

Locating Women's Time in To The Lighthouse

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Abstract: *To the Lighthouse* is a 1927 novel written by Virginia Woolf, extending the tradition of modernism to highlight the technique of multiple focalization that displayed the ebbing and flowing of the inner stream of consciousness. Julia Kristeva has been regarded as a key proponent of French Feminism with a remarkable influence on feminist literary studies that has subverted all monologic authoritarian systems and the stasis of unitary subject positions. I attempt to investigate the means of visions and perceptions in Virginia Woolf's novel, *To the Lighthouse*, deploying the concept of Women's Time – the parallel existence of linear and infinite time, in relationship to language and meaning.

Key Words: Interior Monologue, Women's Time, Symbolic and Imaginary order, Psychological Time, Mechanical Time.

Hailing from a distinguished literary family, Virginia Woolf was known for her vast reading, wide learning and a serious intellectual aristocracy, whose temperament was alive to the feeling of life, filled with impressions yearning for expression. By the last decade of 19th century, life in England had shown signs of complete social change. There was a break-down of rural England into a nation of industries and cities. It was also a period which had felt the emotional scars of World Wars; sensitive people marked the situation as a hopeless muddle with an emergence of revolt against authority, and feelings of religious scepticism, cynicism, general disillusionment and a shift of emphasis from the outer to the inner. The political history of early twenties showed people's boredom with political principles, Freud and Marx had started influencing masses, and women had fought for the sacred rights of the suffrage. Literature of the time was highly influenced by science and psychology. Novel became a popular literary genre and a serious art form with immense variety and complexity. On the one hand, there were traditionalists like Galsworthy, Wells, Bennet, who were called 'materialists' and on the other hand, were innovators like Henry James, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf who called themselves 'spiritualists.' Psychoanalysis and spiritual searchings were also dominated with the themes of Realism.

Mrs. Virginia Woolf started by adopting a revolutionary technique for the expression of her vision of life and human nature. She used the stream of consciousness method to get close to the mind of her characters to express exactly the impact of life and its experiences on their personality. The first phase of her career depicted the mysterious immensity and loneliness of existence, with the texture of incidents woven with slender threads and attention to minute details. The middle phase, which is also the main phase, showed a rigorous process of selection and clarification of her material, with a positive structure and successful attempts at the use of stream of consciousness technique. The last phase reflected fresh experiments, carrying the stream of consciousness method to unexpected and unconnected byways of expressions.

Stream of Consciousness or the Interior Monologue technique expresses the most intimate thoughts that lie nearest to the unconscious, just as they are born without any precondition of logical organization. Human mind is treated as a flowing water of ideas, with disconnected thoughts arising and subsiding in it and the interior monologue technique tries to capture the stream of consciousness that goes on passing through our mind, presenting a picture of the incoherence of our mind. It becomes a synthesis of multiple traits that try to capture the states of mind being modified by the associations deriving from the situations of the past, present and even the future. Characterised with an inwardness that enables the readers to enter the inner life of the characters, the technique depicts the flow of the mental states and the panorama of the human mind. Modern Novels marked a complete break from the traditional modes of representations, influenced by the psychoanalytical studies carried out by Freud, Jung and Lacan. They studied human consciousness and conceived of it as something in a state of flux, constantly changing and evolving in response to the sensations received from outside. Hence, there was no relevance of the Clock (Mechanical) Time while depicting human psyche, which was a complex network of sensations, desires, emotions and memories. The inescapable forward movement of Temporal Time, was then counterpointed against the Psychic Time of inwardness and introspection. This sort of treatment of time envisages that a chance occasion is the cause of the free movement of consciousness, and the mental processes which thus rise up in their peculiar freedom are rendered naturalistically.

Time, thus, plays an important role in stream of consciousness technique; value and duration of Time become relative to many subjective, fluctuating factors. Freeing the concept of clock time from the chronology of calendar, and easily shifting it backwards and forwards, the interior monologues express the special logic of the unconscious and the fluid states of mind. This psychological time becomes the point of departure for Julia Kristeva's concept of Women's Time, and from a feminist perspective, this is one of Kristeva's most important concepts, because she here explicitly addresses the question of feminism in relation to the symbolic order, the social world of ideological conventions, patriarchal linguistic communications and intersubjective relations. According to Kristeva, female subjectivity would seem to be linked both to the cyclical time of repetition and to the monumental time of eternity, conceptualizing 'Time' from the perspective of physical/emotional/spiritual and social reproduction. The time of history, however, can be characterized as linear time. The first wave feminists, demanding equal rights with men, demanded their right to a place in linear time, while the second wave feminists emphasized women's

radical difference and demanded women's right to remain outside the linear time. According to Kristeva, the second position always generates the risk of degenerating into an inverted form of sexism. Thus, Kristeva argues, the duty of the new generation feminism is that to allow a reconciliation, an intermingling of these approaches to open up a space where individual difference is allowed a free-play.

In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Woolf has manipulated the Symbolic Time in forward horizontal movement and backward vertical movement, resulting in a deeper probing into the consciousness, cutting loose from the exterior occurrences, releasing series of ideas moving freely through the depths of Imaginary Time, ensuring a constant interplay of both. The whole novel is divided into three parts. Part 1 'The Window' describes a house party on the island of Skye. Prof. Ramsay and his wife are on a holiday with their children and some friends. They have promised their youngest son James to see the lighthouse. The father predicts unsuitable weather conditions and the journey is postponed. Here, the clock time is only a few hours, between six o'clock and the dinner to which the action leads up. Mrs. Ramsay sits by the window knitting the stocking, and we are placed within her mind, by the novelist, where the seemingly trivial external incidents turn on her inner musings. Her practical problem is the length of the stocking, but then she looks around and begins to think which ranges over long expanses of time and space. In three long digressions, we are given her stream of consciousness which throw light on her own character as well as on the natures of other characters in the novel. The past and present are telescoped, with the past throwing light on the present. Part 2 'Time Passes', describes how during the long years of war, the house is deserted and left to silence and loneliness. The external time passes rapidly, blending with the empty house, in which marriages, births and deaths in the family are recorded in parenthesis. Within a span from bed time to waking, many nights have passed fusing together many days, nights and years, erasing the distinctness of separate nights and then, the family, without Mrs. Ramsay and two of the children, returns. Part 3 'The Lighthouse' describes the visit to lighthouse after the passing of the years. Mr. Ramsay sails with his children Cam and James to the lighthouse, to the future and their friend Lily Briscoe, sitting in the lawn, in front of the house allows her thoughts to wander into the past until the figure of Mrs. Ramsay is recreated. Lily Briscoe completes her painting, realizing her vision at the same moment as James lands at the lighthouse and thus realizing his dream. Lily, thus forms a thread between past and present, by recreating an imaginative involvement with the spirit of Mrs. Ramsay and with Mr. Ramsay's voyage, against the background of past and passing time, creating moments of intense experience. The moments are significant not in themselves, but because of the way in which they influence the present, surviving the emptiness of mechanical time and re-fashioning the present, almost like a work of art. In this intensity of the moment, psychological time is revived and triumphed over clock time, triumphed even over death, since Mrs. Ramsay Who was dead, haunts these pages with a presence that echoes the permanence of the lighthouse. Even after her death, she is present through the consciousness of others and dominates the novel as a linguistic unconscious which infiltrates the conscious discourse of the Symbolic. The female protagonist, the guiding spirit, presides silently in the memory of other figures of Part 3, and in effect, controls and masterminds the actions and visions of that section. Her husband, living through the linear time, undertakes the journey to the lighthouse in order to fulfil one of her most cherished dreams, thus remembering and revisiting the circular time through his present action. As Lily paints, she thinks of the multiplicity of Mrs. Ramsay's personality, her friendliness, her kindness, her aloofness, her illusions, her beauty and silence and retrieves the monumental time of eternity through art.

Different characters intersect throughout the narrative, giving rise to numerous multiple visions of each other, including the memories of the past fused with present perceptions and meditations. Mr. Ramsay, who is an eminent intellectual, is a materialist and factualist. He is a scholar and thinker whose excessive passion for reality makes him a hard tyrant. He is an egoist and a worldly man who harbours no false hope, where as Mrs. Ramsay is the cohesive force, a symbol of harmony, who is fond of constructing memorable and exaggerated moments of unity. While Mr. Ramsay represents the Symbolic factual truth, Mrs. Ramsay stands for a truth which is in constant flux towards the truth. His truth thus follows a logical, scientific procedure, whereas Mrs. Ramsay's apparent illogicality is actually the evolution of her intuition. For her, matter is a logical complexity which is subjected to the process of destruction and recreation, and memory, a creative synthesis. Taken together, they consist of the hybridization of creative duration which interpenetrates to create a satisfactory description of Mrs. Ramsay's truth, which could be identified as what Kristeva calls Women's Time. Mrs. Ramsay's vision is centred in the day-to-day struggles to achieve moments of felt-relationship and intimations of the future, who thus becomes an artist in and of life, who becomes the point of preference, erupting and returning into linear time, shaping the present and future, indicating the possibility of re-experiencing the Imaginary monumental in its original form.

An extensive use of symbols is also made in *To the Lighthouse* communicating the philosophical ramifications of great import that develop a vision which constitute a vital synthesis of the flux of time. The lighthouse is the most dominant symbol --- it is a man-made symbol of endurance for Mr. Ramsay and the most searching light of truth for Mrs. Ramsay, which constitutes a synthesis of uniqueness of being and impersonality of reality. The sea symbolizes the eternal flux of time and life, and the waves have been employed as the symbol of the movement of life. The window also becomes a screen between reality and consciousness and the journey explores the farthest possible limits that human intellect can achieve. Virginia Woolf has undeniably embedded these symbols to project a dual aspect while identifying themselves with existence, and by striking a balance between the dualities and multiplicities, the novelists has represented that it is the reconciliation of the multiplicities, not a contest between them, that can bring in a satisfactory vision.

A number of devices have been used, as we have seen, by Virginia Woolf, to create *To the Lighthouse* as an impressionistic piece of art. She rejected conventional techniques of narration --- the distinctions of time and space are obliterated, order emerges out of chaos and consciousness flows endlessly giving form to the formless. The metaphysics of Time is devised by the writer to serve as a background for the characters to expose their moods, fantasies and desires, and it is devised not

just as damaging and destructive, but also as sustaining and healing. Her characters come to life, as we see through their minds and their images in the thoughts of others, through an elusive permeation of Time and Space, Inner and Outer, through the currents that unite and divide and through the intermingling of emotions and senses, mapping the constant irruptions of the unconscious of the text into the conscious surface realm of historicity. The theme of the novel --- coming together, tearing apart and equanimity are so well represented by the symbols also. Thus, the most relevant message put forward by the novel through its technique, characterisation, symbols and vision indicates that achieving a harmonious balance between the opposites is imperative, because, achieving a multiple vision, as Kristeva suggests through her *Women's Time*, is imperative to actualize a comprehensive view of life and a healthy perception of the nature of reality. It is this pattern of looking at life with better understanding, the moment of vision that makes the text an interesting achievement.

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