

**The portrayal of marriage and feminine sexuality in some
women's writings**



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Abstract

Both in contemporary and historical times 'marriage' has been considered as one the most important social institutions. The benefits of marriage are undeniable, yet in most of the cases the restrictions and bindings imposed on married women are also inevitable. To feminists, marriage is a site for female subordination, which binds women to household labour, which is undermined by society.

Women's economic solvency is an important path for women to emerge from this reliance on marriage. However, it is only recently that women have been able to emerge out of this dependence. The emergence of the 'new woman' of the early twentieth century also helps us to shift the focus away from maternal aspects only, and has resulted in new ways of depicting women and looking at their lives.

My thesis will look into five texts by women writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This thesis will try to explore the conditions and situation of women in society, specifically the position of women in marriage. Starting with the agendas of feminist movements, feminist criticisms and feminist interpretation of marriage, this thesis will analyze married life in the chosen texts. The 'new woman', madness, women's individual happiness and autonomy will be traced by focusing on feminine sexuality. The purpose of the thesis is to find the position of women in marriage along with notions of marriage. This will be done by placing the texts in appropriate contexts and examining the position of the concerned authors.

Chapter one

Prologue

'Feminist criticism' is a specific kind of political discourse: a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism, not simply a concern for gender in literature [...]¹

'Feminine', 'female', 'feminist' are three different but inter-dependent categories. Male-female distinctions can be seen as biologically determined sexual difference; 'feminine' and 'masculine' represent social constructs, indicating patterns of sexuality and behaviour imposed by cultural and social norms. Thus, feminine represents nurture where the usage is 'female'. 'Femininity' is a cultural construct and it constitutes sweetness, modesty, subservience, docility, humility etc. which make a woman 'natural'. Conventionally, when a woman refuses to conform is called 'unfeminine' and 'unnatural'. Society often decides on the feminine and unfeminine characteristics of women and carries with it the strong meaning of male domination. Therefore, patriarchy has believed in real 'female/feminine nature: the biologism and essentialism which always lurk behind the desire to bestow feminine virtues on all female bodies necessarily plays into the hands of the patriarchs.'² Social institutions are directly or indirectly related to patriarchy which is based on a hierarchical system, keeping men on top and women at the bottom. Starting from the psychological aspects to the sociological, physiological, moral, economic, racial etc. it is the women who are victimized.

¹Toril Moi, "Feminist, Female, feminine" in Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore's *the feminist reader* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1997) 104.

² *Ibid.* 108.

Women conform to social expectations and bindings. From the early ages women start believing in the patriarchal notion of 'femininity.' There is an equation of femininity with passivity.

This passivity assumes prominence through 'marriage.' Feminists voice a different opinion to the conventional notion when it comes to marriage. According to feminists the 'personal is political'¹ and marriage is seen as the unequal partnership between men and women with women taking the lower position. The myth of marriage being the romantic pinnacle may not entirely be sound and women are seen deserting this myth in the quest for independence and freedom especially since most marriages turn out to be nothing but the underpinning of male dominance. Marriage is also like a financial alliance. Married women have a tendency to become dependent on their husbands and they basically identify their own survival with the prosperity of those who feed them. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in *Women and Economics*² (1898), insisted that women would not be liberated until they were freed from the 'domestic mythology' of home and family that kept them dependent on men. Gilman's idea dictates the Victorian society; unfortunately things have not changed much as most contemporary societies are patriarchal where the father occupies the superior position. As a result, women remain subordinate, and their limited opportunities for employment put them in a worse situation.

¹ Kathy J. Whitson, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature*. (Greenwood Press, London. 2005) 153.

² Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (Boston: Small, Myland and Co, 1898)

Even if a working woman has financial independence, there is no assurance of her emotional and physical freedom. Hence she remains a subordinate to her husband. Division of labour plays a large part in patriarchal marriage, which is determined by the superior economic position of the male and the inferior economic position of the female. Sexual politics prevails at work, as well as at the family level. The unpaid labour of women in the households is never considered as equal to the labour of a working class man. Married women have to work from sun rise to sun set and as compensation they get a roof over their heads. Basically, no changes in social relationships take place automatically; it is the women who have to change their condition. Therefore, the aim of my paper is to analyze difficulties of women in marriage which prevent them from establishing a separate identity with their own capability. The findings will be based on the reading of five major texts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This thesis will be a chronological study of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), Virginia Woolf's two texts: *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937).

'The first wave refers to the feminism movement of the 19th through early 20th centuries, which dealt mainly with the Suffrage movement. The second wave (1960s-1980s) dealt with the inequality of laws, as well as cultural inequalities. The Third wave of Feminism (1990s-current) is seen as both a continuation and a response to the perceived failures of the Second-wave.'¹

¹Krolokke, Charlotte and Anne Scott Sorensen, "From Suffragettes to Grrls" in *Gender Communication Theories and Analyses: From Silence to Performance* (Sage, 2005).

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminist_movement#cite_note-Suffragettes_to_Grrls-2.
1Apr.2009. 20 February 2009.

Feminist movements have been divided into three waves. First wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which focused on officially mandated inequalities, primarily on gaining women's suffrage (the right to vote.) On the other hand, second wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity which began during the 1960s and lasted till the late 1970s. Where first wave feminism focused mainly on overturning legal obstacles to equality, second wave feminism addressed unofficial inequalities as well as official ones. Unlike the first wave, second wave feminism provoked extensive theoretical discussion about the origins of women's oppression, the nature of gender, and the role of women in marriage. It was also an era which favoured middle class development, had consistent effort on re-establishing pre-war patriarchal social trends which idealized domesticity by placing women in a closed sphere where they only had to fulfill the roles of housewives and mothers. In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* demonstrates a feminist existentialism which prescribes a moral revolution. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica¹ Beauvoir examines the notion of women as 'Other' in patriarchal society. Beauvoir claims male-centered ideology was being further accepted as a norm and enforced simply by the ongoing development of myths. Her analysis focuses on the concept of 'The Other'. It is the social construction of women as the other that Beauvoir identifies as fundamental to women's oppression. As an existentialist, Beauvoir supports 'one is not born a woman, but becomes one'² and she focuses on the philosophical belief that individuals are free and responsible agents, and are able to transcend the roles imposed by society. Women as 'Other', are oppressed. Men are thought to be the 'Self', the free being, self-determining agents

¹ "The Second Sex." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2009. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/531605/The-Second-Sex>>. 15 Apr. 2009.

² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. (Vintage, London, 1997) 172.

who define their own existence, whereas women always remain the 'Other', the passive, object and the meaning of their existence is not defined by themselves.

No man would consent to be a woman, but every man wants women to exist. 'Thank god for having created woman.' 'Nature is good since she has given women to men.' In such expressions man once more asserts with naïve arrogance that his presence in this world is an ineluctable fact and a right, that of woman a mere accident- but a very happy accident.¹

In case of marriage, the phallic pride of a man helps him to sustain his dominant status. Just like a ploughman, a husband also penetrates inside his wife 'as the ploughshare into the furrow'². Thus marriage becomes a platform of the continuation of women's passivity. Beauvoir also asserts that women are as capable of making choices as men, and hence can choose to elevate themselves, ascending beyond the immanently assigned positions. Such ascension allows them to reach a position in which she assumes the sole responsibility for herself and the world, from whereon she can truly choose individual freedom. Furthermore she elaborates on the capabilities of women in propagating life through childbirth, lactating to provide nourishment for the new born, and menstruating to continue the process of reproduction. With strong convictions emphasized through such elaborations Beauvoir asserts that there is no valid cause or explanation for women to be placed as the 'second sex'.

The term 'Sexual politics' refers to power-structured relationships, arrangements and in Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) 'sex' is seen as a status category having political implications. Races, castes, classes, and sexes being variations in all categories, women's positions in a number of recognized political structures tend to be stable but their oppression is

¹ Beauvoir. 173.

² Beauvoir.183.

prevalent In the arch of patriarchy status, role and temperament are three interrelated categories. Status is a political component, role is ensured sociologically and temperament is a psychological effect; therefore men with a higher status tend to adopt the roles of masters as they are often encouraged to bolster their temperaments of dominance. Kate Millett in the second chapter of *Sexual Politics* points out that patriarchy is the focal point for female oppression not only in terms of marriage only, but every other aspect where women are deprived of their fundamental, and secondary rights. There are many different spheres of society which collectively illustrate men's material interest in the domination or subjugation of women and the purpose behind constructing a variety of institutional arrangements is to sustain this domination. Opposing the belief of the essentialists (the differences between men and women are innate); Millett exemplifies the ways in which women are socially constructed to be subjugated or ruled over. Marriage is a mere power play on the man's part. Superiority and inferiority are often displayed in marriage. Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey observe that the United States workplace still centers on the assumption that 'men are the breadwinners and women are the homemakers'.¹ Women were often educated to become better candidates for suitors. This was the major agenda underlying women's education for a long time. After marriage many of the women are seen becoming economically dependent on their husbands. As a result the dependency proceeds from one sphere to another and ultimately women become 'parasites' on their husbands. Therefore education is important for women's freedom and independence so that they can occupy a separate ground and for that women must be given equal opportunities through the same kind of education men receive. Even a couple of years ago, there were certain well known colleges which were only for men in the U.S. Women were

¹ Gwyn, Kirk, and Margo Okazawa-Rey, *Women's lives: Multicultural Perspectives*. (2nd ed. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 2001) in Whitson. 153.

educated in order to become better in the marriage market. Only recently women have been participants of education with the purpose of gaining knowledge and establishing strides through employment and other ventures.

According to Loraine Gelsthorpe, postmodern feminists have broadened the meaning of 'Otherness' of women (where men are the 'Self'). Some of the roots of postmodern feminism are found in the works of Derrida (1978, 1981). Postmodern feminists have celebrated women's 'Otherness' in all its diverse forms. Emphasizing the positive side of 'Otherness' is a major theme in the associated deconstructionist approaches, also in the celebration of a plurality of knowledges. 'Otherness' thus symbolizes plurality, diversity, difference and openness. There are also attempts made to create fluid, open terms and language which more closely reflect women's experiences. Postmodern feminism is perhaps perceived to have the most critical relationship with the broad project of feminism, 'largely because of beliefs that feminism itself may be misconceived in assuming that it is possible to provide overarching explanations for women's oppression and identify steps towards its resolution.'¹

Sexuality and marriage are intermingled and sexuality is a common instinct present in all human beings. In case of marriage, women are often raped under the label of 'marital sexuality.' Toril Moi summarizes Derrida's ideas on phallocentrism in the essay "Feminism

¹ Loraine Gelsthorpe, "*Feminism and Criminology*." (Oxford handbook of Criminology, 1997).

<<http://www.oup.com/uk/orc/bin/0199249377/resources/synopses/ch04.doc>> 2 February. 2009.

Literary Criticism”¹ saying phallogocentrism denotes a system that privileges the phallus as the prime symbol or source of power. Logocentrism colluding with phallogocentrism is actually an effort to oppress and silence women (the conjuncture of logocentrism and phallogocentrism is called phallogocentrism after Derrida).

Sexuality is an integrate part of marital life; sexual intercourse would mean the ‘combination of both body and soul’ as D.H. Lawrence puts it. In case of the majority, sexual intercourse in marriage, is a ‘scheduled’ thing to be done and always dominated by the male figure. Women have their own fantasies, own ways of looking at sexuality, which often take them beyond the boundary of marriage. Women also have passionate feelings, and desires which in most cases are suppressed. A woman sleeping with her husband, doing things according to the will of her husband is often called the ‘perfect wife’; on the other hand women seeking their own passionate pleasures, sexual freedom are called ‘whores.’ A man sleeping with many women becomes ‘experienced’ whereas for women with sexual experience are labeled as whores. According to feminists, heterosexuality is a kind of rape. Conventionally, women ought not to seek sexual freedom; independent passionate desires having the fear of to be called ‘whore’ remain silent in a marriage. If a woman seeks her own freedom and independence by educating herself therefore remains unmarried, society would still raise a lot of questions. It is almost like a dilemma from a woman’s part when she can not go beyond the conventional norms and regulations in a marriage, also can not suppress her inner feelings. Ultimately, the women become insane or commit suicide. Thus the women transgressing

¹ Meli Steele, *Theorizing textual subjects* (Cambridge University Press, 1997) 186.
<<http://books.google.com/books?id=SMUAUjQn4HsC>>

marital boundaries traverse new ground, for which they have to pay the most difficult price (either madness or suicide).

This thesis will proceed by looking at four disparate female writers and their depiction of the position of women in their marriage. The following paragraphs will introduce us to the reasons these authors were chosen.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) was a prominent American novelist, writer of short stories, poetry, non fiction and also a lecturer of social reform. Her accomplishments were exceptional for women and she was considered as a utopian feminist. Her most famous writing *The Yellow Wallpaper* resembles her own life experience to a significant extent. It was written after a severe bout of post-partum depression. *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) was rediscovered during the 1970's and called an early feminist indictment of Victorian patriarchy. It is an account of a repressed, suppressed self of a woman whose movements are limited, as she is confined by her husband's 'rescuer' notion of hysteria which ultimately drives her to madness.

On the other hand, the feminist themes of the inequality of traditional marriage and of female desire for personal autonomy and sexual freedom were boldly explored by Kate Chopin (1851-1904), in *The Awakening* (1899). A similarity between *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *The Awakening* is that, the protagonist of the first text is shown in an extreme prison like condition; if the Protagonist of *The Awakening* Edna Pontellier would not listen to her inner self, could end up in a similar way. *The Awakening* reveals a rebellious side of Edna Pontellier's personality that was never seen in the roles of the society's good, dutiful wives and mothers. *The Awakening* poses a different role for women that is neither the role of a mother nor wife. The ending of the text

(Edna's suicide) raised a number of criticisms as it was ambiguous regarding whether her rebellion was defeated or whether this was a celebration of her rebellious spirit.

Virginia Woolf's (1882- 1941) *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) is a novel written in the post world war period (a time of incredible political and social change) This novel contains a splendid satirical attack on the profession of psychiatrics, gender stereotypes, society's superficiality, conventional marriage life. It also shows the incapability of a war returned soldier to cope up with his life. He feels himself to be an 'Eternal sufferer.'¹ Septimus is the negative parallel to Clarissa, the protagonist in the sense that Clarissa could repress her passions and desires; she was also admired in the patriarchal society (in this way she becomes an androgynous character). Femininity and madness are noticed in the paired characters. Clarissa is the alternative construction of sexuality but fulfills the sexual stereotypes. She is also a reflection of the subjugated married woman in a patriarchal society. Mrs. Killman, the teacher of Clarissa's daughter Elizabeth is another alternate character to her. Miss Killman pities such a way of leading life and her perception is justifiable as Clarissa has been trapped in her own social class. She needs support, as her thoughts and actions do not match. She is portrayed ultimately as a woman without a heart and mind in this process her individuality is lost. Septimus Smith (a shell-shock victim, who ultimately commits suicide) is the opposite of Clarissa. It is through the characters of Clarissa and Septimus, Woolf discloses the terrifying results of the invasion of unconscious impulses, and shows that Clarissa successfully manages to keep her sanity intact. On the other hand, *To the Lighthouse* (1927) deals with the consequences of two days with the gap of ten years. Woolf's concept of androgyny and

¹ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (Jason Carter. Rose Norman. University of Alabama in Huntsville.1997, 2004).29.

traditional mother-wife characters are noticeable here. The story extensively deals with Woolf's technique 'streams of consciousness' and a comparing study will be followed between these two texts by Woolf as the thesis proceeds.

Black Feminists have secured a special ground in the field of Feminism. It is believed that Black women possess a unique standpoint on, and experiences of, historical and material conditions. To quote:

It is further claimed that Black women's experiences uniquely provide an 'outsider-within' perspective on self, family and society which in turn serves to establish a distinctive standpoint vis a vis sociology's paradigmatic facts and theories.¹

The African American novelist and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston lived in the first incorporated, self-governing, all black town in the United States which helped her in gaining experiences regarding her sense of racial identity. The experiences are also reflected in her fictional and non fictional writings. Hurston was also associated with the Harlem Renaissance which is a black arts movement of the 1920s and the movement was done to re-establish black culture and the slogan 'Black Is Beautiful' was carried by the movement. Being a black feminist writer Hurston faced a list of criticisms from her own people. Many people criticized her for associating with white writers blaming her as an opportunity seeker. She was an artist participating in stage plays and one of her roles in a play was criticized by the critic Hughes for playing the 'perfect darkie' in order to achieve patronage from wealthy white individuals.

¹ Loraine Gelsthorne, *Feminism and Criminology* (the Oxford handbook of criminology, 1997)
<<http://www.oup.com/uk/orc/bin/9780199249374/resources/synopses/ch04.doc>> 12
March.2009.

Nevertheless, Hurston's love of African American oral storytelling traditions and folkloric culture infuses her most famous novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). It provides a picture of the town of Eatonville, where Hurston was raised. It's a lyrical novel and it is about a black woman's quest and search for self realization and equality in marriage ending with a failed love affair.

The following chapters will examine these five pieces of fiction to decipher and highlight the picture of marriage and female sexuality they portray. Many of the insights of feminist criticism and the feminist movement will be brought to bear on the analyzes that will be made.

Chapter 2

Women as Wives: *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *The Awakening*

It was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy [...]¹

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's (1860-1935) autobiographical short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* is interpreted in many different ways. It is the portrayal of a married woman's confinement in society, has gothic elements but most importantly it is a criticism of the medical treatment provided to women in their nervous breakdown problems. Gilman had suffered as a patient of America's one of the well known neurologists' Weir Mitchell and this is reflected in her short story. She says:

For many years I suffered from a severe and continuous nervous breakdown tending to melancholia-and beyond [...] I went [...] to a noted specialist in nervous disease [...] he concluded there was nothing much the matter with me, and sent me home with solemn advice to 'live as domestic a life as far as possible,' to 'have two hours' intellectual life a day, and 'never to touch pen, brush or pencil again, as long as I lived.'²

The narrator's house also has been seen as having abnormal connotations. John S. Bak explains that the mansion incorporates "external instruments of restraint suggestive of a prison or a mental ward"³. *The Yellow Wallpaper* addresses issues of mental illness and also the medical treatment of women. Resolution of mental disturbance is important in prevention

¹. Gilman, "Why I wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper*?" in Gilman and Shulman's *Great Modern American Short Stories*, ed. William Dean Howells. (Oxford press, 1920) 332.

² *Ibid.* 331.

³ John S Bak, "Escaping the Jaundiced Eye: Foucauldian Panopticism in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 31.1 (Winter 1994) 41.

of mental disorders. *The Yellow Wallpaper* also illustrates the ways in which society discourages women from creative self-expression. The narrator's desire for writing has been stifled by her 'rescuer'. The narrator's psychological distress is clearly implied in the beginning and her condition is worsened by her husband's treatment which confines her to the house. The inadequacy of the patriarchal medical profession in treating women's mental health is indicated further by the narrator's fear of being sent to Dr. Weir Mitchell. According to Golden, the purpose of putting the doctor in Gilman's story was to "reach Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, and convince him of the error of his ways"¹. Golden's article is a comparative study between Mitchell's female patients as talked about in the book *Characteristics* and Gilman's fiction. According to this article, Gilman tries to defy her neurologist in her writing by making her protagonist a writer. She draws a conclusion saying:

Gilman's "creative life and her fiction reveal that she ultimately 'overwrote' Mitchell's efforts to make her more like the ideal female patients predominant in his affluent medical practice and his fiction"²

The rest cure prescribed by Mitchell, reflects men's disparaging attitudes towards female madness. His rest cure calls for complete rest and enforces isolation. Mitchell, specializing in women's nervous ailments, expounded upon his beliefs about for women's nervous conditions saying:

American woman is, to speak plainly, too often physically unfit for her duties as woman, and is perhaps of all civilized females the least qualified to undertake those weightier tasks which tax so heavily the nervous system of man. She is not fairly up to what nature asks from

¹ Catherine Golden, " 'Overwriting' the Rest Cure: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Literary Escape from S. Weir Mitchell's Fictionalization of Women." *Critical Essays on Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. Ed. Joanne P. Karpinski (New York: G.K. Hall, 1992)145.

² *Ibid.* 145.

her as wife and mother. How will she sustain herself under the pressure of those yet more exacting duties which nowadays she is eager to share with the man?¹

The narrator's mental disorder is seen in various lights. Critics also comment on her illness calling it 'hysteria'. According to Greg Johnson it is "an expression of long-suppressed rage"². He further elaborates his point saying that her madness is temporary and in her temporary madness her suppressed rage becomes apparent. At the end of the story the narrator is convinced of the fact that there is no escape for her from the surveillance of her husband John and the care taker Jennie; above all from the life she is leading. She herself admits that there are certain things in her life that have always made her nervous and hysteria is a functional disturbance of the nervous system. She could tell what would help her in recovery but she gives up all hope as her husband remains unchanged.

In her utopian fiction Gilman tried to envision the perfect kind of world for women. However the world is not entirely utopian as Gilman tries to focus on the fact of unwanted marriage in *The Yellow Wallpaper* and the narrator's "new self housed" in the wallpaper of the bedroom. The wallpaper is symbolic in terms of the vivid depiction of a woman trapped in her roles as mother and wife. The story deals extensively with the wallpaper in which the narrator sees her hidden freedom and a vivid description is given about the wallpaper which

¹ Weir S. Mitchell, "Wear and Tear, or Hints for the Overworked." *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: "The Yellow Wallpaper."* Ed. Dale M. Bauer. (Boston: Belford Books, 1998) 135.

² Greg Johnson, "Gilman's Gothic Allegory: Rage and Redemption in 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 26 (1989). 522.

gradually acquires polymorphous meanings. A strong inter-relation is established between the narrator and the wallpaper. To the narrator it represents "her 'repressed other' or 'suppressed self' ".¹ At one point she feels there is a woman hiding behind the frontier of the wallpaper, her gradually developed thoughts make her believe that there is not only one woman hidden behind, there is actually a collectivity of women who are craving for freedom and want to come out of the cage. The development of the human mind is essential to all, and certain limitations and obstacles can result in great disorder. Starting from a new born child to an old person, everybody seeks liberty, both physical and mental. Sigmund Freud's essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'² deals entirely with the development of the human mind. The theory is discussed through a couple of examples where it is shown that human desire for freedom starts from the very early days of one's life. A baby playing with a toy throws it away and picks it up which shows the desire of human mind to overcome the gulf between loss and achievement. This makes reconciliation between our losses and gains.

In the case of the protagonist of *The Yellow Wallpaper* the same kind of desire is noticed. This is extended by the strong powerful imposition of her husband's will on her. She seeks to have her own way of life as she has an artistic mind and loves to write. She keeps a secret diary for and according to Golden the protagonist's undated journal entries 'can be seen as a spatial indication of the narrator's own fragmented sense of self.'³ Despite constantly urging her husband for moving away from the house, and allow her to have her

¹ Beverly A. Hume," Gilman's 'Interminable Grotesque': The Narrator of 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 28 (Fall 1991). 481.

² Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Ed., trans. James Strachey .W. W. Norton.(New York. Publication Year: 1961) .3.

³ Golden.193.

way; he remains unchanged in his decision. The narrator wants to reconcile her loss and achievement through her writing. Her artistic creativity is hampered by her husband. He does not allow her to write which is a great barrier in terms of her emotional recovery. She understands that she can avert her mind from her nervous breakdown through writing but her husband and sister in law's constant surveillance prevents her from doing so. Yet at the end she tears up the wallpaper and allows the metaphorical woman to come out from confinement. She feels happy as the freed woman resembles herself as well. The narrator also wishes the same freedom for all women who are trapped by social, emotional and physical barriers. Her temporary madness can be justified saying; once she allows the woman to come out of the cage she remembers her regular dreadful nights: "I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!"¹

The Yellow Wallpaper expresses a general concern regarding the role of women in Victorian society, particularly in the realm of marriage, maternity, and domesticity. The narrator's confinement to her home and her feelings of victimhood in the household is an indication of one of the many domestic limitations that society imposes upon women. *The Yellow Wallpaper* deals with the gendered power politics of the nineteenth century and Victorian sexuality also has an implication in this story. The nailed-down bed shows static-sexuality or 'a sexual crucifixion'² of the narrator's married life. Victorian sexuality was immobile like the heavy bedstead. In the Victorian age, a wife used to be considered as a commodity. She belonged to her husband wholly and her husband could do anything with her

¹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co. 1899).4.

² Johnson. 526.

body. A wife was a useful material to her husband until a significant number of children were born. Women's duty was merely to give birth to children and please their husbands. Women were expected to be submissive and docile.

"Gilman's Gothic Allegory: Rage and Redemption in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" by Greg Johnson draws the story of Emily Dickinson's mother as an example to show the position of Victorian women as married women. When Dickinson's mother was pregnant, she had a similar wallpaper in her room which had not been changed despite many requests to her husband. She re-prints the paper at last thinking that, this is the only thing she could do as there was no way out. This was her "only recorded act of wifely defiance"¹. Victorian women did not have much control over their lives; as a result they used to seek their autonomy in such trifling acts. The narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* goes into temporary madness which can be seen as an escape from the strict norms and values imposed upon her by society. Such feelings are also contained in Emily Dickinson's poems such as: "Much Madness is divinest Sense"(Poem 435) and "She rose to his requirement"(Poem 732).

Much Madness is divinest Sense—
To a discerning Eye—
Much Sense—the starkest Madness—
'Tis the Majority
In this, as All, prevail—
Assent—and you are sane—
Demur—you're straightway dangerous—
And handled with a Chain—

¹ Johnson.521.

This poem contains a dark imagery of confinement and fear which sets it apart from many other poems by Dickinson. The theme of this poem is madness and sanity. This poem represents Dickinson's sense of humour, as well as her rebellion; it also shows an intellectual woman's inner frustration in a male dominated world. Dickinson was seen as a recluse, also as a demure human being in real life but she used her writing as a medium to express her inner thoughts. Dickinson's strong sentiments are expressed through her poems but in this particular poem she shows her fear of literal madness. Dickinson's idea of insanity is a little ambiguous in this poem as there is a sense of fear of being insane. It was the period when insane people were handled strictly. Although the most insane person considered by society can be the sanest (in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, John is considered to be sane and his wife insane), society denotes people as sane and insane. Dickinson believes that individuality is more important than conformity. In a website article by Melissa Haug¹ it is said that in the sentence 'To a discerning Eye--' 'Eye' is a pun for 'I' and the implication is the absurdity of blindly following social dictates. Most people decide what is sane and insane and a deviation or any alternate action is not accepted by the majority. Also those who object can be threatening and are ostracized. Dickinson's rebellion is not only against the men who are the initiators of the social rules; it is also against the women who accept those rules silently. In Victorian times a woman was expected to act according to the norms, if she would not then she is 'controlled' or 'handled with a chain'. It is also possible that Dickinson was referring negatively to being handled or confined by marriage or in a mental asylum.

¹ Melissa Haug, "Emily Dickinson, Understanding the poet". 2007.
<<http://www.victoriana.com/history/emilydickinson.htm>>. 23 January, 2009

She rose to His Requirement - dropt
The playthings of her Life
To take the honorable Work
Of Woman, and of Wife -

If aught She missed in Her new Day,
Of Amplitude or Awe -
Or first Prospective - Or the Gold
In using, wear away,

It lay unmentioned - as the Sea
Develop Pearl, and Weed,
But only to Himself - be known
The Fathoms they abide -

This poem gives a sad insight into the facts which are lost or gone when a woman surrenders her desires, wishes, dreams also herself to a man. The message this poem conveys is clear as Dickinson wants to emphasize the fact that a woman's desires, and dreams are not mere 'playthings'. A woman just as a man should pursue his or her personal desires and dreams in order to be complete. This poem stands for women who sacrifice everything of their lives to their husbands. It is also a subtle attack on all the women who give up their own dreams, work and remain as mere housewives. The last three lines of this poem are very important as it suggests that a woman who has missed many opportunities and fortunes in her life time of marriage, does not desire to talk about it to her husband as the husband knows best what is worthwhile 'the pearl' or 'weed'.

Women such as the protagonist of Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* actually forged ahead and challenged patriarchy (Dr. Weir altered his rest-cure notions). It proves women can move beyond the restrictions of the ideologies but the number of such women is very small. Marriage, in which men play the dominant role and wield control eventually place women at the mercy of their male counterparts and many wives get trapped (some women

also take that as their fate and conform). On the other hand, some women have been trying to escape such a position despite the seeming impediment of feminine biology. Hence, the romanticizing of woman's role in the family and home, barring them from the public domain are not successful measures always. Being freed from the enslavement of the ideology, some women perceive their lives from a different angle from the conventional one.

The concept of 'New Womanhood' portrays women who are different from the traditional. The cult of womanhood binds women to family and household. The Cult of True Womanhood "purposely did not acknowledge the growing work force of women, did not sanction professionalism and careerism for women [. . .]"¹. By getting out of the wallpaper, a collectivity of women 'defied the corrupted power that men wielded over women, escaped their confinement, and created for themselves a new ideological role, one that included entry into the public sphere, or the market place.'² Women who can liberate themselves from such confinements are new women and the protagonist of the next novella is an example of such a woman.

¹ Mary E. Papke, *Verging on the Abyss: The Social Fiction of Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1990) 12.

² Deborah Thomas, *The Changing Role of Womanhood: From True Woman to New Woman in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"*
<<http://itech.fgcu.edu/faculty/wohlpart/ala/gilman.htm#INSERT%201>>
27 July.1998. 2 February.2009.

Kate Chopin (1851-1904) was among the first American authors to write truthfully about women's hidden lives, passionate desires, sexuality, and about some of the complexities and contradictions in women's relationships with their husbands. Chopin is also considered by some to have been a forerunner of the feminist authors of the 20th century. Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) depicts nineteenth century society and women's struggle to overcome their conflicting emotions and the oppression of tradition. In *The Awakening*, Chopin gives examples of how women should and should not act in society, in their homes, and with their husbands. In Edna Pontellier's adopted society, women are viewed more valuable when they conform into the mother-woman role. The mother-woman role is another form of male control, because it dictates how women should raise their children, worship their husbands, and honour their isolated, alienated but inferior positions.

Chopin is one of the first female writers to address female issues especially sexuality. Chopin declares that women are capable of overt sexuality in which they explore and enjoy their sexuality. Chopin shows that her women are capable of loving more than one man at a time. Edna Pontellier (the protagonist) is not only attractive but sexually attracted. She is a married lady with children but her thoughts and passionate desires resulting in extra marital affairs, make her different from conventional married women. 'Edna had once told Madame Ratignolle that she would never sacrifice herself for her children or for any one.'¹ Such women are always made to face harsh criticisms, as Mademoiselle Reisz said:

The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth.²

¹ Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Chicago and New York: Herbert S. Stone and Co., 1899). 121.

² *Ibid.* 106.

In *The Awakening*, Chopin wanted to give the new woman or newly awakened self a different characterization. Chopin tries to give an identity of a woman who is neither a wife nor a mother. Chopin incorporates androgynous ideas; the protagonist gets sexually attracted to both men and woman. Within Edna's identity sex and gender are combined with psychic sexual characteristics which are never articulated even by Edna.

But the beginning of things, of a world especially, is necessarily vague, tangled, chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing. How few of us ever emerge from such beginnings! How many souls perish in its tumult.¹

As a moderate feminist, Chopin tried to portray an androgynous woman. Edna begins to perceive her androgynous self positively, by which many of her societal obligations are rejected. However her relationship with Robert brings a new dimension to her problems. To establish a hybrid identity, Edna blurs her role with that of a man and subordinates herself to a sentimental obsession. She feels relieved after freeing herself from patriarchal obligations yet receives a negative notion of being more masculine and less feminine to completely liberate herself. In this novella Chopin experiments with the opportunities, liberty and freedom available to men by changing the conventional notions. It was an attempt done to blur the demarcation of gender lines. Edna's new sexual urge and intense sensuousness are also thought to be unusual in a woman. She begins to visit horse races to bet and to spend time with intellectual women and men of questionable morality, for instance Arobin. She decides to make a living by selling her sketches. She wanted to adopt a life of an independent man as many of her actions and decisions are considered to be acceptable for men only.

She becomes an androgynous character and is attracted towards Madame Ratignolle physically. She starts going to events she prefers, stays out late at night, skips church, which

¹ *The Awakening*. 34.

results in her husband's dismay. After experiencing closeness with a member of her own sex, she desires the same rewarding pleasure with a man. This is more conventional and more appropriate for her. When Edna begins to see more of Robert, she also begins to look at the sea more- a vast body of water that is analogous to her submerged identity and sexuality. Chopin's narration describes this sexuality as something liberating and subject affirming as:

Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual.¹

Womanly pleasures such as shopping with her husband for household fixtures don't interest her, as her utmost pleasure is felt in Robert's company. Her relationship with Robert is also charged with male domination. Her feelings:

Which she entertained for Robert in no way resembled that which she felt for her husband, or had ever felt, or ever expected to feel.²

Her marriage to Léonce Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of Fate. It was in the midst of her secret great passion that she met him.³

But ultimately Edna's attempt fails because of centuries of conditioning. In *The Awakening*, Chopin questions gender-roles, but can not show a satisfactory resolution. The ending of *The Awakening* is ambiguous because of Edna's suicide can imply both her defeat or triumph. Papke writes:

For Chopin, each individual—particularly each woman—possessed infinite potential for self-fulfillment and expression but also, at the same time, the greater possibly for self-compromise and self-destruction.⁴

¹ *The Awakening*. 245.

² *Ibid.* 121.

³ *Ibid.* 46.

⁴ Papke, 30.

Showalter believes that *The Awakening*:

'May be read as an account of Edna Pontellier's evolution from romantic fantasies of fusion with another person to self-definition and self-reliance.'¹

Eventually Edna fails to reach the final destiny. Edna's suicide has been interpreted in various ways. Gilmore remarks that Edna's story:

has to end in death because there is no way for the world she inhabits to accommodate the change in her[...] Nothing less than a transformation of social reality would enable the 'new-born creature' Edna has begun to go on living.²

As hard as Edna tries ultimately she's doomed to failure but this can not be called her defeat as she never regretted any of her decisions. She commits suicide because she did not want to look back and as she realizes there is no position in society for such women she decides to celebrate her autonomy, and freedom by committing suicide. Although she dies, it is her victory that she did not feel the need to repent anything.

The present alone was significant; was hers, to torture her as it was doing then with the biting conviction that she had lost that which she had held, that she had been denied that which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded.³

¹ Elaine Showalter, "Tradition and the Female Talent: *The Awakening* as a solitary book." Martin 33.

² Micheal T. Gilmore, "Revolt against Nature: The Problematic Modernism of *The Awakening*." Martin 63.

³ *The Awakening*. 116.

'The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.'¹ Women, identity, sexuality, gender- all are mixed up in the metaphor 'sea', the metaphor describing Ratignolle as 'sensuous' also describes the sea suggesting even further the vagueness and ambiguity of Edna's struggle. Edna turns to the sea as she embraces the ambiguity of her gender identity, 'but to her unaccustomed vision the stretch of water behind her assumed the aspect of a barrier which her unaided strength would never be able to overcome.'² She is caught up in the struggle to find a balance between two seemingly opposite pulls, which are independence and love. The newly awakened woman wants freedom, and deserves it but has not been given the skills necessary for survival. The image of the bird in this novel symbolizes the new woman but with broken wings. According to Martin, Edna overestimates her strength and is still hampered by her 'limited ability to direct her energy and to master her emotions.'³ Unfortunately, Edna has been educated too much in the traditions of society and is not capable of reasoning and independent survival, as she admits to Robert 'we women learn so little of life on the whole.'⁴ Edna wants to overcome the gender stereotype and also using behaviours such as assertiveness and boldness, but the struggle is new to her and she fails to discover a method that would allow her to successfully leave behind society's conceptions. As Martin states:

Ambition, striving, overcoming odds, the focusing of energy on a goal are habits of mind associated with masculine mastery. A woman who wants to develop these skills has to defy a centuries- old tradition of passive femininity. [...] But Edna Pontellier does not have the emotional resources

¹ *The Awakening*.34.

² *ibid*.72.

³ Martin.22.

⁴ *The Awakening* .120.

to transcend the conventions that regulate female behaviour, conventions that she has, in fact internalized.¹

According to Erin E. Macdonald² Edna achieves her independence from her husband, but can not proceed because of her tangled emotions of affection for her children. She thought she would be able to choose one but she fails. She goes for Arobin, but that is unfulfilling. It shows both domestic and romantic life does not work for a woman and she also fails to gain strength. A cultural and emotional limitation traps her. Edna is almost like a bridge between the passive, dutiful wife and aggressive, newly awakened woman. Edna mistakenly associates her growing sexual awareness with her newly found liberation. Edna's desire for Robert separates her from her controlling husband. Edna considers herself as a living, sensuous woman. Edna's new sexual self awareness gets encouragement with Robert. Chopin describes her sexuality with Robert as something liberating and self affirming. Erin E. Macdonald also says, Edna is not only defiant to her husband she is also subconsciously aware of her futile struggle. During an unhappy situation of her life Edna takes off her wedding ring and flings it on the carpet, she tries to crush it with her heels but the grand patriarchal tradition refuses to be so easily destroyed. Both domesticity and romantic life do not work for Edna as she fails in an attempt to find a middle ground between these two. A depression envelopes her which is the result of emotional and cultural limitations.

She stopped, and taking off her wedding ring, flung it upon the carpet. When she saw it lying there, she stamped her heel upon it,

¹ Martin. 22.

² A doctoral candidate of 1999 from the University of Waterloo. MacDonald, Erin E. "Necessarily Vague": Kate Chopin's Gender-Awakening.

<http://www.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/macdonald.html>>5.Dec.2001.
7.January 2009

striving to crush it. But her small boot heel did not make an indenture, not a mark upon the little glittering circle.¹

She is never self sufficient and independently content. It proves that Edna is never completely satisfied; all her happy and enjoyable moments are fleeting. Similar to her marriage with Mr. Pontellier, her affairs, though sexually charged with both Arobin and Robert become suffocating. Yet she enjoys to the fullest and gives her life away instead of surrendering herself to society. In her words:

[...] perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life.²

The irreconcilable paradigms of Victorian domesticity and the New Women are also noticeable in this novella. The absence of Edna's children and her husband give her relief when she says:

Their absence was a sort of relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her.³

At the scene of her final dinner party in her husband's house 'Edna may look like a queen, but she is still a housewife.'⁴ Her affair with Arobin again proves that women are always dependent on men.

¹ *The Awakening*, 235.

² *Ibid.* 292.

³ *The Awakening* .48.

⁴ Showalter. 33.

Erin E. Macdonald further writes that during the fin-de-siecle, realist resistance to the romantic ideal was vague because of the intense competition between Victorian domesticity and the feminism of the new woman. Societal notions make women like Madame Ratignolle in their passivity and self-effacement, while Edna is confused with her newly found liberty and her instinct for rebellion. The hazy awareness comes to her when she is drugged with freedom. Dream imagery is ambiguous here. Edna's sleep is disturbed by dreams that are unattainable; she is almost like a child who does not know what to do with her newly acquired toy, Edna is half-awake;

They were troubled and feverish hours, disturbed with dreams that were intangible, that eluded her, leaving only an impression upon her half-awakened senses of something unattainable.¹

According to Michael T. Gilmore, both Edna and Chopin:

Remain trapped in their habits of thought they oppose, conceptual systems that prove so pertinacious that they saturate the very act of opposition. Edna, who struggles to free herself from society's ideal of female identity, never relinquishes a limiting Victorian notion of what constitutes a 'real' self.²

It is a novella displaying different types of women. A contrast has been set up between Mademoiselle Reisz, Ratignolle and Edna. Edna likes both of them, at the same time she refuses to be either of them. Edna does not approve of Madame Reisz' solitary lifestyle, it is very distant from society's expectations.

She was a disagreeable little woman, no longer young, who had quarreled with almost every one, owing to a temper which was self-

¹*The Awakening*. 82.

²Gilmore. 60-61.

assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others. Robert prevailed upon her without any too great difficulty.¹

Edna feels attracted towards her friend Madame Ratignolle as she gets a little aroused by her figure. She starts feeling sensual desires for Madame Ratignolle. But the contrast between Madame Ratignolle and Edna Pontellier also puts Edna's character in a completely different category from the 'good wife-mother'. Edna's sensuousness, her desire for independence, her desire to inhabit an autonomous position and to establish a different position in the world, her sexual urges make her completely different.

[...] Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her.²

The contrast between Madame Ratignolle and Edna has been explicitly demonstrated by their perception of marriage. Edna defies the idea that women seek marriage above everything else and says a 'wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth.'³ Madame Ratignolle is a happily married woman but Edna thinks she does not have any life of her own. Hence Madame Ratignolle becomes her model of sensuality, but not her model of behaviour.

She was moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle, -- a pity for that colourless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment, in which no moment of anguish ever visited her soul, in which she would never have the taste of life's delirium.⁴

¹ *The Awakening*. 64.

² *Ibid.* 33.

³ *The Awakening*. 20.

⁴ *Ibid.* 143.

Cristina Giorcelli argues that,

Through her androgyny Edna succeeds in achieving the wholeness of a composite unity, both integral and versatile, both necessary and free. Triumphant over sex and role differentiations ontologically implies subjugating that which substantiates but curtails, and ethically it entails mastering the grim unilaterality of responsibility. The bourgeois crisis that Edna endures—the discrepancy between duty toward others and right toward herself [...] may be overcome in the grasped fullness of her dual being.¹

Unfortunately, Edna does not achieve the wholeness of unity because there is no established position for women like her. For such an individual, total success is an impossible position. She enjoyed the ambiguity of being an androgynous being, but she wasn't aware that it was not about to last for a long. Her small changes of life (moving out to a separate place) didn't provide her any place in society, but she committed suicide not as an act of regression but rebellion.

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* draw their power from two truths. Firstly, each work stands as a political cry against injustice. Secondly, each text is a gatekeeper of a new literary history. Kate Chopin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman seem to initiate a new phase in textual history where literary conventions are revised to serve an ideology representative of the "new" feminine presence. Two conventions in particular seem to be of central importance: "marriage" and "propriety". A similar thread runs through *The Awakening* and *The Yellow Wallpaper*, 'women's mental illness.' Mr. Pontellier suspects his wife is having some kind of mental breakdown when she starts behaving differently. It is actually the 'new woman'; the 'awakened self' of Edna which makes him think this and consulting with a doctor he says 'she has got some sort of

¹ Cristina Giorcelli, "Edna's wisdom: A Transitional and Numinous Merging." Martin 123.

notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women [...]’¹; meaning women ought to behave in certain ways otherwise they are suspected of being mad. Being an older man and a medical authority Dr. Mandelet understands Edna’s situation and wonders about the presence of another man in her life. He predicts Edna’s heart longs for a man and her heart is also tied to ‘an uncontrolled submission to sexual passion.’² Both the protagonists of the two texts struggle for their liberty and freedom. Edna is bolder and more expressive while the narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* is submissive. Ultimately both married women manage to secure a different ground for themselves.

My next chapter will elaborate on lives of married women in two major texts by Virginia Woolf in a setting of modernism, who are also different from each other.

¹ *The Awakening*.170.

² Macdonald, “Necessarily Vague”: Kate Chopin’s Gender-Awakening.
<<http://www.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/macdonald.html>> 5 Dec.2001.
5 January 2009.

Chapter 3

The wife in modernism: Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*

Modernism is an aesthetic term. It describes the period between 1890 to around 1939 (although some would call it a 'timeless concept') in which literature and art dramatized the breakdown of the boundaries that defined nineteenth-century literary production. A number of movements such as Expressionism, Surrealism, Symbolism, Impressionism, Nihilism and Dadaism etc. emerged during this period. It is a period of a growing awareness of 'The Canon' and the establishment of literary movements. The literature of the modern period has its roots in the literature of Europe and grows out of a reaction to Realism and Naturalism.

The case of Modernism's total dominance has often been put and is easy to see. One of the word's associations is with the coming of a new era of high aesthetic self-consciousness and non-representationalism, in which art turns from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique, and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life.¹

In literature, modernism displays some distinctive characteristics such as: modernism includes an avant-garde view of an artist and it also draws relationship of crisis between art and history. In terms of modern life, people display a growing social isolation, and suffer from alienation caused by mass industrialization. Characters are often withdrawn, unresponsive, and hurt by unnamed forces. The language of modern writing elevates the individual and the inward over the social and outward, also the use of language is done in a

¹ Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, *Modernism* (Penguin books Ltd, England. 1991) 25.

very self-conscious way, language is seen as a technique for crafting a piece of literature just as an artist crafts a piece of art; almost like a sculpture or a painting.

‘No artist tolerates reality,’ Nietzsche tells us; the task of art is its own self-realization, outside and beyond established order, in a world of abnormally drawn perspectives.¹

Modern writing has an ‘existentialist’ tendency where existence precedes essence. Things exist in general but they do not have any meaning for people except as people create meaning through acting upon them. Modern writers ‘turned inward’ for their subject matter and expressed bitterness and often despairing cynicism. The most distinctive characteristic of Modernism is that it tried to capture what psychologists called the ‘stream of consciousness’, the flow of ideas, memories and associations running through the human mind. Virginia Woolf (one of the best known modernist writers) holds that the modern stylistic revolution emerged from historical opportunity for change in human relationships and human character, therefore modern art had a social and epistemological cause, it set the artist to be free allowed a writer to ‘move beyond the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of light.’²

Virginia Woolf is considered to be the foremother of twentieth century feminist literature. In her 59 year long life (1882-1941) Virginia Woolf left a notable mark as a British novelist, diarist, critic, and essayist.

¹ Malcolm. 25.

² *Ibid.* 25.

Woolf's characters' thoughts often contradict their inner feelings. Woolf looked for a better way than the conventional one to project her character's personal and emotional experiences. She also wanted a way to demonstrate their mental processes in order to convey a greater deal of the characters. James Joyce's narrative style represents irrational and fragmented flow of thoughts and imaginations, commonly known as 'stream of consciousness'. This attracted Woolf as a modern technique as it gives an insight into human psychology. But Joyce's way of writing was complex and confusing to Woolf and she wanted to give her novels a new form and shape. She re-created the real processes of the mind and did not feel any theory such as Freudian theories were enough to express the actual experiences of the human mind. She calls her 'stream of consciousness' a 'tunneling process' and she uses it in her novels to 'tell the past by installment.'¹ *Mrs Dalloway* is a perfect novel displaying Woolf's 'stream-of-consciousness' method explicitly:

I should say a good deal about [*Mrs. Dalloway*], and my discovery; how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters; I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect, and each comes to daylight at the present moment.²

These caves are the account of characters which builds a unity. This is done to bring shreds of memories of each character into the present. This helps in developing complete personalities and bringing in the past experiences contributes to the coherence of the novel. In *Mrs Dalloway*, memories come to Clarissa and other characters as fragmented past experiences. Longer sentences in Woolf's novels display the internal experiences of her

¹ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, Hogarth Press, London, 1977-84, Vol.2, 15 October 1923.

² *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, Hogarth Press, London, 1977-84, Vol.2, 30 August 1923.

characters whereas the shorter ones give details of the actions. Long sentences are 'loosely constructed'¹ representing flow of thoughts. The use of present participles like: sitting, playing, running, growing brings actions and emotions into the present. Also a sense of continuation from experience to experience is emphasized on by using the conjunction 'and' frequently. As the following excerpt from *Mrs. Dalloway* illustrates:

[...] she's been sitting all the time [...] mending her dress; playing about, going to parties; running to the House and back and all that, he thought, growing more and more irritated, more and more agitated, for there's nothing in the world so bad for some women as marriage[...]²

Woolf's breaking the Victorian realist narrative form with her innovative writing style of 'Stream of consciousness' entitles her to be considered as one of the most successful experimental novelists of the twentieth century. According to Auerbach, "Virginia Woolf's narrative stresses 'inner' elements of character at the expense of 'exterior.'"³ As Marsh puts it, her novels show a fundamental conflict of two forces:

One a destructive force which fragments and disperses things, and whose end is chaos. The other is a creative force, found in humanity and among animals, based upon instincts for survival and self-protection. This force tends to pull and hold things together, to build and to create unity.⁴

¹ Nicholas Marsh, *Virginia Woolf, the novels* (St. Martin's Pres, Inc., New York. 1998) 6.

² Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Jason Carter. Rose Norman. University of Alabama in Huntsville.1997, 2004).26.

³ Marsh. 203.

⁴ *Ibid.* 182.

Woolf's exploration of this theme and her concerns moved further between 1925 and 1931. The two novels that I will discuss in this chapter are *Mrs. Dalloway* (1926) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Both novels illustrate this dual theme. For instance, Clarissa's 'creative' will power helps her in maintaining the societal façade, whereas her subconscious mind is complex and jumbled. In Mrs. Ramsay's case, she uses her creative energy in maintaining her views of family life, whereas the description of nature and sea is chaotic. *Mrs. Dalloway* is about a day's experiences of two characters: a middle aged wife of a politician who arranges a party is co-related with the last day and suicide of a soldier traumatized by war.

According to Marsh, *Mrs. Dalloway* manages 'in illuminating experience in a more manageable compass'¹ than many other novels by Woolf. Woolf presents multi-faceted characters by being both a combative opponent of conventional characterization and a bold innovator in the representation of personhood in this novel. Traditional characters who are marked by hard edged distinctiveness are dissolved giving way to changeability, and interpenetrating voices. Characters have fluidity, permeability, borderlessness and rapture. It is about plurality and tracing web of thoughts about several groups of people during the course of a single day.

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf substituted the conventions of plot, denouement, description of the story, setting with symbolism and metaphors. It is the narration of two days with a gulf of a decade. There is scarcely any physical happening in the novel, as the novel concentrates on mental states, with descriptions of a few deaths and fragments of marriages. According to Auerbach, Woolf developed techniques to put margins in the elements of

¹ Marsh. 193.

exterior reality. She accentuated on 'inner self' which is 'more real' and extremely personal. Woolf also succeeded in presenting a new way of characterization known as 'androgyny' which brought her much criticism, yet she could successfully establish a separate ground for 'androgyny' as opposed to 'gender roles' determined by society.

These achievements show that she was not only a destroyer of tired old writing methods; she also left vital gifts behind which have been incorporated into the repertoire of the contemporary novelist. Even those who are not renowned for experiments with form, often show a debt.¹

Woolf was famous for the concept of an androgynous mind, although it was controversial. Woolf in her *A Room of One's Own* says an author must possess an androgynous mind because a female author usually brings in her own sentimentality in the characters. Elaine Showalter in '*A Literature of Their Own: Virginia Woolf and the flight into androgyny*', along with some other feminists criticized Woolf for her suggestion of an androgynous mind. To Showalter androgyny is the 'full balance and command of an emotional range that includes male and female elements.'² Showalter rejects Woolf's concept of an androgynous mind because it is too passive and by embracing androgyny Woolf actually tries to flee her gender identity. Unifying self has been very important in Showalter's feminism and it is the central concept of Western male humanism.

Showalter feels by following the concept of androgyny a text loses its authenticity as the author does not secure a particular gender position. For Showalter Woolf's

writing continuously escaped the critics' perspective as her texts refuse to be pinned down to a unified angle of vision. For critics, especially for Showalter, Woolf lacked the necessary negative capabilities to qualify as a good feminist author Woolf's androgynous characters are far away from 'troubled feminism.'¹ Showalter thinks *A Room of One's Own* is an impersonal and defensive writing which lacks seriousness. She further claims it is a book full of exaggerations and repetitions.

The entire book is teasing, sly, elusive [...] Woolf plays with her audience, refusing to be entirely serious, denying any earnest or subversive intention.²

It is a seminar based writing and Woolf uses her personal experiences in this book. It can not be called impersonal; the discrimination done to women at the library of 'Oxbridge' is purely based on real experience. Moreover, an upper class novelist cannot depict the real suffering of a woman, Showalter argues. If it was really so Lucrezia from *Mrs. Dalloway* would not be possibly made so appealing.

The concept of androgyny by Woolf as the union of masculinity and femininity was also criticized by Nancy Topping Bazin, who argues it is actually the opposite of any such union and it is the deconstruction of duality. For her both Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay are feminine and balances in consisting the masculine and feminine 'approach to truth'.³ Woolf's two major characters of *To the Lighthouse* Lily Briscoe (an artist) and Mrs. Ramsay have been sometimes calyöd feminine and sometimes androgynous. For many critics, Mrs.

¹ Showalter.282.

² *Ibid.*284.

³ Nancy Topping Bazin, *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press.1973) 138.

Ramsay is an androgynous character balancing masculinity and femininity and the artist is feminine only. For Herbert Marder, 'Mrs. Ramsay as wife, mother, hostess, is the androgynous artist in life, creating with the whole of her being.'¹

Heilburn on the other hand says it is only through the 'clouds of sentiment' and 'misplaced biographical information' readers can discover Mrs. Ramsay who as not being androgynous, but very much 'one sided and as life denying as her husband.'²

This criticism is justifiable as *To The Lighthouse*, is the novel which shows 'the destructive nature of a metaphysical belief in strong, immutably fixed gender identities- as represented by Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay.'³ Lily Briscoe on the other hand deconstructs sexual oppositions and 'perceives its pernicious influence'⁴, she tries to live as a woman in a rigidly patriarchal order. Toril Moi takes the argument a little further saying, both Clarissa and Mrs. Ramsay are androgynous characters, considering them as Woolf's ideals of femininity are like betraying their 'vestigial sexism'.⁵ Thus the concept of androgyny becomes crucial in Woolf.

'Politics of gender'⁶ has been very crucial similar to androgyny in Woolf's texts. In *Mrs. Dalloway* Clarissa is an androgynous character; Mrs. Ramsay from *To the Lighthouse* is not. Septimus is the negative parallel to Clarissa. Clarissa could repress her passions and desire; she was admired by patriarchal society. Clarissa is the proverbial angel of the house; she is the alternative construction of sexuality which fulfills the sexual stereotypes. She is

¹ Toril Moi, "Introduction: who's afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist readings of Woolf." *Sexual/ Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (Taylor and Francis, 1985) 14.

² *Ibid.* 15.

³ *Ibid.* 13.

⁴ *Ibid.* 13.

⁵ *Ibid.* 15.

⁶ Marsh. 183.

also a reflection of the subjugated married woman in a patriarchal society. 'She is the perfect hostess.'¹ In Peter's words '[...] she enjoyed imposing herself; liked to have famous people about her; great names' was simply a snob, in short.'² Mrs. Killman (Clarissa's daughter Elizabeth's teacher) is opposite to her. According to Mrs. Killman, Clarisa leads the life of deceit and vanity. 'Her life was a tissue of vanity and deceit.'³

Clarissa's marriage to Richard Dalloway was not based on love but revenge. She married Mr. Dalloway to take her revenge over Peter Walsh. As Peter Walsh was her lover before her marriage, she goes through memories of him while he is sitting in front of her; 'how he scolded her! How they argued! [...] never should she forget all that. Cold, heartless, a prude, he called her'⁴ Peter Walsh's love for Clarissa always attracted her but he always took control of her actions and behaviour. Clarissa could never feel free in her relationship with him. She marries Richard to prove that she could make her own decisions and she devotes her life to 'being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway.'⁵ Her marriage to Richard is both an act of revenge and selfishness. She has hurt Peter Walsh greatly, but she marries Richard because it saves her from the Peter Walsh's emotional demands made by Peter Walsh. In her marriage with Richard she feels more independent than in her relationship with Peter Walsh. In her words:

in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be
between people living together day in day out in the same house[...],

¹ *Mrs Dalloway*. 69.

² *Ibid*. 134.

³ *Ibid*. 142.

⁴ *Ibid*. 10.

⁵ *Ibid*. 13.

with Peter Walsh everything had to be shared, which was intolerable.¹

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf's portrayal of the connection between nature and human subconscious is significant. There is a constant conflict in between Clarissa's subconscious emotions (natural) and her powerful wish to have a control over her life. Her subconscious is compared to a primitive jungle full of wild beasts:

It rasped her, though, to have stirring about in her brutal monster! To hear twigs cracking and feel hooves planted down in the depth of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul; never to be content quite, or quite secure, for at any moment the brute would be stirring, this hatred which, especially since her illness, [...] made all pleasure in beauty, [...] making her home delightful rock, quiver and bend as if indeed there were a monster grubbing at the door [...]²

The extract shows Clarissa's struggle between her conscious self and her suppressed subconscious mind through a metaphor. Woolf tries to show the conflict between nature and civilization is like the struggle of human aims and ideals against the inner self of an individual self. Clarissa is often in a dilemma as she finds it difficult to conform to her social existence an opposition of the demands of her subconscious mind. This gets prominent in a long extract reflecting Clarissa's condition after hearing about Septimus' death from Lady Bradshaw during the party. She goes to the terrace and starts thinking:

The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him, [...] she felt somehow very like him- the young man who killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living. [...] but she must go back. She must assemble. [...] and she came in from the little room.³

¹ *Mrs Dalloway*. 10.

² *Ibid.* 15.

³ *Ibid.* 204.

This shows her subconscious mind as nature evokes her to self destruction or suicide, yet Clarissa could keep this urge at bay by diverting her life into her superficial social roles and duties. The window that she stands by is the focal point of the contrast between her social life and 'uncompromising view of nature and true outside.'¹ She is drawn to the two opposites at the same time. The word 'assemble' suggests her going back to the party and presenting herself as a social person. At the window she could experience the implications of death and darkness but she has assigned duties to perform. She feels the same as Septimus does, as if she herself has jumped off the window. She feels this without actually jumping out of the window. She feels happy thinking that her social role can prevail now as Mrs. Dalloway has always given too much of importance to her social life:

[...] she thought, feeling herself suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless, the grinding, blowing, flowering of the day, out of doors, out of the window, out of her body and brain which now failed, since Lady Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her.²

Mrs Dalloway's relationship with her friend Sally Seton was a significant example of homosexuality. In an article on Woolf, Elizabeth Abel³ has used Freud's notion on the development of women. Freud's theories on the development of women have been illustrated in three different ways. First one deals with girls at their early age; who are like boys and also go through oedipal complex, as they do not have penis they stop competing with their

¹ Marsh, 121.

² *Mrs. Dalloway*. 35.

³ Elizabeth Abel in her article 'Narrative Structure(s) and female Development: the case of *Mrs Dalloway*', in *Virginia Woolf*, quoted Sigmund Freud from 'Femininity' *Women and Analysis*, ed. Jean Strouse, (Grosman Publishers, New York, 1974).92.

brothers and start longing for sexual orientation with father. As they shift their sexual urges to their fathers, at the end they become neurosis or go through similar kind of problems. Another kind of development includes similar kind of changes of a boy as they in their adult life seek companionship from opposite gender in replacement of their mothers. Boys thus become heterosexual but girls (as they follow similar kind of development as boys) become homosexual. The third kind of development includes first few similar phases but later on girls replace other man in the position of their father and become heterosexual. In case of Clarissa the second type of development can be identified and there have been examples in the novel which imply her sexual relationship with Sally Seton. Both of them take 'marriage always as a catastrophe'¹ and in an occasion, she and Sally Seton get interrupted by Peter Walsh and her reaction is really noticeable:

Oh this horror!" She said to herself, as if she had known all along that something would interrupt, would embitter her moment of happiness.²

On the other hand, Clarissa's love for Peter Walsh has been a memorable experience for her. When he kisses her she thought 'if I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day!'³ But she marries Richard Dalloway and the thought was temporary. She absorbs herself in her social and artificial life. According to Walsh 'the obvious thing to say of her was that she was worldly; cared too much for rank and society and getting in on the world- [...]'⁴ excluding a couple of occasions like:

¹ *Mrs Dalloway*.39.

² *Ibid.*41.

³ *Ibid.*52.

⁴ *Ibid.*85.

there was always something cold in Clarissa, he thought. She had always, even as a girl, a sort of timidity, which in middle age becomes conventionality, and then it's all up [...]¹

Clarissa's marriage to Richard is not a perfect one '[...] she had to see things through his eyes- one of the tragedies of marriage.'² When a person is not entirely happy with someone or something, their actions reflect that. She is too affectionate with her daughter which implies a covering up of her bitterness or sorrows. "Here is my Elizabeth," said Clarissa, emotionally, histrionically, perhaps.'³ She puts too much emphasis on her affection for Elizabeth. However she did success in maintaining a balance between her social self and her inner side. She could make a concrete position of her in society despite being a different Clarissa inside.

Lily Briscoe from *To the Lighthouse* is also an androgynous character. She is an artist and has her 'vision.' As it is a novel set in a two-day period (with a gap of ten years), Lily as an artist is introduced in the first part, but she finds fulfillment as an artist only at the end. After the death of Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay seeks emotional attention from Lily. She understands his feelings and also sympathizes, but she feels herself unable to perform the role of his late wife. She struggles to give Mr. Ramsay his wife back. Only his wife could have sympathized with his despotism.

Lily is frustrated; she needs her sexual feelings to be aroused. She has fears and desires hidden in her mind, and it can not find expression. As Marsh puts it, Lily's desire for painting

¹ *Mrs Dallway*. 55.

² *Ibid*. 86.

³ *Ibid*. 53.

is actually part of her sexual energy and femininity. He further compares a couple of phrases with an extract from Freud's *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*;

An artist is once more in rudiments an introvert, not far removed from neurosis. He is oppressed by excessively powerful instinctual needs. He desires to win honour, power, wealth, fame and the love of women; but he lacks the means for achieving these satisfactions. Consequently, like any other unsatisfied man, he turns away from reality and transfers all his interest and his libido too, to the wishful constructions of his life of phantasy.¹

Sexual imagery can be traced by focusing on the association of her ideas with a 'fountain spurting'.² Her 'juice' is 'spontaneously squirted'.³ Lily's painting is a feminine response to Mr. Ramsay. 'Whatever she had wanted to give him, when he left her that morning, she had given him at last'⁴ Sublimating her sexual desires and the finished painting resembles her feminine response to Mr. Ramsay. Lily gets aroused by Paul Rayley's passionate descriptions full of metaphors such as 'red' and 'fire'.

Lily Briscoe's ideas of marriage show a different dimension of her character and lead us to consider her as an androgynous character. Although her sexual desires and feelings are aroused by Paul's description of passionate love, she always looks down on people who are married, especially married women. Mrs. Ramsay is the matchmaker of Paul and Minta's marriage and at the end of the last chapter, Lily Briscoe feels rescued as she is not 'caught' in

¹Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, London, 1971, p.376.

² Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*(Vintage ed. Vintage Books, Random House,1990)152.

³ *Ibid.* 152.

⁴ *Ibid.* 197.

marriage. '[...] she would move the tree to the middle, and need never marry anybody, and she had felt an enormous exultation.'¹ When the Rayley's married life becomes chaotic, Lily thinks that if Mrs. Ramsay were alive she 'would feel a little triumphant, telling Mrs. Ramsay that the marriage had not been a success.'² She had also pitied Mrs. Ramsay when she was alive for being a traditional wife and mother, always conforming to her husband's demands. Mrs. Ramsay admired her for her thoughts about life and devotion towards her art, which made her independent. As Mrs. Ramsay puts it:

With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face, she would never marry; one could not take her painting very seriously; she was an independent little creature, and Mrs. Ramsay liked her for it; so, remembering her promise, she bent her head.³

Mr. Tansley always criticized her saying it is difficult for a woman to succeed as an artist, but nothing could stop Lily from continuing with her painting. She has always enjoyed her loneliness.

Woolf's novels criticize social roles as the underlying meaning of certain actions, and feelings shows artificiality. The same thread is there in *To the Lighthouse*. Mrs. Ramsay's two children fight over a stuffed tusked boar's head, hanging on their bedroom wall. The girl, Cam is frightened as she has nightmares about it, but James does not want his mother to remove it.

Cam must go to sleep (it had great horns said Cam) -- must go to sleep and dream of lovely palaces, said Mrs. Ramsay, [...] She could see the horns,

¹ *To the Lighthouse*.95.

² *Ibid*.95.

³ *Ibid*.9

Cam said, all over the room. It was true. Whenever they put the light (and James could not sleep without a light) there was always a shadow somewhere.¹

Gender divisions are noticeable here: the main character (Mrs. Ramsay) is behaving maternally as she stops her child's fears and saves her daughter from despotic truths. It is not only Cam, but also Mrs Ramsay who gets upset by the boar's head and her motherly attempts are vague. 'Virginia Woolf's subject seems to be the artificiality of social convention again- in this case a mother's role in her family.'² Moreover, Mrs. Ramsay makes a fairy story regarding the boar's head (at the end of the excerpt) and this process of covering up the primitive and constructing a superficial beauty in life is a constant motif in this novel.

Woolf's writing has a 'theme of self-knowledge and self-ignorance [...] she is interested in the pressures education and society exert upon individuals, dividing them from themselves.'³ Mrs. Ramsay is always busy with her household chores, children, and most importantly her husband. She follows tradition and conventional values, she supports her husband's 'insecure ego,'⁴ and he worships her beauty and dwells in her role of a perfect wife in return. It will be illustrative to follow a conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay:

For she felt that he was still looking at her, but that look had changed. He wanted something- wanted the thing she always found difficult to give him; wanted her to tell him that she loved him [...] a heartless woman he called her; she never told him that she loved him [...] it was only that she never could say what she felt [...] and as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, [...] that she loved him. He could not deny. And smiling she looked

¹ *To the Lighthouse*. 106.

² Marsh. 11.

³ *Ibid.* 16.

⁴ Marsh. 58.

out of the window and said (thinking of herself, Nothing on earth can equal this happiness) - 'Yes, you were right. It's going to be wet tomorrow.'¹

It is a private conversation between the Ramsays, where they do not speak much and their thoughts are not related to what they say. Mrs. Ramsay is enthusiastic about the marriage of Paul and Minta. She is thinking about them and feels nothing on earth can equal this happiness but says 'it will be wet tomorrow.' Trivial and irrelevant dialogues are one of the most common features of Woolf's writing. By irrelevant dialogues a contrast is made between intense inner feelings and the outward dialogue. 'There are unspoken processes in the relationship between them; and the content of what they say to each other does not matter.'² Mr. Ramsay expects to hear that she loves him, but she does not say so, yet he knows that she loves him and her assertion 'yes you were right', assures him. They talk in a code language where the other is instinctively expected to understand.

Was there no crumb on his coat? Nothing she could do for him?³

Here Mrs. Ramsay is a picture of a traditional wife. It is always Mr. Ramsay who decides on going to the lighthouse and his wife always agrees to his wishes as his knowledge is superior to her own. According to Marsh, the relationship is like a deal where she seeks her husband's support in continuing in her role as a mother, wife 'because his self-righteousness

¹ *To the lighthouse*. 115.

² Marsh. 55.

³ *To the Lighthouse*. 115.

takes responsibility and helps to keep her own sense of futility at bay.'¹ He needs her support to sustain his superior knowledge and wisdom.

Gender stereotypes are explicitly demonstrated in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In *Mrs. Dalloway* Clarissa and Sally Seton take marriage as 'a catastrophe.'² Lucrezia and Septimus are a married couple, and while they are sitting on a bench Lucrezia thinks:

And it was cowardly for a man to say he would kill himself, but Septimus had fought; he was brave; he was not Septimus now. She put on her lace collar. She put on her new hat and he never noticed; and he was happy without her. Nothing could make her happy without him! Nothing! He was selfish. So men are. For he was not ill [...] Look! Her wedding ring slipped- she had grown so thin. It was she who suffered- but she had nobody to tell.³

Lucrezia assumes that as Septimus is a man, it is natural for him to be selfish. To her when he went to the war, he proved himself to be brave but now he is not brave anymore. She also feels it is not expected for a man to think about suicide. Lucrezia tries on the 'external trapping of femininity'⁴ by putting on a hat and laced collar to attract her husband. Lucrezia also resembles a large number of women who blindly follow gender stereotypes; she comes to the conclusion that her husband is happy without her but she is not happy without him. She pities herself for not being able to tell her condition to anyone. These gender attitudes distort their relationship as the stereotyping hinders human relationships.

¹ Marsh.58.

² *Mrs Dalloway*.39.

³ *Ibid*.27.

⁴ Marsh.51.

Mr. and Mrs. Dalloway and Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay have a similar relationship; both Richard Dalloway and Mr. Ramsay are socially established. '[...] the social background is a tradition where men learn things and do things, while women merely exist.'¹ Portrayal of such marriages made Woolf controversial. A criticism of Woolf that is very pronounced is that her fictional female characters (analyzing a different novel *Orlando*) do not represent authenticity. Woolf has been also criticized as a failure in creating new models and images of women by Showalter.² In her chapter on Woolf, she argues that a good feminist fiction would present authentic or truthful images of strong women, with whom the readers would be able to identify. It is undeniable that a fictional character can not be entirely connected to a reader yet, certain experiences and certain feelings can resemble a reader's self. *Orlando* is a novel by Woolf where the protagonist is a transgendered woman, who questions her marriage saying:

[...] if one's husband was always sailing round Cape Horn, was it marriage? If one liked him, was it marriage? If one liked other people was it marriage? And if one wished more than anything in the whole world, to write poetry, was it marriage? She had her doubts.³

The above excerpt from *Orlando* stands for many married women's unvoiced or unraised questions. The innovative creativity of Woolf lies in, that she could make something real out of a fictional character. An author does not need everything authentic in order to make the readers identify themselves with his or her characters; rather it makes an author different from the rest if he or she creates something different from the mainstream. In

¹ Marsh.59.

² Elaine Showalter, "Virginia Woolf and the Flight into Androgyny." *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton:Princeton UP, 1977)

³ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*(New York: Harcourt, 1956) 262.

Woolf's case, she could successfully create a new woman; the protagonist of this novel was questioning her marriage in realistic terms and it clearly reflects Woolf's innovative creativity. Thus Marcus called Woolf a 'guerrilla fighter in a Victorian skirt'.¹ The claim that Woolf's novels lack authenticity is not substantiated. Writing on Woolf can be paradoxical; she has been rejected as insufficiently feminist or praised on grounds for her brilliant contributions to feminism.

Woolf's comments on marriage are controversial and have sexual connotations too (sometimes). A conversation between Peter Walsh and Clarissa has such an implication.

Here she is mending her dress; mending her dress as usual, he thought; here she's been sitting all the time[...] mending her dress; playing about; going to parties; running to the House and back and all that, he thought, growing more and more irritated, more and more agitated, for there's nothing in the world so bad for some women as marriage, he thought; and politics; and having a Conservative husband[...] he thought, shutting his knife with a snap[...] And she opened her scissors[...]²

This passage deals with Clarissa's thoughts and reactions when Peter Walsh comes to her house and Peter Walsh's reactions and thoughts after seeing her. The excerpt also represents Walsh's notion of marriage and his 'venomous thoughts about Mr. Dalloway.'³ This passage exhibits Woolf's proficiency in using symbols, similes and imagery. Clarissa mends her dress 'like a virgin protecting chastity.'⁴ She is not trying to hide her dress out of shame or discomfort, 'but out of a self-protective sexual fear.'⁵ The sexual implication here is

¹ Jane Marcus., "Thinking back through our mothers". P.1, Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics: feminist Literary Theory*.16.

² *Mrs Dalloway*.34-5.

³ Marsh.6.

⁴ *Mrs. Dalloway*. 34-35.

⁵ Marsh.7.

between Walsh's knife and Clarissa's scissor: Walsh opens up his pocket knife and points towards her dress but snaps it in anguish as Clarissa has married someone else. Clarissa dismisses such threats by opening her scissors and continues with what she is doing. According to Marsh, the knife symbolizes the phallus and the scissor threatens castration. Woolf's explanation does not elaborate it, yet the two metal instruments represent the shifting balance of domination in their relationship. Both Clarissa and Peter Walsh use these things to reassure themselves of their positions. Clarissa plays a feminine role as she is mending her dress; her major business is to be the hostess at the party for her husband's friends and their guests. Peter portrays the figure of a macho man: returning from an adventure, flourishing his pocket knife. In his words:

She's looking at me, he thought, a sudden embarrassment coming over him, though he had kissed her hands. Putting his hand into his pocket, he took out a larger pocket-knife and half opened blade.¹

In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay's primitive urges and her sophistication are portrayed. She is a match maker and she has arranged the engagement of Paul and Minta. She was also interested in inducing Lily Briscoe to marry William Bankes. She knows love is an 'illusion', and in within it carries 'seeds of death.'² Still she takes an interest in promoting marriage. Her motive behind it is ambiguous as the metaphor: she 'held her hands over' Paul and Minta's passionate love for two different reasons which are 'to warm them, to protect it.'³ Mrs. Ramsay nurtures their passionate love to warm her own desires. Paul and Minta

¹ *Mrs Dalloway*. 46.

² *To the Lighthouse*. 93.

³ *Ibid*. 93-95.

inspire her to re-create the sensuousness that was missing from her life since her 'own courting days.'¹

Virginia Woolf has shown marriage and the relationship between men and women as a subtle sexual power play. Clarissa and Peter Walsh communicate in gestures to each other, while Mrs. Ramsay overplays her role as mother and wife to find fulfillment. Women learn to repress their feelings as they find social fulfillment through marriage in their upper class settings. The following chapter will take us to a completely different setting, where an African-American feminist writer follows one woman's search for fulfillment.

¹ Marsh.. 147.

Chapter 4

Black Feminism and the image of the wife in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Black women have long occupied marginal positions in academic settings. I argue that many black female intellectuals have made creative use of their marginality- their "outsider within" status- to produce Black feminism thought that reflects a special standpoint on self, family, society. I describe and explore the sociological significance of three characteristic themes in such thoughts: (1) black women's self-definition and self-valuation; (2) the interlocking nature of oppression; and (3) the importance of Afro-American women's culture.¹

According to Lorraine Bethel, Black women writers have consistently rejected the falsification of their experience as Black women, which is a stereotype in black male and in white American female literary traditions. Unlike many contemporary white female and Black male authors, Black female writers have refused to dispense 'with things which are clearly Black and/or female in their understanding in an effort to achieve the mythical "neutral" voice of universal art.'² *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston exemplifies the immense potential contained in the Black female literary tradition.

¹ Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within", the sociological significance of black feminist thought. *Social Problems*, vol. 33. no.6.

<<http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/gender/Activities/Collins.pdf>> 6, December.1986.29. January.2009.

² Lorraine Bethel, "This Infinity of Conscious Pain": Zora Neale Hurston and the Black Female Literary Tradition. *But some of us are brave*. (Ed. Gloria T. Hull, 1982). 177.

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960) was an Afro-American novelist, folklorist and anthropologist. According to Henry Louis Gates, Jr.¹ in his afterwords on Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* entitles the novel as:

One of the most important works of twentieth-century American literature, Zora's beloved classic, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is an enduring Southern love story sparkling with wit, beauty, and heartfelt wisdom. Told in the captivating voice of a woman who refuses to live in sorrow, bitterness, fear, or foolish romantic dreams, it is the story of fair-skinned, fiercely independent Janie Crawford, and her evolving selfhood through three marriages and a life marked by poverty, trials, and purpose.²

Their Eyes was largely dismissed upon publication because it was out of step with the decade's penchant for proletarian realist fiction like Richard Wright's *Native Son*.³

Wright writes an essay regarding *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that Hurston perpetuated 'minstrel' stereotypes of African Americans. Wright also accuses her for not emphasizing the oppression and victimization of black Americans which Wright did in his novels. According to him, Hurston chose to portray the positive side of African American life and culture in most of her anthropological and fictional writings. 'Black writers (Negroes in Wright's terms) were forced to have techniques in their dialogues which would make the white people laugh and Hurston was no different to them.

[...] her novel is not addressed to the Negro, but to a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy. She exploits that phase of

¹ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 152.

² *Ibid.* 152.

³ Kathy J. Whitson. *Encyclopaedia of Feminist Literature*. (Greenwood Press, London. 2005) 117.

Negro life which is "quaint," the phase which evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the "superior" race.¹

He claims that Hurston did not have any ideas about themes and significant interpretations are not possible to draw in her novel so to him Hurston did not have any desire to move in the direction of serious fiction. In his words:

Her characters eat and laugh and cry and work and kill; they swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears.²

Hurston justifies herself in a controversial essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me"(1928) where she writes that she is not tragically colored, she never belonged to the sobbing school of Negrohood where people are always dealing with hurt feelings. She says:

'Even in the helter-skelter skirmish that is my life, I have seen that the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less. No, I do not weep at the world--I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife.'³

This characteristic attitude earned Hurston much criticism (being a Black feminist for many critics was easier to point out her follies) but it also brought her much appreciation. This novel:

depicts the process of a woman's coming to consciousness, finding her voice and developing the power to tell her story. This fresh and much-

¹ Richard Wright, "Between Laughter and Tears." (New Masses: October 5, 1937) 22-23.

² *Ibid.*

³ Zora Neale Hurston, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me"(1948) in Richard Nordquist. 2009. 21. March.2009. <<http://grammar.about.com/od/60essays/a/theireyesessay.htm>>

needed perspective was met with incomprehension by the male literary establishment.¹

Kathy J. Whitson's chapter on Hurston in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature* gives a profound idea about Hurston's career and life. Alice Walker admired Hurston's for her 'racial health', also for her 'sense of black people as complete, complex, undiminished human beings.'² She was the most prolific Afro-American woman writer in the United States from the 1920s to the 1950s but in the forties and fifties her career was in a decline. Hurston opposed the Supreme Court's 1954 desegregation decision against Black inferiority. Alice Walker along with other feminists stood united to recover a black female literary tradition, alike the British female literary tradition Virginia Woolf looked for in *A Room of One's Own*. Hurston's novel was rediscovered in the early 1970s. Alice Walker was the first to bring *Their Eyes Were Watching God* into the modern literary canon. She searched the South for Hurston's unmarked grave, and inscribed on it: "Zora Neale Hurston, A Genius of the South." *Their Eyes* remained out of print and unread for thirty years following its initial publication in 1937. Now it is acclaimed for its feminist sensibility, strong unconventional heroine, and poetic celebration of African American folk traditions and dialects. The theme of this novel is a woman's search for self realization which was out of step with literary fashion in the 1930s and 1940s, yet in the late 1960s black feminist writers and critics managed to rescue the book from obscurity and secured its status as a black

¹ Trudy Bush, "Transforming Vision: Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston". *Christian Century*. (November 16, 1988). p.1027. <www.christiancentury.org.>

22. February.2009

² Whitson. 117.

feminist classic. This novel influenced a subsequent generation of black feminist writers, especially Alice Walker as she says 'there is no book more important to me than this one'.¹

Their Eyes Were Watching God is a novel dealing with three consecutive married lives, a love story and also a progressive feminist parable and cultural study. Janie's quest for identity and self recognition takes her through three marriages and into a journey back to her roots. Janie comes back to Eatonville and finds herself with her voice which inspires her female listener Phoeby. This helps her female readers to embark on her quest for self realization and the novel ends in Janie's reminiscence of Tea Cake. Critics have debated the extent to which Janie gains her full independence and autonomy in the course of the novel. This character is undoubtedly represents a landmark in American literature. 'Defying previous stereotypical representations of black women as "mammies", "jezebels", and "tragic mulattos [...]"² Hurston's Janie has inspired subsequent black writers especially Alice Walker:

Condemned to a desert island for life, with an allotment of ten books to see me through...I would choose, unhesitatingly...*Their Eyes Were Watching God*, because I would want to enjoy myself while identifying with the black heroine, Janie Crawford.³

This is a story of a young girl, whose heart is filled with many dreams and most of it are related to love and marriage. Her beliefs regarding marriage and love start going wrong from her first unhappy marriage, which also turns her into a woman from a young girl. Janie realizes that being married does not necessarily mean that there will be love. By learning this, she becomes a woman.

¹ Whitson. *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature*. 117.

² *Ibid*. 121.

³ *Ibid*.

Janie could never get a chance to fulfill her dreams during her days with her grandmother who arranges Janie's marriage with a farmer called Logan Killicks, who is much older than Janie. Janie thought a husband would make his wife feel special and would always fulfill his wife's wishes. Janie's belief proves to be mistaken as her husband makes her work hard and does not care much about her wishes.

Joe Starks comes to her life with happiness and he makes us believe that Janie's dreams will soon come true. Janie runs away with Joe Starks and starts living in a town called Eatonville. Janie's husband becomes the mayor and by Joe Starks' dialogues regarding his wife and women in general, Hurston provides a picture of the perception of many men about women.

Somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don't think none theirselves.¹

Jody becomes known to everyone in the town and gradually exacts his power even to rule over his wife, along with the town people. Janie's dreams start breaking all over again and she starts believing that her marriage with Joe Starks is at risk. Janie does not have much of a say when it comes to expressing herself. Joe does not like it when she keeps her hair loose and he also asks her not to talk much with other men coming to their shop. Janie does not have a strong grip on her identity as he forbids her to just be herself.

Joe Starks wants to be "a big voice" in his all-black town, patterning himself after the white men he has observed bossing their communities. He gives Janie possessions and status, but assumes that her identity will come only from her role

¹ *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Chap. 6, p. 67

as his wife. He demands complete submission and keeps her aloof from the community, making her play the role of an idle woman to show off his prosperity and power. By uncritically copying white society's class system and materialism, as well as the sterile ideal of the turn-of-the-century white, southern lady, Starks kills both his marriage and, eventually, himself.¹

After the death of her second husband, the carefree attitude of Tea Cake attracts her and Tea Cake makes his first move towards Janie looking at her beauty, her physical appearance and her wealth (according to the town people). 'Janie gains some sense of identity as she finally unties her hair, which Joe made her keep tied.'² This is a pivotal moment in terms of Janie gaining a hold of her identity. Although not all her dreams, couple of her dreams start coming true after meeting Tea Cake as she starts feeling like a 'pear tree in bloom.'

[Tea Cake] looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom - a pear tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps. Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took. Spices hung about him. He was a glance from God.³

Tea Cake allows her to speak her mind and does not impose his will over her, unlike Joe Starks. People think their marriage is purely based on the financial security that Janie provides him with but Tea Cake proves himself to be the best amongst her husbands.

¹ Trudy Bush. "Transforming Vision: Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston". *Christian Century*. (16, November 1988). p. 1027.
<www.christiancentury.org.>

² Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Harper, 1990) chap. 8. p.82.

³. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Chap 11, p. 101

Tea Cake makes Janie aware of how beautiful she really is. He tells her that he bets she never looked at herself in the mirror. It was true; she hadn't. When he leaves that night, she looks at herself in the mirror.¹

They move to Everglades, a place where plenty of sugar cane and beans are grown. Janie's days with Tea Cake seem to be far better than with any other husband and her happiness lasts for quite some time until a hurricane comes and drastically hits the town. He saves her life from a rabid dog and gets bitten himself. He falls ill and in his hallucination he attempts to kill Janie. This is the reflection of his jealousy. Joe Starks had the same kind of jealousy but that was based on his insecurity regarding himself whereas in the case of Tea Cake, it is his way of expressing his love. He does not want their neighbour's brother to come any closer to his wife (despite numerous efforts by his neighbours) and that is because he truly loves his wife.

Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss.²

Tea Cake takes out his gun, but while she herself is saved she kills her husband unintentionally. She feels sorry for herself for losing the only person who loved her so dearly, at the same time she feels happy thinking she could at least experience the feeling of real love for once. Janie faces a trial and she is not found guilty and she comes back to her town.

¹*Their Eyes Were Watching God*. chap.11. page.12

² *Ibid.* Chap 17, p.140.

So Ah'm back home agin and Ah'm satisfied tuh be heah. Ah done
been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house
and live by comparisons.¹

Moreover, Janie's journey from West Florida to Eatonville and later on to Everglades coincides with the movements of escaped slaves. They moved from one place to another in search of freedom and in Janie's case, she changed places to obtain her ultimate self realization.

Gender roles are prominent in this novel. Stereotypical gender attitudes are seen in Tea Cake as he beats Janie brutally to show his power over someone. Black women often have to face this and the phenomenon is accepted by them. Her life with Tea Cake is not bitter as it was with Logan where she felt like a mule. It was not like the life with Jody where she had to act like a show piece. Yet, she is not completely free of certain things which Black women could never avoid, as getting beaten up. They take that as their fate and in the Black town Janie is treated like any other black woman by her husband Tea Cake. Women often speak in a passive voice, whereas men are aggressive. Jody or Joe Starks talked about the horizon as his ultimate destiny, whereas Logan's dreams are enclosed within his sixty acres of land. Logan undermines her opinions and she could not take that lightly. Joe's suspicious mind forces Janie to tie up her hair which shows Jody's domineering position in the marriage. Jody's stubbornness has been criticized by the town people at the same time they also sympathize with Janie's situation being the wife of such a man. Although Janie is always portrayed as a woman who is different from the rest of the women, being a mayor's wife she becomes more isolated and the marriage acquires a different angle. Speaking in rhythm had a different connotation for Janie. For her it is a way to express love but unfortunately neither

¹ *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Chap. 20. p.182.

her first or her second husband spoke to her in a rhythmic tone which eventually increases Janie's dissatisfaction with both of them. Her first two marriages had many problems in common. Joe was always ambitious, he wanted to grab power and impose himself on others. He mistreats Janie along with the town's people to prove his superior position. He possessed her actions; she worked in the store all day long. He insults her publicly and says "Somebody got to think for women and children and chickens and cows."¹

The horizon represents Janie's need to explore all the dimensions of life and of her own self. This ability to understand and express her inner life through powerful figurative language characterizes Janie throughout the novel.²

Janie's journey towards the horizon begins after the death of Joe. She seeks to get an opportunity to meet her mother who had abandoned her and to tend her grandmother's grave. Her search begins to obtain for something more, something different from what she has been doing all through her life. Neither her mother nor her grandmother was like her. She was encouraged by none of them. Her thirst for freedom and quest or inquiry for the horizon made her different from her foremothers and her own mother.

Her married life with Joe started going bad very soon and her conversations with Phoebe after her husband's death exposes her inner dissatisfaction with the bindings that marriage imposed on her. She does not bother about what people think unlike Phoebe.

¹*Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Chap.12.p.90

² Trudy Bush. 1027.

Hurston draws a very subtle distinction between the last man in Janie's life Tea Cake and her departed husband, Jody. Janie is physically attracted to Tea Cake at the beginning. Joe Stark's ambitious mind and Tea Cake's physical appearance captured her attention. She was not physically attracted to Jody. Tea Cake loves Janie's hair, whereas Jody used to get jealous to see it loose and asked her to tie it. It was also a way to put a barrier to her freedom of choice; she always had to hide her hair in public. Moreover, Jody would never allow her to join the neighbours as an equal. He wanted to hold a superior position and he wanted Janie to be the same. Tea Cake on the other hand, asks Janie to walk rather than taking trains, meet people, and participate in games which shows that he wants her to mingle with general people. While, Joe enforced an isolated life upon her; Tea Cake influences her to recognize her inner strength. In their first meeting, Tea Cake asks her for a light for his cigarette. Literally it was so, but metaphorically he wanted her to acknowledge her inner fire. Joe Starks never wanted to see her in any particular colour; his dream was to be the mayor of Eatonville which he could, after which he lost interest in Janie. After his death Janie wears blue dresses (because Tea Cake likes it) and she cares more about him than society. Tea Cake does not show any sign of possessing Janie. After marriage Tea Cake and Janie move to Everglades and he becomes the leader of the community. Unlike Jody Tea Cake is never oppressive and not a 'big voice', he maintains a sound relation with the people with his humour and playing the guitar. He never tries to impose his will over her unlike Jody. Tea Cake could make Janie feel like the person she wanted to be, unlike her other husbands.

Dis ain't no business proposition, and no race after property and titles.
Dis is uh love game. Ah done lived Grandma's way, now Ah means tuh
live mine.¹

¹ *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Chap.14.p.120.

Janie sells off her store and goes to a new town 'Everglade' with Tea Cake, as after meeting him she starts leading a life of her own as previously she lived lives of her grandmother's choice (marrying Logan) and thoughts (having a wealthy husband, Jody). The beginning of her relationship with Tea Cake was smooth and one after another all her thoughts about love started coming true for the first time. With Tea Cake, Janie realizes the actual meaning of fear and sacrifice related to true love. The book starts with an imagery of the horizon; people on the board and ships. Tea Cake offers her to sail to the horizon, and it is with him she experiences the meaning of true love. He caresses her hair, combs it.

Her marriage with Tea Cake is a contrast to her grandmother's notions about marriage. Her dreams regarding love started coming true after meeting Tea Cake. Although the stories of illusionary love-affairs scare Janie, she feels that with Tea cake her desires will be fulfilled. The relationship is filled with happiness, sorrow, jealousy (which ultimately sets them apart). Nunkie is the girl who tries to flirt with Tea Cake which makes Janie jealous and she slaps her husband. Feminine jealousy has been portrayed here and the loving relationship between them helps Tea Cake immune to other women's provocations.

Tea Cake teaches her the use of a gun and ironically Janie kills him with the skill impacted by him. In the court, Janie's lower voice indicates her powerlessness. Usually power is related with a high voice but Janie does not show her power by raising her voice because she knows it is not going to be helpful. Tea Cake's murder is a mere accident and Janie is set free by the court for this reason.

After losing her last husband Janie feels her life is complete as she has experienced almost everything related to love (jealousy, care, sharing). She feels sorry for shooting her husband, at the same time she feels she has touched the horizon which is no longer a strange thing to her. The horizon is familiar to her now, which incorporates all the joyful memories of her life. It is important for all to have a life of their own. As Janie says:

you got tuh go there tuh know there...Two things everybody got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves.¹

According to Bush Janie is a different female role model and Janie:

[...] comes to validate "the kingdom of God within" and to refuse to be conformed to the world.²

In this novel Hurston is trying to show through Janie that America is beginning to grant well-earned mobility and power to women. Janie reveals her unique charactersitics, her strength separating herself from the average women. She does so by venturing alone through various destinations with several men with hopes of achieving piece of mind and happiness. Violence toward women is depicted by Hurston as the negligence of their freedom and autonomy. The novel does substantiate Janie's quote that God acknowledges women as well as men. Janie acquires her own voice and the ability to

¹*Their Eyes Were watching God*, Chap.20.p.150.

² Trudy Bush, 1027.

shape her own life. Although she was an African American, who had a small voice to be something in society, she was distinct with her attractive looks and distinctive attitude.

Epilogue

The Yellow Wallpaper is "a supernatural tale drawn from the best nineteenth-century Gothic conventions, particularly from Edgar Allan Poe and Charlotte Bronte"¹.

The Yellow Wallpaper was published in 1892. This was the period dominated by Edgar Allan Poe's supernatural, horror, gothic tales and also stories of insanity. The description of *The Yellow Wallpaper* conveys a gothic environment influencing the interpretation of the story as supernatural fiction with an imaginary ghost haunting the narrator. Eugenia Delamotte claims that "women who just can't seem to get out of the house [are] the most basic subject of Gothic plots"². Gothic texts are usually scary, haunting, terrifying and are set in isolated and distant places. Vampires, and animal-like human acts are some standard measures of a gothic text however, a mysterious architecture can also be one of the standard measures in order to make a story supernatural-gothic fiction. At the beginning of the story the narrator says in her description of the new house that she and her husband have temporarily moved to a place; as an "ancestral estate,"³ "a colonial mansion"⁴, "a haunted house".⁵ This creates the picture of a terrifying gothic house. The husband chooses to take the upstairs room as their bedroom which was previously used as a children's nursery and the

¹ E. Suzanne Owens, "The Ghostly Double behind the Wallpaper in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Haunting the House of Fiction: Feminist Perspectives on Ghost Stories by American Women* (Ed. Lynette Carpenter and Wendy K. Kolmar. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1991).63.

² Eugenia C. Delamotte, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* Vol. 37. (Ed. Paula Kapos. Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1991)207.

³ Gilman. *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Boston: Small, Maynard & Co. (1899). 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*15.

⁵ *Ibid.* 15.

huge hanging yellow wallpaper becomes an element of mystery to the narrator. Initially she sees “bulbous eyes”¹ and “absurd unblinking eyes [. . .] everywhere”² in the wallpaper which has a strong gothic undertone. However it is also a little grotesque, transforming the room into a prison for the narrator. “The Ghostly Double behind the Wallpaper in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper* is an article by E. Suzanne Owens where she says that the gothic convention of the house also refers to the condition of the narrator. According to Owens “she had sensed ‘strangeness’ from the beginning and had tried to reason away the ‘ghostliness’ of this place”³. In describing the wallpaper and the room the narrator mentions ‘a smell’ of the room which comes from the wallpaper. Owens further says “Readers familiar with ghostly conventions will recognize in this odour a conventional indicator of a ghostly visitation”⁴. Moreover, the woman behind the wallpaper is the narrator’s ghostly double. By tearing apart the wallpaper, the narrator frees her ghostly double and her creeping on the floor is the celebration of the freed self. Greg Johnson interprets her new condition by calling it a new birth of the woman. Despite of surrendering herself to the surroundings or the society she chooses to suffer as a rebel. She crawls in the nursery room as if she is exploring the world as an infant.

The theory “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic experience” by Jacques Lacan can be used in interpreting the relation between the narrator and the symbolic woman behind the wallpaper. King, Jeannette, and Pam Morris write in an article on ‘split self.’ They try to relate the narrator’s self with Lacan’s theory.

¹ Gilman. 21.

² Gilman. 22.

³ Owens. 74.

⁴ *Ibid.* 75.

Lacan explains the 'mirror phrase', involving "joyful recognition/misrecognition by the child of its image in a mirror as a corporate unity differentiated from its surrounding world"¹. The narrator sees an imaginary self hiding in the wall paper. It is "an imaginary self, irrevocably split from the perceiving self"² with which the narrator recognizes or misrecognizes herself. The symbolic woman in the wall paper is the narrator's suppressed self. By tearing off the strips of the wall paper the conforming self of the narrator lives through, it is the victory over social ideals.

Madness is also a feature of gothic fictions which *The Yellow Wallpaper* suggests in the temporary madness of the narrator. "Gilman's yellow room parallels Bronte's red room: both are large rooms located in the upper regions of the house; a massive bed is the focal point of both; and the intimidating color of each alters as various lights play on it".³ The synchronization of both the rooms is noticeable as the room given to Jane Eyre by John Reeds has similarities with Gilman's story's room. The similarity gets prominent when Jane Eyre wonders "whether her red room is haunted, and Gilman's narrator observes that the house feels haunted".⁴ Bertha Mason is the most well known mad woman of nineteenth century and there is a symmetrical connotation between both Jane Eyre, and Gilman's narrator: as they are the traditional or conventional self and Bertha Mason and Gilman's wallpaper's imaginative woman represent "the raging and uncontrolled madwoman"⁵

¹ King, Morris, "On Not Reading Between the Lines: Models of Reading in 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 26 (Winter 1989): 23-32. 26.

² *Ibid.* 26.

³ Delashmit, Margaret Delashmit and Charles Long, "Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Explicator* 50 (Fall 1991) 32.

⁴ *Ibid.* 32.

⁵ Owens. 77.

The Yellow Wallpaper is a testament of Gilman's personal life experience. It is semi biographical and a fiction as a whole. Gilman's intense emotions and personal attachment never reflected in any other story of her as much as it did in *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

Peter Barry writes in *Beginning Theory*:

Feminist criticism portray women in literature as the most important forms of 'socialization,' since it dictates to society, what constitutes acceptable versions of the 'feminine' and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations.¹

About *The Awakening* Carrie Harris writes:

I believe Kate Chopin wrote this book to be a catalyst for the Feminine movement, by using Edna Pontellier as an example, to show how strong women must be to overcome men's dominant control, to achieve their ultimate desires.²

Showalter says: Edna's "unfocused yearning" for an independent life is similar to Kate Chopin's yearning to write works that go beyond feminine endings.³

Emily Toth referred Kate Chopin as "a pioneer in her own time,"⁴ even though men condemned "*The Awakening*," for contradicting the views of a male-dominated society by openly portraying how important women desire independence and control of their own sexuality.

1 Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory* (Second Edition. Manchester U Press, 2002)122.

²Carrie Harris, "Feminist Criticism to *The Awakening*". 31. March. 2008. 22. March. 2009.<http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/683425/feminist_criticism_to_the_the_a_wakening_pg3.html?cat=38>

³ Elaine Showalter, "Tradition and the Female Talent: *The Awakening* as a solitary book." Martin.33.

⁴ Emily Toth, "A Woman Ahead of Her Time".
<<http://www.angelfire.com/nv/English243/Chopin.html>> 19. March.2007.

The Awakening and *The Yellow Wallpaper* have similar accounts as each work stands as:

a political cry against injustice and at the socio/political genesis of the modern feminist movement'; [...] each text is a gatekeeper of a new literary history. Kate Chopin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman seem to initiate a new phase in textual history where literary conventions are revised to serve an ideology representative of the "new" feminine presence. Two conventions in particular seem of central importance: "marriage" and "propriety".¹

In case of modernists, according to Nicholas Marsh at the beginning of the century Virginia Woolf opposed the literary tradition and applied her own post-Freudian outlook and radically feminist ideas and notions to the difficulties of writing novels. Thus she redefined the concept of literary form and 'the results can be seen in *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* [...]'²

Virginia Woolf's childhood was a series of emotional shocks and bereavements; at the same time she had considerable contact with actual and incipient madness, and suffered the indelible personal damage of long-term sexual abuse.³—

This can be traced in the attitudes of Clarissa Dalloway and Lily Briscoe towards sex and men. Woolf's friend Violet Dickinson and her aunt Caroline Stephen were bold, strong and independent women by whom Woolf was encouraged to question the traditional roles of women, and realized the importance of financial freedom for women. On the other hand,

'Her argument calls for women-and subsequently men- to pass beyond the socially engineered restrictions of sexual politics, and to be liberated

¹ <<http://www.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/mahin.htm>>

² Nicholas Marsh. *Virginia Woolf*, The Novels. Cover page.

³ Marsh.175.

into a mature existence as free, independent human, without reference to gender.'¹

In case of Zora Neale Hurston, despite of facing quite a number of harsh criticisms (for instance, Wrights's) she successfully manages to secure a separate ground as one of the well known afro-American Novelists. In Hurson's words 'I belong to no race nor time. I am the eternal feminine with its string of beads.'²

Henry Louis Gates Jr. on *Their Eyes Were Watching God*:

'A true literary wonder, Zora's masterwork remains as relevant and affecting today as when it was first published- perhaps the most widely read and highly regarded novel in the entire canon of Afro-American literature. Zora was a novelist, folklorist, and anthropologist whose fictional and factual accounts of black heritage remain unparalleled.'³

The book has received a number of criticisms, mostly harsh criticisms but Zora proved herself to be a strong woman writer. She justifies herself radically, In Zora's words:

I shall get twice as much praise or twice as much blame. It is quite exciting to hold the center of the national stage, with the spectators not knowing whether to laugh or to weep.⁴

The book has been admired by African-Americanists for its celebration of black culture and dialect and by feminists for its depiction of a woman's progress towards self-awareness and fulfillment.⁵

¹ Marsh.184.

² Zora Neale Hurston, "How it Fells to be Coloured Me" (1948) in Richard Nordquist 2009. <<http://grammar.about.com/od/60essays/a/theireyesessay.htm>> 21. March.2009

³ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 154.

⁴ Zora Neale Hurston, "How it Fells to be Coloured Me" in Nordquist.

⁵ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 10.

Gilman, Chopin showed a new woman and Woolf and Hurston on the other hand presented different dimensions, various inter-related issues of married women's lives. Therefore, no two married women of my thesis analysis can be called same as all these married women project different dimensions of married life and their conditions in marriage. They all stand in different grounds, having not much of resemblances. Thus it proves, the condition of women in marriage is distinctive from one to another, partly for societal reasons, but mainly for their own ways of looking into life.

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