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**Feminist Thoughts in Virginia Woolf's**  
***“To the Lighthouse”***

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## **Dedication**

*To my mother, brother and sister,*

*To my lovely friends,  
Houaria El Mahroug and Fatima Zahra Khelil.*

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## **Abstract**

The emergence of feminism has fought against the existing patriarchal practices and visions. Feminists included individuals from different backgrounds and with different expertise in many domains. Novelists have contributed to the description of their patriarchal societies through their literary works. The present dissertation aims at analyzing Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* for the purpose of unveiling the portrayals of both main female characters, Mrs. Ramsay and Ms. Lily Briscoe. The study reflects on how patriarchal was the Victorian community and how the author represented her own feminist visions in the narrative. In addition, this work highlights the binary opposition of both characters as to show the old-thinking controlled woman, and the new free independent woman.

**Keywords:** Feminism, patriarchy, *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf, the Victorian society

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## General Introduction

Since ever, women have been facing difficulties and inferiority in their lives. Social oppression could stop them from calling for their rights. In order to change the existing patriarchal visions, feminism emerged and impacted on several areas like culture and literature. Patriarchy, which can be defined simply as the male ruling of society and culture, has become later the focus of feminist criticism.

Women's inferior position in society was progressing. From the beginning of the last century, several literary works tackled the issues of women and patriarchy through their characters, plots and messages. The feminist views in such works played a major role in identifying women's sufferings and finding solutions for their dilemmas. Literature gave a voice to women who are not able to speak for their communities.

One of the well-known feminist forerunners is the English writer, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941). She attempted to describe and improve women life situations in her society during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Choosing her masterpiece *To the Lighthouse* for examining her feminist views is critically effective. There were many studies that worked on this novel in order to extract the feminist thoughts of the author. However, and according to the specifications of research, less attention was drawn into the acts and lives of the female characters in the narrative.

This dissertation attempts to study Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* in order to reflect on the lives of both main female characters, Mrs. Ramsay and Ms. Lily Briscoe. The reflections aim to show how patriarchal was the Victorian society and how Woolf managed to include her feminist vision in the narrative. The study cannot skip the binary opposition of both characters' lives and features; it uncovers how they represent the old-thinking suppressed and controlled woman, and the new free independent woman.

The researcher raises these two questions:

- How are Mrs. Ramsay and Ms. Briscoe portrayed in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*?
- To what extent the Woolfian feminist thoughts are found in the opposition of 'angel' and 'evil' and representation of Mrs. Ramsay and Ms. Briscoe?

It is hypothesized that:

- Mrs. Ramsay is representing the old woman that is controlled and oppressed; while Ms. Briscoe is representing the new independent lady that rejects old social rules.
- Woolf attempts to reflect the reality of her own society through the conflict between the old and new women, the evil and the angel, and other binary symbols in the novel.

The present dissertation consists of two chapters. The first chapter is devoted to introducing feminism and its main waves. In addition, major feminist ideas and arguments are presented; the difference between the "Victorian" and "New" women are addressed. The chapter adds a brief account to the binary opposition in the feminist theory. The second chapter aims to analyze the portrayals of major female characters in *To the Lighthouse*. It provides analyses of both Mrs. Ramsay and Ms. Briscoe's different characterizations. Throughout the chapter, some indications from the author's viewpoints are discussed.

# Chapter One:

## Feminism

### Introduction

It is a fact that women have suffered from society's oppression in all fields. They have gone through a lot of difficulties in their lives and have not asked for their rights until Feminism was born to come to their rescue. Feminism has played a major role in identifying women's sufferings and finding solutions for their dilemmas. Feminism gives a voice to women who are not able to speak for themselves, and it is a weapon to face what is against them. This chapter deals with Feminism and its main waves. In addition, Virginia Woolf and her feminist ideas, the difference between the "Victorian" and "New" women are addressed. Finally, the Binary opposition in the Feminist theory is taken into account.

### 1. A Historical Background of Feminism

According to the Oxford Learner Dictionary, the term feminism is defined as follows, "the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; the struggle to achieve this aim" That supports the idea that men and women are equal thus should have equal rights in all the domains of life. In addition, the term "feminist" is usually ascribed to a person who advocates feminism and have their supports their beliefs.

Since antiquity, women have made salient attempts to reach equality with their sexual counterparts: men. It was only until 1837 that the term "feminism" saw light when Charles Fourier used it. Moreover, with the rising demands of women on equality in Britain and in the USA, the term was used to refer to the movement that sought to establish new social, economic and legal laws that would grant women the same rights as men; by doing so, oppression and even sexist terms would be from the past. (McCann et al 11)

Women have suffered from patriarchy socially, politically, economically, and psychologically. Thus, Feminism exposes these problems. It can change the false stereotypes about women to create a world where women are recognized and appreciated differently. Women have often been regarded as inferior human beings by men. It has turned to be humiliating to be a woman because of lower status in society. Male philosophers, writers, and leaders share this patriarchal vision about women. Plato (c.427-c.347 B.C.E) expresses such an opinion as he “thanks the gods for two blessings that he had not been born a slave and that he had not been born a woman” (Bressler168). Napoleon Bonaparte (1774-1843) shares the same thought as Plato, as he states that “Nature intended women to be our slaves....They are our property ....What a mad idea to demand equality for women” (Bressler 169) .Women are depicted as creatures meant to serve men and attend to their needs.

Many women have accepted their inferiority and have not tried to change this ideology about them. For instance, the French writer Madame de Staël (1766-1817) believed that women were inferior and she said “I am glad that I am not a man, as I should be obliged to marry a woman” (Dobie 103) .Men’s ideology about women has influenced them in believing that they are not equal compared to men. This has led them to become judgmental about themselves.

For a long time, women have not been given the opportunity to study or to write in the field of literature. Such fields were occupied by men who did not accept to share it with women in order not to lose their power, and not to lose their dominance over them. Kurt Vonnegut, Jr (1922) believed that, “Educating a woman is like pouring honey over a fine Swiss watch. It stops working” (Bressler170). Men underestimated woman’s abilities to become educated, and to write literary works because she would not act according to the norms of her society anymore. To state this leads inevitably to Robert Southey, poet Laureate (1774-1843) who said that, “Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought

not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even ....my recreation” (Bressler 169). Men have been selfish and have wanted woman not to have any time that is devoted to herself. They have believed that she is not worth having that time. They wanted her only to serve and to please them.

Feminism is a reaction to these beliefs. It faces such biased criticism by arguing that Literature is not restricted to only one gender, and everyone should be valued in the society whether men or women. Feminism began in the late eighteenth century with Marry Wollstonecraft who published “*A vindication of the Rights of Woman*” in 1792 in which she wrote about the oppression of women. She called women not to be weak anymore by saying:

I earnestly wish to point out in what true dignity and human happiness consists—I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt.... I wish to shew that elegance is inferior to virtue, that the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex. (Dobie 104)

Marry Wollstonecraft was the first feminist who tried to convince women to be in charge of their lives. She has wanted them to create their own identity by being strong, and courageous to face men in society.

Marry Wollstonecraft’s writings inspired writers to publish their own feminist works. Margaret Fuller has published “*Woman in the Nineteenth Century*” in 1845. John Stuart Mill also has written “*The Subjection of Women*” in 1869. There have been two feminist masterpieces which have been “*A Room of One’s Own*” by Virginia Woolf in 1927, and “*The Second Sex*” by Simone de Beauvoir in 1949.

Feminism’s main goals were to achieve equality between men and women by eliminating all the boundaries to reach equal social, political and economic opportunities for

women. Feminism has tried to make women seek finance's independence and to gain the right for education. Feminists faced and rejected oppression and patriarchy, and sought to correct the male patriarchal visions about women. Feminism went through a lot of changes historically. This made its goals differ. Such a development and shift of focus is present in three waves of Feminism's claims.

## **2. Waves of Feminism**

The history of Feminism is described in three main waves. They differ in time and goals, but all of them paved the way for women all around the world to become important human beings in their societies.

### **2.1 The First Wave (late 1700s-early 1900s)**

Nowadays the right for voting is given to anyone in society despite their gender; however, this right was hard to get by women centuries before. The First Wave of Feminism took place in World War I. In that period women all over the world started to call for their right to participate in political field by giving their opinions. Feminists believed that in order to assert themselves in society they should gain political power, and to achieve that they sought to get the right of women's suffrage.

Some countries like Germany already granted women's suffrage; however, in the USA this right was still not granted. Members of the National Women's Party (NWP) demonstrated in front of the White House. They were holding writings showing their disturbance and refusal of what the government was imposing over them. The NWP party was illegal, so many of its members were arrested because they were calling for something strange back then for the American government. Despite the difficulties that the feminists were facing, they have been involved in many organizations to grant more rights for women. (Walters 63)

The first wave involved a wide range of organizations which called for their right to vote such as The National Woman Suffrage Association NWSA, which opposed the Fifteenth Amendment that gave the African American men the right to vote. Contrary to NWSA, the other organization was called the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), agreed on the Fifteenth Amendment. The NWSA founders, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, fought to include women in voting. The contributions of the feminist activists led to the emergence of the National Universal Suffrage in 1920.

The victory of 1920 made the government notice women's power. As Carrie Chapman Catt (1859-1947) has said, "Parliament have stopped laughing at women suffrage, and politicians have begun to dodge! It is the inevitable premonition of coming victory." (Krolakke and Sorensen 2). Women's potentials were not underestimated anymore by society.

The First wave did not only inspire women to call for their rights to vote, but also to work in all fields, not only politics. The women's suffrage movement dealt with issues such as education, health, rights within marriage and property ownership. Women were granted with their right to vote in most countries in the world. For example, British women of all classes had the right to vote in 1928.

It has been argued that the victory of 1920 was a climatic point for feminists. As Miriam Schneir said, "Soon after 1920, the main women organizations disintegrated, and feminism entered a long period of dormancy.... feminist leaders vanished into virtual oblivion; their struggle nearly forgotten (Bailey 20). Following the period of 1920, feminists went through hard times, and they were not united as they had been before.

In the First wave, feminists have experienced a lot of difficulties while achieving their goals. They have published a lot of influential books and have made successful organizations. These achievements have influenced women all over the world to create their own identities.

The First wave paved the way for women to appreciate themselves and to call for a world where there is equality between men and women. It has inspired them to continue this journey which led to the emergence of the Second wave.

## **2.2 The Second Wave (Early 1960s - late 1970s)**

The second wave continued following the ideas and activities of the previous wave; however, it broadened them. It discussed issues such as workplace, sexuality, rape, family and violence. This wave identified the inequalities of women in general, and sought equality for Black women. Its slogan was “the Personal is Political” in which everything was related to politics. If a woman decided to work in a male dominated field, or to have abortion, then her decision had political consequences. Women’s issues were politicized and had consequences outside their individual life.

The Second wave emerged after World War II while women’s employment increased during this time. They even gained some benefits in their workplace such as maternity’s leave. The women’s contribution in working with men made a positive impact on economy which was expanded. In addition, their presence in economy, feminists were still interested in politics. By the late 1950s new organizations emerged including the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966.

In the Second wave, writers presented the role of women in society, and the great valuable work that they had done for their community especially after the war. Simone de Beauvoir wrote “*The Second Sex*” in 1972 which was one of the most famous works. She talked about how society viewed women and their roles, and she emphasized the idea that women should be independent. She made up her image of the independent woman who: “wants to be active, a taker, and refuses the passivity man means to impose on her. The modern woman accepts masculine values; she prides herself on thinking, taking action,

working, creating on the same terms as man” (Walters 98). Simone de Beauvoir called women to value themselves, and not to underestimate their potentials because they could do as much as men could, this is also valued by Betty Friedan.

Betty Friedan wrote “*The Feminine Mystique*” in 1963 which was also one of the influential works at that time. She wrote about the experiences of unhappy women in their marriages, and how they were unsatisfied because they only had to do housework and to care about children. It has challenged the old belief saying that the only fulfillment of a woman is by being a housewife. This book contributed in the emergence of the (NOW) organization in which Betty Friedan joined as a member. (Oliver 82)

The Second wave of feminism gave women the opportunity to discuss different matters such as race, sexuality, social inequality, gender and identity. It influenced feminists to keep talking about taboo things in society. As explained in this chapter, the Second wave was a continuity of the first wave. What about the third wave which distanced itself from the early feminism?

### **2.3 The Third Wave (Early 1990s- Present)**

The Third wave of Feminism responded to the previous waves. It rejected the Second Wave’s ideologies, and it was a period of “backlash” against that Second Wave. This wave was characterized by the rise of the queer theory. It argued that the Second wave gave a lot of importance to upper and middle-class white women more than the other races. It also sought to change the old definitions of femininity that were born out of the ideas of the Second wave. (Walters 74)

The Third wave feminists consider that they are an influential and powerful group compared to the previous feminists. They have argued that main factors such as nationality, gender, race, ethnicity, class and religion need to be discussed while talking about feminism.

One of the famous figures in this wave was Rebecca Walker, the daughter of the famous African American novelist Alice Walker, who used the term “third wave feminism” in 1992. The Third wave feminists used new ways and methods to change the lives of women, and to call for their rights. For example, they replaced the term “woman” with “girl” to attract the young generations. Despite the different goals of the Third wave, it had the same influence as the previous waves which made them all have a powerful impact on women. (Walters 81)

The three waves have played a major role in discussing women’s rights all over the world. They paved the way for other feminists and movements to emerge, and to continue the journey of enhancing women’s lives and guaranteeing their rights to be appreciated and valued in their societies. Feminist’s writings also influenced women to change to the better and one of the famous writers who helped them achieve this goal was Virginia Woolf.

### **3. Victorian Women**

Women in the Victorian era had one main goal in life which was to marry, and to support their husbands in their intellectual interests and business. Women had to learn housewife skills, and they were discouraged from seeking education because it was mainly restricted to men. Some Victorian women struggled against the patriarchal behavior of men and women alike. They suffered economically, socially, and politically. Women were not economically independent because they had no opportunity to work. They tended to be naturally submissive and that made them feel inappropriate to call for their right to work and to vote.

In a patriarchal society, Victorian women dedicate most of their time to household duties, knitting, singing, painting and playing piano. They were unable to challenge men in other fields. Women were not encouraged enough to write literary works because they were afraid not to fit in the norms of their society anymore. Women could not give up the needle

for the pen because they feared to lose their femininity. Maria A. Fitzwilliam said in her article “The Needle not the Pen” that women were: “Unwilling to declare this professionalism for fear of losing their feminine status and unable to shake the perception of intellectual inferiority. Women have equal parts, but are inferior in wholeness of mind” (1). Women could not announce that they have chosen writing as a profession. It was not usual for them to show their intelligence because men preferred intellectually inferior women.

Victorian woman was classed as second-class citizen. When she gets married everything she inherited or owned belonged to her husband and he had every right to dispose it as he wants. According to men, women were physically weaker, sensitive, less capable of philosophical thoughts and they were not capable of having rational arguments because their brains are smaller compared to men. By being the weaker sex, Victorian women needed marriage to be protected. Marriage was a romance and a business contract at the same time. This made women and men fundamentally different.

The doctrine of separate spheres was a keystone in the Victorian culture. Men represented mental and physical strength while women represented weakness and gentleness. The place where the woman lived was associated with her identity and her destiny. Home represented order, comfort and safety whereas the outside represented chaos, danger, wars, politics and all the other activities that were naturally meant for men. Women were best being at home to be protected and men have to deal with the outside world. The woman was responsible for bringing up peace and comfort at home and especially for her husband spiritually and physically. Home was the proper place for women back then and they would not bear the outside world because they would be corrupted.

The stereotype image of the Victorian woman led to the concept of the Angel in the house because the house was the proper place for her. One of the literary works that

crystallized the mythology of the Angel in the house was the poem of “The Angel in the House” by Coventry Patmore who wrote it about his wife as a model for Victorian women (Reid 57). This poem defined what had been to be the ideal Victorian women. The Angel was expected to be passive, charming, spiritual, powerless, graceful, pious, patient, and most importantly self-sacrificing. She was valued for having these qualities and they were considered as characteristics of her gender especially domesticity.

Virginia Woolf has talked about the Angel in the house in her essay “*Professions for Women*”. She says that such a woman:

Was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; ...In short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all--I need not say it--she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty--her blushes, her great grace. In those days--the last of Queen Victoria--every house had its Angel. (Woolf 171)

Woolf has mentioned the Angel in the house several times in her works. Woolf cannot stand how the Angel in the house acts. She believes that this woman is intelligent and has potentials but she is afraid to show how great she is in order not to be a rebellious in the eyes of her society. Woolf mostly kills this character to show women can live freely without expectations of society over them.

The Victorian woman suffered from patriarchy in all aspects of her life. She acts according to the norms of her society which made her lose her identity while trying to please men. Some of the Victorian women could not handle these limitations anymore. therefore, they have become the New woman. The New woman is born as a rebellion against the patriarchal beliefs of men.

#### 4. New Women

The “New Woman” is a term that is used to describe a woman who faced and rejected the stereotypical image of the Victorian woman. This image was highly demanded by readers in literary works. New women were encouraged to express their dissatisfactions about their sufferings, and they looked for a way to make their voice heard, so literature was the best way to have that right.

Some of the New Women were identified as a demon in the house. The demon is any woman who worked outside and earned money for her life and remained unmarried. She would be considered as a demon if she had a sexual intercourse with a man without being married to him. She is also an unfaithful wife and who had chosen to work as an artist, a model or an actress. Victorian society forbade such activities and categorized this woman as a demon in the house and for that she was isolated so she could not influence other women. Most of these women came from the lower-class. They worked in jobs such as prostitution that is why the Victorian era is known as the age of prostitution and strict morals.

New women could not be patient with how society treated them anymore. D.H Lawrence pointed in his book “Do Women Change?” that:

Women used to see themselves as a softly flowing stream of attraction and desire and beauty, soft quiet rivers of energy and peace. Then suddenly the idea changes. They see themselves as isolated things, independent females, instrument for love, instrument for work, instruments for politics... and as instruments they become pointed and wanted everything. (Walls 238)

New women were not defined according to the requirements of the Victorian society anymore. They changed their ideologies and they were seeking for better things for themselves.

The New woman became the protagonist in most writings because she criticized the typical British patriarchy in the world. She gave readers a chance to know her inner thoughts

also her need for independence. The New woman gave the female readers hope to change their lives, and to face Hegemony in the real world too. Both images of the Victorian woman and the New woman were cultural constitutions which made up a binary opposition and strengthen it.

### **5. Binary Opposition**

The term “binary opposition” is related to Structuralism. It describes the differences between two opposite things in addition this concept can be found in the feminist theory in which men and women appose each other within the formation of the patriarchal society and its rejection. Historically, as Feminism went through different waves, each one dealt with the concept of gender opposition differently. The First wave addressed Binary opposition as a sociological problem whereas, the Second wave viewed it in terms of language and biological difference. Finally, the Third wave viewed the binary opposition as ideological constructions and gendered language which needs reformulation. There were no agreements between the three waves concerning the interpretation of the binary opposition.

### **Conclusion**

All the three waves dealt with Feminism with different dimensions. Yet it remains correct to assert that all dealt with the recognition of women’s rights and identity. Binary oppositions and the New woman offer possible analysis in works of literature. In Virginia Woolf’s novel “*To the Lighthouse*”, she has dealt with Binary opposition, and has opposed two females. This opposition is clearly shown in Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay in the following Chapter, there will be an analysis of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe as representatives of good and evil and as old and new women in terms of patriarchy.

## Chapter Two:

# Analysis of “*To the Lighthouse*”

### Introduction

This chapter handles the practical part of this research work. First it attempts to define the element of patriarchy then extracts it from “*To the Lighthouse*”. Second, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay views on patriarchy and marriage are emphasized. In contrast, other passages that reject the old Victorian values of marriage are imbued in the words of Lily Briscoe: a character that represents the New Woman that chooses art over marriage. Finally, this chapter shows how the author sought to convey a message about how women are not supposed to be slaves of social values designed by men.

### 1. Patriarchy

The term patriarchy is usually assigned to the idea that society is a hierarchical construction where males (or men) are given more chances than their sexual counterparts (women) who sit at the bottom of the hierarchy deprived from basic rights. Moreover, sociologists consider patriarchy as a social product (construct) based on the innate and biological differences between males and females. This social organization deems women to be prisoners of domestic work and are expected to be housewives since, traditionally, men are the ones responsible for providing for the family. (Macionis 332)

#### 1.1 Patriarchy in “*To the Lighthouse*”

Woolf deals with women’s lives and positions in society among other instances in the novel. She is particularly keen to show situations and main issues for Victorian women through her main character, Mrs. Ramsay. In the novel, she dominates the first section, a typical and

ideal Victorian woman, a mother of eight children, known for her beauty, and her personality is static. She is a simple woman who acts according to the norms of the Victorian society. She denounces the drawbacks of patriarchy. Thereby, this character suffers from limitations in her society and the oppression of male characters. From the moment Mrs. Ramsay dies in the second chapter of the novel she becomes the focus of the story. Her traditional role as a Victorian woman is revealed in three aspects in the novel. They constitute the three sections of this chapter in terms of patriarchy, the Angel in the house and beauty.

### **1.2 Patriarchy in the Relationship of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay**

Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are the typical prototypes of the Victorian marriage. They reflect the gender roles of their society. Mr. Ramsay is a philosopher, a tyrant, an insensitive and short-tempered father, while Mrs. Ramsay is pure, innocent, attractive, sympathetic, patient and a caring mother. Mrs. Ramsay is oppressed by her husband who always demands sympathy from her to assure his success as a scholar.

Woolf transmits the notion that women in the Victorian era were requested to give and show sympathy to men even against women's will. Mr. Ramsay, another main character, is not satisfied with sympathy from his wife only but from all the women who surround him. Woolf portrays Mr. Ramsay by writing

And then, and then ...this was one of those moments when an enormous need urged him, without being conscious what it was, to approach any women, to force them, he did not care how, his need was so great, to give him what he wanted: sympathy" (221).

The tyrant and insensitive man does not care about women's approval to give him sympathy. Moreover, he is demanding sympathy unconsciously because he is acting according to the norm of his society, so it is a natural need for him to have. Mr. Ramsay belongs to the category of Victorian men who treat people based on his temper showing no respect when angry. He is depicted as arrogant when he starts his days:

The bedroom door would slam violently in the morning. He would start from the table in a temper. He would whiz his plate through the window. Then all through the house. There would be a sense of doors slamming and blinds fluttering, as if a gusty mind were blowing and people scudded. (292)

However, Mrs. Ramsay gives sympathy to her husband endlessly as she fears his bad mood and feels responsible for supporting him even if she doubts his potentials secretly.

He wanted sympathy. He was a failure, he said. Mrs. Ramsay flashed her needles. Mr. Ramsay repeated, never taking his eyes away from her face, that he was a failure. She blew the words back at him "Charles Tansley..." She said. But he must have more than that. It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius. (58-59)

Mrs. Ramsay tries to escape Mr. Ramsay's need of sympathy. He gives her no chance of escaping because he feels that she must sympathize him constantly. But, Mrs. Ramsay's sympathy is never enough for Mr. Ramsay because she feeds him as a baby with her infinite words when "filled with her words, like a child who drops off satisfied, he said at last, looking at her with humble gratitude" (60). The role of husband and wife disappear when described as a mother and a baby.

Mrs. Ramsay never objects her husband's needs. This makes him depend on her to feel important. Mrs. Ramsay fears that if she rejects obeying Mr. Ramsay, he would not accept her. This is also shown in her acting of being stupid in order to be accepted by him. Indeed, Woolf shows that intelligent women were threat to men. For that, men have often preferred stupid women and have considered them more beautiful being this way. By living in patriarchy, Mrs. Ramsay believes that she must behave intellectually inferior to be accepted by men. Jane Lilienfeld comments on that in the book "*New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf: where the Spear Plants Grew*" by saying: "the stupider the wife appears to the husband, the more desirable she becomes" (152). Victorian women were trained to be stupid in order to be attractive to men; Mrs. Ramsay has also been trained to appear to be less intelligent.

Mrs. Ramsay considers herself to be intellectually inferior to her husband. She believes that he is more important than she is and she "must know that of the two he was infinitely the

more important, and what she gave the world, in comparison with what he gave, negligible” (62). Despite her responsibilities as a mother of eight children, she still thinks that what she has done in her life is not important compared to what her husband has done. However, Mr. Ramsay observes his wife reading a book and thinks:

Go on reading ..., and exaggerated her ignorance, her simplicity, for he liked to think. She was not clever, not book-learned at all. He wondered if she understood what she was reading. Probably not, he thought. She was astonishingly beautiful. (182)

She is not a clever reader though she is in an intellectual activity; her husband denies her capacities and focuses on her physical appearance instead.

As was mentioned in the first chapter, Victorian women had limited freedom. They were expected to discuss certain things in life such as children, family, housewife skills and marriage.

When the Ramsays are having dinner she:

described the inequity of the English dairy system, and was about to prove her charges..., when all around the table ..., like a fire leaping from tuft to tuft of furze, her children laughed; her husband laughed; she was laughed at, fire-encircled, and forced to veil her crest. (155-156)

Mrs. Ramsay feels embarrassed and judged by her choice of a subject that is not meant to be commented by women. This situation illustrates why women in the Victorian era had quit telling their opinions about a subject of their preferences and chose to speak about what was expected from them to discuss only so as not to be ridiculed.

Mrs. Ramsay's voice is neglected, and oppressed by Mr. Ramsay. He opposes her in her ideas without a logic reason. When her son James asked her if they can go to the lighthouse, she accepts, yet Mr. Ramsay replies “it won't be fine”(10) for no reason. Then, she approves his opinion, and tells him that “yes, you were right. It's going to be wet tomorrow” (186). By not valuing herself, Mrs. Ramsay is not only oppressed by her husband, but also by other members of the family like Charles Tansley, a philosopher and a pupil of Mr. Ramsay. Tansley is only a guest but tries to control her as she makes men feel superior.

Mrs. Ramsay is also shown as a Victorian woman through her practice of knitting stockings. Knitting is an archetypal image of the Victorian era. In the novel, there are more than ten descriptions of Mrs. Ramsay's knitting such as "she was knitting impatiently" (11). "Knitting her reddish-brown hairy stockings" (48). "She returned to her knitting again" (p98). Such an activity is used as a metaphor for the traditional role of Victorian women. As it is mentioned in Fitzwilliam quote in the first chapter, Mrs. Ramsay is afraid to face men, and to show her intellectual ability. Mrs. Ramsay represents the oppressed woman in patriarchy and patriarchy in her thoughts of marriage. In the Victorian era, women were engaged in marriage and its conception as a goal to achieve in order to belong to the norm.

### **1.3 Patriarchy and Marriage**

Marriage is considered to be the most achievement for women in the Victorian era. Mostly, they marry because they have no income. Mrs. Ramsay cannot afford her trip to the lighthouse and she dies without having the opportunity to go there because "the bill for the green house would be fifty pounds" (92). Mrs. Ramsay's lack of money makes her not achieve one of her wishes. The symbolical meaning of the lighthouse is in fact Mrs. Ramsay's reach of independence and recognition of her leading role in her family; yet, it is denied. As she sees the value of men in their income, she is enthusiastic about matching couples believing that happiness can be achieved by being married. She plays a role in the marriage of Minta Doyle and Paul Rayley; however, their marriage is a whole disaster. Lily Briscoe, another main character who represents the new women, has observed their marriage, and says:

Paul had come in and gone to bed early; Minta was late. There was Minta wreathed, tinted, garish on the stairs about three o'clock in the morning. Paul came out in his pyjamas ...He spoke something violent, abusing her...he was withered, drawn; she flamboyant, careless. For things had worked loose after the first year or so; the marriage had turned out rather badly. (253-254)

Mrs. Ramsay has caused a bad marriage because such match is not based on realistic reasons to make it a successful marriage. However, she envies Minta for marrying Paul "seeing

the golden watch lying in his hands, Mrs. Ramsay felt, how extraordinary lucky Minta is! She is marrying a man who has a gold watch in a wash leather bag” (175).

Because of false expectations in marriages in the Victorian era, most of the arrangements were a failure. Couples were matched for no logical reasons. Mrs. Ramsay doubts in matching Minta and Paul is a mistake. As she reflects: “was she wrong in this, ... wondering if she had indeed put any pressure upon Minta, who was only twenty- four” (93). Mrs. Ramsay influences Minta without taking into consideration her young age for such a decision.

In another instance, she pities William Bankes for not having a family. Mrs. Ramsay observes him and “addressing herself by bending silently in his direction to William Bankes- poor man! Who had no wife and no children” (126). Mrs. Ramsay assumes that a person without company is miserable, and wants all people around her to be married, and happy with their children “but still always laughing, insist that she [Lily] must marry, Minta must, they all must marry” (77). Then, is it a fantasy in making people marry?

Mrs. Ramsay believes that women without marriage have not achieved anything because “an unmarried woman has missed the best of life” (77). Thus, women in the Victorian era feared rejection from their society if they have chosen not to marry. They feared also to be called “spinsters”; however, salient number of marriages were not successful because of this fear, and this is demonstrated in Mrs. Ramsay mania for matching couples, and for making her became the Angel in the house.

## **2. Lily Briscoe’s View on Patriarchy**

In contrast with Mrs. Ramsay as an ideal Victorian woman, Lily Briscoe, another important character, is a new modern woman. Lily is a single artist transformed from a less confident woman who was not able to finish her portrait to finally overcoming her fears and insecurities which help her to finish her painting at the end. She has a complex personality for choosing art over marriage. Also, she represents the independent woman who rejects the beliefs

of marriage and patriarchy. By being the “New Woman”, she represents the Demon in the house; moreover, with her rebellious attitude she opposes the traditional beauty standards of the Victorian era. In this novel Virginia Woolf tries to change the oppressing beliefs of her society through her character, Lily Briscoe.

### **2.1 Patriarchy in Lily’s Eyes**

While Mrs. Ramsay reflects women who supported men in order and made them feel superior, Lily deals with patriarchy differently. She opposes giving sympathy to men when she does not approve of their merit. While sympathy to men especially to a husband is duty to do, Lily finds it hard to do what is expected from her as a female subordinate. Mr. Ramsay advises Lily to show sympathy; but the latter “could not do it. She ought to have floated off instantly upon some waves of sympathy expansion: the pressure on her was tremendous” (221). Lily feels uncomfortable when Mr. Ramsay tries to make her show some sympathy to him.

Ten years after Mrs. Ramsay’s death, Mr. Ramsay shows his loneliness and despair to Lily in order to get sympathy from her as he used to get it freely and infinitely from his wife. He expects women to be like his wife and obey his needs; however, Lily confronts him by rejecting his need. She has chosen to remain true to herself.

She pretended to drink out of her empty coffee cup so as to escape him—to escape his demand on her, to put aside a moment longer that imperious need. And he shook his head at her ...she turned her back to the window lest Mr. Ramsay should see her, she must escape somewhere, to be alone somewhere. (215-216)

Lily tries to escape Mr. Ramsay’s need for sympathy, and to be by herself away from the patriarchal need of men who always ask women to accomplish what is requested to. Adding to that, he demands his need with an arrogant manner and expects her to obey it. Mr. Ramsay does not give up on getting that sympathy from Lily, and he stands beside her while she was painting. Submission is what he looks for. Lily thinks in her own words:

Sat her canvas firmly upon the easel, as a barrier, frail, but she hoped sufficiently substantial to ward off Mr. Ramsay and his exactingness... Let him be fifty feet away, let him not even speak to you, let him not even see you, he permeated, he prevailed, he imposed himself. He changed everything. She could not see the colour; she could not see the lines; even with his back turned to her, she could only think, But he'll be down on me in a moment, demanding—something she felt she could not give him... She fidgeted. That man, she thought, her anger rising in her, never gave; that man took. She, on the other hand, would be forced to give. Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died—and had left all this. (219)

Lily is interrupted by Mr. Ramsay while finishing her canvas. She is so angry that he is going to force her to give him sympathy like he has done with Mrs. Ramsay, but at the end she has just died. Mr. Ramsay's interruption for Lily's painting shows that Victorian men were annoyed to see women spend time for their own leisure. They wanted women to spend this time to take care of them and to please them rather than wasting it.

Mr. Ramsay's patience in waiting for Lily to give him sympathy is almost over, and he feels annoyed because she ignores his need (224). He is surprised that how she could resist his need because women used to please men naturally. Also, Lily has noticed Mr. Ramsay's untied boots, and instead of sympathizing his situation she compliments his boots by saying "what beautiful boots! She exclaimed. She was ashamed of herself. To praise his boots when he asked her to solace his soul" (225). Lily feels embarrassed because Mr. Ramsay is expecting her to pity him not to praise his boots.

Surprisingly, Mr. Ramsay is happy with the compliment that she has given him, and has started to talk about his boots. "Mr. Ramsay smiled" (225). Lily has not sympathized with him, but he is satisfied about her comment. Lily's rejection in giving sympathy to Mr. Ramsay is a rejection of men's patriarchal oppression over women in society. Lily remembers Mrs. Ramsay's sacrifices to her husband which are pointless because he is not pleased with the amount of sympathy that she has given to him. Lily says that "he is petty, selfish, vain, egotistical, he is spoilt; he is a tyrant, he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death" (40). The adjectives used

by Lily points to show how Victorian men were alike. They were oppressive which made women oppressed naturally.

Lily is never able to give Mr. Ramsay what his wife has given him. She “had never been able to praise him to his face, she remembered, and that reduced their relationship to something neutral” (250). Lily cannot give Mr. Ramsay fake compliments which is a mask that is not what the heart calls for. At a dinner party, when Mrs. Ramsay’s voice has been rejected by Tansley who objected her going to the lighthouse, everyone had noticed that he had been rude to her, including Lily. She remembers his words to her: “women can’t write women can’t paint” (130). She wants to take advantage of this incident, and mock him “and if she wanted revenge take it by laughing at him?” (130). Tansley’s diminishing statements have been echoing Lily’s mind whenever she wants to paint. She wants to take revenge by embarrassing him in that dinner.

Lily’s relationship with Tansley is not good, so she asks him “do take me to the lighthouse with you. I would so love it” (130). She just wants to embarrass him. He “felt isolated and lonely. He knew that she was trying to tease him for some reason; she did not want to go to the lighthouse with him; she despised him” (130). Instead of pitying him, Lily challenges Tansley who always tries to discourage her. The latter symbolizes the Victorian men who do not want women to dedicate time for their leisure trying to weaken them. Indeed, men fear that if women master writing and arts, they would lose their superiority over women.

Lily knows that men would not like a woman, like her, who dedicate most of her time to herself and to do something that is not related to men’s pleasure. Men would not see Lily as a suitable wife for them. Moreover, the other reason that Lily was able to finish her art after the death of Mrs. Ramsay is that after the Victorian era women were not restricted anymore to only draw flowers or landscapes. Women of any class then could draw portraits which were not allowed before. Also, women symbolize the traditional Victorian beliefs of not caring about

women's professions. They only support men's passion and interests, and that is what Mrs. Ramsay reflects by not encouraging Lily.

## 2.2 Patriarchy and Marriage

Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay appose each other in their ideas of marriage. Lily refuses to perform the role of being a wife, and she chooses to devote her life to art; however, Mrs. Ramsay thinks that Lily had better find a man to marry rather than to give too much attention to her art. Mrs. Ramsay believes that the role of being a wife and a mother comes before the role of choosing a profession. She thinks that if Lily prefers her profession to her expected role in marrying, she "would never marry" (29).

Lily ignores Mrs. Ramsay's reminders of the need of marriage and prefers to stay a spinster rather than being a slave to patriarchy. She believes that her art saves her from marriage. When she has been taking dinner with the Ramsays, she: "had been looking at the table-cloth, and it had flashed upon her that she would move the tree to the middle of her painting and need never marry anybody, and had felt an enormous exultation she had felt, now she could stand up to Mrs. Ramsay" (258). Therefore, Lily's thoughts suggest that she wants to prove to Mrs. Ramsay that she is able to assert herself and identity without men.

Lily has a negative image of marriage because she has seen the relationship of Mrs. Ramsay with her husband, and she does not want to deal with the oppression that Mrs. Ramsay has dealt with. She thinks that "she need not marry. Thank heaven: she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution" (154). Lily fears that if she accepts to be married, she needs to give sympathy and sacrifice herself for men without her approval which would make her lose her identity, and become inferior in her patriarchal society. Moreover, this quote shows that marriage now is not respected in the society like it was, and it does not determine a person's value anymore.

Lily qualifies Mrs. Ramsay's need for making people marry as a sickness: "what was this mania of hers for marriage?" (257). Mrs. Ramsay even tries to make Lily marry William Bankes, but she fails. After Mrs. Ramsay's death, Lily says:

Mrs. Ramsay has faded and gone, she thought. We can override her wishes; improve away her limited, old fashioned ideas. She receded further and further from us. Mockingly she seemed to see her there at the end of the corridor of years saying, of all incongruous things, "Marry, Marry!" (256).

Lily is fed up with Mrs. Ramsay's reminders about marriage, and she believes that women need to have their own right to choose to marry or not. Lily faces the patriarchal thoughts of her society, and the old beliefs of marriage, and by doing that she contradicts Mrs. Ramsay, and becomes a representative of the Demon in the house.

### **2.3 The Demon in the House**

While Mrs. Ramsay represents the angel in the house, Lily Briscoe represents the demon in the house. By being a new woman, Lily opposes Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts for she is independent and does not sacrifice herself to others. Most importantly, she has chosen art as her career, and refused to be a slave to her patriarchal society. However, Mrs. Ramsay dislikes how Lily is different, meanwhile she likes her independence because it is something that she lacks. She believes that "there was in Lily 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" (157). The New woman makes men fear her because she is cautious about her rights. Mrs. Ramsay likes the uniqueness of Lily, but she knows that the Victorian men will not because she is like a challenge to them.

Woolf deals with the weaknesses that new women met on their way to independence. Lily has insecurities about herself which are transmitted through some difficulties finishing her canvas which reflects her journey to know herself and her value. She has doubted herself and her abilities as a painter because her society tries to weaken her. "She could have wept .it was

bad, it was bad, it was definitely bad! She could have done it differently of course; the colour could have been thinned and faded” (75). The Victorian society, dominated by men, makes women doubt what they have chosen to do especially if it is something odd for them in their conception.

At first, Lily has even refused to show her painting to anyone. If she is painting, and a person passes by her, she immediately hides her canvas. She “turn her canvas upon the grass” (30). Lily has not been confident enough about herself to show her art to others because she fears criticism. By refusing to be an angel in the house, Lily bothers Mrs. Ramsay by refusing her old values and thoughts. Mrs. Ramsay thinks that:

Oh, but Lily would say, there was her father; her home; even, had she dared to say it, her painting .But all this seemed so little, so virginal, against the other... gathering a desperate, courage, she would urge her own exemption from the universal law, plead for it, she liked to be alone; she liked to be herself; she was not made for that. (77)

Lily confronts Mrs. Ramsay, and this triggered her because she feels that she is challenged by her. Lily has achieved self-fulfillment. She has chosen not to please her patriarchal society. By doing that, Woolf shows women the path for freedom, and to choose themselves rather than their society. Which indicates that new women has replaced the Victorian women with new and liberated thoughts to face their patriarchal societies.

While finishing her canvas, Lily remembers the memories of Mrs. Ramsay. She has understood that Mrs. Ramsay has scarified herself because she has been living in a patriarchal society. Despite all the difficulties, she has never complained about anything. In fact, she has been trying to bring harmony and peace to her family. By doing all of that, she has lost herself at the end. Lily has been unable to finish Mrs. Ramsay’s painting because she has been confused about Mrs. Ramsay’s identity. During the process of painting Mrs. Ramsay’s features, she unveils her identity and the purpose of acting the way she did. Lily “owed it all to her” (237).

Painting has helped Lily to understand the reasons why Victorian women have become oppressed by men. She owed her success to Mrs. Ramsay.

In her painting, Lily reflects her understanding of the relationship of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, and other characters like Minta and Paul, Charles Tansley, William Bankes, and most importantly herself. By doing that, Lily becomes a modern symbol who transcends the sufferings and difficulties of the Victorian traditions through her piece of art.

The novel ends with a line that states “I have had my vision” (306). This shows the writer, Virginia Woolf, and Lily Briscoe’s accomplishment of fulfilling their identity, and understanding themselves. Lily’s accomplishment of her painting is also Woolf’s accomplishment of her novel. This quote replies to Charles Tansley’s words, and to the patriarchal society’s beliefs. By doing that, Woolf shows that women can paint and can write. Woolf rejects the stereotypes of the Victorian era through her character Lily Briscoe who has represented the Demon in the house.

## **Conclusion**

Virginia Woolf’s novel is an influential work. She tells the story of a traditional woman oppressed by patriarchy. The obedient angel in the house, Mrs. Ramsay would compel to her man’s orders. A great pressure was put on the lives of women in the Victorian era. Thus, Woolf aimed at delivering a message that the sacrifices of women in satisfying their society make them lose themselves and their identity. The death of Mrs. Ramsay in the novel symbolizes the death of the “old woman” that followed blindly the patriarchal structure of societies. As a result, new values are born: the dawn of the “new woman” that does more than just being a housewife and take care of her house; Lily Briscoe is the embodiment of these new values: a revolutionary woman that chose art over societal chains.

## General Conclusion

Woolf portrays old women as only caring mothers for men, and that deprives them from their social rights. The novel also showed that women had given men what they needed despite their responsibilities, but that was never enough for men. Victorian men, from another side, tried to get women out of all what they consider pleasant and interesting. A man objected a woman for she could lead her life the way that pleases her.

Mrs. Ramsay supported men, but never women. She did not encourage Lily to seek her passion of painting; yet, Lily was able to finish her painting of Mrs. Ramsay at the end of the novel, her participation in making Mrs. Ramsay exist at another level shows that New Women have faced Victorian men and have joined their fields, and have mastered them.

Completing the painting after Mrs. Ramsay's death suggested a symbolic death of the Victorian beliefs and values. Lily's choice of art profession also symbolizes the rebellion of new women against men's patriarchy to promote the idea that art has become a tool to break the claims. The latter, as Woolf showed, are imposed by the patriarchal society, to put limitations on women. Thus, women faced the patriarchal limitations of their society and faced the patriarchal thoughts about marriage.

Throughout the narrative, Woolf promoted the rebellious image of women through her character, Lily Briscoe. The latter displayed the feminist ideas of Woolf regarding the old traditional Victorian values. Woolf attempted to give hope to women by showing how Lily represented a place for change for them to have a stronger role in life, and to be independent and free from all the limitations of society. Facing patriarchal thoughts was through rejecting the oppression of men and the old traditional thoughts of marriage.

The two female characters represented a binary opposition. Mrs. Ramsay was the angel in the house, but Lily became the demon in the house according to how the society considered her. For that, the new woman seemed to make other females -even readers- to have some hope for change in their lives, and to have courage to achieve anything they want, and this has made Virginia Woolf's novel a feminist thought and viewpoint regarding the social conditions of the author herself.

The present dissertation contained two chapters. The first chapter was devoted to the theories regarding feminism and its waves. It also tackled the feminist ideas, arguments and criticism. The "Victorian" and "New" women were also addressed. The second chapter highlighted the portrayals of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe's lives, acts and claims throughout the novel. It analyzed how different their ideas and viewpoints were. In addition, Woolf's characterization of both Victorian females was analyzed through indicating and reflecting on the author's own life and viewpoints related to patriarchy.

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