

Sample P1

Watery Voices: An Interplay of the Feminine and Masculine

A fascinating discussion of feminine and masculine voices is embedded within Virginia Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. One particular passage, pages 80 through 83, is exceptionally good at illuminating the interactions between the gendered voices within the text. In this passage, an old woman across from the Regent Park Tube station is singing passionately of love, while asking for spare change. The semiotic language in this passage depicts the woman as a bubbling spring, and her voice, her song, as water flowing across the city, "fertilizing, leaving a damp stain" (81). In this way, the woman is said to be a "rusty pump" and her voice a "eternal spring" spreading over London (82). This metaphor is fascinating and quite powerful; however, even more meaningful is the character's interactions with this "rusty pump".

Peter's thoughts are said to be interrupted by a "frail quivering sounds, bubbling up in every direction...running weakly and shrilly"—the woman's song (80). Peter's inability to see any power or grace in this woman is demonstrated by how he perceives her voice as "weak" and "shrill". It is also evident that Peter finds her song, her voice, incomprehensible and unrelatable because he refers to the sounds as "absent of all human meaning..." (80). To him, she is a ridiculous, "poor creature" (82) whose song is nonsensical and feeble. Conversely, Rezia upon hearing the woman's voice regards it as an "invincible thread of sound [that] wound up into the air" (83). She feels the power of the "fertilizing" waters and it calms her profoundly: "[she was] quite suddenly sure that everything was going to be alright" (83). These character's opposing impressions of the woman help us understand the purpose of this passage.

The old woman is undoubtedly a representation of feminine power and presence in this masculine space, London. Her song, a flood of water, is said to be a “bubbling, burbling song, soaking through the knotted roots of infinite ages, and skeletons and treasure, streamed away in rivulets over the pavement and all along the Marylebone Road, and down toward Euston, fertilizing, leaving a damp stain “(81). This flood is a depiction of feminine power flooding the streets of London, making “mould” out of this male-dominated space, interrupting and drowning out Peter’s thoughts—masculine voices. We can confirm this claim by looking at the specific language used in this description. The word “fertile” or “fertilizing”, which is very closely linked to themes of reproduction and womanhood, repeatedly shows up in this passage.

Furthermore, this idea of a flood is also associated with rebirth and replenishments as a flood re-nourishes land. There is something distinctly powerful in this description of an old woman crowing into the London streets as to overwhelm the organized patriarchy in this tumultuous way—repulsing those who resist the change while empowering those who embrace it. Perhaps, Miss Kilman is not quite correct when she tells Elisabeth that “Every profession is open to the women of your generation”, however she is right about the growing presence of women in the public realm (136). This passage deeply illuminates the redefining of feminine space outside of the home by representing a woman’s voice as an “ancient spring spouting from the earth” and challenging the patriarchal system.