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# A Thematic Study of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

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### Abstract

Virginia Woolf is fully aware of the shortfalls of human relationships. In her view, human beings seem to be isolated and communication between them was fractional and rather disappointing. Love, sympathy, understanding, harmony, communication, emotional unity, and purposefulness establish good human relationships. This study aims at analysing the relationships between husband and wife, mother and children, lover and beloved, and man and the universe.

**Keywords:** Virginia, Woolf, Human Relationships, Understanding, Harmony, Communication.

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## 1. Introduction

In Virginia Woolf's view, human beings seem to be isolated and communication between them was fractional and rather disappointing. Love, sympathy, understanding, harmony, communication, emotional unity, and purposefulness establish good human relationships. In fact, false hopes and dreams too may act as a binding force and source of happiness.

We can see that 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. One of Woolf's main drivers of feminism was her upbringing in a middle-class Victorian family. Virginia Woolf believed the subjugation of women was a fundamental imbalance in society. 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 a career, and the tale of several lives -but these things happen in the 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 Actions*; there are women gifted with harmony, skilful 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 would 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*.

In *To the Lighthouse*, the novelist's effort is to set up relationships with the people around them with different degrees of success. Words are the main 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.

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 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 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 establish such relationships not by logic, reason and intellect, but by emotions. Ramsay, who is 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.

Ms. 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 characteristic, aloof demeanour 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 as if 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 between them 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, and 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.

## 2. Conclusion

In addition to human relationships, the novel's theme is also a competition between two kinds of truth - Mr. Ramsay's truthful, intelligible truth and Mrs. Ramsay's emotional reality. Together they form a creative duration. The novel is therefore a thesis that the real union of happiness in life can bring about the union of the two truths and not the competition between them. But in later parts, we learn that Mrs. Ramsay's truth is tread on her husband's truth. Both facts are complementary. The novel *To the Lighthouse* shows the ways and means by which happy and satisfying human relationships can be established in life.

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