

The Working of Masculine Mind Vs Feminine Mind in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

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Abstract

Fiction represents life. Inner life unknown to the characters in the novel is known to its readers through each character's inner thoughts reflected in various ways. The present study explores Virginia Woolf's usage of stream of consciousness technique for male and female genders working differently. It also analyzes the behaviors of all four major characters with respect to their genders and investigates how a small incident or sight creates its psychological influence on their lives. The study draws parallel between the working of masculine mind; that is Mr. Ramsay and Charles Tansley and the working of feminine mind; that is Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. The study reflects societal influence as a significant cause on human minds and experiences of fictional characters portrayed in the novel illustrate the complexity of their minds and thought process with respect to gender variance. The study asserts roles of Mr. Ramsay and Charles Tansley as man's dominance and philosophic pursuance whereas women's domesticity is illustrated through character depiction of Mrs. Ramsay. Portrayal of Lily Briscoe's independent nature despite social obstruction highlights the feminist stance of the novel. The study also covers a huge time interval and marks the novel as a text engrossed in thought processes stretched on many chapters. It concludes that contrastive working of human mind; masculine and feminine, characters' past life experiences and present circumstances, the thought processes, and characters' beliefs, emotions, actions, and the dialogues are what Virginia Woolf has laid down and what the present article has focused.

Keywords: Masculine, feminine, mind, working, stream of consciousness, contrast

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Virginia Woolf's novel, *To the Lighthouse*, is a modernist novel of thoughts; describing life of its characters with their ambitions, emotions, impressions, desires, changing visions and changing personalities with the passage of time, mainly through interior monologues and stream of consciousness. In the novel, we are introduced to a Ramsay family with eight children; Mr. Ramsay is a professor of metaphysical philosophy, who is considered as tyrannical and selfish, and one who represents patriarchy. Mrs. Ramsay; who is loving and sympathetic, follows conventional gender roles. She believes that marriage and childbirth are the only paths for a woman to take. Lily Briscoe; a friend of the family and a painter, is portrayal of a modern woman, decides to remain single and independent. She achieves her 'vision' in the end, which also defines Woolf's feminist perspective. She also proves Charles Tansley; student of Mr. Ramsay and representative of patriarchy, wrong in his statement as, 'Women can't paint. Women can't write.' The time interval for the three parts of the novel also shows Woolf's radical representation of time. A family of Ramsays, going to the lighthouse, is hindered by outside circumstances, and then after ten years, they finally visit the lighthouse with much being changed; perceptions, visions, and characters themselves. The novel collectively deals with life of human beings, their emotions, and their impressions. As the critic Eric Bark states that the novel captures "nothing less than the wealth of reality and depth of life in [its] every moment" (qtd. in Green). It also shows how the novelist organizes many thoughts in one novel. Furthermore, S.H

Derbyshire in his article writes; "The whole progression in *To the Lighthouse* is a more and more explicit statement of a way of looking at life, achieving its greatest glories and its best insights"(353). Thus, it is human mind and human life which gets affected, and it is one of the aspects that the present study describes.

Methodology

The nature of the present research study is qualitative. It involves inductive research and studies the working of mind, which further involves many aspects such as; gender variance, psychological aspect, the stream of consciousness technique, time aspect, and societal influence. Secondary data is taken from different literary articles, journals, and websites. The study uses close textual analysis and stream of consciousness a technique to understand the working of the mind of fictional characters, particularly taking gender variance into account. Close textual analysis explores the relationship between the inner workings of text to discern the persuasive function of a text; particularly at the linguistic level (Frey, Botan & Kreps 1999; Hejazi 2017). Textual analysis helps to interpret and describe the content, structure, and function of the selected text. However, stream of consciousness is a writing approach which uses five key characteristics namely; narrative mode, language, techniques for appropriating language of the narrative close to mind, time, and plot influencing works of the stream of consciousness. The authors break conventional narrative pattern and illustrate thoughts of fictional characters mirror their mind to the addressees with no specific objective or order. Narrations

reflecting the stream of consciousness depict characters preceding the plot. These also emphasize the imperfection of the character, varying levels of unconscious and sub-conscious mind, cascading indistinct chaotic desires, and emotions. Linguistic technique used in the selected novel is the narrative of stream of consciousness approach that reflects the mental processes.

Psychology and Character Portrayal

Literary artists use various techniques to depict actions in the past and future without chronological order. The artist mind repeatedly constructs subject matter, which attracts the attentions and accentuates the subject and mind of the writer further. The spatial process holds the standpoint of the addressee and invokes subject matter directly from the writer's heart; these features combined together create a perfect work of art, which is different from other works. Consequently a public style is created known as the writer's personal narrative technique. The style may have various components such as ambiguity, lyrical quality, association, myths, and cultural traditions. Stream of thoughts or defined as 'The Consciousness of Self' as the 'Principles of Psychology' are closely linked to literature. Thoughts flow in time constantly. There are likely many violations that occur within the limits of an individual's mind in the form of interruptions and gaps. During this whole process consciousness fades out altogether and is reborn at a later stage. Similar situations are reflected in the world of fiction where characters struggle with their minds exposing their inner lives.

Virginia Woolf describes the working of the mind with relation to her characters' changing perspectives that not only reveal characters' psychology, but also the characters' expressions and thoughts. Virginia Woolf makes use of stream of consciousness which reveals psychology of her characters according to their gender. As Sang in his article says, "It is her emphases on the experiences and inner lives of her characters that lead to her elevation as a master of the stream-of-consciousness novel" (178). The stream of consciousness of the characters varies according to their gender and, so, according to their experiences with respect to their gender. Woolf uses it for each character in her novel, which reveals her characters' thought processes and, which in turn reveals the behavior of one character towards the other character. Sang rightly identifies Woolf's mastery over her characters' mind and usage of the stream of consciousness technique; "Virginia Woolf successfully overcomes the shortcomings of stream-of-consciousness novel of being incoherent and chaotic, and achieves great explicitness, coherence, vividness and surface unity in presenting the characters' inner world" (175).

It is gender variance also, as to how according to gender, the characters interact with same or different gender, which counts for their similarity in thoughts and ideas as well. It makes the novel more complicated, as Shumeyko says, "The novels also show the effect of characters' interactions on their performances of gender.

[Mrs. Ramsay] is both wife and mother and encourages other women to follow this traditional path (despite her periods of unhappiness). Lastly, she continually undertakes the responsibility of indulging the opposite gender with sympathy and support. She is contradictory, however, in that she does have an active mind and the ability to “know” things. The reader realizes, from the glimpses into her consciousness, that she dislikes various aspects of the masculinity she upholds and is therefore resistant at times. However, her overriding desire to form coherence and happiness as well as her submission to masculine intellect relegate her to the realm of traditional femininity under the control of masculinity” (08-10).

Shumeyko recognizes gender roles, and their contradictions in thought and working of mind.

Sang frequently calls psychic life as unusual, as he mentions; “The only thing unusual about it is the subject of this description, which, of course, in the stream-of-consciousness novel is the consciousness or psychic life of the characters” (175), however, it is one of Woolf’s major attempt to present psychology of human beings through her characters. It is through interior monologues and stream of consciousness

that she mainly describes it. As a novel of thoughts and ideas, Woolf emphasizes on presenting before her readers; an image of psyche and human mind, the thought process, and a vision that follows, which leads to action and at last leads to change in society.

Moreover, the time aspect in the novel also signifies importance of characters’ thoughts and feelings. The first section; ‘The Window’, emphasizes characters development, the thought process, and changing perspectives. The second part, narrated by a house, is the shortest, as a house is void of characters’ feelings and emotions. Finally, the third section’s time limit is huge again as it deals with changed visions and thoughts. Graham, in his article, approves of the same aspect as, “The world of mind time and the world of linear time are related to each other because both are related to a central and eternal reality” (192). For Woolf, time passes with character’s thoughts in mind. One can say that the time given to each section explains Woolf’s importance to characters’ thoughts, decisions, and changing perspectives. The same aspect is supported by Sang elsewhere, as; “Woolf expresses the character’s inner world in such great coherence and surface unity” (178).

Changing Masculine and Feminine Perspectives in *To the Lighthouse*

For Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* does not have action in the stricter sense of the plot; it is life with experiences, and changing perspectives. It reveals how the fictional characters think, behave, and speak about themselves and other characters; in other words, it is the whole phenomena of

thoughts and feelings. Woolf, for the same reason, uses the technique of stream of consciousness which exposes characters' thoughts and feelings at the moment, of the past, and for the future; and a character's thoughts for other character or characters, revealing each other to their readers as well. Woolf's narrative serves to identify the value of human feelings, emotions, human life experiences, and changing perspectives in life. A specific character is described through the minds of other characters; for example, Mrs. Ramsay. It is Charles Tansley who describes her beauty. It is Lily Briscoe who is inclined towards her. It is Mr. Ramsay whose consciousness reveals his need of her. The novel also has a curiosity within, which evokes novel's interest for its readers. Woolf, from the very first sentence of the novel, uses suspense as who is the addressee; "Yes, of course if it's fine tomorrow" (04). The following quotation rightly mentions Woolf's usage of the term as; "Suspense and Curiosity are another aspect of Mrs. Woolf's technique of narration" (*To the Lighthouse: Stream of Consciousness Novel*, 2015). Moreover, the novel relates to many events that shows Woolf's emphasis on thoughts than action as;

"“And even if it isn't fine tomorrow,” said Mrs. Ramsay, raising her eyes to glance at William Bankes and Lily Briscoe as they passed, “it will be another day. And now,” she said, thinking that Lily's charm was her Chinese eyes, aslant in her white, puckered little face, but it would take a clever man to see it, “and now stand up, and let me measure your leg,” for they might go to the Lighthouse after all, and she must see if the

stocking did not need to be an inch or two longer in the leg. Smiling, for it was an admirable idea, that had flashed upon her this very second--William and Lily should marry--she took the heather-mixture stocking, with its criss-cross of steel needles at the mouth of it, and measured it against James's leg. “My dear, stand still,” she said, for in his jealousy, not liking to serve as measuring block for the Lighthouse keeper's little boy” (Woolf 18).

As far as a contrastive analysis of working of masculine mind and feminine mind is concerned, Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Ramsay's personas, which are quite different, describe it well. Mrs. Ramsay's concern for housekeeper's boy and her worry for Lily and Mr. Bankes's marriage identify how caring a woman she is for her neighbors. She is generous and holds dinners for her guests. She is the central force of her family who keeps everyone intact. Her reaction to go to the lighthouse shows optimism and care for her son, James. It also exposes Mrs. Ramsay's feminine mind and illustrates her character as a submissive female. On the other hand, Mr. Ramsay is self-centered and selfish; he does not care about the houseguests or friends; “She looked at him thinking to find this in his face; he would be looking magnificent. But not in the least! He was screwing his face up, he was scowling and frowning, and flushing with anger. What on earth was it about? She wondered. What could be the matter? Only that poor old Augustus had asked for another plate of soup--that was all” (Woolf 59). Moreover, Gũnes states that; “Woolf uses Mr. Ramsay to represent her sense of the tyranny and egotism of

modern masculine culture” (qtd. in Ordu and Karakas 106).

Moreover, the masculine mind of Charles Tansley is contrasted with the feminine mind of Lily Briscoe. Charles Tansley; a patriarch, idealizes Mr. Ramsay, and is self-centered and dominant like him. His statement as; “Women can’t paint, women can’t write” (Woolf 31), suggests his personal perspective and his dominance over Lily Briscoe. Ordu and Karakas rightly mention his character as; “Just like him, Mr. Tansley also sees women as a distractor and he reveals these ideas at the dinner table in his inner monologue, “They did nothing but talk, talk, talk, eat, eat, eat. It was the women's fault. Women made civilization impossible with all their ‘charm, all their silliness’” (108). In the novel, he has been called as ‘the atheist’ because of his stubbornness and his belief in his accuracy. It is also evident from an article in which it is mentioned; “Mr. Tansley and Mr. Ramsay are nothing but symbols of the Patriarchal man, Mrs. Ramsay is the best symbol for the Victorian woman which is also a product of patriarchal society” (Ordu and Karakas 104). On the other hand, Lily Briscoe is portrayal of a modern woman, who sets career oriented goals and decides to remain single. She is an emerging painter and tries to prove Tansley wrong in his beliefs about women. It is through her character that Woolf defines her aspect of Feminism. Rutledge in his research paper recognizes Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe as; Mrs. Ramsay, the Victorian housewife, and Lily, the “New Woman,” are made more complex to the reader when they perform their roles” (73).

Furthermore, Mr. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe in contrast, are both different in their approaches to career making. Mr. Ramsay wants his achievements to be known while Lily Briscoe is not concerned for her paintings to be recognized worldwide. As Ordu and Karakas write; “Woolf mocks the rational, concrete, and result-based vision of man towards life throughout the [novel]... [Mr. Ramsay] wants to be remembered together with the people like Shakespeare, yet he knows it is impossible because he feels he is stuck” (108). Moreover, we see that for Mrs. Ramsay, marriage and childbirth are suitable choice for a woman to take, while for Lily Briscoe, pursuance of career is more important than marriage; as the statement proves, “Lily Briscoe is the only person around her who strictly disapproves Mrs. Ramsay’s behavior and that is why she is the symbol of the modern woman” (Ordu and Karakas 105). That is the reason she decides to remain single in the beginning. It is a conventional image of society that a man is always independent, strong, and logical, while a woman is always dependent, fragile, and emotional.

From the very first page of the novel, the psyche and behavior of a male and a female character is described. Their dialogue describes their psyche, behavior, and experience with their surroundings, which reflects society as well. Woolf reveals feminine mind of Mrs. Ramsay through Mrs. Ramsay’s dialogue which reveals her character as optimistic and caring when she says to her son; “Yes, of course, if it’s fine tomorrow” (04), while Mr. Ramsay, saying; “But, ...it won’t be fine” (04), shows him

as self-centered and a man of reason. This also shows Mrs. Ramsay as a woman of strong character, who cares for her family and houseguests despite giving importance to herself and her own feelings. She is portrayed as a stereotypical woman, which is demanded by society. Mr. Ramsay, on the other hand, 'just takes' without reciprocating anything. He needs sympathy of his wife; he wants no disturbance at his home; and he wants to be obeyed. These two dialogues, in the very beginning describe a lot about Mr. Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay. Matro also says in his article that; "In *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf maintains a consistent and clear analogy between the human problem of truly knowing and experiencing another person" (212). It is also evident from the above discussion that it is society which favours man more than a woman. A woman is considered to be domesticated and a man is the dominant gender.

Woolf signifies the working of the mind to such an extent that even the time interval in the novel is elongated in some chapters and shortened in others, which identifies the importance of thought and working of the mind of the characters; for example, the first part; 'The Window', is the longer part which is comprised of nineteen chapters; covering the time interval of only a day. The second part; 'Time Passes', is the shortest part, though it covers the time interval of ten years; which points at the insignificance of events and circumstances for a house; in Woolf's own words, "I have to give [in "Time Passes"] an empty house, no people's characters, the passage of time, all eyeless & featureless with nothing to cling to" (qtd. in Gaipa 01). Finally, the

third part; 'The Lighthouse' is the longest; signifying the changing perspectives and changing visions of different characters. It is the character that Woolf stresses upon; as: "Virginia Woolf adhered to her own critical dictum, expressed most fully in *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, that the business of the novelist is the exploration of character" (Graham 01).

Characters' perspectives change at the end of the novel. It is in the third part that the characters reach perceptions and have their visions; for example, Lily Briscoe decides to marry as she realizes that men and women are two halves of one entity. She understands life more explicitly as she says in the end; "I have had my vision" (Woolf 129). James no more hates his father and understands that he is father-like himself. Mr. Ramsay realizes Mrs. Ramsay's importance after her death. As Pedersen writes; "Lily Briscoe came, as "peace," and this time entirely "awake" and thus able to see her vision fulfilled... [I]n the end James can see again in clear vision. He realized another identity between himself and his father; 'that loneliness which was for both of them the truth about things'" (592-595).

Questioning *To the Lighthouse* from the stream of consciousness standpoint, it can be illustrated that Virginia Woolf, unlike conventional writers used the technique to create her own special approach of narrative writing for telling the story of Mr. Ramsay, Mrs. Ramsay, Lily Briscoe and Charles Tansley who are all related to one another in some peculiar way, however, they have their own chain of thought that makes them distinct at the same time.

Conclusion

Virginia Woolf's treatment of stream of consciousness technique, and description of her characters' experiences and emotions, precisely describes the working of both masculine mind and feminine mind throughout the narrative. This research paper aimed at illustrating the same working of the mind of both genders with respect to their experiences in the past and their circumstances in the present. The study found that the author's memories, their personal experiences, and the working of mind existed simultaneously in the narratives. The effect of gender variance and societal pressure influence both male and female characters in the novel; such as Mr. Ramsay, Charles Tansley, Mrs. Ramsay, and Lily Briscoe. Woolf's narrative reflected characters' minds to show inconsistencies due to gender dominant roles creating societal problems. The study also emphasized thought patterns of fictional characters change with experience. Fictional characters represent real life experiences leading to change in persona. The study focused the working of mind, particularly by contrasting masculine mind and feminine mind's working in order to describe not only Woolf's intellectual creativity and understanding, but also, the real life situation by understanding Woolf's innovative attempt. Consequently, the conclusion led to the fact that stream of consciousness mode is a significant aspect for developing affluence and epiphany of the authorial intellect constructing wholesome and innovative thoughts and approaches. The study offered a critical insight into creation of works of art and

literature free from conscious levels of mind presenting them in unreasonable and disorderly manner so that the essence of thoughts remains pure and safe. A study can be conducted by analyzing stream of consciousness in *To the Lighthouse* from cultural and religious perspectives.

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