

Concocting Emotions & Intellectual Sensibility And Physical & Immanent In Virginia Woolf's To The Lighthouse By Doing Judith Butler's Performative Gender

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Abstract

This paper attempts to find out the antithetical balance of certain features incorporated into Virginia Woolf's characters in *To the Lighthouse*, such as emotions are counterbalanced by intellectual vigour, pathos by enrapture or euphoria and hardheadedness by physical actions. Virginia Woolf's greatest artifice was the creation of a striking balance between pathos and humour, imagination and concretion, intellect and emotions, and performative action and immanent. Her art relies purely on the aesthetics and dramaturgy of very complacent characters to a troll of being under the impression of whims and caprice, but that capricious and mercurial nature of her characters again, through her very instant stylistic recoil, resumes stability and sensibility. The same we find in the very onset of *To the Lighthouse* when James's romantic thought process is punctured and swatted by a rigorously unqualified reply from Mr. Ramsay about the unfriendly English weather, and a thought-process that was initially ignited and inflamed by the mother-warmth from Mrs. Ramsay. Such were the emotions counterpoised by Woolf through pure amalgamation of romanticism and realisms. As Woolf creates this balance through the help of gender expostulation and as elements emanate from her gender doing, therefore this papers employs this gender polemic as its theoretical framework to use the percepts from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, properly referenced at the works cited. The paper concludes by the remarks that gender politics, in order to attempt gender balance, offers a fertile ground for Woolf to establish a good balance between pathos and humour, regret and optimism, intellect and emotions, bereavement and fluke, romantic and de(romantic) ideals.

Frurther aim of this paper is to examine Virginia Woolf's contribution in giving to the world a new concept of ideal femininity. Mrs. Woolf has celebrated femininity in her novels. Woolf, in her novels, has tried to bring out the anguish and emptiness that permeates in the lives of women. She has artistically crystallized the strife of a female that goes through in her mind. Woolf in this chaotic world tries to create a harmony which can be achieved when both the genders establish a close rapport with each other. She aims at creating a monoclinous world in which there is balance between intellect and emotion, man and woman, heart and mind.

Keywords: Femininity; Balance of Intellect and Emotion, Patriarchy, Gender

Introduction

The remarkable thing with Woolf is her capability of creating harmony and concordance

with highly contrasting values without dismissing the inherent essence of these objective values. Her fidelity to real life can't be questioned neither could she follow any preordained or preoccupied life facts, all was a thorough commitment and reconciliation to life through peeping microscopically into the everydayness in day to day matters.

She does champion the cause of women but her feminism does not eschew the role duly performed by the males. Farooq Shah contends accurately by stating that '[if] she throws her weight to furthering the cause of the women, she does so in order to address a chronic wrong and to restore the authority and place to women that rightly belong to them' (Shah, 1). So she does justice to art, aesthetics, inherent values and gender simultaneously. Whereas in "Modern Fiction" Woolf contends that '[t]he proper stuff of fiction does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss' (35). Virginia Woolf concocts women characters that are paragon of hope and beauty in this patriarchal world for women such as "Mrs. Ramsay" and "Lily Briscoe" in *To the Lighthouse*. History has always treated women as intellectually emasculated and physically fragile. The world around us is bifurcated into private and public spheres.

A writer dictating terms is less charismatic. There needs to be a good balance manipulated or it jeopardizes the aesthetics sense of art, and writers do have this endangerment in mind. Woolf does have this remarkable potential of maintaining this delicate balance and she remains quite faithful to her feminine perceptions. Woolf doesn't mar the stance of feminine position what Natania Rosenfeld 'politics of intersubjectivity', indicate that Virginia Woolf brings feminine subjectivity center stage (9). Woolf documents not the chivalric deeds men perform during their prime

or what battlefields bring into society, but she is far more concerned with feminine subjectivities of day-to-day commonplace life. Her art lies in the concealment of the more ordinary to give it (art) a sense of more sublimity. Women are deemed to be creators of private life and their lives are restricted to basic unit known as home. While the physical world outside home is engineered by men only. Virginia Woolf was dissatisfied with this order. She wanted to make men realize the intellectual sophistication of women. "Women have been denied access to the reigning discourses of our century. And thus cannot express the outrage generated by a culture that labels them inferior" (Woolf 45). To make men understand what it means to be a woman, women need not fight an irrational battle with them, rather this understanding can be revealed to them through proper use of emotion and intellect. Woolf through character of Mrs. Ramsay has shown the invisible power of a woman while Lily Briscoe symbolizes tension in women, who for assertion of their existence are at war not only with fellow men but also themselves. So *To the Lighthouse* is pregnant with such elements of gender issues, polarization, aesthetics, abstraction, mental psychosis, immanent, illusions and hallucinatory incidents. This fiction is impregnated with many themes, and to discuss all, this paper fails to offer affordability both in length and thematic space.

Statement of the Problem

Gender issues and concept of binary issues are core to the narratives operated by Virginia Woolf. She does this feat by bringing all pluralistic options into sharp focus. The problem under discussion that we find the answer to is, whether Woolf achieves the tangible aspect of maintaining the immediate balance under contrasting ideas/elements. The issue of gender is reflected, more often than not, in the literary circuits and current research academia. This work is an ongoing intervention in the research world

fostered by insights from narratology, gender polemic, binary opposites that help the research achieve its academic balance from the early twentieth century literature.

Significance of the Study

Romantic aesthetics, narratology, gender issues and literary theories are siblings. If Woolf and modern researches are interwoven and intertwined, this might outweigh any other current or previous research bulk. Art of subjectivity, gender subtlety, romantic aesthetics, femininity and other aspects are core to the investigation in this research. This study accumulates nearly all important aspects discussed in research today with social respect to Woolf. *To The Lighthouse* covers the important aspect of differing values and family tension. Therefore, this paper holds an instrumental position from research point of view.

Delimitation of the Study

There are many significant aspect and themes in *To The Lighthouse* but this paper does not allow to cover all significant areas which demand thorough critical inquiry. Woolf spews her ink with the nearly inclusive themes to all her works and it's often noted that Woolf writes in line with her previous works still she creates the distinction among them from work to work and within work. Therefore, this paper, even though the discussion section analyses numerous areas, is delimited to the themes of gender discussion, blends of certain binary opposites and romantic aesthetics. Also, this study only focuses on Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*.

Objective of the Studies

The following objectives are expected at the outcome of the research paper.

- a. To find out and celebrate Virginia Woolf's description of feminine ideals

- b. To explore and understand Woolf's art of narrative
- c. To highlight the important binary opposites and to see its composition by Woolf
- d. To see the connection between women's aesthetic representation by Woolf with man's less romantic delineation by Woolf

Research Questions

1. How is gender constructed throughout *To The Lighthouse* by Woolf?
2. What are the elements that hold distinction but Woolf expertly blends them together and unifies them so that they lose individualism?
3. How does Woolf maintain fidelity with her art of narrative in *To The Lighthouse* by fencing and fostering it with critiques from romantic world into real?

Theoretical Framework

This paper through most of its course uses Judith Butler's theories about gender and derives most of its virtues from Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf wrote that fiction in order to place men in their respective position, and for her, although men are a 'vital cog in the wheel', they are stipulated to their de-romanticized position, whereas women for her, 'seem to be less chivalric and falsely represented and shown only as men's glasses for their own reflection' have been, out of despair, demonstrated by Woolf as the progenitor of life's wheel balancing in *To the Lighthouse*. (Woolf, 1929)

Judith Butler inverts the concept of gender by divesting it of its innate essence. She feels that gender is as much a performative construct as the drag queen or drag kings are. There is nothing essential about gender. Instead, it grows out of the repetitive performance of social rituals. For Butler, gender is volatile and constructed only

through social narratives. It does not have its own essence. Butler claims and contends that gender is performative either through immanent actions, physical ones or through bodily gestures or through social behavior or emotional. And in Woolf we see this in *To the Lighthouse* as Mrs. Ramsay does have a lion's heart to accommodate all the strange and familiar guests at home and to boldly show how an adversity is managed, whereas Mr. Ramsay sinks into fear and turns less optimistic only to pretend that he is an embodiment of courage and valour, which, in fact, he's not. This brings us to the concept of drag performances, a concept that is central to Judith Butler's vision of gendered identity. Judith Butler opines in her seminal article "Imitation and Gender Insubordination":

The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality. (Gender Trouble 140)

To the idea of "true" femininity, Mrs. Ramsay and Lily both succumb but they interpret it in different ways. The Lighthouse is often equated with the phallic ubiquitousness of masculine influence in society, but if viewed from another angle, it has more propinquity to feminine experiences as opposed to masculine ones. This paper in addition to the binary opposites uses the perceptual surface from Butler's gender theories, and Woolf cashes it represent feminine gender as a strong candidate for man's progress and being a robust man's counterpart. And for Butler, gender remains nothing more but performative, socially constructed and a mere biological sex.

Discussion and Analysis

The female characters Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe are both, though in different ways, comparable to the nature of actual lighthouse. "Mrs. Ramsay serves as emotional security blanket for people in her life. Mrs. Ramsay fulfills her societal obligations by "burning bright" with empathy and compassion and "beckoning" people home to safe haven of emotional security and durability" (Sheridan 36). Even when she dies, she continues to shape lives of people. Lily would have never completed her painting of Mrs. Ramsay, James would have never reached the lighthouse and Mr. Ramsay would have never understood the importance of reaching to the lighthouse without the amaranthine memories of Mrs. Ramsay. Lily on the other hand "brightens" and "dims" her "light" (with respect to certain social situations which can be interpreted as "uninhabited acceptance of societal gender expectations, in an attempt to evade the social critique of rendering her less feminine when compared to idealized beacon of femininity: Mrs. Ramsay" (Sheridan 45). Mrs. Ramsay is a silent giver and protector. For a woman, two important males are husband: part creator and son: part created. Both her husband and son are enwrapped in her emotional security. Both of them are cushioned against any jolts through her perceptual presence if not actual presence. She lives on in the memory of people even when physically she is long gone. Mr. Ramsay is an intellectual person who is stuck between "Q" and "R". The journey from "Q" TO "R" cannot be completed without the help of Mrs. Ramsay. Mr. Ramsay is intellectually well equipped for the journey but he is emotionally dependent on Mrs. Ramsay. Such is the influence of Mrs. Ramsay not only on Mr. Ramsay but also on so many other people around her, such as Lily Briscoe, Carmichael and William Bankes. They all need her support and attention. She is like a mother whose mere presence is a source of assurance for her children that they can rise to any

challenge. Mr. Ramsay has no question about the division of social roles which has shaped the relationship between husband and wife in patriarchal society. "Accordingly his lack of feminine qualities of creativity denies him an access to the forces of life. He wants to be assured that he lives in the heart of life. His need of sympathy renders him reliant on his wife's femininity. He comes to her not only for sympathy but to feel that he is needed over the world" (Sheridan60). "Mrs. Ramsay looking at the same time be animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force burning and illuminating, and into this delicious fecundity, this foundation and spray of life, the fatal sterility of male plumed itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare. He wanted sympathy. He was a failure" (Woolf, 42-43).

Mrs. Ramsay doubts her husband's intelligence but she doesn't let herself even for a second to feel finer than him. She doesn't discuss her husband's intellectual problems, but she takes roll of fulfiller of his needs and makes him dependent on his femininity. Mr. Ramsay is among those people who contribute so much to the world rationally but on emotional level they are barren. He is "taker" but does not have any capacity to give emotionally something. He like a child feels it is his right to feed off her emotionally and when he satiates his thirst for support he walks away insensitively without gratitude and without appreciating her beauty. "They had nothing to say, but something seemed, nevertheless, to go from her to him, it was the life. It was the power of it. It was the tremendous humor, she knew, she made him slap his thighs. Don't interrupt me, he seemed to be saying, don't say anything, just sit there and he went on reading" (Woolf 129). Mr. Bankes thought that Mr. Ramsay life oscillates between sterile thought and fertile wife. Mrs. Ramsay invisibly rules over the minds of those around her. Everybody is dependent on her. She is the finely tuned receptor to the needs of those around her.

She is a burning light that enters into the crevices of mind and drives the moths of insecurities out. Mrs. Ramsay knows that everybody in the novel is lost and disturbed. They are stuck at a point where they are lost in disorderliness. They do not know about the next step. Mr. Ramsay is stuck in the distance between "Q" and "R". Lily is afraid how to paint Mrs. Ramsay. She is afraid that painting would be stuck in the attic. Charles Tansley is stuck in his research. Mrs. Ramsay wants all of them to merge with each other. She wants everybody should embrace everybody else. She understands that role of woman is to create harmony and peace. When her surroundings do not merge, she questions her role and status of woman. "But what I have done with my life?... the room was very shabby...nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate" (Woolf 101). She has the skill of making men feel good. That's why she makes them feel superior. She feels satisfied when they feel proud through their admiration of them. All the characters hold a divine love for her and want to attain unity with her. Mrs. Ramsay knows how to rule men without letting them know they are ruled by her. She is the embodiment of female power. She knows language of emotions and feelings that's why she feels angry about her husband's least interest in his children's feelings and she tries to comfort James compassionately.

Mrs. Ramsay is the stereotypical mother figure and the novel cherishes her achievements as a mother of eight. Most of the characters admire her immensely. Lily admits being in love with her at times. Mrs. Ramsay is the most ideal symbol of female perfection and excellence. Mrs. Ramsay composure and attitude seems almost faultless. She is viewed by many as faultless, influential and supreme. Carmichael describes his admiration for Mrs. Ramsay. He believes that not only she was a beauty, but she was admired among everyone. He states "the torch of her beauty, she carried it erect into any room that she entered". (Woolf 47). Lily describes Mr. Bankes

adoration for Mrs. Ramsay, “for him to gaze as Lily saw him gazing at Mrs. Ramsay was a rapture, equivalent, Lily felt to the loves of dozens of young men.” (Woolf 62). Also within 50 to 51, Lily is depicted as imagining herself in James position. Lily imagines that her head is leaning on Mrs. Ramsay’s lap. She thinks that this intimate moment of connection would help her achieve knowledge of intimacy. On page 51, Lily has a thought, “could loving as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one, for it is not knowledge of unity that she desired but intimacy itself, which is knowledge”. Lily believed Mrs. Ramsay possessed many of the aspects and characteristics that she lacked. Lily considered many of these characteristics as being vital and essential in achieving the grace and stature of woman.

Lily unlike Mrs. Ramsay revolts against masculine needs. She denies her femininity and gets along with self division in the face of her relationships with men. She fishtailed between personal reflection and social comparison. Following an intense contemplation of how Mrs. Ramsay could have possibly chosen Mr. Ramsay for a husband “Lily {is} glad... to rest in silence, uncommunicative, to rest in extreme obscurity of human relationships” (Woolf 171). Ultimately, it seems as though Lily adopts “the idea that the information necessary to the understanding of a person is not actually hidden in the sense of being behind or inside something; but the information must be voted carefully and then assembled with an intelligence that involves imagination”. (Chapter 90). This imaginative approach towards an emotionally vulnerable connection with others ultimately manifests itself in the creation of Lily’s portrait, through which she asserts (both literally and figuratively) that “so much depends ... on distance” (Woolf 191). Only when given the opportunity to reflect on Mrs. Ramsay’s adherence to social expectations of femininity is Lily able to fully grasp the extent to which Mrs. Ramsay’s identity flourished on the emotional well being of others. Furthermore,

she recognizes in Mrs. Ramsay an ability to be “sensitive to other people as perceivers, she knows their perceptions are bound up with a certain feelings and interest that the “public” world takes on a different form for each” (Chapter 83). “Lily’s art, like her portrait of Mrs. Ramsay is the embodiment of celebratory freedom- control over an aspect of one’s own life that no other can take away or distort” (Martinson 109). Mrs. Woolf aimed at setting up a new formula for personal development. She aspired always for the wholeness of personality – Androgyny. Androgyny and balancing of intellect and emotion. “It implies that the traditional gender identity, which restricts personal development, can be reformulated through the equal acquisition of positive feminine and masculine traits. To the lighthouse itself acts as a force behind a social reassessment of men’s and women’s everyday experiences” (Martinson 55). As is shown by Lily Briscoe’s progressive understanding of what it is meant to be feminine, the light house is neither culmination of journey nor the resolution of nagging tension; rather it is the embodiment of powerful unadulterated vulnerability allowing for a (feminine) multiplicitous perspective of self and other. One must first arrive at a solid understanding of several avenues by which masculinity and femininity are constructed. In *To the Lighthouse* the “character of Charles Tansley act as a representation of omnipresent ideologies allowing for the subjugation of women of all respects from domesticity to academic scholarship” (Martinson 87). Mr. Ramsay, with his fixation on intellectual superiority becomes a very incomplete individual, one whose stern demeanor and harsh judgment works more toward his own isolation and inevitable eradication from the realm of philosophy. Mrs. Ramsay, is conditioned to meet her husband’s emotional needs as she is to perform her own social role as a subservient female, usually submits to her husband’s pathetically overbearing

need for reassurance. Following the dinner party in “the window” Mrs. Ramsay retires to parlor where she proceeds to knit while Mr. Ramsay reads. In lieu of his philosophical dilemmas and personal struggle with intellectual ambition, Mr. Ramsay looks to Mrs. Ramsay for support and admiration. After a few exchanges of dialogue, the simplicity of merely sitting in silence together, Mrs. Ramsay realizes she is being beckoned for emotional support. Mr. Ramsay “wanted something, wanted the thing she always found it so difficult to give him; wanted her to tell him that she loved him and that no she could not do” (Woolf 123). Although Mrs. Ramsay refusal to say I love you may seem a triumph in the face of masculine dominance and expectation, Mr. Ramsay does get in fact his wish, just not in the way he hoped to receive it. Sensing her husband’s unwavering need for marital reassurance and emotional security, Mrs. Ramsay asserts “yes, you are right. It’s going to be wet tomorrow; you won’t be able to go”. Succumbing to her husband’s previous assertions that weather would not permit a forthcoming trip to the lighthouse. Seemingly irrelevant, this acquiescence to Mr. Ramsay former declaration actually function as Mrs. Ramsay way of telling Mr. Ramsay she loves him, showing how a woman is overwhelmingly wrapped up in her ability to reinforce her husband’s masculinity (with respect to authority). Mrs. Ramsay is a romanticized version of a delicate femininity. All the male characters are in need of constant ego satisfaction and all of them get their ego satisfied by gaining an iota of her attention. She feeds everyone’s ego and feels it is her duty to do so.

Lily Briscoe on the other hand stands for that woman who is in search of herself. She wants to establish herself. She wants to assert her position. She does not like the traditional notion that women are subservient to men and wants to shed it off. She does not want to get married because of the sole reason that she wants to rebel

against the traditional role of the woman assigned to her by society. To the lighthouse for Lily is her journey in grasping the true meaning of true femininity. She is a painter and wants to create an everlasting picture. She does not understand the feminine ideals but is enchanted with the personality of Mrs. Ramsay and wants to paint her. She is a feminist and wants to rule men rather be ruled by them. It is only in the end of novel that she culminates in herself men can’t be conquered by fighting them off. They can be ruled over with the use of emotion and intellect. That’s how Mrs. Ramsay has ruled them. Throughout novel Lily looks up to the personality of Mrs. Ramsay but she takes ten long years to imbibe from the personality of Mrs. Ramsay what it takes to be a woman. She initially refuses to adhere to the roles that society sets for women. “Through the pursuit of an ever changing homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity. Female bodies become what Foucault called “docile bodies”. Bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, improvement... through these disciplines, we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel and the conviction of our lack or insufficiency” (Bordo 42). Before Lily begins to paint she becomes unconscious of the world around her and of her own body. “Always (it was in her body or sex she did not know which) before she knew exchanged the fluidity of life for the concentration, she had a few moments of nakedness when she seemed like an unborn soul, a soul reft of body”. (Woolf 119). The process that Lily goes through is further explained. “Certainly she was losing conscious of outer things (...) and her name and personality and appearance” (Woolf 119). Lily loses consciousness of the world around her, of the outer things. As we have seen earlier, this world around Lily is the world that doubts her ability to paint and which questions the verities that can women paint at all?? Women have to overcome the assertion that they are capable of creating art

before they are able to paint. Lily shows the tendencies of wanting to challenge the feminine ideal which stipulates that women should devote their life to family and household work.

She lives alone and paints which deviates from the feminine ideal. At one point, she also expresses her wish to help one of the summer guests to find a lost brooch and thereby be an adventurer. "Lily wanted to protest violently and outrageously her desire to help him, envisaging how in the dawn on beach, she would be the one to pounce on the brooch half hidden by the same stone, and thus herself be included among the sailors and adventurers" (To the Lighthouse, 73-4).

Conclusion

To the Lighthouse suggests that femininity is not something that must either be totally accepted or completely repudiated. In this particular novel, Woolf opines that it is a social phenomenon capable of touching all lives, a phenomenon in need of assessment with respect to its strengths and limitations. Men and women have to accept and respect each other for the world to be harmonious whole. Women cannot move in the world without the support and guidance of the men. The same holds true for men. The world history is filled with marginalization and ostracization of women. Women in this regard have to struggle a lot to enter into the main frame picture. This struggle should be done not with shouting and yelling but with the use of intellect and emotion. Women should make their presence felt in unseen and unfelt ways like Mrs. Ramsay. Everybody in the novel needs bits of Mrs. Ramsay for their own fulfillment. This kind of dependability on any woman is testimony to the fact how important women are in lives of men. The place that Mrs. Ramsay has secured has secured in the patriarchal world should be the ideal of every other woman in the world.

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