"Modern Novels": Women's Agency in Traditional Relationships

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William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying*, Virginia Woolf's* To The Lighthouse*, and Nella Larsen's* Quicksand *all traverse the idea of womanhood in the modern world. Each book explores how women's identities are created via their relationship to men and motherhood, and asks if it is possible for women to extricate their identities from these relationships. The complexities of the ways these novels depict women both creating and giving away their own autonomy are, ultimately, modern.*

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Introduction

Modern writing often focuses on responding to modernity, doing so by criticizing, analyzing, or approving of certain social and technological trends. So, then, it is not surprising to find popular literary commentary on women's rights and autonomy in the late 1920s and early 1930s, as the first wave of feminism had developed in the previous years. Responses to questions of women's autonomy include William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, as they traverse the idea of womanhood in the modern world. Each book explores how women's identities are created via their relationship to men and motherhood, and asks if it is possible for them to extricate their identities from these relationships before, while, or after engaging in them. Each book, however, develops different identities according to the literal and narrative agency given to each character within the traditional relationships that they find themselves in.

Sheldon Brivic explores the idea of mutual exchange in romantic relationships in his article, "Love as Destruction in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*." For the purposes of this essay, love will refer to emotionally-involved romantic relationships. As the title suggests, Brivic is concerned with some of the more destructive tendencies of love, not just in *To The Lighthouse* but also in the traditional organization of families in the Western world. Traditional Western family roles support patriarchal expectations of men and women; as Brivic says, "Love is conditioned by the traditional organization of the family, which divides its members hierarchically into active and passive roles: male is constructed on one level and female on the other" (Brivic 1). His article strives to emphasize that it is not love itself that causes destruction, but the untenable divisions that traditional expectations create. First, there is the division between action and inaction: who is expected to act and think within the relationship as they take on active and passive roles, though Brivic argues that people naturally take on both of these roles. Brivic's argument highlights that denying the reality of the situation, and confining oneself and others to strict roles, only serves to deny their identities as complex people.

Then, he says, there is the very tension within love itself that traditional relationships only emphasize, instead of striving to resolve: an untenable position due to the fact that "through love the subject claims 'being' by reflecting itself in the object" (Brivic 1). "Being," he argues, suggests an independence from any other thing or action, defining itself merely by its own existence. The requirement of love to define one's

independent existence by another person, then, creates an "impossibility" that one cannot actually satisfy, by creating dependence. He goes on to say, "The need to feel autonomous through another binds the lover to a dilemma: the aim of love is so contradictory that merely to give someone love is to do that person serious harm by putting the loved one in an untenable position" (Brivic 1). By engaging in traditional relationships of love with other people, constantly giving up the self in order to define oneself by another, both parties are harmed. So what does this say in response to Woolf's notion of love? Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in *To The Lighthouse* are often considered the picture of a loving couple, admired by other characters in their ability to play the role of devoted husband and wife. According to Brivic, this position puts both at disadvantage.

Mrs. Ramsay and Love in To the Lighthouse

Mrs. Ramsay is described throughout *To The Lighthouse* as a sacrificing woman, pointing towards Brivic's conception of traditional love throughout the novel. Lily, the unmarried woman visiting Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, is constantly observing them, and remarks of Mr. Ramsay, "He is petty, selfish, vain, egotistical; he is spoilt; he is a tyrant; he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death" (Woolf 24). Mr. Ramsey often uses Mrs. Ramsay to build up his own ego and identity, even demanding it from her, and, in abusing her devotion, he "wears Mrs. Ramsay to death." Mr. Ramsay takes advantage of the emotional labor that Mrs. Ramsay can commit to, using her admiration and sympathy so as to feel more confident in his own work. To describe the nature of how he uses her devotion, Woolf writes through the perspective of Mrs. Ramsay's son, saying, "James felt all her strength flaring up to be drunk and quenched by the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of the male, which smote mercilessly, again and again, demanding sympathy" (Woolf 38). This masculine form of love is portrayed as both violent and thirsty for Mrs. Ramsay's attention, which is wearing thin as she constantly tries to support him throughout the novel. Mr. Ramsay, then, supports his life in the novel through a violent dependency on Mrs. Ramsay, implying a vast separation between the roles of these two characters.

Brivic finds this relationship of inequality to be the source of traditional love's problems, such as those found in Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's relationship. He writes of Woolf's characters that

> Ramsay's need for masculine authority is so desperate that his sense of losing it makes him cling to his wife's comfort all the more, even as he struggles to control his tendency to blame her. The structure of their woman-man relationship is one in which she builds him up while he wears her down, so the destruction they exchange cannot be distributed equally. (Brivic 6)

It is not merely the demands that Mr. Ramsay makes of Mrs. Ramsay that burdens their relationship – it is the supposition that he never has to support Mrs. Ramsay's own identity and ego. Brivic's earlier argument concerning the tension between autonomy and dependence in traditional relationships supports the idea that both parties are at disadvantage; in fact, we do see that Mr. Ramsay is harmed by his relationship with Mrs. Ramsay. His extreme dependence on her weakens his ability to think independently of her support, to write his works absent the support of someone else. This proposal, made by Brivic, suggests that Mr. Ramsay's philosophical writing– that which causes him the most frustration and anxiety, and that which causes him to seek the most support from Mrs. Ramsay– is actually inhibited by this emotional salve. After Mrs. Ramsay's death, Lily finds that he is still constantly looking for attention from another source, though he can never find it.

Despite being left stranded at the end of the novel due to his dependence on Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay is still not the most harmed participant in their relationship. Mr. Ramsay is not "worn to death." In describing the male as violent and unquenched, Woolf defines the problem as a situation of unrestrained masculinity, and of conversely overcompensating femininity, as will be later explained. A relationship run according to strict gender roles is unsustainable. As Brivic suggests that a tenable relationship requires both parties to give and take, Woolf then suggests that a person must take on both masculine and feminine qualities to create the same balance, as she has aligned these traits with taking and giving in her novel. That would be the way in which Mr. Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay could better survive their relationship with their

independence and identities intact – yet, Woolf does not change the direction of their relationship before Mrs. Ramsay's death.

However, Mrs. Ramsay is not only acting in a traditional role in her relationship with her husband. Mrs. Ramsay takes on Woolf's "feminine" quality of giving throughout the novel and applies it to those outside of her romantic relationship; in supporting a societal demand for women to have children, Mrs. Ramsay is also a slave to Mr. Ramsay's children. James's narrative notes, "So boasting of her capacity to surround and to protect, there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by" (Woolf 38). This quote reflects, again, the sacrifice that Mrs. Ramsay makes in order to sustain other people. However, it is worth noting the pride with which she makes this sacrifice, and Woolf's diction implies that it is Mrs. Ramsay's "boasting" of her protection of others that undoes her identity. It is not merely giving herself up for other people that destroys her character, but the way in which she centers her pride and goals totally around this idea. Woolf writes earlier in the novel,

> Indeed, she had the whole of the other sex under her protection; for reasons she could not explain, for their chivalry and valour, for the fact that they negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance; finally for an attitude towards herself which no woman could fail to feel or find agreeable, something trustful, childlike, reverential; which an old woman could take from a young man without loss of dignity. (Woolf 6)

Mrs. Ramsay views the nature of men as the reason for which she pursues this untenable form of relationship. For one, they are to be admired, and Mrs. Ramsay finds that by protecting them, perhaps, she is also protecting the countless honors, institutions, and ideologies that she feels they sustain. There is an understanding in Mrs. Ramsay's mind that it is men, not women, that sustain these things– though Woolf shows that men's dependence on women in traditional relationships suggests otherwise, challenging the notion of men's independence and societal power. Mrs. Ramsay's second reason for her engagement in such a relationship is the "trustful, childlike, reverential" attitude that men have towards women. Their dependence on women seems to demand Mrs. Ramsay's protection, and she finds herself agreeing to participate in relationships she has no say in out of obligation to this social order. In saying that "no women could fail to feel or find agreeable" the dependence of men, she naturalizes the dynamics of her relationships with men. She does not truly question her role until later in the book, but this realization does not halt her existing devotion to patriarchal relationships. In fact, she stretches her devotion to the "whole of the other sex," and so it is not surprising that in a variety of relationships demanding things from her, Mrs. Ramsay is then left with little left of her own self. There is a question, however, of the choice that Mrs. Ramsay may be taking to participate in such relationships, feeling obligated but not forced to give herself up without question. On one hand, she knows to some extent the amount of herself that she gives up to her husband; in fact, she expects it from herself. On the other hand, she does not see a choice in her relationship with Mr. Ramsay, not being able to fully explain her reasoning herself nor able to see another choice in the matter. Yet more exposing of Mrs. Ramsay's complicity and devotion to this relationship dynamic, one that only harms her, is her active encouragement, even manipulation, of other people's relationships to recreate the same fate.

Part of the role Mrs. Ramsey perceives herself to take on in the novel is that of "matchmaker," looking to put young people together into the roles that she and her husband have taken on. Paul and Minta are two of those people, and late in the book Mrs. Ramsay remarks:

> She felt, with her hand on the nursery door, that community of feeling with other people which emotion gives as if the walls of partition had become so thin that practically (the feeling was one of relief and happiness) it was all one stream, and chairs, tables, maps, were hers, were theirs, it did not matter whose, and Paul and Minta would carry it on when she was dead. (Woolf 114)

She is so sure that her subtle positioning of Paul and Minta together, making them go on walks and making small suggestions towards marriage, will result in a lasting relationship that will allow someone else to perpetuate her role after she is gone. She feels that encouraging traditional family roles will allow her to perpetuate her legacy, which is defined by her role as a wife. She encourages the same relationship between William and Lily as well: "William must marry Lily. They have so many things in common. Lily is so fond of

flowers. They are both cold and aloof and rather self-sufficing. She must arrange for them to take a long walk together" (Woolf 104). Mrs. Ramsay's narrative demands certain results of the situation; she is so sure of her understanding of events and people that her very narrative assumes a sense of truth in the matter. The subject she believes must become truth, however, runs contrary to the other narratives we are presented with. Lily remarks earlier in the same chapter, "For any rate, she said to herself, catching sight of the salt cellar on the pattern, she need not marry, thank Heaven; she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution" (Woolf 102). Woolf positions Lily as one of the few characters who see the problems that Mr. Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay's relationship dynamic causes, as marked by her relief from being saved from that "dilution" of her independence. Lily is also willing to resist Mr. Ramsay at the end of the novel, when he demands the same sympathy from her that he had demanded from Mrs. Ramsay, as well as resisting her own attraction to William in order to save herself from Mrs. Ramsay's fate.

Yet Mrs. Ramsay succeeds in a different manner; part of her goal in *To The Lighthouse* is to bring gifts to the men that live in the lighthouse, isolated from their families. She declares early in the novel, "One must take them whatever comforts one can" (Woolf 5). This representation of the care she feels obligated to give others is fulfilled after her death, as her family proceeds without her to the lighthouse to bring them gifts. In a different way than that asked of Paul and Minta, her legacy is continued; yet the way in which Mr. Ramsay takes on this role himself in her absence is telling of a change in himself only brought on by her absence, considering that he was the biggest previous obstacle to visiting the lighthouse. By placing these narratives alongside one another, and leaving Lily and Mr. Ramsay as continuing narrators after Mrs. Ramsay's death, Woolf directs readers towards the fallacies that Mrs. Ramsay believes in, and perhaps is even aware of.

Mrs. Ramsay's awareness of the problems in her relationship, and with her devotion to traditional relationships, is expressed towards the end of the novel's second part. She recognizes, for a brief moment, the position that she has put herself into as she struggles to understand Mr. Ramsay's conception of relationships, which is so starkly different from her own:

> He felt about this engagement as he always felt about any engagement; the girl is much too good for that young man. Slowly it came into her head, why is it then that one wants people to marry? What was the value, the meaning of things? [. . .] Do say something she thought, wishing only to hear his voice. (Woolf 122)

Mrs. Ramsay only doubts the nature of traditional relationships when she takes on Mr. Ramsay's narration for a moment, finding that the very person she is so devoted to is so critical of a relationship that she has tried to foster. For him to also suggest that the girl is "much too good" for the man she is dating goes against Mrs. Ramsay's own conception of women's obligation to men, who she feels are deserving of such obligation. At the end of this startling realization, she begs for a moment of sympathy from Mr. Ramsay out of shock, that same thing she has given to Mr. Ramsay time and time again, and finds he has none for her: "he was silent" (Woolf 123). Therein lies their relationship as the novel closes on her life, as she finally realizes the nature of their own relationship and wishes for change, for escape and relief from that which she has even put upon others.

Addie Bundren's Victory: Love in *As I Lay Dying*

Addie Bundren's relationship with Anse in *As I Lay Dying* is also defined by the same expectations that Brivic finds are produced by traditional relationships, though escape takes on a different form for Addie than it does for Mrs. Ramsay. Addie's relationship to the concept of love is tenuous, saying, "I knew that that word was just like the others: just a shape to fill a lack; that when the right time came, you wouldn't need a word for that anymore than for pride or fear" (Faulkner 172). Love seems constructed to her, a weak measure of reality that is used by society to bind her. She defines her life via the existence or lack of words, both having their place to either confuse or betray her. The connection between words and "love" only emphasizes the fact that both are societal constructions that do not necessarily work in Addie's favor, particularly if Brivic's analysis of traditional love holds true in Faulkner's novel. Part of the give and take relationship that Brivic highlights can

be found within Addie's physical relationship to other characters, in that which defies mere words. As a schoolteacher, she took a good deal of pride in whipping her students in the classroom:

> When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever. (Faulkner 170)

Addie uses physical harm in the classroom to impress an image of herself on the children, to create and preserve her identity within them. She metaphorically gives her own blood in the process, and so she perpetuates her identity via an act of harm. Unlike Mrs. Ramsay, Addie Bundren takes on Woolf's masculine conception of identity creation via violence. That does not mean, however, that she is spared from this same violent method of identity creation herself. One of the cruelties she suffers due to her marriage is children, saying, "My aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation: time, Anse, love, what you will, outside the circle" (Faulkner 172). The risk to her is not only physical. Addie had valued her independence, her ability to dictate what she does, yet her "aloneness" is described as having been violated both by Anse and by childbirth. The physical connection that once allowed her to sustain her identity is transformed during her role as a wife and mother, which requires her to sacrifice herself merely to exist in those relationships.

Dorothy J. Hale highlights Addie's quest for independence following this violation in her article, "*As I Lay Dying's* Heterogeneous Discourse." She argues that Addie seeks independence following this physical violation of her "aloneness" by trying to isolate her identity again. This article delves into the difference between public and private identities, which are revealed through the difference between a character's internal narrative and what they actually say in the novel. Hale writes, "In both cases, of course, private identity is what makes each self not just unique, but profound" (Hale 7). The power to restrain one's knowledge and words creates independence and privacy. Addie's narrative is confined to only a single chapter of internal monologue, and so narratively her speech is completely private, never open to other characters. In fact, Hale sees this, in combination with her aversion to language, as a choice for agency that Addie has made in the novel: "Because she imagines that a truly representative language can only be obtained by self-definition, her experience remains necessarily incommunicable" (Hale 11). Addie leaves behind verbal expression, that which is done for other people's sakes and not her own, in favor of self-definition, focusing on her own satisfaction even beyond her death.

Her narrative isolation prevents her, however, from communicating to other characters even if she wanted to. In a way, one might view this as confinement, taking away her agency in the narrative. Hale remarks that Addie's death can be seen as "the defeat of a private self that has lost its battle for self-determined and thus wholly original identity" (Hale 9). Her death prevents any further narrative creation, any further self-definition. However, the fact that Faulkner offers her narrative to readers even though she is already dead fights back against the sense that she is truly dead, whether literally or metaphorically. The nature of her revenge as an assertion of her identity likewise resists the narrative of someone who "lost their battle for self-determined and thus wholly original identity"; in fact, it might suggest that she is the only person who truly triumphed in her goals, as she is able to retain a complete and intact independence.

Addie's choice to begin a relationship with Anse complicates readers' understanding of their traditional relationship. She approaches Anse and instigates a marriage with him, not solely leaving it to Anse to approach her; Faulkner punctuates this conversation with, "So I took Anse" (Faulkner 171). This declaration is reminiscent of Mrs. Ramsay's command of relationships and her husband, framing Addie as the dominant figure in the relationship even as she is sacrificing herself for her family. However, she has cause to openly regret it after she finds that she is with child, that violation she suffers from: "It was as though he had tricked me, hidden within a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it. But then I realized that I had been tricked by words older than Anse or love, and that the same word had tricked Anse too" (Faulkner 172). Even though she subsequently plans her revenge against Anse, she fights back against language as a whole as well, this idea of self that requires one to express oneself and expose one's identity to the world.

Her hatred for her position in life, and for Anse, is what leads to her revenge, the ultimate expression of agency in her position: "My revenge would be that he would never know I was taking revenge" (Faulkner 173). The physical nature of her revenge is that she comes to have an affair with Whitfield, the local minister with whom she has a child. However, the success of her revenge is not just the physical manifestation of turning outside of her marriage for a relationship, but it is also in that she was able to keep this expression of herself secret. Her revenge is the absolute isolation of her narrative and goals. The removal of her narrative without her ever having told someone only solidifies her success. As Hale says, "The only way the private self can be solely self-determined is to leave the public world altogether" (Hale 12). Addie continues to ensure that she is isolated even after death as she is returned to her family's cemetery in Jefferson at her request. She is isolated from her husband both physically and narratively by her death, and so is victorious in leaving the world as a woman once again isolated.

Helga Crane, Desire, and Love in *Quicksand*

Helga Crane stands unique among these three figures in that she experiences most of Nella Larsen's novel, *Quicksand*, as an independent woman, resisting marriage and relationship offers throughout the novel to ensure her own autonomy. This may, perhaps, be due to her interracial identity as a child of a Black American man and a white Danish woman, which she uses to justify resisting marriage throughout the novel. When approached about the topic of marriage, she says, "Marriage—that means children, to me. And why add more suffering to the world? Why add any more unwanted, tortured Negroes to America?" (Larsen 96). Marriage is synonymous with children for her, an inevitable expectation for her as a wife, but the concern lies not with having children in and of itself, but in their suffering as Black children in the United States. This separates her concerns from Mrs. Ramsay's and Addie Bundren's, who, having already had children, are mostly concerned with the personal sacrifice of identity that marriage and children bring. In her freedom from children, Helga Crane portrays herself to be more worried about the "race problem," which many groups in the novel are concerned about, than in the effects of marriage and children on her. The effects of traditional marriage are not yet apparent to her; what is apparent is the result of racism in relationships, and the demeaning and isolating attitudes towards race in the United States. In rejecting Herr Olsen, one of her suitors, she says to him, "You see, I couldn't marry a white man. I simply couldn't. It isn't just you, not just personal, you understand [. . .] It's racial [. . .] If we were married, you might come to be ashamed of me, to hate me, to hate all dark people" (Larsen 82). Her personal concerns about race reflect the experiences she has had throughout the novel, as her own family rejected her due to her racial identity. It is this same fear of racial rejection for her and her children that she gives as a reason to avoid marriage. However, Claudia Tate, author of "Desire and Death in *Quicksand*, by Nella Larsen," finds that there may be an additional reason as to why Helga rejects these suitors, pointing back to reasons more personal to her character than just the "race problem" that Helga cites.

Helga lists non-personal reasons for rejection in order to soften the blow for Herr Olsen, to whom she has become a "tragedy" (Larsen 83) in his life. However, Tate points out that the ongoing plot of the novel for Helga relies on her own relationship with desire, rather than doing things for other people's sake like what Helga tries to do here. Helga struggles not to do what is necessary, but to determine what it is that she actually desires in life. Larsen writes:

> But just what did she want? Barring a desire for material security, gracious ways of living, a profusion of lovely clothes and a goodly share of envious admiration, Helga Crane didn't know, couldn't tell. But there was, she knew, something else. Happiness, she supposed. (Larsen 10)

It is this ongoing quest to satisfy her desires that drives Helga; she moves from place to place within the novel in an attempt to discover and feed said desires. After having lived in Harlem for a time, Helga feels that, "Somewhere, within her, in a deep recess, crouched discontent [. . .] As the days multiplied, her need of something, something vaguely familiar, but which she could not put a name to and hold for definite examination, became almost intolerable" (Larsen 43). This feeling follows her every time she has hope that a

new location would give her both joy and freedom, whether it be Naxos in the South, Chicago, Harlem, or even Copenhagen, Denmark. Helga's personal goals for satisfaction and freedom are undefined, and she looks to new locations and new people to fulfill them, considering new locations and rejecting them once she finds that she cannot be fulfilled there. The difficulty in actually determining what these desires are and how to fulfill them in coordination with locations reflects her own indecisiveness about her relationships to other people.

In rejecting Herr Olsen's proposal, Helga believes herself able to retain some of her own control over the situation, able to come and leave relationships just as she does destinations out of fear of rejection and dissatisfaction. Herr Olsen's proposal easily allows her to justify her rejection, as he says to her, "You have the warm impulsive nature of the women of Africa, but, my lovely, you have, I fear, the soul of a prostitute. You sell yourself to the highest bidder" (Larsen 81). It is this that Helga both laughs at and recoils from: the idea that she gives her sexuality away so freely, and that it can be owned by another person on the basis of her race. Herr Olsen portrays marriage as ownership over both her and her sexuality, and in considering Helga's earlier connection between marriage and children, he implies that he would have control over her childbearing as well. The idea that she is naturally submissive due to her race is abominable to her, and she responds to him, "I'm not for sale. Not to you. Not to any white man. I don't at all care to be owned" (Larsen 81). She later clarifies it as due to the fact that he is a white man, that it is the impossibility of interracial marriage that drives her, as earlier explained in this essay. However, her initial reaction being to reject ownership of her is more telling, particularly in conversation with the idea that she uses her physical freedom to pursue different locations and people to satisfy her desires. Tate expands on this rejection:

> By responding to Olsen's honorable request as to an insult, she can reject him in the manner in which she has felt herself to have been rejected throughout her life and eliminate him as an antagonistic sexual subject. Moreover, her new appreciation of racial solidarity allows her to bolster her self-esteem and to conceal her ambivalent feelings about sex. (Tate 13)

Helga being free to approach and reject relationships as she wishes is one manifestation of how she puts herself into a position of power as a woman, understanding that once she engages in one of these relationships she will lose the ability to pursue her own desires and can, in turn, be rejected and used as an object of desire herself. Yet Tate's dismissal of Helga's racial concerns as something Helga uses merely to conceal her feelings about sex ignores the way in which Helga's identity as both a woman and as an interracial American are inextricable. Her rejection of Herr Olsen is built out of her concern for her restriction not just as a woman, but a woman of color; these experiences are inextricable to her character. Her fears of rejection, ownership, and restriction extend into both racial and gendered romantic relationships, and it is over both that Helga tries to find control and autonomy for herself.

When Helga finally engages in a romantic relationship and marriage, we see her attempt to express her autonomy by choosing the subject of the relationship herself, being Reverend Green. She begins the relationship by initiating a sexual encounter with him, saying to herself, "That man! Was it possible? As easy as that?" (Larsen 107) as she realizes the power that her beauty and attractiveness has over the men in her life. She easily controls Reverend Green's body, persuading him to be with her – and afterwards, she seeks a new kind of relationship in marriage. Pursuing this relationship is driven, in part, out of hurt from being rejected by Dr. Anderson; in considering her encounter with Reverend Green, Helga thinks that Dr. Anderson "would be shocked. Grieved. Horribly hurt even" (Larsen 108). After being rejected, having her ability to choose the relationship removed from her, she seeks a revenge on Anderson that still centers her actions and narrative around his thoughts and choices, rather than her own independent desires that she still does not know. This is what drives her to marriage, the ultimate harm she believes she can inflict: "She meant, if she could manage it, to be married today [. . .] How could [Reverend Green], a naive creature like that, hold out against her? If she pretended to distress? To fear? To remorse? He couldn't. It would be useless for him to even try" (Faulkner 109). Helga is utterly convinced of her power in dictating her relationship with Reverend Green, and it is in seeking this power of autonomy and expression of hurt that she decides to engage in marriage with him. She does so successfully, but the results mirror that of both Mrs. Ramsay and Addie Bundren; she is trapped in a relationship that ultimately does not serve her.

Participating in a relationship driven by her own desires, Helga finds that these desires and their fulfillment are taken from her. The last passage of the book is the most reflective of this sacrifice through its narrative perspective. It begins with Helga's last, desperate expression of desire, as Larsen writes, "It was so easy and so pleasant to think about freedom and cities [. . .] It was so hard to think out a feasible way of retrieving all these agreeable, desired things" (Larsen 125). Helga, removed from the places and travel that she had enjoyed for so long, spends her last moments in the narration wishing for a return to these things. She is longing for the choice that she used to be able to enjoy in her life: her ability to join and leave relationships and places as she wished. She desires to leave Reverend Green and the taxing relationship she has with him: even moreso, the childbirth that she is perpetually put through. She finds herself, however, unable to leave her children behind, saying to herself, "But to leave them would be a tearing agony, a rending of deepest fibers. She felt that through all the rest of her lifetime she would be hearing their cry of 'Mummy, Mummy, Mummy,' through sleepless nights. No. She couldn't desert them" (Larsen 125). She turns away her own desires and the chance of escape in order to keep fulfilling her children's need for her as a mother. This, in turn, is mimicked by the narrative. The narrator takes away Helga's last thoughts of freedom from her by instituting a break in the text, then declaring, "And hardly had she left her bed and become able to walk again without pain, hardly had the children returned from the homes of the neighbors, when she began to have her fifth child" (Larsen 125). The break in text separates Helga's expression of her most fervent desires, her wish to be free from the relationship with Reverend Green, from another impersonal narrator stepping in to dictate Helga's life to readers. This is the stark reality that readers are left with: Helga perpetually in limbo, in the same confining place and relationships.

Tate implies that Helga's life is thus cut off at the end of the novel, whether physically through childbirth or narratively as her ability to dictate her story is cut off by this other narrator. Tate says of the break, "This change in narrative outlook prompts the reader to question whether Helga's death fulfills her own demand or executes the narrator's desire"(Tate 2). Helga's physical death may permit her the freedom that she so wishes for, a freedom similarly achieved by Addie, except that in no way does Helga experience the autonomy of a private narrative. Helga's autonomy is structured in such a way as to center her choice in moving from one relationship or place to another. Her death would symbolize the end of her travels, and if this death were to be in childbirth as Tate suggests, then Helga would have died in the process of having a new relationship forced upon her, one that, as earlier stated, she would not have the will to leave. Whether her death is physical or narrative, however, these things are still taken from her by force. Helga gives no indication that she has control over her life in marriage, and so of these three women she is left the most destitute in her identity and autonomy.

Conclusion

These novels leave readers with three completely different subjects: Mrs. Ramsay, willingly engaging in and encouraging traditional relationships; Addie Bundren, who finds herself working to reinstate her independence after being "tricked" into marriage and childbirth; and Helga Crane, who finds that her own actions to achieve her desires and express autonomy have led her to a disastrous end. The ways in which each woman engages in traditional relationships are drastically different, yet each is representative of the dangers that Brivic's article highlights as they give up parts of themselves for their husband and children. This literary response to traditional relationships brings up a variety of questions concerning women's autonomy, and its complications both inside and outside of marriage. Each novel criticizes people's unquestioning participation in strict, gendered roles in marriage, finding that while harms are done to both sides, women are particularly at disadvantage in risking their autonomy. Yet each novel also presents the idea that women can still pursue their independence even as it is taken away from her. *To The Lighthouse*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Quicksand* all encourage people to consider their relationships with other people and the way that they decide to structure them instead of merely adhering to tradition. The complexities of the ways in which each novel presents these women both giving away and creating their own autonomies are, ultimately, modern.

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