If she were not wealthy (and white), she would not have been able to move out her current home into a new one. Moreover, she would not have been able to employ a maid to help with the daily chores. Lady Slane's character reflects the author of the novel, Sackville-West. In her double biography *Vita and Virginia*, Suzanne Raitt comments that not only did Sackville-West publicly endorse happy heterosexual marriage, but "she was also blatantly and unashamedly anti-working class; and very little of her published writing radically challenges conventional versions of femininity and female sexual pleasure (*All Passion Spent*...is perhaps an exception)" (10). Sackville-West's anti-working class sentiment does, however, penetrate the novel, especially when the narrator provides commentary. Keeping in mind that perhaps the narrator is the mouthpiece of the author, and the narrator and Lady Slane's perspectives parallel, a classist rhetoric begins to emerge. Lady Slane's social status allows her to make her own decisions in old age. Most importantly, her wealth allows her a sense of independence. She has the financial resources to purchase her own home away from her family and make a new life for herself in her remaining years. Because she is a woman, without financial independence she would not be able to live independently from her family. Concerning the working class, the narrator makes remarks about the caretakers: "[h]ow wrongly caretakers were named: they took so little care. A perfunctory banging about with black water in a galvanized pail, a dirty clout smeared over the floor, and they thought their work was done" (*APS*, 89). The narrator characterizes the working class, in particular caretakers, in a negative light. These statements belittle the work that caretakers perform, even perhaps hinting that caretakers are overpaid for their work. This is just one example in the novel that gives the reader a sense of Lady

Slane's class position in society and how she has been afforded the ability to break from her family in securing her own home.

The issue of education is also raised in the novel and provides another aspect of a class dimension. The use of French in the novel without translations also alludes to a readership of a particular class. Lady Slane's maid, Genoux, frequently speaks French in the novel and Sackville-West does not provide translations, but rather assumes the reader to know French. Clearly, the text has been demarcated for middle to upper class people as opposed to a working class reader who most likely cannot read French.

These examples illustrating Lady Slane's sentiment to the working class (in particular, caretakers) and the author's use of French in the novel without translations furthers my argument that a high social status position allowed Lady Slane to have independence. Without her financial resources, she would not have been able to carve out a space for herself separate from her family. If she were a working class woman, she would have had no other choice but to let her children take care of her. Her age of eighty-eight would not have allowed her such freedom in a working class position. Thus, a high class position, regardless of her gender, allows her much more freedom to exercise her financial independence. Indeed, ironically enough, Lady Slane's wealth enables her to make *her* choices to live independently. If she were a working class widow, she would not be able to live separately from her family and be able to support herself financially. Unless a woman was independently wealthy, she would not be able to live alone.<sup>1</sup>

The narrator's analysis of marriage is not unique to Sackville-West's novel. Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando* also constructs an artificial connection between society and heterosexual marriage. To begin with, *Orlando* echoes this same sentiment of feeling alone and unwedded. Orlando notices Bartholomew's ring, and "instantly perceived what she had never noticed before—a thick ring of rather jaundiced yellow circling the third finger where her own was bare" (*Orlando*, 118). She notices the gold ring that has essentially marked Bartholomew physically as a married woman. Upon this recognition, Orlando asks Bartholomew to see her ring, Bartholomew becomes very upset "as if she had been struck in the breast by a rogue." She refuses to take the ring off her finger to see Orlando inspect the round circle of gold, to which Orlando concludes "that it was by the gleam on her wedding ring that she would be assigned her station among the angels and its lustre would be tarnished for ever if she let it out of her keeping for a second" (*Orlando*, 119).

When Orlando goes to dinner that evening, she notices the numerous wedding rings. Even in church, she makes note of them. They were "everywhere." In addition, she noticed a new practice among couples in the town:

In the old days, one would meet a boy trifling with a girl under a hawthorn hedge frequently enough... Now, all that was changed. Couples trudged and plodded in the middle of the road indissolubly linked together. The

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<sup>1</sup> Authors such as Vita Sackville-West, Virginia Woolf, and Radclyffe Hall were all wealthy women. They were also white and European; therefore, they were able to make choices in their lives that influenced their writing. The simple fact that these women are writing is another testament of their agency as wealthy individuals.

woman's right hand was invariably passed through the man's left and her fingers were firmly gripped by his. (*Orlando*, 119)

Orlando attempts to make sense of the phenomenon. In doing so, she “looked at the doves and the rabbits and the elk-hounds and she could not see that Nature had changed her ways or mended them, since the time of Elizabeth at least” (*Orlando*, 119). Orlando looks to nature to find what has changed, and as the passage indicates, nothing in nature has changed, but rather socially-constructed institutions. She makes the point that these institutions are not natural, but rather given privilege by society. *Orlando* parallels *All Passion Spent* when the narrator comments that Lady Slane “naturally” adopted the social perspective of her husband. The ironic tone of the narrator showcases that there is nothing natural about Lord Slane's viewpoint. Likewise, there is nothing natural about the social changes in England brought about with the dawning of the Victorian era, with all of its sexual modesty in tow.

Orlando's fixation on wedding rings causes her finger to have a physical reaction: “[h]er ruminations...were accompanied by such a tingling and twangling of the afflicted finger that she could scarcely keep her ideas in order” (*Orlando*, 120). In order to combat the tingling sensation, she purchases “one of those ugly bands and wear it like the rest” (*Orlando*, 120). Although she conforms to society, she is still not married; thus, the physical reaction in her unwed finger continues. This physical reaction causes her so much trouble that she cannot even continue to write: “she could feel herself poisoned through and through.” Therefore, she decides “to consider the most desperate of remedies, which was to yield completely and submissively to the spirit of the age, and take a husband” (*Orlando*, 120). The text illustrates the pervasiveness of ideology, particularly when accepting a particular ideology has social implications of acceptance.

In the following passage in *Orlando*, the narrator reiterates that Orlando's submission to the social paradigm concerning marriage “was much against her *natural* temperament” (*Orlando*, 120, emphasis added). The narrator goes on to explain Orlando's adherence to social standard in a most telling passage:

Such is the indomitable *nature* of the spirit of the age...that it batters down anyone who tries to make stand against it far more effectually those who bend its own way. Orlando had inclined herself *naturally* to the Elizabethan spirit, to the Restoration spirit, to the spirit of the eighteenth century, and had in consequence scarcely been aware of the change from one age to the other. But the spirit of the nineteenth century was antipathetic to her in the extreme, and thus it took her and broke her, and she was aware of her defeat at its hands as she had never been before. For it is probably that the human spirit has its place in time assigned to it; some are born of this age, some of that; and now that Orlando was grown a woman, a year or two past thirty indeed, the lines of her

character were fixed, and to bend them the wrong way was intolerable.  
(*Orlando*, 120, emphasis added)

Once again, the text reiterates a dichotomy between what the protagonist naturally feels and what a masculine discourse deems as normal. Orlando easily accepted the social norms and customs of previous eras, but the Victorian era strikes her with much apprehension. The protagonist notices the paradigm shift from a liberal era to very much a conservative era based on principles of modesty and respectability for woman. The last sentence of the passage indicates the social role that Orlando will be subjected to because of her gender. Any divergence from “her character” would not be acceptable. Indeed, it is not coincidental that Virginia Woolf structured the novel in a way that foregrounds the social roles of women in the Victorian era. If the protagonist were a man (as in the earlier parts of the novel), Orlando would have been subjected to a much different set of rules, one that emphasized public space and pursuit of a career.

The “spirit of the age” emphasized heterosexual marriage, particularly for women, as their limited professions of wife or spinster. Orlando realizes that she is without a partner and not “mated” like everyone else. Later in the passage, Orlando describes herself as “single,” “mateless,” and “alone” (*Orlando*, 122). The narrator tells us that “[s]uch thoughts had never entered her head before. Now they bore her down unescapably” (*Orlando*, 122). Try as she might, Orlando cannot thwart Victorian ideology. This causes the protagonist great anxiety: “[a]t every step she glanced nervously lest some male form should be hiding behind a furze bush or some savage cow be lowing its horns to toss her” (*Orlando*, 122).

Walking in the woods, Orlando experiences nostalgia of what her life was like before the present and how she found comfort in nature. Then, she begins to experience a “strange ecstasy” “of following the birds to the rim of the world and flinging herself on the spongy turf and there drinking forgetfulness, while the rooks’ hoarse laughter sounded over her” (*Orlando*, 122). She begins to run and trips, breaking her ankle. Not being able to get up, Orlando continues to lie on the ground. There she declares that she has “found [her] mate...It is the moor. I am nature’s bride...Here will I lie...” During her dream she takes off her wedding ring. She describes how she has never been able to find love from men or women and that “death is better” (*Orlando*, 123). She continues her fantastic vision of being a part of nature until she hears a man on horseback nearby. When the man notices that she is hurt, she replies, “I’m dead, sir!” Then, the two become mysteriously engaged (*Orlando*, 123).

The text portrays a different life trajectory for the protagonist Orlando, but it is wholly unsuccessful because Orlando becomes domesticated by eventually marrying Shelmerdine. Orlando wants to be “nature’s bride” and live with nature, but a man’s entrance, which sparks the instant engagement in the novel, interrupts her dream. Orlando imagines a different pathway for herself, but it is not socially acceptable; therefore, a man must come and rescue her from her own willful divergence from social convention.

Orlando, like Lady Slane’s children, is clearly being inculcated with cultural and social values of partnering in heterosexual marriage in order to avoid loneliness. However, unlike

Woolf's character who embodies these feelings of loneliness, Sackville-West's Lady Slane never feels lonely or unhappy because she is a widow, but rather she seems elated her husband has died. This is plausible because we are never shown Lady Slane in mourning for her husband; therefore, she is to be relieved of her duties as a wife.

Not surprisingly, *All Passion Spent* breaks generic boundaries and expectations. Critics rarely analyze one of the most important aspects of the novel--- the friendship between Lady Slane and Genoux. It deserves much attention in re-envisioning an exclusive female space. The relationship between the two women exemplifies Raitt's contention that the novel "does close on a gift between women, and on an affirmation of women's intimacy" (113). As Sharon Marcus puts it, "[w]omen drew clear distinctions between the love felt for a friend and for a spouse and often articulated their belief that marriage demanded unique feelings of love that went beyond even the warmest friendly devotion" (66). By reading the text with Adrienne Rich's notion of the lesbian continuum in mind, the reader can perhaps discern an exclusive female space that is created with Lady Slane's independence from her former home. Rich's lesbian continuum focuses on woman-identified experiences, both sexual and non-sexual, in order to broaden our sense of the full range of women's experiences, especially woman-centered experiences, on a continuing scale. The continuum is not confined to simply homosexual experiences, but also heterosexual ones. Few critics have focused on the significance of the relationship between Lady Slane and her maid Genoux and the lesbian connections that abound, not in sexual terms, but in female friendship and exclusive female space. A key passage illustrates the importance of this lesbian relationship:

She and Genoux, living in such undisturbed intimacy, bound by the ties respectively of gratitude and devotion bound also by the tie of their unspoken speculation as to which would be taken from the other first. Whatever the front door shut behind one of their rare visitors, each was conscious of a certain relief at the departure of intruders. The routine of their daily life was all they wanted—all, indeed, that they had strength for. Effort tired them both, though they had never admitted it to one another. (*APS*, 190)

Several male characters visit (Mr. Bucktrout, Mr. Gosheron, and Mr. FitzGeorge), but only Lady Slane and Genoux live in the home. Even when later a third woman, Deborah (Lady Slane's great-granddaughter), joins this exclusive female space, the lesbian space still thrives and leaves a steady pulse for the novel's entirety. The relationship between Lady Slane and Genoux benefits both women, not only on the level of maintaining a well-kept home, on Genoux's part, or providing an income, on Lady Slane's behalf for Genoux, but also in the company they provide each other. Genoux takes care of her and provides a constant companion for Lady Slane, even until her death.

When Deborah, her granddaughter, enters Hampstead, she reinforces the exclusive female space. Although Lady Slane defiantly states that no grandchildren are allowed to visit, she permits Deborah to visit her in Hampstead. Deborah broke off an engagement,

much to the disappointment of her family. Instead, she wants to pursue a career as a musician. Unlike Lady Slane, Deborah goes against the grain rather than becoming lost in the ideological assumptions of cultural conventions. She rejects the traditional marriage plot; instead, she follows her own desires and dreams rather than capitulating to society's expectations. Lady Slane sees herself in Deborah when she was her age. The two women share more than just a common name, but also a similar life trajectory. For example, Lady Slane wanted to be an artist and her granddaughter wanted to be a musician. The protagonist did not have the courage to end her engagement with Lord Slane, but feels optimistic that Deborah will not make the same mistakes that she did and break the cycle of perpetual matrimony.

Both Lady Slane and Deborah exemplify Carol Ames's contention that "*All Passion Spent* says that, for women, breaking tradition and rebelling are necessary" (20). Indeed, in order to thwart society's stifling expectations and cultural traditions, the two women must break from the established order. Patriarchal society does not grant value to women who reject patriarchal rule; thus, Lady Slane, during her marriage, had to play a role that did not allow her to form her own identity. Likewise, her granddaughter Deborah will soon find out the difficulties of carving out a space for herself.

This discussion of the narrator, gender roles, Lady Slane's subjugation in a patriarchal marriage, and the creation of lesbian space in *All Passion Spent* demonstrates that Sackville-West's novel addresses issues concerning gender roles that are created by adhering to tradition and ideology as opposed to going against the grain in society, in particular, roles in marriage. An understanding of these roles is crucial to any discussion of late-nineteenth, early twentieth-century gender regimes. The novel deserves greater recognition for exposing ideological assumptions in the institution of marriage and the structural violence that is done to women in this institution. Indeed, whether or not it was Sackville-West's intention, the novel elicits a strong feminist discourse in order to undermine the patriarchal values of the culture. Moreover, *All Passion Spent* carves out a space for those women who recognize that their role in a marriage is merely to serve as an appendage rather than an equal partner in a mutually giving relationship. As Lady Slane's character suggests, only through active participation in one's life can one be truly happy and independent.

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