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Virginia Woolf and the Burden of Change in To *the Lighthouse*

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Abstract

Virginia Woolf remains one of the most influential female British writers of the 20th century. Through a series of captivating novels, essays and lectures, she exerted strong influence on the burgeoning landscape of activists for female rights in her time and after. Her novels portrayed women in the chaotic psychological struggle for self-affirmation. Among her signature novels, To the Lighthouse captures the struggles of two women, Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, as they navigate the complex world of men's individual egos and their own personal traumas and fears. This paper focuses on how their psychological development parallels the development of and the complex narrative about women's struggle for freedom. Woolf's fight for freedom was animated by the desire to free the female self from the demands of male hegemony. It is a struggle to give the female body and mind a space of its own, not determined by the alpha male. The imposing presence of the alpha male in the likes of Mr. Ramsay, Charles Tansley and William Bankes parallels those of men such as Woolf's father, her husband and the men in her own literary and social circles. To the Lighthouse is a bold move in the long line of attempts to denounce efforts to muscle women. This paper investigates the journey to the lighthouse as a walk to self-realization and to self-healing, wherein both Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe come to the realization that their autonomy is dependent on self-evaluation and assertion of self-importance.

I. INTRODUCTION

The struggle for women's rights is as old as creation itself with the tipping point being the 20th century with civil movements across Europe and America. The 20th century was a watershed of these struggles, which saw women being given the right to the ballot box, elective positions in government and even allowed changes in fashion. The literary landscape was not indifferent to these changes and will intend, help shape the movement[1]. The cardinal issues of

[1] There were prominent voices of the time such as Rebecca West (1892-1983), whose contributions in feminist and socialist magazines explored themes on women's struggle and need for freedom.; Mona Caird (1954-1930) who wrote in favour of women's rights and women's suffrage; Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence (1867-1942), whose writings played a crucial role in the fight for women's right to vote and Elizabeth Robins 91863-1952) whose writings explored themes of female agency and social

women's struggles for freedom involved unyoking the psychological burden of feeling inferior but equally the burden of change or the necessity to make their own choices in whatever manner of life they chose. In her fiction, Virginia Woolf, presents women burdened by the overwhelming presence of the alpha male, but also by their inability to overcome their own inviolable attachment to them. More than the physical torments encountered by women to assert themselves, Woolf presents in all her novels[2] women who are overwhelmed by psychological stress, battered by cultural and man-made barriers and mentally suffocated by their social and cultural environment.

Virginia Woolf is part of a long line of women whose works decry the injustices against women by a heavily male dominated society. Her forbears, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Barbara Bodichon and Lydia Becker voiced serious concerns about the obstacles to women's progress, but this did not stop the flurry of laws that followed and that complicated women's chances for self-assertion. Woolf wrote against the background of a tight-knit and stiff legal system[3] that rendered the struggle for women's suffragettes difficult. This, however, did not stop the efforts of women freedom fighters to wrestle from the throes of these inhibiting social and cultural stigmas. The feminist movement championed by the early feminists mentioned above sought to break free from a moribund moral and cultural system that held sway and impeded women's social, political and cultural development. These voices were not only British, but also American and European[4]. While in Britain there were such vocal feminists' activists such as Barbara Bodichon, Emmeline Pankhurst, Margaret Sanger, Marie Stopes, and Annie Besant, in France the dominant figure was Simone de Beauvoir. The common denominator of their struggles was the fight for women to have access to education, legal and civil equality, equal right to vote and the right to unionize, with the goal of avoiding women from "being arbitrarily governed",[5] and to have representation.

Assaults on women's identity can be traced to biblical times where women were seen as subordinates to men, to ancient philosophies that saw women as bundles of emotional wrecks, to very recent attempts to objectify women as mere symbols of maternity and sexual gratification. Simone de Beauvoir's negation of this concept results from her disparaging of ancient conception of a woman by ancient philosophers[6]. Beauvoir's grand contention that "the fundamental source of women's oppression is its [femininity's] historical and social construction as the quintessential" other was conceived against the backdrop of disparaging views of women as second-class citizens (Para 32). Feminist struggle hinged therefore on efforts to give women a voice, to move them from "immanence" to "transcendence" where they make choices that will determine their own freedom[7]. In a society structured to favour men, philosophical musings about women's freedom

change. All these writers were part of a large feminist movement for the improvement of women's rights. For more information see *Feminism in the United Kingdom-Wikipedia.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminism_in_the_United_kingdom.April 8, 2025.*

[2] See particularly *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *A Room of One's Own* (1929), *Orlando (1928)* and *The Waves (1931)*.

[3] There were laws inhibiting women from playing their roles as mothers and parents, such as the Custody of Infants Act 1839, laws making divorce very difficult. Women's feminists' movement led to the easing of these laws resulting in such laws as the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 which will be revised subsequently in 1923,1937, and finally in 1973, mainly because of opposition from the church. For more information see *Feminism in the United Kingdom-Wikipedia.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminism_in_the_United_kingdom.April 8, 2025.*

[4] Prominent among them were Simone de Beauvoir in France, author of the famous *The Second Sex,* the British Emmeline Pankhurst who led the British suffragette movement and the Americans such as Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin, Elisabeth Freeman, Jill Johnson and Kate Millet among others who championed American cry for female freedoms. For more on this see *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_feminists#Late_19th-century_and_early_20th-century_feminists.*

[5] Mary Wollstonecraft (Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with strictures on Political and Moral Subjects), quoted by Susan Rustin in her book *The Sexed History of British Feminism"*, Polity Press,2024.

[6] Simone de Beauvoir was particularly revolted by the views of women by ancient philosophers such as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Aristotle argued that women are "female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities", while Thomas Aquinas contended that women are "imperfect men" and the "incidental being" - en.wikipedia.org*/wiki/Simone _de_Beauvoir. April* 9, 2025.

[7] Curtailed from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in Wikipedia. en.wikipedia.org*/wiki/Simone _de_Beauvoir. April* 9, 2025.

could or can only be dislocated by educating both women and men on the wide range of possibilities that women's freedom will offer. Woolf's works explore feminine consciousness and the inner world of women's struggle to achieve a sense of human identity. Woolf believed that women should have their own financial stability and workspace, and they should be encouraged to pursue education and other careers.

In *A Room of One's Own* (henceforth *Room*) Woolf explores the burden of lack and want and how both connive to impede a woman's progress. She sets the stage in this book for the exploration of the multifarious difficulties women must go through, most of which they never even succeed to overcome. It is a statement on what women require to affirm their own being and to give it meaning. The rest of her works can be read against the background of this thought. To lack authority is to lack a room of one's own, which metaphorically will mean not being able to have possession of one's own given ability and natural possibilities, make one's own choices and take life-changing decisions. This is the major source of anguish, which results in the creation of a new form and style of literary expression. Megan Snopik in her review of *Room* in an online article, "A Feminist With A Room of Her Own Revisits Virginia Woolf", contends that Woolf's argument has its shortcomings in today's world arguing that "the conditions in which they secure their financial security trade off with the leisure time to pursue lobbies and the ability to devote time to writing" (Para 4). The belief that women need the same space, time, education and resources as men to realize their full potential is the very essence of her oeuvre. The burden of change lies more on the shoulders of the woman than her male counterpart because her freedom is not a given. She must tear herself from the moral chains imposed by a patriarchy determined to hold her to a standard beyond her abilities.

Room is also a statement on economic freedom for women. To define oneself as free, one must be able to determine one's own economic path. A woman's freedom is indexed to the strength of her economic power. Woolf rightly asserts that "One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well" (Woolf 20). A woman's subaltern position is directly linked to her financial dependency on a man. Part of feminist struggle is the need to have the freedom of access to possibilities of economic survival. The whole idea, as Anjali Kurra determines, is for Woolf the transition from "womanhood to personhood" (268). This is the bottom line of feminist thought whether in Europe, America or Africa. In the early twentieth century, when societies were heavily structured on patriarchal norms, this was a very bold move which did and still does confound even feminist critics. Toril Moi's "Who is afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist Readings of Woolf", catalogues divergent views on Woolf's feminist stance or her stance on woman against Elaine Showalter's dismissive view of her as a feminist stronghold. The center point of her argument is that "Woolf's greatest sin" (as Moi describes it) is that "even in the moment of expressing feminist conflict, Woolf wanted to transcend it. Her wish for experience was really a wish to forget experience" (Elaine Showalter 282 qtd in Moi-134)[8]. Of course, Showalter's contention with Woolf especially with regards to *Room* is on its elusiveness which is made possible by her creative involvement in her narrative, that is, Woolf's detachment from its narrative. Moi goes on to argue that through Woolf's "conscious exploitation of the sportive, sensual nature of language, Woolf rejects the metaphysical essentialism which forms the basis of patriarchal ideology, which hails God, the father or the phallus as its transcendental signifier" (139).

II. NAVIGATING THE BURDEN OF CHANGE: VIRGINIA WOOLF'S FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS IN *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

To the Lighthouse, one of Woolf's signature novels captures this struggle for self-control by the female characters, their effort to overcome it and affirm a certain level of self-identity. Moi contends that *To the Lighthouse*

[8] See Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own. British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing.* Princeton University Press,1977.

> illustrates the destructive nature of a metaphysical belief in strong, immutably fixed gender identities-represented by Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay-whereas Lily Briscoe (an artist) represents the subject who deconstructs this opposition, perceives its pernicious influence in society, and tries as far as possible in a still rigidly patriarchal order to live as her own woman, without regard for the crippling definitions of sexual identity to which society would have her conform. (142)

Woolf, Jane Marcus claims can be read as a "guerilla fighter in a Victorian skirt" (Qtd in Toril Moi's "Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf" 144)[9]. Beyond the theoretical argument that Moi associates this quotation to, Woolf is nonetheless a fighter whose purpose is to create awareness for women that they must determine their own course of action irrespective of the persistent patriarchal stranglehold surrounding their every space. Mrs. Ramsay and her near opposite Lily Briscoe represent in many respects the woman's attempts to form a new self through silence and wit. And as Brenda R. Silver argues, Lily's role is to "recognize and restore what has been missing before, Mr. Ramsay's intelligence, and ensure the integration of the family" (262). Through well-crafted symbols, Woolf lays bare the case for inclusion and the positive impact this will have on human growth should both sexes have parity. The Lighthouse, Lily Briscoe's painting, the river, and the decay that is portrayed in the landscape of the second section of the book all represent the strive and the hurdles that Mrs. Ramsay and lily Briscoe must contend with and overcome. No doubt, one can easily agree with Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover that *The Lighthouse* "is like a giant weave, which generates itself, self-propagates, is fecund-like Mrs. Ramsay" (106), acting like a compendium of "consciousnesses" (Vladiv-Glover 113), attempting to breathe a new life from the maze it harbours.

Woolf's characters in the novel are less garrulous. She knowingly deprives them of speech, thereby accentuating the pain of their deprivation and the necessity for liberation. The novel begins with a reprimand to Mrs. Ramsay's most cherished wish-that of seeing her son and her other children go to the Lighthouse. The contrast between her wish and optimism concerning her son's trip to the lighthouse and her husband's rash interruptions that the weather will be bad tells the story of struggle. Opening her novel with this contrast reflects Woolf's own personal pain both as woman and wife. The contrast of "extraordinary joy" (1) expressed by James when she speaks and the desire to have an axe handy that "would have gashed a hole in his father's breast" (2) reflect the protective cover Mrs. Ramsay has but also betrays the extent of her burden. She is torn between her husband and her father, both of whom vie for her affection and loyalty. The precision with which Woolf captures James' state of mind is revelatory of the insight into the mental disorientation caused by Mr. Ramsay's overbearing and overarching behaviour.

Woolf's images portray a callous Mr. Ramsay determined to impose his will on his family and his son James, who is determined to fulfill his dream of visiting the Lighthouse. The description of Ramsay as being "lean as a knife" and "narrow as a blade" (2) reflects him as inherently violent and reprehensible. Mrs. Ramsay's words do not count; for James knew that his father's opinions were so definitive that the only possibility for him to go to the lighthouse is to kill his father. Mrs. Ramsay's burden is made heavier because she is caught between her maternal love for her son and her duty as wife to her husband. The brunt of both men's anger is borne by her, as well as the burden of divided loyalty. Her inability to be a decisive voice in this matter is the most exacting of her mental energy. She reflects Woolf's own mother, whom Woolf thought gave in

[9] For more on Jane Marcus' opinion see her article "Thinking Back Through Our Mothers". In *New Feminist Essays on Virgnia Woolf.* Ed. Jane Marcus. London: Macmillan,1981,1-30.

to the caprices of her father. Her vision of her mother as subservient and progressive evolved over time in her work as Christopher Dahl argues, where Mrs. Woolf is idealized in "Reminiscences" and "A sketch" where a more balanced picture of her is painted. Through her work, Woolf tries to break free from what Dahl calls "unresolved anger" towards her father to a more balanced vision of her parents and the purported domination of the women folk. This burden is reminiscent of that which Mrs. Ramsay and to some extent Lily Briscoe must overcome.

Mrs. Ramsay like the rest of the females in the novel is overwhelmed by the overbearing presence of the men. They are in a permanent state of subjugation. The disagreement surrounding the weather can only be resolved by the deflation of Mr. Ramsay's ego, whose decision not to take his children to the lighthouse is determined simply by his willingness to prove his manliness and less by any altruistic and fatherly care for his children. The battleground for which the decision to go or not to the lighthouse is simply the desire to contradict his wife. The insistence "No going to the lighthouse, James" is contrasted to Mrs. Ramsay's cautionary "Perhaps it will be fine tomorrow". He is considered an "Odious little man" (11) insensitive to the feelings and desires of others. His lack of compassion is the direct result of his desire to prove his superiority vis-a-vis Mrs. Ramsay. He maintains his ego as the Master of the house.

Mrs. Ramsay is mentally stable, maintains a low profile, submits to the caprices of her husband to protect her son James and at the same time remain loyal and respectful to her husband. The passage below explains her maternal attitude and her desire not to carry the fight to Mr. Ramsay for the sake of peace and for her children.

> Perhaps you will wake up and find the sun shining and the birds singing," she said compassionately, smoothing the little boy's hair, for her husband, with his caustic saying that it would not be fine, had dashed his spirits she could see. This going to the lighthouse was a passion of his, she saw, and then, as if her husband had not said enough, with his caustic saying that it would not be fine tomorrow, this odious little man went and rubbed it in all over again. (11)

Woolf is conscious that the burden of making peace between James and his father lies with Mrs. Ramsay, who must show calm and psychological endurance to create mental equilibrium within the Ramsay family. She is wedged between her husband and her son and must keep a temperament that can navigate both extremes and emotions. She switches her attentions from James to her household equipment to keep a stable mental composure. She silently forages every aspect of her household and the various temperaments of her children and her husband's group of friends. She carries the burden of the whole family in silent dignity and compensates by her actions the decorum so lacking in the husband and the rest of the young men who are her guests. While her silence behooves peace and compromise, that of Mr. Ramsay spells pressure and oppressive authority. He speaks rarely and when he does, it is against the silence and peace of the house. His silence is deafening, pervading the entirety of the book. His silence is oppressive and leaves little or no room for alternative thought. Mr. Ramsay needs to be confronted by an alternative reality and Woolf does that by bringing in Lily Briscoe who takes refuge in her painting and is determined to shun him and thereby assert her own personality.

Lily Briscoe is contrasted with Mrs. Ramsay, and this reveals that Mrs. Ramsay's compromise is a huge price, the result of her moral negotiation between respectability and ideological independence. Lily Briscoe is described as an "independent little creature" and Mrs. Ramsay "liked her for it" (13). Her admiration for Lily is founded on a repressed love of freedom which is only hampered by her unconditional acceptance of her role as a traditional mother, surviving on traditional values. Lily Briscoe represents hope of female emancipation. We can read Mrs. Ramsay's admiration for her as a direct relation to the understanding that there is a connection between the past with all its inherent inhibitions and the hope of a brighter future. Mrs. Ramsay is the link between that past and the eventual

future represented by Lily Briscoe. She agrees with Lily's dream of independence, but at the same time recognizes that emotional company will be necessary to achieve psychological stability. She is the hope of the future, but at the same time must recognize her role as being part of a human social chain and therefore must sacrifice a part of her femininity. The burden of change even at this point is on Mrs. Ramsay who is wedged between Lily and Mr. Ramsay. She is a source of stability to the detriment of her own true self.

In choosing to be a painter, Lily Briscoe has chosen freedom from the drudgery of marriage or any kind of emotional bond with a man. She, unlike Mrs. Ramsay, is not going to accept the delusions created by the likes of Mr. Ramsay for the sake of marriage. She is a breath of fresh air in the world of Mrs. Ramsay. She comes to the stage with a new impetus, with a new vision, a vision of a liberated Mrs. Ramsay. Her painting is an attempt to capture an idyllic calm and to turn chaos into order. More than perhaps any other character in the novel, Lily is conscious of and determined to defeat male oppression. It is a difficult task as Viola Andre writes "…we can observe that she has always been trying to achieve in her painting an equilibrium between the fluid and the rooted, the unsubstantial and resistant" (284-285). No doubt therefore that Koppen Randi will describe *To the Lighthouse* considering art as "once disembodied and embodied, as a conversion/turns away from life and *as* experientially grounded" (379).

The Lighthouse is Woolf's indictment of the Edwardian society, which was characterized by a growing sense of moral decadence, an asphyxiating anti-feminist environment and an almost beleaguered and moribund social fabric. Ramsay, William Bankes, Augustus Carmichael are the last embers of a once glorious past bedecked with its moral insensitivity towards women. James, on the contrary, exudes new energy and a morality defined by standards of equality and scientific truth. The burden of these all lie in the ability of the women to change the narrative in a way that stalls the old norms and creates an atmosphere favorable to individual and collective freedom.

Mrs. Ramsay brings light and laughter to the morosity of the world of men symbolized by Mr. Ramsay. She is completely given to the domestic necessities of her children, to escape the pressure of the overbearing attitude of the husband and the men around him. Mr. Ramsay's irascible temper, his insensitive insistence that it will rain even when he knows that the contrary is the truth, adds to the psychological torment on Mrs. Ramsay who must bear all of this with astonishing grace. She is caught between the raw anger of his son against the father and her husband's callous desire for recognition and care. Both males do not seem to care about her own welfare as every one of them wants sympathy to the detriment of her own emotional stability and physical welfare:

> So boasting of her capacity to surround and protect, there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by; all was so lavished and spent; and James, as he stood stiff between her knees, felt her rise in a rosy-flowered fruit tree laid with leaves and dancing boughs into which the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of his father, the egotistical man, plunged and smote, demanding sympathy. (32)

Mrs. Ramsay is an empty shelf, sucked dry by the demands of a society that requires her to be silent in the face of an oppressive and destructive male hegemony. She speaks only when she is comforting members of her household. She is neither comforted nor taken care of, rather she is weighed down by the demands of her household and the social expectations of her maternal situation. She is "a shell" of her original self and will eventually physically disintegrate under the pressure of these demands. She carries the burden of success, of unity and stability. If her house must remain in the organic form she wishes, then she must be the ultimate sacrifice.

The world in which Mrs. Ramsay evolves is one in which women's opinions are taboo. William Bankes irritating statements that "women can't paint, women can't write…" (41) speaks for itself of the disregard of the female folk by their male counterparts. The audacity of Mr. Bankes who

has no merit of his own is at its highest level when he intentionally tells Lily and Mrs. Ramsay that women do not have any artistic abilities and therefore cannot produce any art. His refusal to associate women with any form of artistic and creative powers smacks of arrogance and ignorance. He categorizes them as having no knowledge and therefore no sense of aesthetics. Lily is determined to change the paradigm; determined to understand female-to female love, but also bent on making it happen. To achieve this and thereby change the narrative, she must come to terms with the one woman whose silence and wisdom reflect the subtlety required for change in this male dominated society. It is only in understanding Mrs. Ramsay's subtle sobriety that she can be able to overcome it. She is determined to overcome bias and spite and recast Mrs. Ramsay in different lenses. She is "the shape of a dome" (44), an incarnation of astonishing internal beauty. The world of the Ramsays revolve around her and without her everything will crumble into decay and ruin. There is a sense of permanence regarding how she must construct and affirm all the subtleties of the emotions rioting inside her.

The trip to the lighthouse is the culminating point of the tension in the novel. The Lighthouse itself is the center of the struggle for power and for control. It is the symbol of both the narrator and the characters to affirm their identity and to define their own character. Caught between spite for her husband's brash attitude and love for her son, Mrs. Ramsay is a martyr of the values and wishes of her own sex. All through the novel, her influence is pervasive; the one thing that defines her existence is the peace and stability of her family even at the cost of her own self. She suffers neglect and sometimes spite from the very man for whom she has put her life at his service. She is always in the background, yet she is the object of all our thoughts, carrying our burdens graciously with her. She is the litigator of the cares of marriage of all the young men and women of the novel; their aspirations and fears; their successes and disappointments. Her energy and the light she emits pervade the social structure of the novel. Nothing seems to happen without her; She seems to be in the know of every little occurrence in her household. This is her power, but this is also her burden.

The journey to the Lighthouse is a psychological progression of the battle for identification. It determines the rhythm of life in the novel and shapes the thoughts of the characters. It is the symbol of the show of strength by Mr. Ramsay "No going to the Lighthouse tomorrow, Mrs. Ramsay," he said, asserting himself. He liked her; he still thought of the man in the drain-pipe looking up at her; but he felt it necessary to assert himself" (73). Mr. Ramsay's tyranny is contrasted to Mrs. Ramsay's silent grace. Her light pervades the darkness of male power, and through it she works her way through her children and her guests. Her relationship to all the men in the novel and especially to her sons is a chapter in her struggle to lighten her grief. Her world and her joy are founded in the love and care she gives to her kids. Yet this is precisely the reason she is weighed down and physically destroyed.

Woolf characterizes Lilly Briscoe as a burden on the patriarchal system around which she weaves her story. She reflects the burden of change that will befall Woolf's world and that of the text she creates. She has a "thread of something; a flare of something; something of her own, which Mrs. Ramsay liked very much indeed, but no man would, she feared" (89). Those aspiring to change must come to terms with the paradox of change as a burden. This is the yoke carried by women, to wit, that their personal freedoms come only if they are willing to subsume their own identities to that of their husbands or the men folk. Mrs. Ramsay is wary of the inevitable changes to their sex and situation. Rather than expressing joy at Lily being a representation of the future, she fears for that future. She is intimidated by what is ahead, by the liberation of the woman folk. Lily's celibacy is the cost to be paid for her freedom. Woolf uses Mrs. Ramsay to question change, and the difficulties associated with it or with obtaining it. Her own life is testament to this desire for change and the struggle for affirmative action. As Brenda S. Helt writes, Woolf disagreed with her lover Sackville-West and some of her younger friends on sexual desire based on gender stereotypes. It is in this regard that Woolf, Helt argues considered problematizing gender as "sexual" to be a "perversion" in a letter she wrote to her homosexual friend Ethel Smyth:

> Then perversion. Yes, I am afraid I do agree with you in thinking you silly. But I suspect we are wrong.... When I go to what we call a Buggery poke party, I feel as if I had strayed into the male urinal; a wet smelly, trivial kind of place. I fought with Eddy Sackville over this; I often fight with my friend. How silly, how pretty you sodomites are, I said, **w**here at he flared up and accused me of having a rednosed Grandfather. (*Letters* 4:200. Qtd in Helt.138)

It is a question of possessing one's body, of disheveling from the common rabble. Mrs. Ramsay's and Lily's burden is also Woolf's, and her personal life was testament to this. Her suicide could be seen as an example of that burden.

The story of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe is that of psychological pain, and egregious disregard for their mental wellbeing. They are scorned by the men as people lacking any intellectual or artistic ability. They are required to withhold their emotions and rather put up a stoic temperament. In Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, Woolf creates two opposing emotions and attitudes towards female freedom. Their success is dependent on their ability to either accept or deny the standards of behaviour required by their social environment. Mrs. Ramsay understands this so well that she gives in to the tantrums of the husband and plays into the psyche of Charles Tansley and William Bankes. Woolf's pain and that of others reveals that change can only come to them if and only if they subject their own realities to that of their men. In accepting the lie that it was going to rain and so there would be no going to the Lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay accepts falsehood to gain moral strength and recognition. It is a victory built on the idea that she stoops to conquer, metaphorically representing the sacrifice she must make to achieve acceptance in a man's world.

Time and the Lighthouse represent the enduring stress and reflection of women's suffrage, and the pain associated with it. The journey through time and across the river to the lighthouse is the road travelled by advocates of female freedom to ascertain the right to self-expression so dear to Woolf and her female contemporaries. The journey to the Lighthouse takes place in the absence of the most optimistic member of Ramsay's household-Mrs. Ramsay. Her victory is summarized in the words of Mr. Ramsay when he says, 'What's the use of going now?" (125). This is the precise point at which her freedom and the liberation of her gender is revealed. Her absence frees both the men and women of her world. The burden of reconciling to and acknowledging the essence of masculinity now lies on Lily. Contrary to her nature, she praises Mr. Ramsay and enlivens his spirit, but her thoughts always revolve around the burden she must carry if and only if she must stand on her own as an independent entity:

> Why, at this completely inappropriate moment, when he was stooping over her shoe, should she be so tormented with sympathy for him that, as she stooped too, the blood rushed to her face, and, thinking of her callousness (she had called him a play-actor) she felt her eyes swell and tingle with tears? Thus occupied he seemed to her a figure of infinite pathos. He tied knots. He bought boots. There was no helping Mr. Ramsay on the journey he was going. But now just as she wished to say something, could have said something, perhaps, here they were –Cam and James. They appeared on the terrace. They came, lagging, side by side, a serious, melancholy couple. (133)

Even though Lily Briscoe is not married and is childless, yet the presence of Cam and James affect her psychologically, making it difficult for her to complete her portrait. Her initial desire to treat Mr. Ramsay with contempt is watered down once she sees Cam and James. Her maternal instinct becomes a hindrance to the assertion of her real powers. She understands at this critical moment Mrs. Ramsay's social politics wherein giving in to the caprices of Mr. Ramsay elevates her. Lily cannot escape from the throes of maternity because her very humanity depends

on that. She is caught between the affection for the children Mrs. Ramsay has left and their desire to go to the Lighthouse and her personal wishes for moral and intellectual independence. Unlike Mr. Ramsay, whose identity doesn't depend on that, hers on the contrary is.

The journey to the Lighthouse is the gravitational point around which Woolf's liberal and optimistic vision of female empowerment and authority depends. It is precisely at this moment that she understands Mrs. Ramsay's struggle and the burden thereof. In the first part of the novel, the family revolves around Mrs. Ramsay, who succeeds albeit with the difficulties in keeping the unit tight. She goes above and beyond to make everyone including her husband who oppresses her feel dignified. Once Woolf removes her from the text, everything falls apart and decay becomes the new norm. Her absence is a turning point in the journey to the lighthouse.

Mr. Ramsay's moral authority and superiority is possible only because of the wife's humility in accepting her subaltern position. Everything falls apart once she is gone. In her absence he is

> like a lion seeking whom he could devour, and his face had that touch of desperation, of exaggeration in it which alarmed her, and made her pulled her skirts about her. And then, she recalled, there was that sudden revivification, that sudden flare (when she praised his boots), that sudden recovery of vitality and interest in ordinary human beings, which too passed and changed for he was always changing and hid nothing …. (134)

Ramsay's strength came from the wife and the wife gone, he has become a shadow of his old self depending on sympathy from the assertive Lily Briscoe who must struggle to keep her female identity and integrity. 'Time passes' is Woolf's brilliant rendition of the silent power of the woman, but also of the burden of proof on the womenfolk and how that burden eventually becomes her undoing. In "Time Passes", the absence of Mrs. Ramsay sets the stage for a better understanding of the burden of her sex but also opens avenues for the eventual freedom that Woolf ascertains at the end of the novel. Beth Rigel Daugherty states that Woolf argued in one of her lectures that she had to kill the "Angel"-her mother- in the house if she must be free. Once she does that, which she did, symbolically speaking "I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her" **(***Sketch* 81, qtd in Daughert.290**)**. This revelation exposes her double burden both as a defender of female freedoms, and at the same time a cautious respecter of traditions.

Lily Briscoe and the women in the novel suffer from social and intellectual pressure. Long after Mrs. Ramsay is dead, Briscoe still has difficulties creating formidable art. She has difficulties ascertaining her own views due to the recurring thought by Charles Tansley that women cannot paint, and they cannot write. She is entangled in the "voice saying she couldn't paint, saying she couldn't create, as if she were caught up in one of those habitual currents in which after certain time experience forms in the mind, so that one repeats words without being aware any longer who originally spoke to them" (137). It is tragic to internalize the feeling of inadequacy because this makes it difficult for her to achieve her own much cherished objectives. She must reconcile with the various currents -male and female-that hold opposing views if she must succeed in capturing the essence of female existence. In her discussion of Androgyny in Woolf's work, Karen Kaivola argues that Lily Brsicoe's role in the novel is "Structurally androgenous", insisting that "as a woman artist who resists traditional female roles, she mediates the gender polarities of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. Where Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay embody the Victorian ideology of separate spheres, roles and characters for men and women, Lily's artistic ambitions and her final vision mix and ultimately reconcile those oppositions…" (250). For Woolf, artistic creativity and production Helt contends are enabled by the "conscious indulgence of the mind's capacity to range freely and contemplate openly all desires, even those that are socially proscribed" (153).

Woolf weaves the story of the female struggle for freedom through an uncanny irony in which the

most submissive of the women-Mrs. Ramsay- is the very foundation of Briscoe's liberation. She represents the bridge between the traditional and the modern, the future and the past, the understanding that female freedom does not at all mean disregard of values that bring order to chaos. These are the defining principles upon which Lily Briscoe must ascertain her art and her vision of the order she too is trying to bring to the chaos surrounding her. Mr. Ramsay the bully must be part of this cosmic system. The relational difference between Briscoe and Mr. Ramsay makes it difficult for her to complete her painting, a painting whose final object is to capture the unity of chaos. This is reflected by the variety of narrative voices from which we could see the character of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay from multiple angles. This variety of voices Anna Snaith contends could represent the complex structure of the female quest for liberty and the search for a genuine self within that society. She argues that "… Woolf uses indirect interior monologue sparingly, instead moving rapidly from omniscient narration to direct speech, to reported speech, to direct interior monologue. This creates the continuously shifting focus, the refusal which pervades the work" (145).

III. CONCLUSION

Mrs. Ramsay's death enforces the burden of loss. Her absence exposes the emptiness of patriarchy, revealing also that light can be born out of chaos. Her absence creates a chilling sense of nothingness. The burden of her absence is the creation of emptiness, a void that makes thought impossible. More than anything else, Woolf is making a statement on the importance of silence or rather on the notion that the battle for freedom can also be won through silence, reflected in Mrs. Ramsay's. She has no high-strung feminist ideas, yet her power pervades the whole text. It is this absence that makes for victory. Mrs. Ramsay is the unspoken symbol of feminist traditional ideals, whose life however projects the eventuality of a more liberal and equitable life for women. The future of female liberation depended on the burden of silence and the ability to win through silent pain. Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe are two peas in a pot, different angles of the same struggle. The Lighthouse is the culminating point of change, characterized by what Roberta Rubenstein calls "suggestive emotional oscillations" (50) and as Paul Tolliver Brown argues "Not only does the relative force of Mrs. Ramsay bring others together spatially, but she also has the capacity to warp and slow time" (45). This can be understood in the meaning of her silence, which is also a symbol of freedom. The death of Mrs. Ramsay can be considered as the disposal of a barrier against the narrator's freedom, but also as the touch shining the light to the path of freedom.

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