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“The inadequacy of Human Relationships in *To the Lighthouse*: Gender-role Stratification and Victorian Discourse on Marriage”

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*Para Juana, fiel compañera.*

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“Nada en mi es original, soy el esfuerzo combinado  
de cada persona que alguna vez he conocido.”

---*Monstros Invisibles*. Chuck Palahniuk.

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## **Introduction**

*“I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work.”*

---Virginia Woolf, “Suicide Note”.

## 1

The writer Virginia Woolf (1882- 1941) is one of the most eminent British writers from Modernist 20<sup>th</sup> century. She represents many of the qualities that were developed during this period. In word of Ruth Webb, one of her biographers, “Virginia Woolf attracts some of the most diverse responses of any twentieth-century writer” (6). To mention some, Woolf is studied as a feminist icon, as well as a brilliant author that helped developing new writing techniques, such as the interior monologue, since the nature of her writing is highly experimental. At the same time, she is also criticized for her academic and social class snobbery. It is in one of her essays, “Modern Fiction”, that we can look at her conception of the previous literary trend, Realism – “If we fasten, then, one label on all these books [Realist narrative], on which is one word materialists, we mean by it that they write of unimportant things; that they spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring” (187). This very same reason is what make her turn inwardly to the characters, to spend her skills on what she considered to be what really mattered, and not waste time in unnecessary external description.

Virginia Woolf was born into a privileged family, her father, Leslie Stephen, was an eminent scholar; while her mother, Julia Jackson, came from a highly-educated social background. The Novel *To the Lighthouse* is regarded, in part, as an autobiographical work, because it reflects Woolf’s childhood spent with her family. It is a shared opinion among scholars that the Ramsay family from the novel have clear parallels with her parents, a very authoritarian father, who is a respected academic, and a warm-hearted woman, who resembles an angel. She was homeschooled, since women did not have access to public education outside the household. Her personal life was no stranger to emotional issues, for she suffered from depression and had several nervous breakdowns during her life. Virginia Woolf’s life ended suddenly in 1941. When, believing she was losing her mind, Woolf

drowned herself in the river Ouse. She left a small piece of writing addressed to her husband, Leonard Woolf, explaining the reasons that drove her to commit suicide.

Woolf was best known at her time for her novels and non-fiction literary criticism. She explored many genres—journals, letters, short stories, and drama were some among them. A common key characteristic in her fictional work is the inner complexity presented in her characters, due to the fact that Woolf believes that we are but a multitude of selves that interact and conflict. Webb observes Woolf “recognized that she occasionally contradicted herself, and she consciously gave this tendency to characters in her novels” (6). This development allowed her to go further into describing her characters’ consciousness, and allowed us to glimpse into their inner states rather than just observe their actions. In order to express this complexity, she exploited writing techniques such as the interior monologue and the stream of consciousness.

This analysis addresses issues presented in Virginia Woolf’s novel *To the Lighthouse*, a milestone of modernist writing. This masterpiece was published in 1927, twelve years later than her first novel-size work, *The Voyage Out*. *To the Lighthouse* has little action; the events are set during the holidays of the Ramsays family in the Isle of Skye, who, along with some friends, spend summer time in their countryside house. Four are the characters taken into account for this analysis, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, Lily Briscoe, and William Bankes.

Mr. Ramsay is a renowned philosopher of his time, he is strict and concerned with academic affairs, intellect is extremely important for him, and he sees knowledge as a cumulative substance, very rigid and academic. Mrs. Ramsay, on the other hand, is a tender mother and loving wife, an angel whose main concern is the welfare of others. They have eight children. Even though, marriage is a major theme in the novel, The Ramsays are the only marriage presented in the actual development of the novel, the rest of the references to marriage are made in retrospective. They embody the discourse of marriage that was hegemonic in Woolf’s time, Victorian England. The family shared their summerhouse with friends; Mrs. Bankes, the Botanist; Lily Briscoe, the painter; Charles Tansley, the scholar working in his dissertation; Michael Carmichael, the poet, are some of these friends.

As it was mentioned above, the novel is not center in the action, but rather in the character's consciousness, how they internally react to observation of others and the outside. How they relate to others, and try to convey themselves to the rest. The novel is divided in three sections – “The Window”, “Time Passes” and “The Lighthouse”. *To the Lighthouse* starts with James Ramsay's desire to go visit the lighthouse that is visible from the summer house, he is a young boy with a lot of hopes about the trip to this little lighthouse. However, he faces his father's refusal to do such trip because of the weather forecast. The trip is not carried out for another ten years.

*To the Lighthouse* is concerned with characterization, and how characters in the novel subjectively describe the world through their thoughts and observations. As Woolf argues in the essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”, character reading and description skills are vital for a writer (2). This assertion is made when she compares her writing with some of her contemporaries, Mr. Bennett one of them, who were closer to Realism. In contrast, she believed description should not be concerned with the external as a central focus. Woolf explains in the same essay, Realist description uses a lot of resources in describing the unimportant. Woolf's interest was “not much description of the world” (6). But description about a character's inner states; modernist writers attempted to describe human consciousness. It is for this same reason that a modernist prose is “enormously compressed” (6). The nature of the undertaking requires a certain denseness in the work, Peter Childs suggests that modernist prose have to be read as philosophy, every sentence, every phrase have to be read closely. These characteristics shape *To the Lighthouse* as a novel, unlike Realist works, having no fixed reading or meaning. It is the reader's task to give meaning to the work.

**From this richness of descriptions in the novel, this analysis ventures to, first, report how the hegemonic Victorian discourse on marriage is presented in the novel and, second, describe the characters' relation to this discourse, in other words, how they interact and conflict with it. The last stage in the analysis, from a gender-role perspective, will be an attempt to glimpse Woolf's modern conception on the nature of human relation through her character's interaction, and how the discourse on marriage and its gender-role expectations shapes and effects the connection among the characters in the novel.**



Although, there is a great amount of literature on Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* that deals with the topic of how the characters establish relationships among them, and how they are many times unsuccessful. What this analysis will try to add is report how gender roles expectations play a crucial part in the inadequacy of character relationships in the novel. Also, to answer how these conflicts are resolved, or not resolved, in the novel.

Addressing the interaction among characters in *To the Lighthouse*, this analysis aims for a deep understanding of the novel that will unveil and explain the discourses of marriage present and human nature that is present in the novel. This analysis will be supported by a description of Woolf's historical context that will be of help as a standpoint of comparison from where her opinions seek to be differentiated. Finally, using ideas from other of Woolf's critical works, such as *Three Guineas*, *The Common Reader*, and *A Room of One's Own*, and some other nonfiction writings will be useful to grasp Woolf's own ideas regarding the topics analyzed in this paper.

## 2

Personally, what made me interested in this author was her concern with gender roles and society. Particularly, the idea of the "Androgynous Mind" that a writer should have. From an early age, she was aware of the "unequal treatment of the sexes." (4) View that was always present in her writing along with the complexity of her characters mentioned above. Ellen Bayuk Rosenman notes that "Woolf felt uneasy in this world [Victorian society]. However much an insider her pedigree made her, Victorians beliefs about gender excluded her as well. The belief in separate spheres strictly limited the kinds of experience and power available to women." (4) Woolf was conscious of the limitations her society imposed on women.

One of Virginia Woolf's most studied texts *A Room of One's Own* is a great source to explore her ideas regarding gender and how a writer should address it. Rosenman claims that *A Room of One's Own* is one of her first concerted attempts to create a counter-theory to Victorian sex roles." (5) And that this collection of essays is also "the first theory of

literary inheritance in which gender was the central category” (11). In “A Room of One’s Own” Woolf shows us her concert with gender treatment; she regards Victorian patriarchy as an ideology used to subjugate women. Rosenman states that in Woolf’s opinion “men not only monopolize power, but they do so on the basis of some alleged natural right or capacity that women are said to lack” (30) from this view, Woolf exposes her idea that gender is socially constructed; therefore, it can be changed and modified. There is nothing natural, as Victorian men claimed, in women that make them inferior. In Woolf’s society, women and other men that not fulfill the patriarchy requirements are not accepted in this hegemonic group of the patriarchy.

Among the many ideas exposed in *A Room of One’s Own* and not being the principal, there is one that caught my attention; in the second part of the essay, Woolf claims that a writer should have an androgynous mind. By being unconscious about one’s sex, the writer can express his or her feelings more freely. In the text, Woolf explains that she began wondering about this idea when she saw one man and one women getting into a taxi; as a kind of revelation, she saw two people of opposite sex becoming one. She concludes “One sex as distinct from the other is an effort. It interferes with the unity of the mind” (100).

Woolf thinks that when a writer speaks from a self-conscious position regarding one’s sex “one is unconsciously holding something back, and gradually the repression becomes an effort. (101) following the same idea, she also argues that “it is natural for the sexes to co-operate” (101). In other words, one sex should dominate the other. Originally, Virginia Woolf took the label of the androgynous mind from the British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, after the reading of one of his essays. She wonders if he meant that “It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine” Her conclusion is that the combination of both is the best way to achieve great literary fertility. She continues, “He meant, perhaps, that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided” (102) She insists that this is the way to a limitless creative mind. In other word, Woolf is conveying that in order for a writer to express completely “one must be woman-manly or man-womanly” (108).

Illustrations of her views can be found throughout the essay. For example, She mentions one of her contemporary writer, Dorothy Osborne, indicating that “She wrote as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman, so that her pages were full of that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself” (96) In Woolf’s words, even though she did not have the genius of many others, she could achieve something they could not. On the other hand, a female writer of greater genius ‘will write for herself where she should write of her characters’ (73) restraining herself for expressing wholly.

In addition, Woolf mentions the effect that this self-conscious writing has in men “virility has now become self-conscious --men, that is to say, are now writing only with the male side of their brains.” (106) she employs a fictional writer to illustrate that men also fall into this malpractice to being over conscious of sex. This fictional character also limits his literary ability. Having this androgynous mind is of vital importance to Virginia Woolf because for her “a novel has to correspond to real life, its values are to some extent those of real life” (77). And a writer should be able to understand both sides to convey these feelings authentically. I wanted to expose these ideas, since we can extract a more general ideal regarding Virginia Woolf and gender, which is, a rigid and, sometimes, arbitrary assignation of gender roles limits a person. There is the idea that someone cannot express themselves fully when framed by these rigid conventions.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Virginia Woolf was born at the end of what is called Victorian England, 1882. This designation comes from the long reign of Queen Victoria, from 1837 to 1901. Although, few common features are transversal to the whole period, it is characterized by a separation of between public and private spheres in British society. Where men are out making the newly industrialized society; while women, stayed home to protect the family.

Woolf was an active writer at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the ideals of Victorian England were dying, and modernity and its artistic reaction, modernism, were taking its place. Modernism is a difficult term to define, in the introductory guide by the same name, *Modernism*, Peter Childs offers us two ways in which the term can be regarded; as a time bound concept from 1890 to 1930; or as a timeless one, taking into account the group of artist and writers that shared a set of common characteristic in their work. These works are “aesthetically radical, contains striking technical innovation [...] [and] tend towards ironic modes” (2). Virginia Woolf fits into these two ways of framing the concept. Her works were published during that period, and, along many other writers, she reacts to the previous literary trend, Realism.

As it has been said, Modernist writing sought to break with the previous dominant style of writing in Victorian England, Realism. Realism, in turn, from *The reader's Encyclopedia*, was “literature that attempts to depict life in an entirely objective manner, without idealization of glamour, and without didactic or moral ends” (Benét 1). Realist authors attempted to portray an objective representation of reality through their writing. On the contrary, Modernist literature was looking for alternative ways to represent the world, focusing in the subjective representation of different realities. Childs tells us that Virginia Woolf “is often regarded as the exemplary Modernist novelist because of her use of interior monologue, recurrent motifs, fragmented time, and intense lyricism” (162). Modernism is “associated with attempts to render human subjectivity in ways more real than realism: to represent [...] meaning and the individual's relation to society” (3). This individual relation to others, to society is present in the novel.

On the one hand, although Woolf was born at the down of Victorian England; she was raised in a Victorian family. Her father was a prominent English writer and critic that

would install Victorian culture inside his home. It is important to mention that his powerful personality would mark Virginia for life; in her diary she mentions the fact that his death was fundamental in her decision to become a writer (Greenblatt 981). She was critically aware of the dominant power his figure had over her. On the other hand, Virginia Woolf, among many other writers at the beginning of the 20th century, made an effort to differentiate herself from the Victorians. Their old ideologies and sensibilities were not shared by this new group of writers (981 Greenblatt). Mocking the previous trend was common for writers from Modernism, and in *To the Lighthouse*, we can appreciate Victorian ideals of marriage being contrasted with a new sensibility brought in by the turn of the century, and present in Woolf's sensibility as a writer.

The position of women in society was a constant topic in Woolf's writing. During Victorian England, women were expected to stay home and look after the children. In other words, women were part of the private sphere and had little power in society. Virginia Woolf was well aware of this fact and it is present throughout her work. Her essay, "Killing the Angel in the House", tells us about her own self-liberating process from the oppression of Victorian expectations on women. To put her in context, it was only in 1908, that the English parliament approved the Married Women's Property Acts that allowed married women were to handle their own property. In relation to this, one of Woolf's most famous essay, *A Room of One's Own*, clearly states that a woman needs economic independence to be able to create and perform as the same level as a man did. From these facts it is possible to say that women had but little power at Woolf's time. They had to be subjugated to their husbands. The poem "The Angel in the house" is a perfect example of the imaginary of women in Victorian England – selfishness and tender to their families, with no real self and ambitions. I will come back to the ideas presented in this poem in the analysis section.

In the book, *A History of Marriage*, Elizabeth Abbott gives us some notes on how marriage worked during the Victorian period. During this time, many marriage guides were written; these "guides painted cautionary portraits of what marriage could be" (68). Also, novels became sorts of marriage manuals. "By the Victorian era, this genre proliferated, with the stories usually structured to preach moral messages contextualized within lifelike stories" (64). It is important to associate this with the hegemonic literary tendency at the time, realism. That tried to be a reliable portrait of society. Abbott also

notes that, although, there existed women liberation movements that criticized male tyranny, women still married. “The New Woman remained a wife dependent on her breadwinner husband” (172) *To the Lighthouse* is not a direct attack to the institution of marriage, only one character, Lily Briscoe, goes to the extent of considering marriage as something negative. What the novel looks at from a critical point of view are how gender roles from Victorian England are, at times, detrimental to a full development of relationships among the characters.

## 2

As I have introduced above, Virginia Woolf was a writer in an effervescent period. The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would as well be the beginning for different ideals. Modernity would come to break with the two-faced social life of Victorian life. Modernism, in turn, would seek to separate itself from this modernity in aesthetics terms. Woolf is considered one of the first English modernist writers, this *firstness* is what makes her subject of analysis, she writes between two eras, context from which she cannot escape. Thus, to claim that she had a complete modern set mind is not possible. The reason being that, it is inevitable to say that her background is present in all her writings.

From a historical point of view, the aim of this study is to analyze her modern discourse about marriage and gender-based human relations and how they are in conflict with the ones from her own context – late Victorian England. Also, how this is shown in her work; in *To the Lighthouse*, particularly. For this reason that I have chosen to follow the claims of new historicism. One of the mayor claims of New Historicism is to see how social values that are contemporary to the work are presented or refuted in it. One of the aims in this study is to analyze how the ideology of Victorian marriage is refuted and shown as destructive in the novel.

New historicist critics seek to study literature from a cultural and historical perspective. New historicism was born in the decade of 1980; its mayor representative is Stephen Greenblatt, American literary critic. Greenblatt states that the historical background of any work must not be detached from it; quite the contrary, it plays a major role in its understanding. He professes that “New historicists are determinedly suspicious of

unified, monolithic depictions of cultures or historical periods” (3), in other words, they do not look at history as a holistic truth, but as a fragmented point of view. Thus, Woolf’s discourse about marriage would come to be one of these fragments.

In the essay, “New Historicism and Literary Studies”, Mukesh Williams, university professor, cleverly defines the aim of new historicists. His view is that new historicists “look at history more as "glorious fragments" than "a set of coherent histories." They believe that people move restlessly and unpredictably to new places and, finding themselves in new situations, create new literary scholarship, literature or histories” (117). In my view, Virginia Woolf is one of these “restlessly people” that moved to new places and created novel literature and history. Her own ambivalent feelings towards marriage created this new situation.

In the text *The Greenblatt Reader*, Greenblatt gives us three presuppositions of New Historicism to function of guidelines of this type of analysis (118). First, literature has a historical base and literary works are not the products of a single consciousness but many social and cultural forces. In order to understand literature one has to take recourse to both culture and society that gave rise to it in the first place, that is the reason why it is fundamental to situate the novel and the author in the context of production, Victorian England. Being aware of the hegemonic discourses of the period help as standpoint to compare a work that emerges from a new modern sensibility, as it *To the Lighthouse*. Second, literature is not an objective human activity, but another vision of history. This has obvious implications for both literary theory and the study of literary texts. Since, taking this claim, Woolf’s novel can be considered as her own vision of history, her own critical vision of Victorian society. Finally, since literature and human beings are both shaped by social and political forces, it is not possible to talk of an intrinsic human nature that can transcend history. Gender-role assignation is this social and political force that shapes human interaction among the characters in the novel. These three claims will be considered as a starting point when analyzing Virginia Woolf’s novel and the context from which she comes from.

Another major figure of New Historicism is the French philosopher, Michael Foucault, whose work has been vastly used in Historical Criticism. According to Williams, new historicists employ three of Foucault’s ideas – “his concept of discourse, the



construction of power and knowledge and the question of the human subject.” The concept of discourse in Foucault’s terms refer to the set of practices “associated with particular institutions and their ways of establishing orders of truth, or what is accepted as 'reality' in a given society” (79). In the context of Virginia Woolf, this would come to be the practices and ideologies that supported the institution of marriage in Victorian England. It is interesting to notice that “an established 'discursive formation' is in fact defined by the contradictory discourses it contains” (79). And Woolf’s own contradictory discourse of marriage is the one I will be attempting to untangle here. In Foucault’s own definition, from his book, *The Archeology of Knowledge* – “to analyze discourse is to hide and reveal contradictions; it is to show the play that they set up within it; it is to manifest” (168). Therefore, to analyze the discourse on marriage presented in *To the Lighthouse* is to reveal her contradiction from a modern time with Victorian hegemonic discourse of marriage and gender roles.

The construction of power in any group of people comes from, in Foucault’s view, institutionalized discourses. These discourses, already defined, “open up delimited forms of action, knowledge and being” (206). The discourses in Victorian England in relation to marriage had to do with the institutionalized subjugation of women and their “selfishness” self. Finally, the question of the human subject has to do directly with the exertion of power through discourses on people. The term “subject” “implies a divided rather than unified identity” (241). It refers to being subjected to particular discourses in a particular society, and at the inner subjectivities of a fragmented subject. In *To the Lighthouse*, it is possible to appreciate the conflicts the characters have with the institution of Victorian marriage.

In the colossal study, *Virginia Woolf’s Philosophy*, M. F. Hussey explains that human relations are inevitably flawed in Woolf’s work and that she does not seem to offer any way in which this can be changed (i). This analysis seeks to report how gender roles play a part in making these human relationships flawed. One of the main reasons for human relations to be flawed, Hussey claims, is the inadequacy of language. That is to say, basically, that the characters are unable to convey their selves fully through language. That is why, in a novel that tells us a great deal about human relations, as *To the Lighthouse* does, actual speech is not the main way in which we discover the discourse about human nature in Woolf’s novel. Inner observations are the main source from which many Woolf’s

critics support their claims. It is in this realm that we can grasp a better understanding of human nature.

Hussey points out that the idea that emerges is “of a world characterized by a lack, by a sense of an abstract ‘gap’ in being which cannot be directly referred to in language” (vii). This is the reason, he declares, why human relations in Woolf’s work are flawed. In her detailed analysis of the novel, *A corpus stylistic study of To the Lighthouse*, Reiko Ikee supports this claim adding that “Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* depicts complexity and subtlety of human relationships by presenting multiple characters’ consciousness” (11). By presenting them through inner monologues and streams of consciousness, and not through actual language.

In a summarized way, it can be said that from the literature on Virginia Woolf’s approach to human relations, there are some fundamental aspects to consider. On the one hand there are the rather internal factors mentioned above, such as the inadequacy of language and the desire of knowledge of the other. On the other hand, there are some that are more visible and tangible, such as the male-female relationships, and the body of the characters and his or her relation with it. In this analysis, I will focus my attention on the actual opinions the characters hold about marriage and its consequences.

### 3

Some notion from gender studies will be of use when reading the analysis. Virginia Woolf’s ideas regarding gender roles are not as sophisticated as the one presented in academic settings today. That is because; she is one of the very first authors that deal with ideas regarding the social influence in gender construction. It is important to say that the concept of gender relation for Woolf does not have to do with a disintegration of the roles, rather it is a critical view on how the particular roles assigned to men and women in her society were detrimental to their own development and to the development of their relationships.

Since the birth of feminist studies, researchers have been working on the concept of gender and how it affects power relations in our society. Among them, there is a particular subgroup interested in how gender roles are constructed in society; here is where a key

concept to study gender has been born - “Hegemonic gender roles”. That, in general terms, refers to the set of characteristics seemingly ‘desired’ by a certain society in the construction of these roles; these characteristics are not necessarily positive, but the contrary in many cases ; however, people regard them as requirements for people who want to fit into the norm of patriarchy in a certain group.

Currently, there are varied opinions regarding how to define the concept in clear lines. But there is general agreement saying that it is not something universal or transversal; social class , gender, place of origin, and so on, there are many other factors that will affect how people select what is “hegemonic” in a certain society. We cannot talk about “hegemonic” femininity in patriarchal societies, where men are still the ones who concentrate the power. In other words, there are many masculinities and femininities in any society; and a patriarchal society has to “pick” what are the features they regard as necessary to construct a certain masculinity that become

In Mike Donaldson’s essay “What is Hegemonic Masculinity?” , the broad concept of hegemonic, taken from Marxism, “involves persuasion of the greater part of the population, particularly through the media, and the organization of social institutions in ways that “appear” natural, “ordinary,” and “normal.” (2) Victorian literature can be considered as a media in Woolf context. Therefore, the gender roles that are being imposed through media, many times without people realizing, acquires a hegemonic nature, because it is what people will take as “normal” and what they will expect in males and females in their group, the social institution of marriage has this normative nature. If we can listen to every joke ever made questioning someone’s “masculinity”, we will quickly realize that the characteristics people take up to make fun of someone are exactly the one that “deviate” from the hegemonic concept of masculinity that different agents try to impose. Among the most influential agents making masculine sexual ideology are priests, journalists, advertisers, politicians, filmmakers, actors, and so on. They are the “wavers of the fabric of hegemony.” (Donaldson 3) They work together to generate this “desire” goal that people have to achieve to become part of the norm. Even though, these are contemporary considerations regarding gender, they can be well applied to Woolf’s context, where people had they discourse of marriage as normal and healthy, despite being negative from a

modern perspective. Woolf's modern and dissident view on the subject let us know how she did not agree on the matter.

Research has unveiled several sources from where we can study hegemonic gender role-role construction; primarily from experiences taken from people who do not fit the "norm" and look at the privileged ones from outside; that is to say, women and other "subordinated" men. As I mentioned above, women are a group affected by what is chosen to be "hegemonic", Connell mentions that the term has been largely used to represent the "practice that allowed men's dominance over women to continue." (832) as we can notice, the concept of "hegemonic gender roles" has been constructed from relations between men, between women, and from relations between men and women.

It is important to mention that the concept of "hegemonic gender roles" is not universal; it may change depending the culture, country, social class, state or even particular group of people. For example, the characteristics a man in a working class neighborhood has to adopt to be "respected" by his peers, let say the kind of language he uses, will change drastically when the same person goes to a job interview; he knows he cannot talk the same way, social norms constrain him. A local notion of "hegemony" may be subjected to a national notion of masculinity that is shown in television or performed by respected men of the country. This analysis is framed on what was considered hegemonic in Victorian England.

The men in power are the ones that dictate what hegemonic is; gaining their own profit from this – either to constrain other men, such as in the example above , or to have control over women . These men in power have to "legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance." (Donaldson 12) this is one way used to perpetuate their power. In "From Hegemonic Masculinity to the Hegemony of Men", Jeff Hearn explains that for people to accept the discourse of a certain "hegemony" to be accepted, the discourse has to "involve both the consent of some men, and, in a very different way, the consent of some women to maintain patriarchal relations of power." (52). we can clearly see this in *To the Lighthouse*'s characters. In this sense, women are also carriers of the ideas that hegemonic gender roles enforce upon them, for example a mother that teaches her sons to protect women, and not the other way around; or teaching her daughters to be careful about being raped, but not teaching her sons not to rape.

## **Analysis**

## 1

The poem “The Angel in the House” presents the ideal expectations about marriage in Victorian society. This poem was written by the British writer Coventry Patmore, and it has become an unparalleled portrayal of the image of marriage in Victorian England. As it was mentioned in the introduction, much of the realist literature from Victorian England tried to give moral codes of behavior to their readers, and this poem falls into this classification. “The Angel in the House” presents Coventry's views on his marriage and wife – “Man must be pleased; but him to please, Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf, of his condoled necessities, she casts her best, she flings herself” (2 -5 Book I, Canto IX). It is in these few lines, fundamental marital expectations are presented; these are a clear sample of the hegemonic discourse on marriage in Victorian society.

The first expectation is that “Man must be pleased”, men become marriage central focus. The second expectation set forth is that it is “women’s pleasure” to please men, there seems to be something inherited in women’s nature that makes them feel this “pleasure”. Finally, the third expectation given by the poem is that a woman “flings herself” to please men, they have to be ready to give up their selves to make men pleased. We can see how the poem unveils a basic dichotomy presented in Victorian England gender roles. This is that , within the interaction of marriage in the private sphere of society, men play the role of the ‘receivers’; while women play the role of the ‘givers’ ready to fling themselves for men, even at the cost of losing their own selves. With regard to gender roles expectations in the public sphere of society is out of the scope of this analysis; however, it is important to mention that men also play the role of the ‘doers’ in society, they are expected to be the ones that make the world move and society advance. These gender-role expectations are found in Virginia Woolf’s modernist writings, where she handles these issues from a critical perspective.

Characters’ observations and thoughts are a crucial source of analysis on the subject of marriage and how it shapes human interaction; four are the characters that will be taken into account for the sake of this analysis, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, Lily Briscoe, and William Banks. A fragmented Victorian discourse on marriage is found, in different degrees, in them. Mrs. Ramsay, the quintessential wife, appears in the novel as the prime source of the discourse on Victorian marriage, she is an amateur matchmaker. For example, two

friends invited to the Ramsays' summer house, Minta and Paul got married with the help of Mrs. Ramsay. Although she believes this new couple "will be perfectly happy", she also feels "life rather sinister again, making Minta marry Paul Rayley; [...] she was driven on [...] as if it were an escape for her too, to say that people must marry; people must have children" (60). Here comes up a slight and hidden questioning to marrying, why is that people have to get married as she did, asked Mrs. Ramsay? "She had had experiences which need not happen to everyone" (60). This in particular makes her feel sinister, to put pressure on people to get married cause a little unease in her, why is that? lightly, ideals from Victorian England marriage are starting to crumble. Paul himself treats the engagement as a personal triumph – "It had been far and away the worst moment of his life when he asked Minta to marry him. He would go straight to Mrs. Ramsay, because he felt somehow that she was the person who had made him do it. She had made him think he could do anything" (78). Paul is proud of the way he has performed his role as a man, and he is eager to report to the primary source of Victorian discourse on marriage, Mrs. Ramsay. Nonetheless, the contradiction inside Mrs. Ramsay is clear, she symbolizes an ideal Victorian wife, yet, she unconsciously feels uneasy, her lead is to think there is something off, life becomes sinister, life (Victorian society) becomes her rival.

On the other hand, Lily Briscoe's observations show a much more straightforward critique to the discourse on marriage presented in *To the Lighthouse*. Her opinion is that – "she need not marry, thank Heaven: she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution (102). "Degradation" and "dilution" are directly related to the ideals about marriage presented in Coventry's poem, they are overtly rebellious to the ideas that a woman's pleasure is to please men and that a woman has to ready to give up herself for men's sake. As we have seen, she is conscious how this hegemonic discourse has an influence on women's self and she is not willing to compromise in order to fit into the patters her society offers. Before going deeper into the examination of the Victorian discourse on marriage in the novel, some additional points from "The Angel in the House" will be addressed.

*To the Lighthouse* allows us to glimpse at a historically specific model of truth and authority and what devices reproduce the discourse that control society, particularity, regarding the institution of marriage. The task is to reveal this discourse of marriage present in the novel with to show Woolf's critique to the system and try to unveil her own discourse on marriage and human relations in her fiction.

A defined discourse on hegemonic Victorian marriage framed *To the Lighthouse*. This discourse is introduced through a series of devices that put it as the central moral standpoint in the novel, leaving other discourses as dissident to the hegemonic one. The main symbols of the institution of marriage in the novel are The Ramsays, from them it is that the rest of the characters take a standpoint, and shape their opinions on marriage. The following lines are Mr. Ramsay's own opinion about roles in marriage – "He liked men to work [...] and women to keep house, and sit besides sleeping children indoors" (164). The verbs used are direct - men "work", while women "keep [the] house". This quote illustrates the clear-cut division between public and private spheres that dominated Victorian English society, a very rigid separation that was, in particular, detrimental to women's liberties. They also relate to the ideas presented in the "Angel in the House". "Man must be pleased" – sentence that sounds natural in the context of the poem. The choice of the verb "Must" leaves out any alternative, it is not women's or even men's choice; it is the natural gender play in the society. We notice how the hegemonic discourse favors men over women. It is crucial to observe that men, regardless of their position and worth in relation to women, are capable of influence women and subjugate them under a patriarchal hierarchy, to benefit from the status quo they do not have to be morally or mentally superior. In a conversation with Mr. Bankes, Lily easily spots Mr. Ramsay's flaws as she says to him – "You have greatness, [...], but Mr. Ramsay has none of it. He is petty, selfish, vain, egotistical; he is spoilt; he is a tyrant; he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death" (24). Nonetheless, Mr. Ramsay is still portrayed as a respected member of society throughout the novel, even Mr. Bankes cannot but respect Mr. Ramsay. It is important to make reference the last part of the passage "he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death", while he receives mostly benefits from their marriage, Mrs. Ramsay does not seem to grow with the relation, quite the contrary, there



are many instances in the novel that show her as being tired and exhausted from the requirements that are imposed over her. She, unlike Mrs. Ramsay, has to be perfect.

Although Lily Briscoe is not married, the same impositions can be observed in her interactions with others. She realized that pleasing men is an important part of being a woman in Victorian England – during the dinner at the Ramsay's house, Lily perceives that “there is a code of behaviour, [...], whose seventh article (it may be) says that on occasions of this sort it behaves the woman, whatever her own occupation might be, to go to the help of the young man opposite so that he may expose and relieve the thigh bones, the ribs, of his vanity, of his urgent desire to assert himself; as indeed it is their duty, she reflected, in her old maidenly fairness, to help us, suppose the Tube were to burst into flames” (91). The man who makes her fall into this reflection is actually Mr. Tansley. Despite the fact that Lily is not fond of Mr. Tansley, she feels the urge of helping him, against her reasoning, all the history behind her is telling her to help a man, because that is what women do, because men will help her as well, men will fix the “tube” if it “were to burst into flames”. Lily, as women do, feels this obligation of helping man, since it is them who own society and are the ‘doers’ of civilization. Woolf makes reference to everyday life to express how women feel this obligation to help men, things that may sound unimportant, such as fixing something. But that are crucial to the configuration of gender roles.

Mrs. Ramsay also feels this necessity of serving men is something almost inherent to the female – from a simple question that Mrs. Ramsay does to Mr. Tansley “Do you write many letters?” (85). Lily Briscoe “realizes how she [Mrs. Ramsay] treats different men and women [...] for that was true of Mrs. Ramsay –she pitied men always as if they lacked something – women never, as if they had something” (85). Mrs. Ramsay takes the role of the ‘giver’ to the ‘doer’ male, and she is so embedded in this role that it comes out as a condescending treatment, almost like serving a child. She is helping men, since she is in ‘charge’ of raising the ‘doers’ of society. This means, Mrs. Ramsay is perpetuating the same gender role presented in Victorian England. The same point is taken up by Lily Briscoe; women are forced to take a seemingly paternalistic treatment towards men (which by no means make them superior in society). From the point of view of men, some lines from Lily's thoughts come perfectly as an example when she talks about Mr. Ramsay – for her “That man, [...] her anger rising in her, never gave; that man took. She, however, would

be forced to give. Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died--and had left all this" (149). Her anger tells us how she is not content with this gender role of the 'giver', role that Mrs. Ramsay plays until death. As we have noted so far, Lily Briscoe's critical views of her surrounding let us know a great deal about how gender roles are played. It is interesting as well to notice how, in the novel, verbs like "give" and "take" are employed to express the flow that gender roles take, women give, while men take.

"Him to please, Is woman's pleasure" – since the behavior is rather mandatory and there are not many requirements of superiority to fulfill, the willpower have to come from women themselves. It is their "pleasure" to serve their husbands. Thus, the role of women as a 'givers' is depicted as inherited in them. This is one of the many ways by which women and men naturalize Victorian discourse on marriage – on the one hand, men are the 'doers' of society and the 'receivers' in a marriage, since they are the 'doers' of society, their professions are endlessly; on the other hand, women whose only profession is marriage, have to give it all, they act as 'givers' who have to please men. women feel a 'natural' inclination for serving men, and provide for them seems almost like an obligation, Mrs. Ramsay's lines are a perfect example of this behavior when she meditates on that "she had the whole of the other sex under her protection; for reasons she could not explain, for their chivalry and valour, for the fact that they negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance; finally for an attitude towards herself which no woman could fail to feel or to find agreeable, something trustful, childlike, reverential" (6).

Mrs. Ramsay's opinion clearly tells us that women have to serve men because they are the 'doers' of society, they are the ones who made things happen; therefore, women serve as assistant to men, that is their role. Circumstantial facts, such as "they ruled India" are used to express the power of the discourse. Also, the adjective "childlike" makes allusion to the point made above, there is a condescending atmosphere from women to men. Finally, these reasons "she could not explained" tell us something about the unknown self, the impossibility of achieving a whole understanding through words, this situation is observed in many instances in the novel, and it will be mentioned again in the analysis. This quite expresses two levels of understanding of the self, on the one hand, we have the social context, and we see how the gender roles socially accepted shape the characters'

behavior. Second, these unexplainable reasons relate to the fact that the self is unknown, it is a dark place.

In relation to the small range of activities in society for women, Virginia Woolf regards having a profession as a vital part in the configuration of a person, of a woman particularly. In her essay "Three Guineas", Woolf refers to marriage as "the one great profession open to our class since the dawn of time until the year 1919" (24) year when the Sex Disqualification Removal Act was passed in Great Britain allowing women greater liberties. Marriage was regarded as a profession where formal education was not needed, Woolf even adds that "education unfitted women to practice it" (20). Thus, not having formal education was an advantage for married women, since education would turn a charming angel into a conscious subject who would not be as ready to fling herself to please her husband. Owing to the fact that marriage was the only profession available for women, they had to content "with providing education for her brothers" (17) Woolf asserts. Coming back to the idea present in "The Angel in the House", a woman's pleasure is to please men becomes a central characteristic expected to be found in a proper Victorian woman.

This disadvantageous situation is observed during the dinner party at the Ramsey's summer house. Mrs. Ramsay is thinking about Lily and Charles Tansley when she wonders that "They were both out of things, [...]. Both suffered from the glow of the other two [Paul and Minta]. He, it was clear, felt himself utterly in the cold; no woman would look at him with Paul Rayley in the room. Poor fellow! Still, he had his dissertation, the influence of somebody upon something: he could take care of himself. With Lily it was different. She faded, under Minta's glow" (104). Lily and Charles are both in the very same situation, overpowered by the glow of physically more attractive people; however, the outcome is different in each case. While, Tansley has his dissertation, his work to rely on, Briscoe has nothing, after losing on physical attraction; there was nothing else in her, according to Mrs. Ramsay that could make her not fade. Through Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf illustrates the position of women and their role in Victorian England, the only profession available for them is marriage, without it, they fade. In a conversation between The Ramsays we can see clearly illustrated the Victorian household, women are in charge of the house and children, while men are reliable people who protect their family and work. "Why must they grow up and

lose it all? Never will they be so happy again. And he was angry. Why take such a gloomy view of life? He said. It is not sensible. For it was odd; and she believed it to be true; that with all his gloom and desperation he was happier, more hopeful on the whole, than she was. Less exposed to human worries –perhaps that was it. He had always his work to fall back on” (59). Mr. Ramsay is not as worried as Mrs. Ramsay of losing his children since, he knows, he can rely in his work, while Mrs. Ramsay feels that part of her task will be gone, her profession of being married will lose some tasks and that unconsciously worries her. All these attempts to show the negative effects of Victorian discourse on marriage are related to what Modernist writers attempted to do; they wanted to focus their writing “towards the disjointed, disintegrating and discordant in opposition to Victorian harmony (18 Childs). Virginia Woolf is trying to show the readers a disjointed aspect in the harmony of Victorian marriage by showing how this discourse is detrimental to women in particular.

A woman “Flings herself” for men’s sake – it does not seem like the best option, but the problem was that there was not option at all. Marriage is the only profession available for women. They had no option but to be ready to fling themselves. This turns into yet another way of naturalization of the Victorian discourse on marriage. The creation of an indispensable ‘need’ of being married, the discourse tells that an unmarried woman is not a complete one, she will not find happiness, and after all, marriage is the only profession for them, there are not many options left for women. Lily Briscoe, one of the main sources of dissident views on Victorian marriage, is painfully aware of this ‘need’, although, the fact of not being married allows her to do many things, she cannot evade social pressure, she still believes that “she must, [...], marry since in the whole world whatever laurels might be tossed to her, or triumphs won by her, [...], there could be no disputing this: an unmarried woman has missed the best of life (49). She is conscious of her circumstances and of the fact that being married is a fundamental part of a woman’s life, she does not have her ‘work’ to rely on (as Mr. Bankes does), she is permanently lacking something by not being married. We find this ‘need’ in Mrs. Ramsay as well, when she, unconsciously, feels the desire of marrying people, two characters during the novel get married thanks to her support, Paul and Minta. Making women feel this ‘need’ is one of the main devices that force them to get married and carry on with the hegemonic discourse.

A final Example of these ideals presented in “The Angel in the House” of gender roles is Mr. Ramsay. He acts as the ‘receiver’, he has a need of “without being conscious what it was, to approach any woman, to force them, he did not care how, his need was so great, to give him what he wanted: sympathy” (151). Mr. Ramsay has the need of women to please him, to give him sympathy (the verb “give” is used again) closing the never-ending circle of a patriarchal society where men are the ones that get the most out of it. The system that has been established is circular, women feel that giving is natural for them, and men feel that women have to give them what they need, sympathy and self-assurance among others. Men do not have to completely fulfill the hegemonic discourse on marriage to obtain benefits from it. The conclusion is that men have the need to feel superior, one way is to directly denigrate women’s value, as Tansley does with Lily by saying "Women can't paint, women can't write"; make them feel they have to be perfect and beautiful is another device of subjugation, finally, as we have read above, women take the role of ‘givers’ whose main task is to make men pleased.

### 3

Relating to the way the Victorian discourse on marriage is presented in the novel, and following the modernist trend, it is possible to say that Virginia Woolf’s writing seeks to be a “questioning of the constraints of the nuclear family which seemed to hamper the individual’s search for personal values” (19 Childs). As we have seen, she looks for a disintegration of Victorian harmony, since she does not agree with the predominant discourse on marriage presented to her, she is constantly questioning of the status quo presented in her society. These constraints of the family are presented in the discourse on marriage, through gender role expectations; for Woolf, they hamper healthy human relationships. Particularly, this is most evident from women perspective. We will see how Lily Briscoe, for example, plays an important roles in this process, she resists marriage, she has a profession on her own, and her two most fruitful relationships are nonsexual, two dear friendships with Mrs. Ramsay and William Bankes.

Example of this questioning of gender roles is one of her most famous essays, *A Room of One’s Own*, where Woolf brightly illustrates the position of women in England. Among many of her concerns with the issue, there is the view on the representation of

women in fiction. From her own readings, Woolf states that, on the one hand, women in fiction are presented as having great “personality and character” (43). Instance of this are Shakespeare’s heroines. On the other hand, however, women in real life were far from having the same adventures. In fact, their life is enclosed in the private sphere of the household. Woolf calls this woman “A very queer, composite being” (43). Women, as well as in real life, become means by which men are pleased, there had to be heroic women in fiction, but they are needed only to complement heroic men, not for their own sake.

A second concern present in *A Room of One’s Own* is the construction of the hegemonic discourse of marriage by men, which, as we have seen, includes the subjugation of women. Woolf’s views on men’s writings about women is that “possibly when the professor insisted a little too emphatically upon the inferiority of women, he was concerned not with their inferiority, but with his own superiority” (31). Another task for a married woman is to function as a mirror to her husband, is to give him a sense of self-assurance in spite of her own self-consciousness. They are the ‘givers’ that have to please men, one of the consequences, Woolf explains here, is that men regard women as inferior. In the same text, Woolf makes clear why men behave in such a way, she explains that “Without self-confidence we are as babes in the cradle. And how can we generate this imponderable quality, which is yet so invaluable, most quickly? By thinking that other people are inferior to one self.” (35). This line is useful to explain both situations, on the one hand, it describes how detrimental it is for women to lose their self-confidence, they become babes in the cradle. On the other hand, it shows Woolf’s awareness about the fact that men acquire self-confidence by making others feel inferior. Instance of this behavior are found throughout the novel, the two main male characters that act in such a way are Mr. Ramsay and Charles Tansley.

This behavior is evidently elucidated when Lily refers to Mr. Tansley and his usual phrase – “Women can’t paint, women can’t write”. For Briscoe, Tansley is “the most uncharming human being she had ever met”. Yet, at the same time, she still questions “why did she mind what he said? [...] what did that matter coming from him, since clearly it was not true to him but for some reason helpful to him, and that was why he said it?” (86). Lily discerns that more than trying to attack her, Tansley is trying to reassure her position as a female, situation, we saw above, Virginia Woolf introduces in “A Room of One’s Own”

when she talks about the professors' anger. Women here are to play yet another role, being a point of comparison to men, women serve to make men feel better. In Woolf's words, women are "looking-glasses" (35). That helps men feel superior. As we notice, self-reassurance in men comes from a comparison with women; men have to make them feel inferior, women have to be subjugated. To further illustrate this point, we have Mr. Ramsay's own opinion when, being next to his wife, he tells her – "You don't look sad now, he thought. And he wondered what she was reading, and exaggerated her ignorance, her simplicity; for he liked to think that 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. Her beauty seemed to him, if that were possible, to increase" (121). Mr. Ramsay childishly delights himself with this thought of a beautiful but not clever wife, she acts as a point of comparison to obtain his self-reassurance; he is the book-learned one. She is beautiful, and that is all there seems to matter, it is shocking to see how there is only one positive quality considered by Mr. Ramsay in contrast to the rather harsh adjectives he uses to judge her– ignorant, simple, not clever, not book-learned, with little understanding. The ideals from "The Angel in the House" are clearly present in Mr. Ramsay.

A third concern in *A Room of One's Own* deals with the relation between women in fiction. Woolf introduces this issue by quoting Shakespeare – "Chloe liked Olivia," I read. And then it struck me how immense a change was there. Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature. Cleopatra did not like Octavia. And how completely *Antony and Cleopatra* would have been altered had she done so! [...] the whole thing is simplified, conventionalized, if one dared say it, absurdly" (82). Woolf gives hints of how the limited and simplified representation of relation between women in fiction is another device through which male dominance is exerted, the representation of women is simplified, they are conventionalized as the angel in the house, for example. "Cleopatra's only feeling about Octavia is one of jealousy. Is she taller than I am? How does she do her hair? [...] All these relationships between women, I thought, rapidly recalling the splendid gallery of fictitious women, are too simple. So much has been left out, unattempted" (82) Along with the two points mentioned above Woolf is clearly telling us how incongruous and biased is the representation of women in literature, they are portrayed as splendid human beings, which is in itself not bad, however, the fact that they are only portrayed in relation to men, always to

men, lead us to point two, women's function in relation to men's requirements, and they have been historically depicted in fiction for that purpose. Example of a not at all simplified relationship between women in *To the Lighthouse* is the one between Mr. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. They share deep feelings and varied aspects of their interaction are shown through the pages.

However, a simplified relationship between women is also present in the novel that helps to make a point on how the Victorian discourse was exerting its power I the characters. Who are the ones to blame for men's actions? Women once again come to play that role, as Mrs. Ramsay blames Mr. Carmichael's wife for his attitudes towards her by saying that "he did not trust her. It was his wife's doing" (41) women once again, by falling in an apparent condescending treatment, lift the responsibility from men's shoulders – "He (Mr. Carmichael) should have been a great philosopher, said Mrs. Ramsay, as they went down the road to the fishing village, but he had made an unfortunate marriage" (10). To sum up, we notice, once again, how these gender role divisions are not particular favorable from women's perspective. "It was his wife's doing", Mrs. Ramsay blames another women for Mr. Carmichael own behavior, lifting the responsibility from him. This condescending behavior relates to the naturalization of the Victorian discourse on marriage mentioned in part one.

As we have seen, Virginia Woolf is conscious of the ideology present in The "Angel of the House". These concerns with the situation and representation of women in fiction influence the writing of *To the Lighthouse*; my claim is that in order not to enter the same discourse Woolf portrays women with personality and greatness without falling into a complete fictional character that does not exist in reality. She is aware of the limitations for women in Victorian England, for that reason that she portrays her characters' selves by means of observations and thoughts rather than direct action, this is a characteristic of Modernism, and this gender-related turn can be helpful to explain why Woolf followed that trend.

As we mentioned previously, a rich source of observations regarding human interaction is the widower and biologist William Bankes. The fact of not being married fragments William Bankes views and raises him as another voice within the novel that both, approves and rejects gender role expectations. He states that he prefers to be alone, he



has a profession he likes; Mr. Bankes is a botanist. Nevertheless, he is a symbol that being marriage is still a measure of man's worth in society – "Ramsay lived in a welter of children, whereas Bankes was childless and a widower – he was anxious that Lily Briscoe should not disparage Ramsay (a great man in his own way)" (21). Mr. Bankes takes into account having children and a wife as important parameters to figure a man's worth, this make him somehow inferior to Mr. Ramsay, even though, they both have works and a profession. Just by not being married, Mr. Bankes feels inadequate next to Mr. Ramsay. Moreover, he gets anxious when Lily Briscoe looks down on Mr. Ramsay; since, he is the symbol of a proper Victorian man. Bankes considers that Briscoe should not disparage what he represents. Somehow, William Bankes is presented as a supporting character to the Victorian discourse.

William Bankes is still a dear friend to Lily Briscoe, she holds him in the highest esteem. In one of their many conversations she began to think, Lily regards the very same characteristics used by Bankes to put him above Mr. Ramsay, this is a sign that she is not embedded in the discourse as he is – "you are finer than Mr. Ramsay; you are the finest human being that I know; you have neither wife nor children (without any sexual feeling, she longed to cherish that loneliness), you live for science" (24). This can be interpreted as Lily's rejection of Victorian marriage; she likes Mr. Bankes for not being married, for being devoted to science. For her, these characteristics made him superior to Mr. Ramsay. However, this opinion contrast with the pity Mrs. Ramsay feels towards Mr. Bankes. Although, he is a respected man, he is pitied for not being married, in Mrs. Ramsay's words "Bankes –poor man! Who had no wife, and no children and dined alone in lodgings except for tonight" (84). Her perspective make her feel that he is incomplete, that he only can function with a women next to him, because, a great deal of men self-assurance comes in relation to women, that is what was expected in the Victorian interaction of gender role.

In conclusion, Lily is the only one who regards him as a complete man – "Why does she pity him? For that was the impression she gave, when she told him that his letters were in the hall. Poor William Bankes, she seemed to be saying, as if her own weariness had been partly pitying people, and the life in her, her resolve to live again, had been stirred by pity. And it was not true, Lily thought; it was one of those misjudgments of hers that seemed to be instinctive and to arise from some need of her own and not for other people's.

He is not in the least pitiable. He has his work, Lily said to herself (84). Lily cleverly point out the source of this pity, Mrs. Ramsay needs to pity him, by doing so she reassures her discourse on marriage; since, for a discourse to be hegemonic it has to be imposed in other, it has to spread and be over dissident discourses. Lily's perceptive observations are fruitful as an example of the reproduction of the hegemonic discourse. While, Mr. Ramsay is at the top of the pyramid, being supported by his wife, someone like Mr. Bakes has less value because he does not meet all the expectations of Victorian gender roles. It is important to point out how he puts himself in a lower position. He is also subjugated.

In *Modernism*, Childs tells us that "Modernist text often focuses on social, spiritual or personal collapse" (19). And we have seen how this is portrayed in *To the Lighthouse*; there is a focus on the discourse of marriage. Moreover, there is a focus on how relationships are established, how gender roles shape them and how these conditioned relationships affect an adequate communication and healthy among the characters in the novel. None of them seem completely at ease with themselves or the rest. *To the Lighthouse* is deeply concerned with the self and how it relates to others, human relationships and its detrimental effects on the self. These statements have been taken from the characters' observations and, sometimes, conversations. As Woolf expresses in "Modern Fiction" – "Life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small (190). Life in the novel is expressed through this small talks and thought. There is one final text from Woolf that concerns with this analysis, her suicide note. In this short note, the ideals and concepts that have been just analyzed are present, the Victorian discourse on marriage is present as well as the effects they have in Woolf own opinions and observations.

In the note, Virginia Woolf states some of the reasons for committing suicide. The note will be analyze because it offers a direct view to Virginia Woolf's observations, through these lines we see how the discourse is replicated in her to some degree and how that facts conflicts in her as well. Above all, was her mental state –"I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate". (1) Since she feels there is no way out, she takes the resolution of drowning in the river. She "can't fight any longer". The note is full of love and gratitude towards Leonard, her husband. Some ideas regarding

gender roles effect on human interaction can be inferred from these few lines devoted to her husband, which are closely related to the ideas from “The Angel in the House” and the critique on Victorian marriage presented in *To the Lighthouse*. First, there is the idea that she is a burden to her husband that she is preventing him to do his work, as Mrs. Ramsay did with Mr. Ramsay, or how Mrs. Carmichael affected his husband’s work –“I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work”. Woolf takes the same ideas; she is spoiling his husband’s life, and preventing him from working properly. We see how, even though Woolf considers and criticized how human relationships were configured in Victorian Society, these lines also replicate those ideal to some extent. Second, she realizes her husband’s sacrifices to help her; she tells him that – “You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that — everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you”. And it is for this same reason that she cannot stand the feeling that “I can't go on spoiling your life any longer.” He has been “patient”, “good” and like a saver to her. Even though, it is no possible to assert that these feeling of ‘guilt’ was one of the causes of her suicide, it is possible to say that she was aware of the burden she had become to the relationship, and that she is not letting her husband grow, her view is that she is negative to Leonard’s self. This view contrasts, for example, to one that regards marriage as a symbiotic relationship, where problems have to be solved in communion until “death do us part”. We notice how she does not feel this way, Leonard is being pushed back by her, and it seems, that she cannot stand that feeling.

#### 4

With the analysis of one of the many discourses presented in Victorian society, marriage, and how its rigid gender roles prevented healthy human communication from a modern perspective, now we will see how it affects particular characters in the novel, the same four that were analyses above, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, William Bankes, and Lily Briscoe, and also the hints Woolf gives to solve or explain the nature of this problem. Now, let’s turn to analyzing more general observations regarding human relationships in the novel. The analysis of the discourse of marriage has been used to explain Woolf’s critique to the discourse presented in Victorian England and how this discourse prevented a true understanding of the other. The conflicting relation between gender role expectations and

the inner self seems to be one of the main causes of crisis in the characters. What comes below is an attempt to describe how the characters try to reach a solution to this inadequacy by different means. How they try to achieve this knowledge of the other. First we will list how the discourse affects particular characters and second the developments or solutions that are offered.

We see how limited gender roles prevent from a true communication of the self “She had done the usual trick –been nice. She would never know him. He would never know her. Human relations were all like that, she thought, and the worst (if it had not been for Mr. Bankes) were between men and women. Inevitably these were extremely insincere she thought” (93). The word used to describe “being nice” is “the usual trick”, being nice is regarding as some action we perform to face other people. It is part of her role, and the fact the he would never know her and the other way around represent how these relations are built. They are extremely insincere because gender roles do not allow for a greater understanding. The gender roles play creates shallow relationship, and it prevents a deep understanding of each other.

Mrs. Ramsay’s reasons to be always prone to help other are presented from a self-centered perspective, “That all this desire of hers to live, to help, was vanity (Mr. Carmichael). For her own self-satisfaction was it that she wished so instinctively to help, to give, that people might say of her, "O Mrs. Ramsay! Dear Mrs. Ramsay ... Mrs. Ramsay, of course!" and need her and send for her and admire her?” (41). She wonders if all these good deeds are made out of self-satisfaction, out of vanity. This idea of self-satisfaction is present in Western thought until this day, so it is impossible to answer this question in these pages; however, a tentative source for this would be, as I mentioned above, the results of the hegemonic gender role assigned to wives, there were supposed to be always there to help others, husbands, and children. But, only giving without any reward would tire out any human being, it is for that reason that women had to find a way through which get this rewards, and this would be feeling satisfaction when helping other. Looking for self-satisfaction become the way out from the pressure of gender roles. However, this interchange does not go smoothly, we have seen so far how the discourse of Victorian Marriage is crumbling. Her own conclusion is to think that –“she did not feel merely snubbed back in her instinct, but made aware of the pettiness of some part of her, and of

human relations, how flawed they are, how despicable, how self-seeking, at their best. Shabby and worn out” (42). She still cannot figure out the reason of this pettiness, of the inadequacy of human relationships. The idea presented here suggests that this is caused by gender roles; they hinder true human communication and set out doubts in the self.

The shared opinion William Bankes and Lily Briscoe about Mr. Ramsay is wondering “why such concealments should be necessary; why he needed always praise; why so brave a man in thought should be so timid in life; how strangely he was venerable and laughable at one and the same time” (45). From their critical perspective it can be seen how gender roles prevent a healthy self, on the one hand, they are aware of the novelty of Mr. Ramsay’s mind. However, on the other hand, he is regarded as someone laughable and praise-seeking. They can glimpse at Mr. Ramsay’s self, he someone venerable. But, he still cannot escape the gender role assigned to him, he must be pleased by women, they have to give him praise that is the natural interaction he has to follow. These constrains of gender roles also affects at the ones that get most of the benefits in society.

An example of how the stratification and arbitrary codification of gender roles negatively affects human relationships Lily Briscoe is another example of the negative effects of rigid gender roles in human relationships. The fact that there is a role to play enables her to achieve true knowledge of the other, what Lily craves is love, intimacy, and knowledge of the other. Her inner fight with Victorian gender roles is based on her desire to understand. She wonders –“Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? For it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee” (51). She wants to understand others, she looks for a deep understanding of these relations, but it seems that it is this same fact that enables her to establish a connection, since, in her context, relationships based on gender roles are shallow and, many times, insincere. She is in love with Mrs. Ramsay’s self, but since she does not what 'inscriptions' that could be written, she cannot label herself, and that is conflicting, since she cannot escape her reality, when gender roles are as strong as they were in Victorian society, things are to be labeled, knowledge cannot escape language, and this is the conflict in Lily. That represents the detrimental nature of gender roles in the novel, how they disable an effective

communication and creates conflicts in the characters. Hussey also mentions this point, he asserts that Virginia Woolf's writings "are concerned with knowledge: knowledge of others, and knowledge of the world. The question of the nature of self is at the heart of her thinking, and is the dynamic of her fiction (iii). We have seen how these questions are expressed through her characters; how their fight for a better understanding let us look at Woolf's observations of human nature.

A rather "unimportant" moment becomes crucial the examination of human relations, when Mr. Ramsay is acting silly in front of other, his behavior does not parallel the expectations he has to fulfill, and this creates conflicts in his wife, the person who sees him is Mr. Carmichael, when he is "shuffling past, precisely now, at the very moment when it was painful to be reminded of the inadequacy of human relationships, that the most perfect was flawed, and could not bear the examination which, loving her husband, with her instinct for truth, she turned upon it; when it was painful to feel herself convicted of unworthiness, and impeded in her proper function by these lies, these exaggerations" (40) The shallow image she has of her perfect husband crumbles when Carmichael sees him acting silly. Mrs. Ramsay instinctively realizes the flaws on her husband and she becomes aware of the inadequacy of human relationships; the self does not seem to be able to show itself truly to someone else, there is always something that inhibits true unity, true communication.

As we have seen, Victorian gender-roles impositions limit relationships, and language is somehow inadequate to establish healthy communication. In opposition to this, there are many instances in the novel where a character feels at ease when being silent, when being alone. For example, there is moment of intimacy between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, where there is not a word spoken, however, for Lily "The moment at least seemed extraordinarily fertile", they two of them are silent, they "rest in silence, uncommunicative; to rest in the extreme obscurity of human relationships. Who knows what we are, what we feel? Who knows even at the moment of intimacy, this is knowledge? Aren't things spoilt then, Mrs. Ramsay may have asked (it seemed to have happened so often, this silence by her side) by saying them? Aren't we more expressive thus? (171)" Ramsay wonders if we are more expressive when we are not talking, does a real moment of silence becomes intimacy? How do we explain the feeling that by talking we spoil the

moment? The moment between Lily and Mrs. Ramsay reflect a patent idea in the novel, that language is somehow inadequate for a true human relationship, there is something in language that leaves a sour flavor. Society and now language are two factors that seem to prevent a true human communication. We can understand this by comparing the actual interaction among characters and when they have their own interior monologues. During this inner reflections, the characters express their real observations and views concerning others and themselves. It is from this comparison that we realized the fragmentation between the roles played in society and how they actually would like to be or be seen. As we see, these are just hints and glimpses given in the novel, no character says what is the real way to human relationships, there are just guesses, characters are full of questions, and it is all these questions regarding human relationships throughout the novel, the ones that stand to represent the foggy nature of human relationships, no one has a clear answer, a straight-forward solution. Another question arises, is language itself the one inadequate to establish true relationships? Or is it just another device the power of the hegemonic discourse, marriage for example, is exerted? And we realize this because the characters' interior monologues. Fact that supports the idea that Realist description was not adequate for a real understanding of the character.

Silence seems to be one of the few ways to getting in contact with the self, with the true self, far from the limitations of gender roles, far from the duties that society imposed in behavior. We see this difference more clearly in Mrs. Ramsay, always with the need of helping others; it is not until she is alone that she realizes that "For now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself. And that was what now she often felt the need of--to think; well, not even to think. To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others" (62). In these few lines the ideas behind the novel are condensed, the self is something invisible to other, "a wedge-shaped core of darkness" that may even be invisible to oneself, but that one gets closer when being silent, when resting, when not being expansive, when not trying to show the self to others, when there is not the need of thinking of someone else. It seems there is an irreconcilable relations between the self and others, because it is something that

cannot be expressed, it is unknown, cannot be labels and it limited by the impositions of gender roles.

As a final point, it is important to present William Bankes' views regarding gender-role based human relationships. His observations are slightly different to the rest, we see how during the dinner party at the Ramsay's house, after looking at the people present, he wonders that— ““The truth was that he did not enjoy family life. It was in this sort of state that one asked oneself, what does one live for? Why, one asked oneself, does one take all these pains for the human race to go on? Is it so very desirable? Are we as a species? ...Is human life this? Is human life that? One never had time to think about it. But here he was asking himself that sort of question, because Mrs. Ramsay was giving orders to servants” (89). With all these questions Mr. Bankes is trying to reach a solution, he is trying to understand. His questioning is another example that shows how mysterious and even unreachable the self is. He cannot reach a complete understanding of others, or even of himself. He does not enjoy family life, his way out is his work. But, at the same time he also wants to understand others, he wants to achieve unity with Mrs. Ramsay, but she is being expansive, she is “giving orders to servants” her inner self is deep down and covered by her gender role. Mr. Bankes' use of language shows us his background as a biologist, he wonders about the “human race” and humans as a “species”, overtly, there is very little written about instinctive human relationships, this is one of the few instances where human are presented as animals, meaning that reproduction is also a reason of human interaction. This view can be linked to the new world view brought by Darwin's theory, William Bankes is looking at humans more as a species, among many others. There seems to be something instinctive in the characters that get them closer to some people and not to others, there are many things that cannot be explained, the self is “darkness”, it is the unknown. In conclusion, from Mr. Bankes' views, human relationships are kept, despite all the inadequacies mentioned so far, because of this instinctive and animal need of a species, to be with the other, to achieve unity as a species. Instinct is the reason why, despite being inadequate, relationships are longed for and cherished. It also explains inadequacy of language and gender roles, since they are presented as somehow detached to the self, that cannot be explained in terms of words or roles.



## **Conclusions**

From this analysis of *To the Lighthouse* and how the rigid stratification of gender roles has an important impact in human interaction, I have discovered the deep understanding that Virginia Woolf had of male-female interaction. Moreover, how this subject-matter is present throughout her writing in not only her fictional writing, but in her nonfictional writings. We can see, for example, many instances in *A Room of One's Own* where she considers how a person's gender has a direct influence in the quality of their writing; the idea of the "androgynous mind" is of this sort. Rigid and limited gender roles prevent from a full development of a writer, and for extension I believe she also thought in that way regarding humanity in general.

The subject of marriage is a rich source of understanding regarding Woolf's work. It is clear that she was aware of the effects of Victorian discourses on people, and how the discourse on marriage from Victorian England did not represent what she considered healthy gender roles. Women are not "angels in the house" for her. From a modern perspective, they have to acquire some independency, and men as well have to leave behind pervasive behavior.

Rigid Victorian assignment of gender roles created shallow and insecure relationships, helping to enforce the so-called "inadequacy of human relationships" found in Woolf's writing. This is why Woolf looks for a new stratification, or at least, changes some fundamental aspects in the male-female interaction. Lily Briscoe is the main source of criticism towards Victorian gender roles; she explicitly says she does not want to marry. At times, she almost seems unfitted to be married, she is an educated painter, and we have seen how education may be detrimental to a wife from a Victorian perspective. Her acute observations flood us with critical perspectives of the rest of the characters. She possesses a modern set mind that put us in perspective to glimpse at a Victorian society, represented by the Ramsays mainly.

The examination of the Victorian configuration of gender roles in the novel by Virginia Woolf requires a close exploration of how modernity, through the characters'

fragmentation, brings a different set of expectations. Women and men are not longer expected to behave in such a way as they did in Victorian England. From reading Woolf nonfiction we realize how she does not agree with the previous discourse of gender roles. She is not looking for a destruction of the system, but rather, with flexibility in the gender roles assignment, that allows women, in particular, to develop in a male hegemonic society. By extension, a new flexibility in male gender roles is expected.

From the reading of the poem "The Angel in the House", we understand the rigid expectations that were imposed in Victorian England. Men are the "doers" in society, and "receivers" of women affection. While women were expected to be "givers" to men, to fling themselves for them, who were the ones making society advance. It is from this idea that Woolf criticizes the discourse, she does not believe in this rigidity in gender roles.

There can be further studies in the way Woolf present her ideas in her novels and nonfictional work, regarding gender in particular. How, for example, in order not to enter the same discourse Woolf portrays women with personality and greatness without falling into a complete fictional character that does not exist in reality. She is aware of the limitations for women in Victorian England, and it is for that reason that she portrays her characters' selves by means of interior monologues and thoughts rather than direct action.

From a biographical perspective, there can be further analysis regarding her diaries and letters and how she presents in them her gender perspectives, in particular, how rigid gender roles are detrimental to the full development of a person, writer or character. There are enough sources to elaborate a philosophical thought in Virginia Woolf, many of her ideas are novel to her context, and they follow a clear line towards freer human being, without so many restraints, as they existed in Victorian England.

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