

**"The Power of the Looking-Glass"**

**An Approach to *A Room of One's Own* and its Reflections in *All Passion Spent***

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When Virginia Woolf states in *A Room of One's Own* (*ROO*) that "[w]omen have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of the man at twice its natural size", she makes use of an image that is very significant from two perspectives: first, the image of a mirror where men and women face each other in a distorting process stands for the relationship of inequality between the sexes explored in Woolf's essay. Secondly, that image provides a useful metaphor to examine the connections existing between *ROO* and Vita Sackville-West's *All Passion Spent* (*APS*), since this novel offers a fictional treatment of some of the ideas developed in Woolf's essay that opens the way for assessing *APS* as the reflection of *ROO* in a mirror held by Virginia and Vita's friendship-love. In the light of this, the goal of the present article is to analyse the relevance of the mirror image both in terms of the topics dealt with in *ROO* –in particular, women's creativity and the androgynous quality of the artist's mind–, and with regards to the echoes linking *APS* to Woolf's essay.

La afirmación de Virginia Woolf en *A Room of One's Own* (*ROO*) sobre cómo "[w]omen have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of the man at twice its natural size" recurre a una imagen que es muy significativa desde dos puntos de vista. En primer lugar, la imagen de un espejo donde hombres y mujeres se encuentran cara a cara a través de un proceso distorsionador representa la relación de desigualdad entre los sexos que Woolf explora en su ensayo. En segundo lugar, dicha

imagen proporciona una metáfora de gran utilidad para examinar las conexiones existentes entre *ROO* y *All Passion Spent* (*APS*), pues esta novela de Vita Sackville-West ofrece un tratamiento ficcionalizado de algunas de las ideas desarrolladas en el ensayo de Woolf que invita a contemplarla como el reflejo de *ROO* en un espejo sostenido por la relación de amistad-amor de Virginia y Vita. En este contexto, el objetivo del presente artículo es analizar la relevancia de la imagen del espejo tanto en términos de los temas tratados en *ROO* –en particular, la creatividad femenina y el carácter andrógino de la mente del artista–, como en conexión con los ecos que vinculan *APS* y el ensayo de Woolf.

*Key words:* English literature, Modernism, feminism, androgyny and artistry, Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West.

*Palabras clave:* Literatura inglesa, creación artística en la primera mitad del XX, feminismo, androginia y creatividad, Virginia Woolf y Vita Sackville-West.

“Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of the man at twice its natural size” (*A Room of One's Own*, p. 41)

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own -ROO-* (1929), which was composed out of two lectures delivered by the writer at the female colleges of Newnham and Girton in October 1928, explores the difficulties undergone by women artists (writers in particular) in their pursuit of creativity. Thus, in the course of six different sections, the author deals with topics related to the issue of 'women and fiction', such as the contrast between male and female University colleges, women's exclusion from history and literary tradition, or the need to change the situation of inequality and sexual constraint encountered by women writers.

Behind these ideas is the hypothesis that underlies the whole essay: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (*ROO* 7), an assertion which is justified by the fictional 'I' which emerges as the narratorial voice of the work. This 'I' ("Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or [...] any name you please", *ROO* 8-9) is not Virginia Woolf herself, but the representative of the twentieth-century woman artist (Jones 228), and in more general terms "the voice of the anonymous female victim of male violence throughout the ages" (J. Marcus 149). The struggling female voice of Woolf's *persona* has the power to establish with both audience and readers a conversation among equals which defies the authoritarian position of the male speaker/writer in traditional academic lectures and essays (J. Marcus 146).

Leaving aside this feminist challenge, the subversive nature of *A Room of One's Own* becomes apparent even when analysing the structure of the work: as Ellen Carol Jones has remarked (230-231), although the essay follows the traditional principles of the Aristotelian logic and the Ciceronian rhetoric, it is unconventional in the way it blends these classical elements with fiction. It is probably because of this fictional quality that Woolf's work is most remembered, the anecdote of the talented Judith Shakespeare being one of the most famous and often quoted passages. In this sense, the powerful appeal of the story of the thwarted vocation of Shakespeare's fictional sister can be compared with the critical relevance of the celebration of Aphra Behn as the writer "who earned [women] the right to speak their minds" (*ROO* 72).

The popularity and influence of passages like the ones devoted to Judith Shakespeare and Aphra Behn has eclipsed other images of *ROO* which are equally significant. Among them, one which has often gone unremarked is that of the looking-glass: reflecting on the anger that pervades men's work about women, the narrator Mary Beton reaches the conclusion that "[w]omen have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (*ROO* 41). This image, which synthesises the way in which throughout history men have stressed women's inferiority in order to assert their own superiority, is relevant on two levels.

On the one hand, within the context of the essay itself, this looking-glass on whose surface the reflections of men and women encounter one

another face to face can be seen as the physical object embodying the complex interactions between the sexes which are explored in the text. On the other hand, in a wider sphere, the image of the mirror provides a useful metaphor to analyse the influence of *ROO* on *All Passion Spent -APS-* (1931), a novel written by Virginia Woolf's friend-lover Vita Sackville-West. This novel has been regarded by Louise A. DeSalvo as "a fictional treatment of the themes in [Woolf's] polemical tract [...] an outgrowth of *ROO*" (211); in this light, following the metaphor of the looking-glass, those features of the novel which represent the fictional counterpart of some of the ideas expressed in Woolf's essay can be seen as the reflections in a mirror held by the hands of the relationship existing between Virginia and Vita.

The purpose of the present work is to analyse the implications of the image of the looking-glass as a representation of some of the ideas explored in Woolf's essay, and above all, to investigate the power exerted by a metaphorical mirror on the links existing between *APS* and *ROO*. In other words, it offers an approach to the echoes and reflections of *ROO* in *APS*, paying special attention to the relationship of friendship-love of their authors as the force that lies behind these mirror-like connections.

In *ROO*, the mirror embodies several ideas developed in the course of the essay. In general terms, this image serves a two-fold purpose, since a looking-glass on whose surface the images of men and women encounter each other is useful to represent two types of interaction between the sexes. Firstly, and taking the image of the mirror as it is used in *ROO* (that is, as the embodiment of men's use of women as the object to assert their own superiority), the looking-glass stands for the inequality that throughout history has existed between men and women. This inequality, resulting from a patriarchal structure in which men have silenced and constrained women in order to preserve their dominant position, is explored in the essay in the context of women and creativity. The way in which the subordinate position of women interferes in their creativity is always present in the course of *ROO* since the essay is in itself a woman's account of the process of artistic creation (Jones 228). However, two sections of Woolf's work are specially relevant in the way they fully concentrate on the topic of women's literary creation.

Preceded by three chapters that analyse how precarious conditions have hindered women's creativity—an idea which shows that, for Woolf, "[t]hinking and thought [...] are not independent of physical and material circumstances but shaped by them" (L. Marcus 219)—, sections four and five explore, respectively, women's scanty artistic tradition and the hope raised by a new type of women's writing. In this context, chapter four exemplifies the difficulties encountered by sixteenth-century women through the fictional Judith Shakespeare, a character that stands for both the oppressed woman artist in general and, at the time of Woolf's lectures, the prosecuted writer Radclyffe Hall and her lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* (J. Marcus 166). After providing a survey of women's literary tradition, the narrator stresses in chapter four the way in which, apart from enduring negative criticism and discouragement, women writers have faced the difficulty of having such a scanty tradition. Finally, section four ends by introducing the issue of the future of women's fiction, a theme developed in chapter five through the narrator's analysis of the fictional Mary Carmichael's *Life's Adventure*, the first novel which explicitly acknowledges that "Chloe liked Olivia" (*ROO* 89).

This statement marks for Woolf's *persona* the glorious opening of a closed and forbidden ground: the literary presentation of the fact that "[s]ometimes women do like women" (*ROO* 89). As the narrator points out, considering that it was not until the eighteenth century that the restricted pattern of men's portrayal of women in their relationship with men began to change, the relevance of this novel lies in how for the first time the existence of love relationships between women is being fictionally recognised. Nevertheless, Mary Carmichael cannot succeed because, even if she had "five hundred a year" and "a room of her own" (that is, "power to contemplate" and "power to think for oneself", *ROO* 115), she would need the support of a creative tradition since "a woman writing thinks back through her mothers" (*ROO* 105). This tradition is to be built by women who "have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what [they] think" (*ROO* 122), and whose work would provide the necessary conditions for a new (and real) Judith Shakespeare being born and succeeding in her artistic career.

Despite the importance of the new tendency explored in section five (the literary presentation of the silenced topic of lesbian love), creation by and about women is by no means the only concern of *ROO*. As Jane

Marcus has pointed out, in terms of sexual and literary difference, for Virginia Woolf not only lesbianism and homosexuality are categories equal to male and female, but “androgyny is a privileged fifth [...] stance” (138). It is precisely with regards to the issue of androgyny that the looking-glass emerges again as a useful image to represent the interaction between the sexes, in this case a positive interaction that results in the creative force of the androgynous mind.

The idea of the androgynous mind as the one which “is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties” (*ROO* 106) is discussed in the last section of Woolf’s essay, where the narrator reconsiders her previous reflections on women’s struggle against men’s restrictions by suggesting that “[p]erhaps to think [...] of one sex as distinct from the other is an effort. It interferes with the unity of the mind” (*ROO* 104). This idea opens the way for the exploration of the androgynous mind, the mind that “is resonant and porous [...] transmits emotion without impediment [...] is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided” (*ROO* 106), and which is, above all, the artist’s mind, whose most characteristic representative is Shakespeare.

Described in sexual metaphors (Jones 233) which Karen Kaivola has associated with the heterosexual union (236), the androgynous-artist’s mind is characterised as the man-womanly or woman-manly mind, a state in which the male and female powers “live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating” (*ROO* 106). Thus, only those writers who are able to create without being conscious of their sex can be seen as having a truly androgynous-artistic mind; this is why Shakespeare represents the androgynous (man-womanly) mind, and why Jane Austen can be linked to Shakespeare since, like his, her mind “had consumed all impediments”, being able therefore to write “without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching” (*ROO* 74). The state of balance of the androgynous-creative mind is seen by the narrator as a condition which is very difficult to attain in her day because “[n]o age can ever have been as stridently sex-conscious as our own” (*ROO* 107).

This sex-consciousness that hinders the development of the androgynous mind is associated in Woolf’s essay with the Suffrage campaign and the desire for self-assertion that it roused in men (*ROO* 107), a suggestion which is very significant considering the way in which

Shearer West (71) analyses the figure of the androgyne in the late nineteenth century: it is, simultaneously, a signal for both the uncertainty resulting from 'the battle of the sexes' and homosexual love, and a symptom of the crisis that men suffered at the turn of the century in the construction of their identity. This view of the androgyne implies some sex-consciousness which differs from Woolf's conception of the androgynous mind as resulting precisely from the creative synthesis of sexual difference in the form of a collaborative effort between the male and female sides of the mind.

The positive implications of the idea of the androgynous mind as it is developed in *ROO* were lost in Elaine Showalter's assessment of Woolf's use of androgyny as "the myth that helped her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition" (264). This negative view, which stressed that androgyny was for Woolf the means to avoid the confrontation with both male and female forces (266), has been questioned in recent years by critics such as Kari Weil (149-50) or Makiko Minow-Pinkey, who favours a more tolerant interpretation of Woolfian androgyny as "heterogeneous and open to the play of difference" (165). In any case, the concept of the androgynous mind is undoubtedly one of the most relevant contributions of *ROO* to the question of gender and artistic creation, a question that is fictionally explored in Vita Sackville-West's *APS*.

This novel is centred on eighty-eight-year-old Lady Slane and the freedom she achieves after the death of her husband, a situation that enables this 'perfect wife and mother' to retire to a little house of her own where she can look back on her married life and her thwarted vocation as a painter. In *APS*, some of the actions undertaken by Lady Slane rely on certain aspects of the author's life and personality, such as Vita's interest in old houses and rural retreat –a tendency that Suzanne Raitt associates with the "conservative pastoralism" of the homosexual subculture of the 1920s and 1930s (12)–, or her desire to get rid of her jewels –understood by Victoria Glendinning as resulting from Vita's discomfort amid the poverty of the Depression (xvii), and by Raitt as linked with the author's suffering after her mother accused her of stealing the family jewels (112)–. Moreover, two of the fantasies that for so many years have remained hidden in the protagonist's silenced thoughts are, according to Glendinning (xvi), echoes of Vita's own ideals: while Lady Slane's vision

of the escape of her younger self from conventional girlhood was young Vita's own desire, the protagonist's longing for independence and detachment was the ideal that prevailed in the writer's mind after her scandalous involvement with Violet Trefusis.

Nevertheless, *APS* cannot be fully understood without taking into account the relationship existing between Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf. This is so not only because some episodes of the novel are based on experiences shared by Vita and Virginia during their friendship –as Glendinning points out, like Lady Slane, in their excursions together they went to Hampstead by Underground, walked on the Heath and visited Keats's house (x)–, but above all because Vita and Virginia's relationship and the “professional camaraderie” implied in it (J. Marcus 107) had a great influence on their writings. In this context, when analysing the extent to which *APS* was influenced by *ROO* (or, following the metaphor of the mirror, when dealing with the reflections of *ROO* in *APS*), the friendship-love of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West cannot be left unexplored.

This relationship lasted since their meeting in 1922 until Virginia's death in 1941, although the period of stronger attachment ended in 1934, almost ten years after their love affair (1925-28) had begun. The Woolf—Sackville-West relationship (which has been studied by critics such as DeSalvo and Raitt) emerged at a time which was very significant for both women: if Virginia was suffering the loss of her dead friend Katherine Mansfield, Vita was undergoing the effects of her passionate affair with Violet Trefusis.

There were, moreover, some similar elements between them that helped to strengthen the friendship-love they had established: as DeSalvo points out (198-199), Vita and Virginia discovered that, despite their class difference, they had lived very similar childhoods, with painful family situations and without the opportunity of going to school; furthermore, in both cases their lesbian relationship did not interfere with their married life. In fact, while for Virginia and her husband Leonard Woolf marriage was merely an institution which remained unaffected by their relationships with other people, the couple formed by Vita and Harold Nicolson had reconsidered the terms of their marriage after Vita's involvement with Trefusis (Raitt 4-5).

The effects of the Woolf—Sackville-West relationship were very positive for both women writers, on the personal as well as the creative level. On the one hand, the personal benefits of Vita's influence on Virginia are clearly reflected in an anecdotic episode mentioned by DeSalvo (199) which, curiously enough, is related to a looking-glass: although Virginia Woolf had always hated mirrors, she bought one when both women travelled together to France, since "[w]ith Vita she could take a look at her old self, and she could look anew at the self she now was".

With regards to Vita, she received from Virginia the influence of her friend-lover's open-mindedness, which undoubtedly had some effects on Sackville-West's convictions and ideas. As Raitt suggests in her study (10, 41-48), before meeting Woolf, Vita was an anti-working class conservative and a convinced eugenicist whose writings supported the traditional view of femininity and of female sexual pleasure. However, it was precisely during the period of strongest attachment with Virginia that Vita wrote her most explicitly feminist novel, *APS*, which has been regarded as "a tribute to Woolf's teachings" (J. Marcus 109). In fact, this work shows the influence of the feminist critique of *ROO* both as a spoken and written text, as Vita was part of the audience of Virginia's lectures and at the same time one of the earliest reviewers of her essay.

On the other hand, the effects of Virginia and Vita's friendship-love on the creative level become evident in the fact that their relationship coincided with the most prolific period of both writers. In this context, the influence that each one exerted on her friend's work can be analysed in several aspects, and thus, if Virginia learned from Vita the skill of alternating different types of intellectual tasks, Vita acquired from her friend the necessary strength to develop her technique to the utmost (DeSalvo 201-2).

With regards to particular works, the interaction that took place between these writers in the course of their relationship resulted in many parallels and instances of mutual influences which can be exemplified by *Orlando*, Virginia's tribute to Vita and the most eloquent celebration of their relationship. Inspired to a certain extent by Sackville-West's account of her family's history *Knole and the Sackvilles* (DeSalvo 204), Woolf's novel exerted at the same time a powerful influence on Vita's writings which in *APS* appears in the form of echoed motifs and passages

of poetic lyricism (Raitt 107, 111). However, it is not *Orlando*, but its “twin meditation on gender” (Gilbert 213), *ROO*, that has been acknowledged by most critics as Woolf’s greatest influence on her friend-lover, an influence which is clearly seen in Vita’s novel *APS*. As a matter of fact, the echoes and reflections of Woolf’s essay in Sackville-West’s novel lie at the heart of the possibility of using the looking-glass as a metaphor to analyse the connections existing between these two works. Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own -ROO-* (1929), which was composed out of two lectures delivered by the writer at the female colleges of Newnham and Girton in October 1928, explores the difficulties undergone by women artists (writers in particular) in their pursuit of creativity. Thus, in the course of six

Written in the period of Virginia and Vita’s strongest friendship, both *ROO* and *APS* deal with the topic of women and creativity, in such a way that, if Woolf’s essay concentrates on the difficulties encountered by women writers, *APS* fictionally analyses the figure of the painter (and, indirectly, of the musician) through the thwarted vocation of Lady Slane and the promising career of her great-granddaughter Deborah. Precisely these two types of women artists are seen in *ROO* as the ones that had still to overcome more difficulties even at the beginning of the twentieth century: “Probably for a novelist this germ [of discouragement] is no longer of much effect [...] But for painters it must still have some sting in it; and for musicians [...] is even now active and poisonous in the extreme” (*ROO* 61).

In this context, as some critics have suggested (DeSalvo 210; Raitt 107), *APS* is a fictional presentation of the central hypothesis that underlies *ROO* since it focuses on the important role that ‘a room of one’s own’ plays in the life of a woman artist. In fact, it is not until Lady Slane moves to a house of her own after the death of her husband, Henry Holland Earl of Slane, that her mind can set free her silenced thoughts on her marriage and the way it frustrated her vocation as a painter. Thus, through her memories we can have access to one of those “infinitely obscure lives [of women] [that] remain to be recorded” (*ROO* 97) because, although Lady Slane has by no means suffered the life of poverty that usually condemns to anonymity, she has lived in the shadow of her husband (*APS* 113), always “following Henry Holland like the sun” (*APS* 137-8) and “self-eclipsing” her silenced and frustrated artistic career.

In the course of this life, Lady Slane has undergone the effects of a dichotomy opposing marriage to artistic vocation which emerges in her memories in the form of the coexistence of a surface and inner life, which is represented in the symbolic butterflies that metaphorically stand for her inner self (Zamorano 239). This coexistence is characterised by Lady's Slane friend, Mr. FitzGeorge, as a denial of her true nature (*APS* 210) –“so admirably trained, and so wild at heart” (*APS* 215)–, a view which echoes that offered in *ROO* of the woman writer in the sixteenth century as “a woman at strife against herself” (*ROO* 57). However, far from following FitzGeorge's angry view of how “[m]en do kill women” (*APS* 221), which again recalls the words in Woolf's essay (“Men are the ‘opposing faction’; men are hated and feared, because they have the power to bar her way to what she wants to do”, *ROO* 65), Lady Slane looks back on her life not with hatred, but with resignation. This anger-free recollection (which somehow realises Woolf's ideal of women writing without the indignation that “interferes with the integrity of a woman novelist”, *ROO* 80) derives its mildness partly from “the triple vantage point of widowhood, old age, and tranquil Hampstead” (Glendinning x).

Hampstead, the setting of Lady Slane's house of her own, plays without doubt an important role in the unfolding of her memories since it is in the solitude of its garden that the protagonist is able to see herself again as Deborah Lee, the inner self that was hidden under the name of Lady Slane, the title of Vicereine, and her surface existence as Lord Slane's wife and later widow. This place is the background of the action in Parts Two and Three, which, remarkably, are preceded by some lines quoted from Christina Rossetti (the poet that is discussed together with Tennyson in the first section of *ROO*), while the quotation that opens the novel is taken from *Samson Agonistes* by Milton, the poet whom Mary Beton sees as challenged by her economic independence (*ROO* 45).

However, the relevance of Hampstead arises not only from its significance as the place where the protagonist remembers her past in Part Two, or where she meets her old acquaintance Mr. FitzGeorge again in Part Three, but above all from the fact that it is here that Lady Slane can establish her most meaningful friendship, that with her landlord Mr. Bucktrout and the fix-it man Mr. Gosheron. Together with FitzGeorge, they represent the world of those who have “a sense of beauty, though none of value” (*APS* 75), the world to which Lady Slane herself belongs

and which is opposed to the world of business and achievement represented by Lord Slane and four of his children, especially the eldest ones, Herbert and Carrie.

Within the sphere of that world of beauty, Lady Slane can recover her hidden artistic self (a self that, though unfulfilled like that of Judith Shakespeare, reveals itself through the protagonist's pictorial insights and descriptions), while FitzGeorge is "an artist in appreciation" (*APS* 257), and the company of the other two men becomes the source of Lady Slane's utmost happiness (*APS* 129). In contrast, from the perspective of the world of achievement and value, Mr. Bucktrout is simply an "old shark", FitzGeorge an eccentric millionaire, and Lady Slane no more than an "appendage" without "enough brain to be self-assertive" (*APS* 24). This world of value is the one in which the protagonist has lived since her engagement, an event which Lady Slane remembers as a series of nebulous images of which she was a mere spectator unable to act.

When analysed in the light of *ROO*, two aspects of the episode of the engagement are significant: on the one hand, the "ambition" that led Deborah's parents in their search for their daughter's husband (*APS* 152-3) echoes slightly the "family avarice" which historically has ruled the fate of women in their married life (*ROO* 48), while Deborah's feeling of having her will suspended by "innumerable little strands" that "ran up [...] in somebody's heart" (*APS* 156) recalls Judith Shakespeare's hesitation when, facing the idea of marriage, she feels unable to break her father's heart (*ROO* 54). On the other hand, the episode shows the way in which women do not speak, but are spoken for, reflecting thus the moment in which Mary Beton realises in the British Museum that traditionally women have not written about themselves, but have been written about by men (Raitt 109).

Lady Slane's life in the world of achievement, a world in which her husband has always occupied a predominant position, is strongly linked to her married life. This marriage, like that of the frustrated writers recalled in Woolf's essay, Lady Winchilsea and Margaret of Newcastle (*ROO* 66-7), has been a "perfect" one, a marriage with the best of husbands. In fact, Lord Slane resembled Lord Dudley in his being "a man of cultivated taste and many accomplishments [...] benevolent and bountiful" (*ROO* 70) since he was a "[h]edonist, humanist, sportsman, philosopher, scholar, charmer, wit" (*APS* 15), a man who "gave the best

of his intelligence to everybody on the slightest demand" (APS 81). However, Lord Slane also shared with this gentleman mentioned in *ROO* his tendency to "load" his wife with "gorgeous jewels"(jewels that are seen by FitzGeorge as the only stain on his friend's fingers, APS 224) and his desire to 'protect' her from any responsibility.

In fact, Lady Slane has led a sheltered life ("He had taken the greatest possible care of her [...] Henry had always seen to it that she had the least possible amount of trouble", APS 165), a life in which her only role has been that of the perfect wife and mother, being always ready to follow her husband and to accept her position of subordination as her husband's possession: "as her needle plucked in and out of her embroidery, he would gaze fondly at her bent head, and would say he was lucky to have such a pretty little wife to come back to" (APS 161). This position, which significantly is associated in *ROO* with women's belonging to a different world ("He would open the door of the drawing-room [...] and find her among her children perhaps, or with a piece of embroidery on her knee [...] and the contrast between this world and his own [...] would at once refresh and invigorate", *ROO* 94), denies any possibility of artistic fulfilment

This denial is signalled by the moment when Lord Slane patronisingly interprets his wife's vocation as an "accomplishment" and reminds her that "after marriage she would find plenty of other occupations to help her pass the days" (APS 163). Significantly, once their father is dead, Lord Slane's successors –Herbert and Carrie– want to maintain their mother engaged in these "occupations and interests", which consist mainly of social events and charity organisations. In this sense, both of them disapprove their mother's decision to begin a life of her own, since while Herbert, like his father, is "flattered by womanly dependence" (APS 55), Carrie regards Lady Slane's independence as an outrage.

Thus, the protagonist's elder children are opposed to her younger ones, Kay and Edith, the only ones for whom she feels some sympathy. If Kay is the only son named after the protagonist's romantic choice, Edith shares with her mother her being considered a "half-wit" (APS 29), and her silence, associated by Raitt with "a Freudian fear of uttering obscenities" (110). Moreover, both women rejoice in the opportunity of having a house of their own since, like Lady Slane's French maid Genoux,

they have been deprived, in different degrees, of a life of their own. Nevertheless, despite these parallels, the protagonist does not feel a strong attachment to her daughter, but to her great-granddaughter Deborah, with whom Lady Slane's inner self becomes intertwined just before her death.

Like the protagonist, whose vocation of becoming a painter is remembered as an attempt to escape disguised as a man –or, essentially, a “sexless creature” (*APS* 149), which reflects the synthesis of sexual difference in the androgynous-artist's mind–, young Deborah wants to become a musician, and she has broken her engagement in order to pursue her dream. In their communion, which represents the last stage in Lady Slane's metamorphosis from “the angel in the house” into “Judith Shakespeare” (Zamorano 241), the protagonist's hidden thoughts are given voice by Deborah, who finds in her great-grandmother the silent recognition of her belonging to the world of beauty and artistic creation, the world in which people like Herbert and Carrie are alien creatures and the only one in which young Deborah will be able to fulfil old Deborah's thwarted vocation.

In conclusion, Vita Sackville-West's *APS* offers a fictional treatment of the topic of women and creativity in the form of the thwarted vocation of its protagonist, Lady Slane, and the way she felt impelled to give up her dream of becoming a painter in favour of a life devoted to her husband and children. This exploration of the difficulties encountered by women artists in a world dominated by a patriarchal structure in which marriage and motherhood are women's only fate, places *APS* as the fictional counterpart of Virginia Woolf's *ROO*. In fact, in the course of this essay, a *persona* that embodies women's historically silenced voice investigates the way in which women artists (writers in particular) have suffered the effects of their position of subordination and exclusion in a male-dominated social order.

Considering the echoes and parallels existing between *APS* and *ROO*, the connection of both works –a connection supported by the relationship of their authors– can be analysed in the light of the metaphor of a looking glass on whose surface some theoretical ideas of *ROO* are reflected as fictional features in *APS*. The mirror is precisely the object mentioned in Woolf's essay to signify the way in which men have oppressed women in order to assert their own superiority, and its image

is useful within the context of *ROO* to explore both the inequalities between the sexes and their creative synthesis in the form of the androgynous mind.

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