

Killing the “Angel in the House” in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*: Authorial Murder in the Light of Michel Foucault’s Theory of Power

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Abstract:

Our paper aims to analyse Virginia Woolf’s portrayal and killing of the “Angel in the House” in her novel *To the Lighthouse* in the area of power politics particularly in the light of Michel Foucault’s theory of power. It seeks to vindicate that the “angel in the House” becomes a collaborator with patriarchy rather than a victimised “other” that is relegated to the margin of civilisation. An analysis of power elements related to the character of Mrs. Ramsay exposes the fact that power circulates in the novel in a web which allows Mrs. Ramsay to acquire enough power to become the “immediate enemy” that defies the resistance represented by the character of the artist Lily. When the struggle becomes a female-female struggle, killing the “immediate enemy” becomes a necessary authorial act that brings a shift in power relations in the novel and allows Lily to overcome patriarchy.

Keywords: “Angel in the House”, Madonna, Patriarchy, Michel Foucault, power elements

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1- Introduction:

The Victorian period witnessed an alliance between religion and science in an attempt to define women’s role in society. The impact of such union was the spread of a patriarchal ideology that contributed to a large extent to developing an image of a feminine ideal. Science played an effective role in validating Biblical prescriptions of gender stereotypes and promoting a culture, which situates women within the most idealised model of womanhood: maternity. The feminist Ruth Roach Pierson (1984) states that:

By the time Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837, most of what we now identify as the Victorian ideology of femininity was already in place: the cult of true womanhood with its ideal of the passionless and delicate lady, and the cult of domesticity with its ideal of the utterly unselfish and pure angel in the house. The idealisation of maternal nurturance and compassion in the cult of motherhood also developed throughout the century in pace with the elaboration and intensification of motherhood as a vocation. (p. 105)

The Western ideology is based on the Biblical presentation of women. The Bible offers two images of women. The first one is that of The Tempted Eve, who was associated with Satan and led Adam out of Eden, because of disobedience. Such interpretation of the Bible offers reasonable justification for women’s subordination and inferiority. However, the second image is that of the Virgin Mary or the Madonna, who brought salvation of the female sex through sexless life, self-sacrifice and maternal devotion. Such view is shared by Jeannette King (2005) who believes that:

Images of the Madonna and of angels therefore contribute to the formation of the Victorian feminine ideal, in both visual and literary representations. What emerges out of this iconography is a highly idealised picture of woman as disembodied, spiritual and, above all, chaste. (p. 10)

Such Victorian feminine ideal has been denounced by many intellectuals at the wake of the twentieth century for the constraints it imposes on a woman’s identity. In fact, the idealisation of the stereotypical image of femininity as a Madonna or what Woolf terms as “The Angel in the House” led many feminists to attack the whole ideology behind its construction on the ground that it victimises women and limits their existence to servitude in the private sphere of society. However, Woolf’s act of deliberately killing “The Angel in the House” in her novel raises many concerns about its status in the dichotomy victimised/victimiser. Although many critics analysed Woolf’s novels and essays “*A Room of One’s Own*” and “*Professions for Women*” from different critical lances, notably the feminist one, they did not interpret her intention of making “the Angel in the House” central in the novel and suddenly killing the character in the area of power politics.

Most of the studies done on Woolf’s production being fictional or critical were dominated by feminist criticism that discussed her characters in the arena of gender politics by making references to her ideas on patriarchy or her two lectures “*A Room of One’s Own*” and “*Professions for Women*”. For example, both Alice Fox’s *Virginia Woolf and the Literature of the English Renaissance* (1990) and James J. Miracky in *Regenerating the*

Novel: Gender in Woolf, Forster, Sinclair and Lawrence (2003) argue that Woolf's experimentation with the literary genres is a feminist endeavour that is primarily linked to her theorising on gender issues in her writings about patriarchy as a cultural institution and androgyny. In addition, many scholars provided culture-bound analyses of her works such as in *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf* (2006) by Jane Goldman and Mary Hellen Snodgrass's *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature* (2006) which highlighted some of the socioeconomic aspects of her works and her class consciousness. The literature produced on Woolf is varied and huge making use of almost all the critical schools that appeared before and after her.

Feminism dominated the criticism produced on Woolf as a writer and many scholars tried to align her with the movement despite her refusal of the harsh ways used by feminist advocates of women's rights. Her treatment of women's issues of marginalisation in society, fiction and the academia made her writing a fertile land for feminist investigation, however, most of the research done on her made a stereotyping of women as victims and passive agents constrained and excluded from the public sphere. This article will bring evidence that Woolf's representation of "The Angel in the House" transcends Simone De Beauvoir's (1974) dichotomy "the subject/ the other" or the feminists' victimiser/victimised as we link her portrayal of gender relations to power relations notably power exertion and maintenance to show that women can be oppressed and marginalised by other women. It is not only a question of male/female struggle over power; it can be a female/female struggle.

The analysis of women's issues of otherness and oppression in a hierarchal order dictated by gender roles has always been one of the primordial concerns of feminists. As suggested by Ellen Messer-Davidow(2005), "Intellectually, feminist studies investigate gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and sexuality as categories that organize social and symbolic systems"(p. 300). During the 1960's, feminist critics attempted to re-evaluate women's representations in literature and their reflection of male hegemonic discourse. The problem of gender issues originates in power relations in society, academia and knowledge production and documentation. The Western culture has been characterized by a gendering of knowledge, space, and social existence as it situated men at the center and relegated women to the margin. As the critic Jane Flax (1990) suggests, feminism is "located at the center of cultural power [...] as an outside discourse, that, a movement born out of the experience of marginality, contemporary feminism has been usually attuned to issues of exclusion and invisibility" (p. 141). American feminist criticism shed light on the misogynist assumptions in literature produced by men. In 1969, Kate Millet, another important figure, published *Sexual Politics* to analyse sexist assumptions in literature produced by men. In the work, she examines power relations or what she terms "politics" in society. She also criticises Freudian psychoanalysis for its male bias and other male authors, such as Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and D.H. Lawrence, for their negative portrayal of women in fiction. At the beginning of her *Sexual Politics*(1971), Kate Millet argues: "Groups who rule by birth are fast disappearing, yet there remains one [...] in the area of sex [...] What goes largely unexamined, often even unacknowledged in our social order, is the birthright priority whereby males rule females"(24-25). For Millet, Men's exertion of power over women is deeply rooted in the social order that it has become a birth right.

Feminists treated the female identity in relation to power exertion in society in an attempt to highlight the social factors that define and construct a woman's identity independently from or depending on her biological nature. Moreover, the power relationships that situate her at the margin of civilisation are the active manifestations of the cultural codes that determine masculinity and femininity in society. The French author Simone de Beauvoir

introduced an existentialist philosophy into feminist theory. Being influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre’s precept that existence precedes essence, she argues in her treatise *The Second Sex* (1974) that a woman is not born; she is rather the result of a culture. It is through the process of socialisation that a woman becomes inferior and subordinate and her identity is defined in relation to man who is the active agent in society while woman is relegated to the margin of power exertion and any evaluation of her is made in reference to him. “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute-she is the Other.” (p. 806). In his critical work *Contemporary British Fiction* (2008), Nick Bentley states that “femininity and masculinity, therefore, are a series of artificial constructs or codes of behaviour that are maintained and reproduced by the dominant ideas and practices in society” (p. 11). De Beauvoir provides an analysis of the social, cultural and religious tradition, which is responsible for the construction of woman as other. However, she did not expose the micro dynamics of power exertion when “The Angel in the House” becomes powerful enough to be revered by men and starts acting as an agent of patriarchy.

2. Michel Foucault’s Theory of Power:

Michel Foucault theory of power offers some of the tools that may prove adequate in exposing such micro dynamics. Although, Foucault does not present a coherent theory in analysing power and some of his ideas lead to contradictory conclusions, he has a major contribution to the analysis of the micro-politics of power. He has been of a great influence for postcolonial and feminist theories (Mills 1991; 1997). Despite many claims that Foucault is a misogynist (Morris 1979, p. 152), many feminist theorists made resort to his thinking on the ground that

Both [feminism and Foucault] identify the body as the site of power . . . both point to the local and intimate operations of power rather than focusing exclusively on the supreme power of the state. Both bring to the fore the crucial role of discourse in its capacity to produce and sustain hegemonic power and emphasise the challenges contained within marginalised and/or unrecognised discourses, and both criticise the ways in which Western humanism has privileged the experience of the Western masculine elite as it proclaims universals about truth, freedom and human nature. (Diamond and Quinby, 1988, p. x)

Foucault’s theories on discourse were used by the feminist Dorothy Smith “[in] her work on the discursive construction and negotiation of both femininity and mental illness. [She] has used Foucault’s thinking about discourse in order to examine the way that individuals negotiate with structures rather than simply submitting to them”(Mills 2005: 29). Similarly, Edward Said’s reference to Foucault’s theory in his widely influential work *Orientalism* attracted theorists of post-colonialism to reconsider power relations in the context of colonialism in the light of Foucault’s theory of power as a web of relations rather than an act of domination resulting in subordination and submission. Foucault’s reconceptualization of power appeared in different theoretical frameworks including the post-colonial, materialist and psychoanalytical by influential authors including Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and McClintock.

Foucault was influenced by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche which can be seen in his treatment of the relationship between truth, knowledge and power especially from his work *The Order of Things* onward. Power has been discussed to a great extent in his seminal

works and appears as a web of relationships of influence. It is not possessed or exerted by one institution, group or individual over others as it circulates and manifests itself in the results of actions over actions. He believes that

[Power] is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions (Foucault, 1982, p. 789).

Foucault's micro analysis of power politics offers a new theorising of the nature of power which he regards as an exercise, an action instead of a possession, a web of flexible relations that permit circulation as the individuals become vehicles of power instead of recipients and exercisers. In *Power/ Knowledge*, he states: 'Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain . . . Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation . . . Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application' (Foucault, 1980, p. 98).

Foucault's new conceptualisation of power questions the old concepts related to the nature of power and the role of individuals in power relationships, the fact that shakes the established knowledge related to the dichotomies: victimiser/victimised, oppressor/ oppressed and powerful/powerless. In this context, Sarah Mills (2005) maintains that

Power is often conceptualised as the capacity of powerful agents to realise their will over the will of powerless people, and the ability to force them to do things which they do not wish to do. Power is also often seen as a possession – something which is held onto by those in power and which those who are powerless try to wrest from their control. (Mills, p. 34-35)

She goes further in her analysis of Foucault's theory by suggestion that his theory opens debate about three focal points related to power exertion and maintenance going beyond the old simplistic view of power relations. She states that:

There are several important points to note here: first that power is conceptualised as a chain or as a net, that is a system of relations spread throughout the society, rather than simply as a set of relations between the oppressed and the oppressor. And, second, individuals should not be seen simply as the recipients of power, but as the 'place' where power is enacted and the place where it is resisted. Thus, his theorising of power forces us to reconceptualise not only power itself but also the role that individuals play in power relations – whether they are simply subjected to oppression or whether they actively play a role in the form of their relations with others and with institutions. (p. 35)

Indeed, such new perception of power offers deeper analysis than the old view that divides power exercisers into the holders of power including individuals and institutions and the oppressed upon whom power is exercised. Many feminists tried to link this new concept of power relations to gender identity including Judith Butler who has developed models of the

relation between power and gender suggesting that power is not only centralised in the form of institutions and gender identity is a context-bound performance rather than a possession (Butler, 1993; Salih, 2002).

In decentralising power exercise, Foucault rejects the feminist view of power as oppression or repression suggesting that power exists at all levels in society and shapes events and behaviours instead of empowering or constraining individuals. In his essay, “The Subject and Power,” (1982), he maintains that

Power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted "above" society as a supplementary structure whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of. In any case, to live in society is to live in such a way that action upon other actions is possible-and in fact ongoing. [...] A society without power relations can only be an abstraction. (p. 791)

At the level of social relationships, Foucault (1982) asserts in that a number of points must be established. They are briefly summarised in the following:

2.1. The System of Differentiations: They permit one’s action upon others’ actions. They are the conditions and the results of each power relationship and can be determined by the law, traditions of status and privilege, cultural differences and differences in knowledge and competence.

2.2. The Types of Objectives: they include exercising the authority of a status or a function and maintaining a privilege as they are pursued by those who act upon others’ actions.

2.3. The Means of Bringing Power Relations into Being: The exercise of power by discourse, violence, economic disparities, systems of surveillance, explicit or implicit rules being fixed or modifiable and finally documenting.

2.4. Forms of Institutionalisation: A combination of customs and traditions related to the family, predispositions, hierarchical organisations that are functioning in a defined order and generally speaking, the distribution of power relations in a socially predefined order.

2.5. The Degrees of Rationalisation: The transformation of power relations into action in a range of possibilities is related to the effectiveness of the means and the certainty of the outcomes in proportion to the reaction embodied in the resistance to power exercise. In other words, power exercise is transformed and organised into processes that fit the context. (p. 792)

Foucault’s theorising of power opened up new directions in the analysis of human relations, society workings and institutions. He himself believed that pushing his work to new arenas of discussion is something positive when he stated that

A book is made to be used in ways not defined by its writer. The more, new, possible or unexpected uses there are, the happier I shall be . . . All my books are little tool-boxes. If people want to open them, to use this sentence or that idea as a screwdriver or spanner to short-circuit, discredit systems of power, including

eventually those from which my books have emerged . . . so much the better. (as cited in Patton, 1979,p. 115)

His theory of power exercise as a web of cause-effect relationships decentralised the concept of power itself. Using it in analysing power relationships in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* can offer another explanation of the act of killing the character of Mrs. Ramsay away from the feminist analyses of the novel that regarded Mrs. Ramsay as the submissive wife in a patriarchal hierarchy that guarantees male's supremacy and dominance over women.

3. A Foucauldian Reading of Power Relations in *To the Lighthouse*:

Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*, published in 1927 presents the world through a feminine perspective and shows how the feminine is either revered or undermined in its relation to the Victorian culture. The latter defines a woman's identity as a social construct that serves patriarchy and promotes traditional stereotypes of femininity. Both science and religion contributed to promoting a culture that situates women within the most idealised role which is motherhood and the image of the "Angel in the house" has become revered by men. Women who succeed in playing the role of the "angel in the house" acquire power to influence men's and women's actions as they become stereotypes of femininity that are active agents collaborating with patriarchy instead of resisting it.

Any close reading of the novel reveals that the character of Mrs. Ramsay was given a central role in the novel for she is portrayed as the "Angel in the House" whose actions influence both men and women in the novel. Instead of being regarded as a submissive victim of patriarchy, as previous feminist studies attempted to show, she is rather an active agent of patriarchy who is collaborating with men's actions. The character of Lily, however, is presented in direct confrontation with both Mrs. Ramsay and men and her actions react to theirs with resistance.

In fact, power relations in the novel circulate in a triangular way because there is an interaction of influence between three agents: men, Mrs. Ramsay and Lily. Mrs. Ramsay serves men's needs which influences their actions towards her and makes them revere her as the idealised image of femininity and compare her to Madonna (the Virgin Mary). Lily decides to resist patriarchy, refuse marriage and devote her life to painting which is an exclusive male activity. Consequently, all men in the novel undermine her artistic talent and compare her to Mrs. Ramsay. Lily becomes alienated, socially rejected and resisted by both men and Mrs. Ramsay because she does not collaborate with patriarchy and play her role in the predefined system of roles for each gender. Of more importance are the power relations between Lily and Mrs. Ramsay. The latter represents a major obstacle that Lily finds difficult to overcome for different reasons. Her actions influence men's view of Lily and her art and make her seem ridicule compared to the sacred role that Mrs. Ramsay is playing in their lives. Moreover, she tries to end Lily's resistance by pushing her to get married to Mr. Bankes and expressing her pity towards her for lack of physical beauty and devotion to art. Finally, Mrs. Ramsay is Lily's subject of art that she is trying to represent in an abstract portrait, the fact that cannot be accepted by men who associates Mrs. Ramsay with the Madonna, a famous figure in the realistic tradition of visual art.

Lily resists the power of Mrs. Ramsay and does not succeed in attaining her artistic vision until Mrs. Ramsay is dead ten years after the beginning of resistance. We can say that Woolf killed Mrs. Ramsay for the power her actions bring over others' actions particularly Lily. She attempted to give Lily the necessary freedom she needs for the success of her anti-patriarchy struggle which can be termed in Foucault's words "immediate" struggle (*The Subject/ Power*, 1982, p.780) because Lily can resist men as her "chief enemy" (780) but

finds Mrs. Ramsay a powerful perpetual force of femininity that collaborates with patriarchy and pushes other women to surrender. On such type of struggles, Foucault believes that “the main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much ‘such or such’ an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class but rather a technique, a form of power” (781). Killing Mrs. Ramsay is an act of killing a technique, a form of power rather than a character.

4. Authorial Murder of the “Immediate Enemy”:

The character of Mrs. Ramsay represents the “immediate enemy” to Lily because her actions situate her as the Victorian feminine ideal in *To the Lighthouse* and allows her to become a central agent that negotiates with the power of men and exercise her own power as a stereotype revered by men and exerts power as a model over other women in the novel. It is shown through the analysis of the five aforementioned points that are suggested by Foucault.

4.1. The System of Differentiations: A Religious Patriarchal Prescription:

In Woolf’s novel, *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay embodies the characteristics of the ‘angel in the house.’ In her essay “Professions for Women,” (1966) Woolf declares such domestic submissive feminine role the major obstacle a woman writer has to face in order to express herself in writing. The critic, Deborah Parson (2007) believes that “for Woolf the ‘angel’ becomes a ‘phantom,’ who appears when she begins to write and tries to control the opinions of her pen” (p. 85). Thus, as a writer, Woolf felt the need to escape conformity and free her pen from the Victorian ideal. In challenging patriarchy, Woolf had to kill the ‘angel’ so as to succeed in writing and reviewing fiction, which the ‘phantom’ made impossible.

In *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Mrs Ramsay personifies the “Angel in the House” with her physical beauty, submissiveness, silence, sympathy, self-sacrifice and, above all, maternal affection. Her existence relies on her success in soothing and reassuring others. Moreover, her self-sacrifice denies her any personal interest that takes her away from playing her role as the guardian of men’s morality, virtue and happiness. As a product of patriarchy, she defines her identity in relation to the needs of people around her. She becomes strong, when her children need her. In fact, Mrs. Ramsay needs her children as much as they need her because her motherhood is part of the conditions that guarantee her status and privilege in the patriarchal system. This, in part, explains her desire to see her children stay young:

Why, she asked, pressing her chin on James’s head, should they grow up so fast? [...] She would have liked always to have had a baby. She was happiest carrying one in her arms. Then people might say she was tyrannical, domineering, masterful, if they choose; she did not mind. (Woolf, 1927, p. 51)

Mrs. Ramsay can negotiate her status with men and allows the necessary interaction in the web of power relations. In addition, she has complete freedom because she can choose to surrender in moments and to hold her power back in others, such as the concluding scene of “The Window”, Mrs. Ramsay surrenders to patriarchy, by agreeing on her husband’s weather forecast. However, in her own terms, it is defined as a triumph because, in part, she has felt strength in her refusal to declare her love to Mr. Ramsay while she maintains his love and admiration.

4.2. The Types of Objectives:

Mrs. Ramsay is a guardian of the patriarchal tradition. She is not only subservient to the male authority, but, she becomes other women's oppressor by ensuring the continuity of the Victorian values. She raises her daughter, Prue, to be another 'Angel in the House' and tries to marry people off, to protect men, reassure their superiority and harmonise their lives. In Deborah Parson's (2007) view: "Man's self-confidence [...] depends on his sense of power and superiority. [Thus] the idealised Angel of the House nurtures that self-confidence" (p. 84).

Furthermore, Mrs. Ramsay's opinion about the guest Lily is, typically, a reflection of the patriarchal society. Lily's lack of physical beauty, Mrs. Ramsay thinks, will be an obstacle to her marriage. Thus, she decides to help her by making a match between her and William Bankes. "Lily's charm was her Chinese eyes, aslant in her white, puckered little face, but it would take a clever man to see it" (Woolf, 1927, p. 21). Mrs. Ramsay is aware of Lily's rejection of conventional gender roles. However, she tries, with a mother's care, to persuade her that "whatever laurels might be tossed to her [...] or triumphs won by her [...] an unmarried woman has missed the best of life" (p. 43).

4.3. Power Exercise by Discourse, Silence and Conduct:

Mrs. Ramsay exercises her power by her choice of discourse which is part of a patriarchal one that gives women a choice between silence or "yes". In the sixth section of "The Window", Mrs. Ramsay faces her husband's anger and insulting words "damn you" for persisting in her expectation that they will go to the lighthouse, with mere silence. She also guards her privilege when he demands her love by resisting him with silence. In other situations, Mrs. Ramsay's reactions are all presided by "yes," which is, strikingly, the first word in the novel: "Yes, of course, if it's fine to-morrow" (1927, p. 1). Similarly, the last unspoken words in "The Window" are: "Yes, you were right. It's going to be wet to-morrow" (1927, p. 110). In a discussion of the employment of 'yes' in the novel, the critic, Jane Goldman (2006) believes that Mrs. Ramsay's use of 'yes' is an assertion of patriarchal matrimony. Here, her use of language and silence to serve the marital institution gives her the privilege of collaborating with the patriarchal system and holding a central role inside it. Finally, Mrs. Ramsay's action according to the explicit rules that govern the codes of behaviour in the Victorian society makes her power over others' actions undefiable.

4.4. The Victorian Family: Socially Predefined Forms of Institutionalisation:

In fact, Woolf is so concerned with human relationships in all their forms. According to Joanne Campbell Tidwell, "Woolf's political aims in much of her work involve altering relations between groups and individuals. She highlights the relationships between men and women, between masters and servants, and between the individual and the state" (2008, p. 93). The Victorian marriage was regarded by Woolf as an archetypal institution established by the Victorian culture. The labour of middle class women was denounced as an act against the progress of civilisation. Thus, their restriction to domesticity was a necessary step in such progress. In this specific context, the evolutionary Anthropologist James McGrigor joined scientists and churchmen to denounce female freedom.

Is it possible to conceive a more contemptible and deplorable spectacle than that of the female [...] who, having undertaken, and having appointed to her, by nature, those functions, in the proper fulfilment of which consist the charm and glory of the sex, deliberately neglects and abdicates the sacred duties and

privileges of wife and mother to make herself ridiculous by meddling in and muddling men’s work? (as cited in Jeannette King, 2005, p. 28)

The images of wife and mother were idealized in that period to a point they acquired a religious touch. Women were supposed to fulfil their sacred duty of procreation: “According to the ‘law’ of the division of labour, the exemption of woman from productive labour, so that she might devote herself to the bearing and rearing of children, was a characteristic of the most advanced societies” (2005,p. 27).

To the Lighthouse presents the beautiful, sympathetic, Victorian wife in the character of Mrs. Ramsay, who plays an enormous role in the life of her husband. Although their marriage is a successful one according to the Victorian values, its success, however, depends on her role. She is the one who has to sympathise, soothe and respond to the demands of her dominant, compelling husband. In fact, Lily Briscoe, a family guest, perceives them as “the symbols of marriage, husband and wife” (1927, p. 63). In the same vein, Steve Ellis, a professor of English Literature at the University of Birmingham, writes, “The Ramsay’s marriage, deeply unequal yet deeply affecting, assumes not only an archetypal status, with its partners becoming ‘the symbols of marriage, husband and wife’ (63), but [...] a symbol of partnership and union”(2007, p.79). Despite their differences, Mrs. Ramsay is represented as a partner instead of a dominated oppressed victim. She works to maintain the distribution of power relations in a socially predefined order in the Victorian society by playing her role in the private sphere and making matches between characters to ensure the continuity of the institution.

4.5. The Undeifiable Power of the Multifaceted Angel:

Mrs. Ramsay’s character is much more complex than the ‘angel in the house’ which Virginia Woolf depicted in “*Professions for Women.*” She has a double identity: in public, she is the perfect representation of femininity, which makes her revered by men as Madonna. But, when she is alone without any person demanding her sympathy, reassurance and affection, she becomes “a wedge-shaped core of darkness” (1927, p. 54). On the one hand, Mrs. Ramsay’s physical beauty and motherhood make men revere her as Madonna, particularly, Mr Bankes. Woolf’s portrayal of Mrs. Ramsay is influenced by her father’s description of her mother: Julia, when they met in 1866. In *The Mausoleum Book*, he writes “I do not remember that I spoke to her. I saw and remembered her, as I might have seen and remembered the Sistine Madonna or any other representation of superlative beauty” (1977, p. 31).

Mrs. Ramsay’s status as an “Angel in the House” is given a mystic existence that escapes definitions and acquires transcendental power. Whenever she is in solitude she goes deep in herself where “beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep” (Woolf, 1927, p. 54). Such self is flexible, “her horizon seemed to her limitless [and adventure becomes possible for] there were all the places she had not seen; the Indian plains; she felt herself pushing aside the thick leader curtain of a church in Rome” (p.54). In a state of complete peace and harmony with nature, the freed self becomes transcendental as it enters into a fusion with the things it meditates:

She looked up over her knitting and met the third stroke and it seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes, [...] she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to things, inanimate things [...] expressed one [...] became one [...] knew one, in a sense were one.” (p. 55)

Mrs. Ramsay does not associate herself with the light, but feels that she becomes the light itself. “(She looked at the long steady light) as for oneself” (p. 55). However, her inner self is not strong enough to acquire definitions. As a “core of darkness,” a light stroke, it resembles void rather than existence. In this context, Jane de Gay (2006) believes that “this emptiness confirms Mrs Ramsay’s status as the angel or the ghost” (p. 108)

As a collaborator with patriarchy Mrs. Ramsay’s perceptions of reality are oriented by polarised gender roles and idealisation of the institution of the family. Mrs. Ramsay, representing a whole culture, sees the family guest Lily in relation to the feminine characteristics highly valued by the Victorian society. She believes that her lack of physical beauty will prevent her from marriage. The latter is, in Mrs. Ramsay’s opinion, the highest achievement a girl may accomplish. Mrs. Ramsay denies Lily her artistic ability and wonders if she will be lucky to fulfil her gender role, because “with her little Chinese eyes and her puckered up face she would never marry” (Woolf, 1927, p. 13).

The character of the artist Lily is the only representative of resistance in the novel, but the power of Mrs. Ramsay’s actions puts her in struggle with two enemies: a chief and an immediate one (Foucault, 1982,p. 780). The chief enemy in the novel is more conceptual because it is embedded in all actions by men and women to respect or assert the continuity of patriarchy. Lily’s stand in face of patriarchy is a resistance rather than a fight. Woolf does not propose an outspoken rebellion or a fight, but only a refusal of surrender to patriarchal demands and a devotion of one’s self to art. Lily’s resistance is not only to the male authority but also to the pressure exerted on her by Mrs. Ramsay. In fact, “What Woolf depicts in Lily [...] is not a feminist political program, but the acts of everyday resistance that enable women to carry on under patriarchy” (A. E. Fernald, 2006, p. 42). Lily does not enter a direct struggle with any of the male characters in the novel, even with Mr. Tansley, who denies women any intellectual abilities. Lily’s arm of resistance is her artistic activity, which is directed in opposition to social pressures to get married. Such confrontation between social tradition and modernity is seen at the beginning of *To the Lighthouse*, when Lily refuses to pity William Banks for “He is not in the least pitiable. He has his work, Lily said to herself” (1927, p. 74). At this stage, Lily’s perception that she is equal to men is clear as “She remembered, all of a sudden as if she had found a treasure, that she too had her work” (p. 74). A work, Lily believes to be as valuable as those of the male intellectuals in the novel.

In addition, Lily despises Mr. Tansley for his severe patriarchal ideas and his trial to undermine the whole female sex. Mr. Tansley’s words “Women can’t write, women can’t paint” (p. 75) become internalised in Lily’s mind and repeated each time she feels she will fail as if she were calling all her power by reminding herself of her enemy. According to Anne E. Fernald (2006),

Lily Briscoe [...] struggles with a dangerous fragment: Charles Tansley’s “Women can’t write women can’t paint” haunts her, seeming to confirm her own self-doubt. These slogans must be

overcome, and Lily [...] eventually defeat[s] them through internalizing, repeating, and rejecting them (p. 42).

Through Lily, Woolf tackles the problem of the marginalisation of women artists. As a writer, she finds it difficult to escape patriarchal discourse and use an ‘écriture féminine’ suitable to the expression of the female body. As a painter of abstract art, Lily has evaded the patriarchal discourse by using colours as means of expression; however, she cannot completely escape the humiliation any woman artist undergoes in patriarchy. Besides, the evaluation of her art is always made in reference to male-determined tradition.

Rejecting old referential criteria in art creates in Lily a self-doubt, which exposes her unconscious reference to great painters. “[Looking at her picture,] she could have wept. It was bad, it was infinitely bad! She could have done it differently of course; the colour could have been thinned and faded; the shapes etherealised; that was how Paunceforte would have seen it” (Woolf, 1927, p. 41). Lily is threatened by patriarchal discouragement of her creative activity, because as a woman artist, she doubts her talent and undermines herself and her work. At that very moment of self-doubt, Lily remembers Tansely’s bogy “women can’t paint, women can’t write” (p. 42).

In fact, Lily’s anxiety of creation is deeply evoked by the subject of her art: the revered “Angel in the House” or the Madonna representing the “immediate enemy”. Lily’s picture and Woolf’s novel are both creations of women artists, who seek an aesthetic vision beyond traditional conventions of society and art. In addition, they try to offer a representation of woman in art, and in their case the woman is the cultural figure “the Angel in the House”, who challenges any representation. Such view is shared by Jane de Gay (2006), who believes that:

Writing and painting carry conventions of representation, and [...] the images clustering around the Angel in the House informed popular ways of representing women in art. The issue Woolf addresses in ‘The Lighthouse’ is only partly to do with her personal battle against Victorian ideals of womanhood. The problem faced by both Lily painting Mrs. Ramsay and Woolf writing about her mother as Mrs. Ramsay lies in dealing with the image of the Angel, a fictitious figure which was difficult to subvert. (p. 124)

Woolf allows her fictitious artist, Lily, to see the difficulty of Mrs. Ramsay’s character and try to portray what she sees rather than what men see or want her to see. When Lily discusses the object of her art with Mr. Bankes, who wonders how the objects of universal veneration, mother and child, can be reduced to “a purple shadow without irreverence” (1927, p. 45), she states that “the picture was not of them [...] Or not in his sense. There were other senses, too, in which one might reverence them” (p. 45). Hence, portraying Mrs. Ramsay is as difficult for Lily as creating her by Woolf. For example, in “The Lighthouse” section, Lily thinks about the difficulty of knowing Mrs. Ramsay: “One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought” (p. 175).

Killing the character of Mrs. Ramsay becomes a necessary authorial act that allows both Woolf as a writer and Lily as a painter to have their artistic visions and complete their works

that become transformative rather than representative. When Mrs. Ramsay's power makes Lily's resistance insignificant, eliminating the female collaborator with patriarchy is the only way that brings a shift in power relations in the novel. Although Lily chooses to become a modern artist and rejects "[Mrs. Ramsay's] limited, old-fashioned ideas" (p. 154), she cannot overcome a feeling of insignificance in front of her. The mother's "wilful", "commanding" (p. 92) power leads Lily to idealise and romanticise her as a mythical figure: "She imagined how in the chambers of the mind and the heart of the woman who was, physically, touching her, were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out would teach one everything" (p. 44). In "The Window", Lily cannot tell Mrs. Ramsay about the things that define her existence: "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" (p. 43). Here, Woolf evokes the notion of 'otherness' but on another level. It is more difficult to face 'the other,' when she belongs to one's sex. Lily feels weak and "so little" (p. 43) for she has to face Mrs. Ramsay, the guardian of virtue and morality; she has to face the Madonna, who becomes Lily's oppressor by her promotion of the values of patriarchal society.

Lily becomes mature in Mrs. Ramsay's absence and feels triumphant, because she resisted her influence, "she had only escaped by the skin of her teeth though, she thought" (p. 155). While painting, Lily remembers Mrs Ramsay's wishes for the Rayleys and feels a power in herself, because Mrs. Ramsay's "universal law" has proved its inadequacy and the Rayleys' marriage turned to be a failure. "And one would have to say to her, It has all gone against your wishes. They're happy like that; I'm happy like this. Life has changed completely. At that all her being, even her beauty, became a moment, dusty and out of date" (p. 154).

The death of the mother or the "Angel in the House" allows Lily, or Woolf the daughter, to create art and reach an artistic maturity. Being an artist, she feels safe, because the old pressures to conform to social conventions are gone with Mrs. Ramsay. "It had seemed so safe, thinking of her. Ghost, air, nothingness, a thing you could play with easily and safely at any time of day or night" (p. 158). Indeed, Lily's quest in the novel leads her to capture the artistic vision she is longing for since the beginning of the novel.

5. Conclusion:

The analysis of power elements in the novel revealed that power circulates in a triangular way not a hierarchal order as suggested by feminist studies of Woolf's novel. Power relations in the novel are not relations of oppression, subordination and domination. In fact, Mrs. Ramsay representing the "Angel in the House" has a key and central role in the novel. She acquires enough power to gain a stereotypical status and become revered by men in the novel. Her qualities guarantee her strength as a collaborator with patriarchy as she exerts her power through silence, discourse and behaviour to ensure the continuity of the patriarchal ideology through the family. In addition, her representative status of the Madonna made Lily's efforts to resist patriarchy go in vain. Woolf deliberately killed the character of Mrs. Ramsay to show that her power as an "immediate" enemy" is more threatening to Lily than that of men in the novel. Killing the "Angel in the House" in the novel allowed both Woolf and her fictional artist to have their visions and overcome patriarchy.

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