



## Feminine Bias: Downsizing Masculinity, Virginia Woolf's Reversal of Historical Gender Narrative in the English Fictions of Virginia Woolf

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**Abstract-** The purpose of this study was to explore Virginia Woolf's fictions from the perspective of what gender roles appear in these fictions. Woolf's four fictions: *A Room of One's Own*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Between the Acts*, were considered for analysis. In order to analyze the selected texts, Judith Butler's (2015) *Gender Trouble* has been used as a lens. The research focuses on Woolf's treatment of gender issues in her work. Especially, drawing on Butler's contention that gender is constructed and performative. The study shows that like the great woman novelists of the long Nineteenth century, Virginia Woolf emerges as the true spokesperson of the gentler sex. While she riles the male dominance in every walk of life in her social essays, her fiction forwards its feminist logic much more subtly. The woman of her novel is delineated so meticulously that she seems to gather a life of her own. It is not Virginia Woolf that we hear speaking in the pages of *Mrs. Dalloway* or *To the Lighthouse*; the characters of her novels speak from their own hearts. In this respect, Woolf's characterization vies with Shakespeare's. Every character in her novel is afloat the river of life with an inner dynamism. The superb art of characterization, a mastery over dialogue and most importantly, the intimate knowledge of heart keeps Virginia Woolf in good stead when it comes to faithful presentation of life. And, it is this faithful presentation of life that muffles and camouflages Woolf's feminist agenda.

**Keywords:** fictions, Virginia Woolf's, woman novelists

### I. INTRODUCTION

Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.

#### 1. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (26)

Virginia Woolf tries to reverse this historical trend that assigns feminine subjectivity a passive and subsidiary role. Women have invariably been depicted as companions – good or bad – to men. Women have always been an indirect interest, as an object of desire or hate. Virginia Woolf laments in *A Room of One's Own* that it is as if having nothing better to show, they are 'almost without exception [...] shown in their relation to men,' (76). When the onus of rectification falls upon Woolf, she fulfills her historical responsibility by doing just the opposite: she seeks to puncture the traditionally romantic aura of manliness, thus creating room for a feminist narrative. It is through this double-barreled approach, that she attempts to create balance in the gender presentation in fiction.

When Hélène Cixous points out, 'you can't just get rid of femininity. Femininity is inevitable,' modern writers seem to be instinctively aware of this inevitability of femininity (358). Virginia Woolf is all the more conscious of the literary resonance of femininity and, therefore, her work pioneers the modern wave of feminism. Being at the center of the Bloomsbury set, she had the firsthand experience of volatile sexual identities. She also founded one of the first private presses with her husband and, in that capacity, enjoyed the privilege of supervising the most enlightened of the ideas that animated what may be described as the very happening first half of the twentieth century. Also being the literary genius of the first order, she interwove these enlightened notions of hers into her texts. As a person of keen sensibility and strong conviction, she delivered her feminist message without stuttering. With *A Room of One's Own*, she smashed the stereotypes surrounding feminine agency. The so called historical evidence that women were in any way less than their male counterparts was blasted through the presentation of very mundane facts of social life. The generic

downplaying of women's independence and the chronic disregard of their private space are the chief reasons that keep women from realizing their optimum potential.

Yet, a person who takes on the outright policing of morals is no artist. A delicate balance between art and the message needs to be struck or the aesthetic foundation of the art is done away with. Virginia Woolf maintains her primary fidelity to art by remaining true to her feminine intuitions. Without compromising what Rosenfeld (2001) calls the 'politics of intersubjectivity', Virginia Woolf brings feminine subjectivity center stage (9). Instead of valorizing the males and their exclusive concerns like politics and war, her work focuses on the reality of everyday life as it presents itself to a woman. It is not that she completely sidesteps the big issues like colonization, de-colonization, the rise of nationalism and the world wars: unlike Joseph Conrad and Chinua Achebe, she does not make them the prime concern of her novels. She shows both clarity of her mind and integrity of her character when she declares, 'I don't like any of the feelings war breeds: patriotism; communal & all sentimental & emotional parodies of our real feelings' (Ellis, 2015, p. 189).

In Woolf's works, a male dominant world view is gently replaced by a feminine perspective through a shift in the narrative voice. Making women the protagonists of her stories, Woolf achieves the impossible feat of rendering the male characters as less interesting and hence less romantic.

The traditional feminist studies focus Woolf's involvement with the feminine issues in literature and society. See (2010) reads 'Darwinian Feminism' in Woolf's work (49). Similarly, Krista Ratcliffe concerns herself with evidence of 'textual feminism' in Woolf (404). The time has come that we investigate her contrasting attitude to both the genders and explore the reflexive nature of her depiction of male and female agencies.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Using Judith Butler's (2015) *Gender Trouble*, the research focuses on Woolf's treatment of gender issues in her work(s). Especially, drawing on Butler's contention that gender is constructed and is performative, the study shows as to how Woolf documents the woman's day-to-day performance of their daily rituals and to what effect. Similarly, Woolf's subtle rendition of feminine agency in contrast with the male's is usually reduced to an indiscriminate bundle of stereotypes. A sensitive awareness of women's inner life weaves a kind of romantic halo around them. While an inability to penetrate the inner life of the male characters automatically assigns a secondary status to them. This privileging of the female perspective over the male oriented literary tradition culminates at the de-romanticisation of the male agency.

The primary focus of this study is going to be *A Room of One's Own*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Between the Acts*, as these texts can be taken as Woolf's most mature and the most successful presentation of her take on the gender issues and the polemic. The texts are discussed within the spheres allowed for gender polemic and the related stuff Judith Butler demonstrated to have an anatomic and microscopic look at gender and sexualities.

## III. ANALYSIS

When Virginia Woolf started writing, a formidable task stood before her. She had to bring sanity to the chaos in the social denomination and classification of gender. Sandwiched between two World Wars, she found herself hard pressed by the chauvinistic views. A dark, heavy mist that shrouded better part of the Victorian era had got fresh feeding from the war mania. Despite the universal destruction and that too a thoroughly male creation, the masculinity appeared to ride roughshod over the feminine protestations. The situation seemed pretty bleak when Woolf took upon herself the herculean task of bringing at least a semblance of parity in the domain of gender. Upgrading the overused, underestimated, rusty feminine tyre, she removed the redundant layers of shallow pride and false hubris from the male tyre. This bi-pronged started strategy ultimately culminated at balancing the cart of life. By this time women seemed to have outgrown the role of ornamental toys for men who performed all the meaningful stuff and had started to educate themselves so as to become more useful members of society. This change became the precursor of a series of changes that were bound to lead to women empowerment later on. But the real impetus to the feminist movement came paradoxically from world wars. As these wars made man appear as dismal and formidable as these wars themselves by the dent of their names.

Enloe (2000) recounts in her seminal study titled *Maneuvers: The International Politics of*

### *Militarizing Women's Lives:*

Woolf's double message: militarization does not simply occur in the obvious places but can transform the meanings and uses of people, things and ideas located far from bombs and camouflaged fatigues; militarization may privilege masculinity but it does so by manipulating the meanings of both femininity and masculinity. (289)

A general militarization of society with fires of war simmering or burning in the background reduces femininity to a subsidiary vocation. This diminution of the diminutive creates a boomerang effect as the suppressed anger explodes into an outburst of uncontrollable ideas and ideals. Out of the protesting voices, Woolf's rings the loudest and the echoes are heard far and wide. She speaks and speaks valiantly against the systemic neglect and outright subjugation of the women. Her views on gender and sex anticipate the views of the most progressive women philosophers of the twentieth century including Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler. Her literary outpourings complement her social writings. She writes to champion the cause of the women in face of chauvinistic narrative. How she accomplishes what she undertakes is the subject of this study.

The study argues that Woolf breaks the rigid system of gender categorization by working on the determinants of gender and showing that these determinants are largely performative and do not refer back to any innate essence or genealogical etymology. As David Marcia (2017) points out, 'Virginia Woolf is, fundamentally, all about performance and performativity' (p. 35, emphasis in original). Performativity undercuts Woolf's views on gender as well. She carefully constructs and deconstructs the male and female behavior. Especially, Woolf's treatment of the phenomenon of war makes her views transparent. Through a local level acting of killing an animal, Woolf brings killing of the enemy to focus. Gender is a carefully constructed paradigm and it cannot be used to straitjacket the individual. Similar views are expressed by Judith Butler who argues:

The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality. (p.140)

This performative nature of gender reflects the performance of actions on a really small scale. Woolf also shows her leanings towards the female gender through a detailed description of their daily activities and of the unceasing flow of thoughts directed at those humdrum activities. The complexity of the inner life will surface as one sure criterion if one were to spotlight protagonist of any story. The subtle rendition of the subjectivity has especially been the hallmark of the fictional heroes. Virginia Woolf's deft art is even more self-consciously aware of this game changing power of the subtle strokes. She mocks those of her contemporary writers who try to show their expertise in characterization by being objective. To her, such representation is useless because it is ineffective. What she prefers in characterization is to reach the dark inner caves of the unconscious of her characters and from those dark recesses to bring out the real character as is shaped up by the thoughts and emotions. Woolf's knowledge of the mechanics of painting keeps her in good stead when it comes to the conception and presentation of her characters. The large brush with which she paints the male characters of her novel almost automatically makes them anything but heroic. Her characters are heroic in their very own way. Their heroism lies in their being relatable, they are heroic because of their extraordinary way of being ordinary. The character of Mr. Ramsay is one prime example in this regard. The dogmatic creed of truth he adheres to caricatures him and makes him another buffoon in scholar's cloak. His wisdom is compared usually to knives, highlighting its tendency to seek razor sharp precision, as well as its ability to cut and hurt which comes as a part and parcel of its very nature.

The reality he hopes to salvage from the brand of disillusioning facts makes a universally despised figure of him and his insatiable need for sympathy makes the situation even worse. He makes a fool of himself while aspiring to be a hero. This is the reason; he is enlisted here as the typical male figure of Virginia Woolf's stories. Mr. Ramsay, who is described as 'lean as a knife, narrow as the blade of one' loves to play the role of a surgical instrument for everyone around him. He takes upon himself the role of truth teller for his family.

It is the result of cool disregard for the emotions of others that he excites the extremes of emotion that Mr. Ramsay excited in his children's breasts by his mere presence; standing, as now, lean as a knife, narrow as the blade of one, grinning sarcastically, not only with the pleasure of disillusioning his son and casting ridicule upon his wife, who was ten thousand times better in every way than he was (James's thought), but also with some secret conceit at his own accuracy of judgment. What he said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all of his own children [...]. (182)

Contrastively, Mrs. Ramsay's wisdom is compared to the light of the lighthouse, harmlessly illuminating: 'she looked out to meet the stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke' (63). She becomes the light.

On the other hand, we have the gentle and suave Mrs. Ramsay. Surely, like Mr. Ramsay, she is a believer in reality, yet her reality is the reality of human feelings, emotions, hopes and aspirations. The fact is her adherence to reality makes her more sensitive to what people feel and what they expect of her, while Mr. Ramsay's blind worship of reality hurts others and himself.

The dichotomy between these two brands of reality and their adherents becomes all the more obvious with the choice of metaphors. While Mr. Ramsay's vision of reality has been compared to sand dunes, Mrs. Ramsay's world view and her own personality are more like waves on the surface of the ocean, apparently as indeterminate but guided by a more sensitive logic of life. Although Ramsay is never portrayed as an intellectual figure overtly but by proving in the end that it is the flawed version of a female's worldly wisdom that helps better to pass through the labyrinth of life. Woolf actually busts the balloon of Male intellectual superiority with Mrs. Ramsay's knitting needle. From the preceding discussion, it will be safe to assume that Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are the prototypical male and female figures populating Woolf's fiction.

Moreover, Mr. Ramsay is a forward looking, development oriented *intellectual* who does not have much sympathy for the recursive behavior shown by Mrs. Ramsay. His egotism makes him weak and condemns him to an insatiable hunger for sympathy. The more one wants to go linear, the more one alienates oneself – this axiom appears to form the basis of Woolf's criticism of masculinity. The idealism of the philosopher is then a trap. The philosopher falls a prey to the most transparent of deceptions. Mr. Ramsay's pursuit of truth leads him far and deep into an emotional wilderness. Dr. Theodor Koulouris shows his awareness of Woolf's thesis when he avers in her truly ground breaking *Hellenism and Loss in the Work of Virginia Woolf*, '[I]n *To The Lighthouse*, Woolf identifies egotism and self-pity with the masculine need for intellectual/artistic definition and need for 'progression' (161).

Besides these central figures, there are foils that serve to heighten the already discernible contours of their antithetical personality. Charles Tansley, a faithful effigy of Mr. Ramsay, is yet another male duped by the lore of hard facts. He follows Mr. Ramsay's footsteps and seeks to blast the illusions wherever he sees them. His character shows what Mr. Ramsay if his intellectual caliber is taken from him, would look like Tansley. Lily Briscoe is there to embody the artistic version of the mundane Mrs. Ramsay. These two extensions of the primary characters, namely Charles Tansley and Lily Briscoe, serve to underscore the fundamental attributes of their respective mentors.

But worth noticing here is the fact that, where Charles Tansley turns out to be a dull and drab carbon copy of Mr. Ramsay highlighting the discrepancies of the former and having a series of his own personal shortcomings as well. Lily Briscoe presents a modern and more evolved version of Mr. Ramsay. She seems to have over grown her own ideal and has become all that Mrs. Ramsay could not be. The wisdom that in case of Mrs. Ramsay is overshadowed by the dominance of Mr. Ramsay finds a brilliant manifestation in Lily Briscoe, this being because she stands unlike Mrs. Ramsay as an individual with no Other to define and undermine her in comparison.

Buter (2015) opines, 'Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time' (p. 22). And, perhaps, this is the main trouble with the gender. Motility of gender cannot be contained by the limiting definitions. Virginia Woolf adds another to this gender trouble when she wields this motility as a means to distinguish between the male and female characters of her novels. In terms of inner complexity and fluidity, both of these genders are treated differently. Where the inner life of the

female characters is given maximum depth and scope, male characters are rather caricatured along the pre-set lines.

Even her narrative style looks to dismantle the linear progression. She felt that both the narrative of her era and the narrative techniques were male oriented since they were created by men. They gave importance to things that were significant to men and failed to discuss things that were of more importance to women, and that is why she suggested that women themselves should write to tell their own stories from their own perspective. The diction that seeks to trace the eddies of thoughts and goes round and round to any given idea is in direct tension with the linear narratives. Woolf categorically debunks the traditional style of narration when she says, 'Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end' ("Modern Fictions" 32).

Domesticity of vision may perhaps be called the hallmark of Virginia Woolf's fictional narrative. She seeks to restore sanctity and grace to the women's perspective. Virginia Woolf takes issues with the straitjacketing of the female potential in *A Room of One's Own*, both of these progressives seem to have left the social determination of the gender roles alone, instead saving a lot of steam to focus on the gender equity in general. Woolf recounts women's contribution to the structural stability and continuity of the capitalistic, industrialist society in *Three Guineas* and concludes that without unpaid labour of women the society would simply cease to be. She refers to women as 'wives, mothers, daughters without whose work the State would collapse and fall to pieces, without whose work your sons, Sir, would cease to exist' (*Three Guineas* 54). Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is a war cry against discrimination against the female gender. She wrestles with the patriarchal society of her times to win basic facilities needed for the cultivation of the female potential. She makes it clear that women must have the basic right to ownership of property and private space in order to carve out an intellectual space for themselves, to have a fulfilling existence and to be the fully functional member of the society. Women's domesticity that was mocked by the Chauvinistic world is given a novel interpretation by Woolf, she does not take the period that women have spent confined within the walls of household, not as a paralyzing influence, she rather considers it a period that women have spent in contemplation over things big and small and she believes that the wisdom collected in this long span of intellectual hibernation needs expression and thus she encourages women to write their hearts out without over burdening themselves with the choice of appropriate genre or meeting the popular demand. She encourages them to write to express, not to impress.

Women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must need harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics. (*Room of One's Own* 73)

But for that to happen, women need some breathing space. Right to personal space and personal time will have to be appreciated if women are to respond to the call of their heart. She is absolutely clear that '[a] woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction' (4). Given space and a chance to live their lives the way they want to, women can rise to the highest status reached by their male counterparts. It is not the lesser genius of women that relegates them to the inferior status; it is the collective conspiracy of the male gender that they are condemned to live at the quarter of what they deserve. By appropriating their share of social power and prestige, men hijack women's right to self-expression and self-determination.

I thought of that old gentleman, who is dead now, but was a bishop, I think, who declared that it was impossible for any woman, past, present, or to come, to have the genius of Shakespeare. He also told a lady who applied to him for information that cats do not as a matter of fact go to heaven, though they have, he added, souls of a sort. How much thinking those old gentlemen used to save one! How the borders of ignorance shrank back at their approach! Cats do not go to heaven. Women cannot write the plays of Shakespeare. (*Room of One's Own* 39)

Her crusade against the patriarchal society does not remain confined to her social essays; she portrays the woman's world in order to counterweigh masculine bias of the literary writings of her times. She writes from the feminine perspective, and shows to the world what it has missed by stifling the voice of female artists.



Gender then is not biological but a social construct. It is not determined by the physiognomy of a human when he is born, it is rather the social role thrust upon that very individual when someone says “it’s a boy” or “it’s a girl”. Following it is nothing but a never-ending effort of staying the role. The announcer makes us a drag queen or king by just one announcement and then the rest of life is nothing but an effort to stay in character. Woolf approximates this idea of performativity through the pageant which includes a section titled “Ourselves”. Resultantly, the audience is thrown into a state of befuddlement: “Was that voice ourselves? Scraps, orts and fragments, are we, also, that?” Here the characters play the members of the audience. This part of the pageant is the reminder to the audience about the constructed nature of their personal existence. The actors play the audience the way the audience plays itself in real life. Everyone is a drag performer playing himself or herself. Woolf gives the insight of Clarissa Dalloway’s character which may be equally true of other men and women populating her fictional world: ‘Half the time she did things not simply, not for themselves; but to make people think this or that; perfect idiocy she knew for no one was ever for a second taken in’ (40). At the same time, doing things for the sake of others may distance us from our true self but it also creates our persona. Identity is constituted by our drag performance.

Writing, as well, is a performative construct. Gaston Bachelard had once said, ‘A word is a bud attempting to become a twig’ (17). A word striving to find its place among other words is in the process of becoming. The word looking to dissolve itself in the narrative is an identity.

With Mrs. Dalloway, the domestic bias is as pronounced, if somewhat less grandiose.

Mrs. Dalloway has a similarly comely nature and is as prone to endless meditations as Mrs.

Ramsay is. Clarissa Dalloway remains drowned in the sea of sounds.

For having lived in Westminster – how many years now? over twenty, – one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. (Mrs. Dalloway)

The theatricality of the everyday makes itself felt in Clarissa’s thought process. The ‘particular hush or solemnity’ that catches Clarissa off guard is the rupture in the tensile upper layer of the ordinary. It marks one of the ‘moments of being’ when the veil gets lifted and the transcendental peeps through the immanent. The instant truth and authenticity are not tagged with any big discovery or realization though. The neutrality and inconsequentiality of life remain inviolate. Unlike those of Joycean heroes, Woolf’s moments stop short of prophetic pretensions. Whereas the Joycean heroes undergo major epiphanies that turn their worlds and beings upside down, undoing them and then recreating them anew, the characters of Virginia Woolf exist on a different plane of experience. The Joycean characters deal with all the “Whats” such as what is life? What is religion? What is the purpose of being? Woolf’s characters get down to a more basic level of “Hows” How to live? How to deal with religion? How to live in this chaotic world? They do not undergo changes of cosmic proportions, rather theirs are the epiphanies of moment, in every moment they live they undergo something small enough to go unnoticed by the external world but significant enough to create a ripple in their own microcosm.

Though Rita Felsky argues that the dailiness of the daily is marked by ‘casual inattentiveness’ and opacity, in Woolf the dailiness remains inspired by the adventurous spirit (*Doing Time* 90). The daily panorama is attended by an exuberance of thought, sensation and emotion. In this respect, Woolf’s viewpoint contradicts the established philosophical position that sees everydayness as an antithesis to the life of thought. The never-ending eddies of thought traced by Woolf negate the assumption of blankness and apathy of the routine activities. She tends to defamiliarise the routine so that we start looking at it in a perspective hitherto undiscovered. She imparts colours to the black and white routine so that we get to see the variety and beauty of it. She does not amaze us by bringing something exceptional; instead, she startles us with the marvels of the ordinary. Therefore, it is hard to disagree with Lorraine Sim when she argues, ‘Clarissa Dalloway’s ‘lark’ and ‘plunge’ into the streets of London to buy flowers on one June morning in 1923 is one example of Woolf’s sense of vividness and excitement that can attend the ordinary’ (12).

seeker. It does not achieve its semantic possibilities until it jostles with other words. A word in writing, as in speech, is a doer, an actor, a performer, though the life of its performance depends upon the activity of the hand that pens it down, on the tongue that speaks it out. In other words, the performance of this second-hand performer depends upon another performance. Writing ultimately becomes the performative proof of another existence. To write is to be. Woolf believes it to be so when she asserts, 'But for me, nothing is real unless I write it down'. To Woolf, then, getting to grips with reality, appropriation of reality and, in other words, creation of reality depends upon her writerly vocation.

Simon de Beauvoir's view in this regard is interesting, indeed. If writing is a form of existence and is performative, it does not allow women the freedom to express or to be as much as it provides to their male counterparts. Writing, as other forms of functionality, operates in the masculine framework. It is because as an established habit, the male's version is always considered more genuine and authentic, and for a woman to sound authentic, she has to adhere to the male standards thus compromising on the personal female standards. Simon de Beauvoir declares, 'Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with the absolute truth' (51).

Woman appears to act as a background against which male agency is portrayed. Judith Butler seeks to dismantle these binaries which perpetually hegemonise the notion of gender. And, in effect, Virginia Woolf does the same in her novels, especially in *Between the Acts*. In fact, Woolf's seminal ideas anticipate Butler's views on gender, though it is unclear how much Butler is indebted to Woolf for her theories on gender. The prime target of Woolf's revolutionary art is the established literary paradigm which appears to Woolf as a system of narration ill-suited to her generation. Moreover, when she introduces the idea of "Feminine

Sentence" she is trying to assert that the standards created for men will never be a workable

solution for a woman's intellectuality. For she finds in this male designed system a dominance of

the "I" that does not let the Other breathe in its domain. Thus, she comments:

[...] but after reading a chapter or two a shadow seemed to lie across the page. It was a straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter 'I.' One began dodging this way and that to catch a glimpse of the landscape behind it. Whether that was indeed a tree or a woman walking I was not quite sure. Back one was always hailed to the letter 'I'. (Room of One's Own 83)

Time and again she tries to make the readers realize that men and women look at the world from two different perspectives and enforcing women writers to fit into the male model or to mold their perspective according to the established and standardized male version will never do justice to their creative urge and artistic expression. Thus, she shifts the needle of the importance gauge to the feminine standards by specializing the trivial and highlighting what is negligible for men but central for women. In "Modern Fiction" Woolf states that '[t]he proper stuff of fiction does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss' (35).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In order to conclude, we can say that Woolf's iconic vision does not subscribe to the partisan approach. She is a feminist but her clear-sighted feminism does not look to dismantle the existing structures out and out. Instead, with her suave, literary feminism, she seeks to bring sanity to the unjust distribution of prestige and privilege among the sexes. Through her intellectual openness to the different sexual orientations, she also undoes the rigidity of heterosexual orthodoxy. What is more, her literary playfulness helps create many different forms of sexuality.

To recount the progress of this study is to recount the development in Woolf's evolving views on gender. From a fairly binary position vis-à-vis sexes in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf appears to adopt a pluralistic stance in *Between the Acts*. The movement from the dualist bond between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay to the multiplicities of love, attraction and infatuation in *Between the Acts* serve to heighten a progress toward a truly modern society. It appears that the world moves to a new social contract where the basic unit of society is a

heterosexual couple anymore. The uncertain sexuality of Giles, his unsatisfied wife, his sanguine father, and his pale aunt leaves an unsettling impression on a reader looking for the vindication of his complacent assumptions about a family life. Even Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are not a conventional couple. The account of their family life throws the traditional paradigms overboard. The surge of inner life in Mrs. Ramsay in a quaint atmosphere of a summer house is as startling as Nora leaving her “ideal” home in Henrik Ibsen’s *Doll’s House*. The richness of Mrs. Ramsay’s inner life overflows the narrative, controls and dominates it. Her celebrity status among the unhinged male figures serves to heighten her stature in the world of modern fiction. Her knitting knits the fabric of the story and her presence fine-tunes the thematic concerns of the novel. Hers is a towering presence in the life of all the other characters including her husband. She remains a vital figure even after her death. Her unseen presence precipitates Lily’s artistic vision and nudges Mr. Ramsay along the path of his symbolic fulfillment. This overwhelming persona of Mrs. Ramsay automatically cuts her male counterpart Mr. Ramsay to size. Through parallelism and contrast, Woolf clears the ground for a feminist narrative and accomplishes her agenda of balancing the symbolic carriage of life. By privileging Lily, the painter over Carmichael, the poet and by preferring intuition over intellect, Woolf furthers the cause of the women. The downsizing of the male tyre with a corresponding up-gradation of the female tyre, the feminist novelist of modern times balances the vehicle of life.

However, the most advanced idea that comes out of Woolf’s fiction is the maneuverability of gender. As the title suggests, *Between the Act* gives an impression of a constructed social life. The axis of this experiment in social construction is gender. If the basis of life is reiterative and performative, the claim to naturalness and innateness of gender gets automatically punctured. In *Between the Acts*, Woolf focuses on the drama of life. Everything from married life to spinsterhood is an *act*. Life is a series of acts. Acts that repeat themselves change into habits which in turn are translated into character. Repetition of acts gives the semblance of identity. Moreover, Lacan feels that ‘every act is to be constructed as a repetition, the repetition of what cannot be recollected, of the irrecoverable’ (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 244). An act does not have a prototype which means that act in itself is a repetition. There is no standard to uphold; there is no trail to follow. Butler argues that ‘[t]he Derridean notion of iterability, formulated in response to the theorization of speech acts by John Searle and J. L. Austin, also implies that every act is itself a recitation, the citing of a prior chain of acts which are implied in a present act and which perpetually drain any “present” act of its presentness’ (244). It is through such “reiterability” of the gender related actions that Woolf constructs one gender or another.

Woolf’s fictional world bears the stamp of everydayness. In fact, everydayness is the hallmark of Woolf’s artistic vision. Placed under the Woolfian lens, the humdrum life turns out to be the richest and full of endless possibilities. Women’s sphere of activity is confined to the mundane issues that crowd the world of every day. In Woolf’s fiction, seldom has a woman transgressed the limited domain of every day, yet the spirit of adventure attends the domain of the ordinary. Therefore, with Woolf, the ordinary becomes extraordinary and complex. And, this is how Woolf shifts the balance towards women folks. Putting women’s day on the show, she not only rectifies the historical error of fiction that seldom, if at all, concerned itself with days and nights of ordinary women performing ordinary tasks, she captured a beauty of every day.

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