

# An inquiry into Virginia Woolf's portrayal of human relationships in *To the Lighthouse*

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## Abstract

Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* introduces us to a cast of imaginary individuals whose sincere goal is to develop happy and healthy relationships with those around them, with varied degrees of success. Based on this notion, the novel can be seen as a study of the ways and means by which people form satisfying human relationships with those around them. According to Mrs. Woolf, human beings feel isolated, and contact between them is often incomplete and unsatisfactory.

**Keywords:** novel's, Virginia Woolf's, human relationships.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the relationships between husband and wife, mother and children, lover and beloved, man and the universe in *To The Lighthouse*. Virginia Woolf seems to be aware of the shortfalls of human relationships. In Woolf's view, human beings seem to be isolated and communication between them was fractional and somewhat disappointing. Love, sympathy, understanding, harmony, communication, emotional unity, and purposefulness establish good human relationships. False hopes and dreams too may act as a binding force and source of happiness.

People are isolated and communication between them is often limited, unsatisfactory and prejudiced. Personal freedom, education level, income suitability, social status, position in the working system and political status determine human relationships. Virginia Woolf believed the subjugation of women as a fundamental imbalance in society. One of Woolf's main drivers of feminism was her

upbringing in the middle-class Victorian family. The inequality at home had its counterpart in the political sphere; the family's problems reflected the State's. Lack of wholeness in the modern world was an implicit theme in almost everything Woolf wrote. In her novels, she attempted to reconcile fact and imagination, masculine reason and feminine intuition.

Woolf's characters are happy and sad, but not good and evil. Hers is the little world of people like herself, a small class, a dying class – the middle class. To her, the exciting occurrences are the occurrences in mind. Action, whether it be the shock of a thrown body on a polo field, or the mandarin-nodding recurrence of breakfast, shopping, walking in the park, tea, dinner, drawing room and bed - action is this panoramic, half-seen, swaying background to the mind. In Mrs. Dalloway, there is madness and violent death, love and heartbreak, the ruin of career, and the tale of several lives -but these

things happen in mind, or at any rate, are seen through the screen of the mind.

Woolf's novels depict human relationships through characters and vice versa: some scholars don't care, like Ramsay, Hilbery or Edward Pargiter; some intellectuals cannot love the opposite sex, Bonamy in *Jacob's Room*, Neville in *The Waves*, Nicholas in *The Years* and William Dodge in *Between the Acts*; there are women gifted with harmony, skillful and sensitive women like Mrs. Ramsay and Mrs. Dalloway; and there are people who create works of art, like Rose-Pargiter in *The Years* and Lady Bruton in *Mrs. Dalloway*. These and several other types of people appear in different books, but although they can be roughly classified in this way, the individuals within each are not more alike than alike.

Woolf points out that it was the fashion to gift women with articles like knitting needles, wools, paints, and brushes to be busy and not go out of their houses. The incident was a clear male dominance against the women. Mrs. Ramsay faces the same problem in *To the Lighthouse*.

Words are the primary source of correspondence, and communication between one character and another is essential. But words are often inadequate to set up good human relationships and catch the complexity of thoughts and feelings. In *To the Lighthouse*, the novelist aims to set up relationships with people with different degrees of success.

Miss Woolf is aware of both these aspects of verbal incompetence. As Lily stands next to Carmichael on the grass as she tries to explain to Miss Ramsay, Lily's mind is filled with countless thoughts. Sometimes silence is golden. It has an important role in human relations. Often times, silence is more meaningful than words. Lily totally understands this and feels more in touch with Carmichael than when she talks.

Human relationships can be established and sustained by the expressive power of words by saying a few kind and loving words. Ramsay comes to see Lily to ask for sympathy. The praise of the boots is something mundane, even

comical, but it helps establish compassion and understanding between Lily and Ramsay and brings them closer together. Good human relationships are necessary for happiness in life. We can develop such relationships not by logic, reason and intellect, but by emotions. Ramsay, sympathetic to his children and understands their psychological needs, is loved and respected as they hate their father. Though it is a lie, such lies are essential for human happiness.

Mrs. Woolf tries to set up communication to build good human relationships between the various characters in the novel: Mrs. Ramsay's attempt to get Paul and Minta and Lily and Bankese married, her party, which allows guests to talk to each other, her constant efforts to remove the statue of isolation, her adventures towards the lighthouse are examples of establishing harmony and interpersonal relationships.

The novel also exemplifies and demonstrates some good human relations. The relationship between Tansley and Lily Briscoe is satisfying. Tansley makes a desperate attempt to make an impression during the conversation that goes on there. Lily understands his feelings among those present. With his usual, aloof demeanor towards people, he reveals his hostility by inviting him to go to the Lighthouse, which produces a rude and childish response. Since he is intelligent, he begins to talk to satisfy his ego. The party is a success as a good relationship has been established between Charles Tansley and the others.

The relationship between Mr. Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay is the most developed and elaborate of all the relationships in the novel. Mrs. Ramsay praises her husband in his presence and strengthens his self-confidence. Mr. Ramsay is a strange man who is constantly haunted by a sense of failure and resentment because he has achieved less than he should and that his books do not last, so his judgment is perverted and dull. He feels that when others praise the works of other men, they do it to offend him. This aspect of his personality puts a heavy burden on his wife, who is constantly trying to hide things from him.

The part of the novel entitled “The Window” describes the pattern of their relationship from one end to another. They seem to be at the farthest point of disagreement when confronted with the question of going To the Lighthouse. Mrs. Ramsay tries to make people happy by bringing them together. Still, when she sees that the contented innocence of her children is beset with danger, she feels that her husband’s attitude is foreboding and hateful. They fall apart, their differences seem to grow, but when Ramsay apologises to her, the rest of the chapter moves towards the point when the power of his masculine mind grips her. She controls her sad thoughts, and indirectly she can assure him of her love.

Thus, the novel *To the Lighthouse* shows the ways and means by which happy and satisfying human relationships can be established in life.

## Reference

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