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## **From The Editor**

*The International Journal of Media, Culture and Literature, published biannually by the School of Foreign Languages at Istanbul Aydın University, Istanbul, Turkey, is an international scholarly journal in English devoted in its entirety to media, culture and literature.*

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**Muhammed Nacar, Ph.D.**



# Language Functions and Distance Learning

**Veysel Kılıç<sup>1</sup>**

## **Abstract**

This article provides a critical assessment of distance learning as an alternative to face to face learning. It is argued in this article that language has got various functions and that these functions determine the language learner's attitude and social communication as well as the meanings of linguistic items. It further asserts that these functions can be attained only in the context that learner and teacher share the same time and place. In a distance learning situation, they may share the same time but not the same place.

**Keywords:** *Function, Distance Learning, Basic Principle, Interpersonal, Textual, Expressive, Transactional*

## **What is Distance Learning?**

Distance learning can be traced from the early nineteenth century. The earliest form of distance learning presumably developed through correspondence courses in many countries. For instance, teaching English as a foreign language was carried out through radio until television became very popular. I am sure this was the accepted norm in many countries, particularly in Europe, until the 1950s when instructional radio and television became popular.

What is distance learning? It is open or exible learning to a certain extent. It is a program of study that consists of video printed or online materials, which allows students to study far from the premises where face to face teaching takes place.

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According to some educators, distance learning and distance education have been applied interchangeably by many different researchers to a great variety of programs, providers, audiences and media. Its hallmarks are the separation of teacher and learner in space and/or time (Perraton 1988), the volitional control of learning by the student rather than the distant instructor (Jonassen, 1992), and the non-contiguous communication between student and teacher mediated by print or some form of technology (Kegan, 1986). It is a field of education that focuses on the pedagogical and industrial system designs that are effectively incorporated in delivering education to students who are not physically on-site to receive their education. The reason why these programs have recently become more popular is that the internet has become a reliable channel of tuition.

Distance learning/teaching has been widely used recently. Distance learning/teaching can be implemented very well for some subjects; unfortunately, it is rather difficult to say the same thing for language learning, no matter how sophisticated the technology employed for this purpose might be.

### **Basic Principles of Foreign Language Learning**

Learning a foreign language is a long and tedious process. In language learning and teaching the content of some concepts has recently changed and became enriched. One of them is the relationship between learning and teaching. In the past, teaching was more important than learning because the teacher was almost the only source of information. Recently language instructors and linguists have started to place greater emphasis on learning than on teaching because the increase in the number of sources of information has increased.

### **Learning is a Process, not a Product**

Since learning has got the priority over teaching, the entailment of this is that learning is a process rather than a product. This process calls for awareness, determination, willingness and motivation. In order to succeed in gaining competency, and as a result of it, fluency and accuracy, one should be exposed to a variety of texts and develop different language skills. Furthermore, the language learner should be given the opportunity to have access to all types of resources as far as the target language is concerned. In order to establish reasonable communication, to be able to



interpret and comprehend the language functions and notions, s/he should have the ability to analyze a text and express himself/herself effectively. Therefore, we should aim to develop the basic skills of language learning.

### **Language Learning/Teaching Strategies**

Language learning/teaching is basically based on how we define language. We teach it in accordance with our definition of language. It is dangerous to generalize about approaches, methods or techniques in language teaching, for what is appropriate and stimulating for one group is not for another; a method successful for one teacher can be a failure for another. The most important thing in language learning/teaching is experience. One can learn while teaching because learning and teaching are mutually supportive. It is also difficult to recommend a particular method or technique for distance learning. As far as the nature of language is concerned, there are certain principles in language learning and teaching. As far as distance learning/teaching is concerned, the following points can critically be discussed:

### **Learning is More Important than Teaching**

Some concepts have changed in priority. In the past, teaching was important because a teacher was the only source of knowledge, whereas sources of knowledge are various nowadays and students can get information about any topic from different sources.

Learning is a process not a product; that is why it is important. This entails that the ultimate goal of a good lesson is not how well the instructor performs; it is whether or not the learners learn and how long the learning will last. In other words, the ultimate objective of a good lesson is to activate students. This goal can be attained in a face to face learning situation, but it is practically impossible to activate students as required in distance learning. In language learning interaction has got the ultimate importance. Language by nature is like complex machinery, and language teaching is correspondingly complex. This complex process should be realized in the presence of both parties, i.e. speaker and hearer (teacher and learner) in communication theory because language learning and teaching itself is basically communication.

In other words, if both components of communication share the same place and time, this complex process can be accomplished. In distance learning a teacher and learner might share the same time but not the same place. This means that communication cannot take place as required. Furthermore, different situations call for different methods and techniques as well as materials, different activities and strategies. This entails that the important measuring tool is that whatever method, material, etc. is used will enable students to activate in order to attain the desired goal, i.e. learning. In a face to face context the goal can be easily achieved by means of the rapport developed between a teacher and learner, but it is doubtful whether such a rapport can be developed in distance learning.

### **Language is Communication**

Along with the same place and time, communication requires a speaker, a hearer, a channel, a common code system and conventions and beliefs shared by the speaker and hearer. In a face to face context, communication takes place appropriately because both parties can use the same common code system, even the same channel. However, in distance learning this channel cannot be used as functionally and interactively as it is used in a face to face context. Since language itself is communication, it should be taught accordingly. Communicative teaching emphasizes that the goal of language teaching/learning is communicative competence. Communicative competence is not only knowing the language very well but also knowing how, when, where and with whom to use the language.

According to communicative teaching, language is not a collection of structures and grammar that you add to your knowledge. You can only possess it after prolonged effort. Furthermore, it is a natural human activity. Communicative teaching also emphasizes the processes of communication, such as using language appropriately in different types of situations; to perform different kinds of tasks, e.g. to solve puzzles, to get information etc.

The main purpose of communication is using the language to interact with other people for various reasons and also using the language to keep the social wheels turning. It requires teaching the language to express and understand different kinds of functions such as requesting, describing, expressing likes and dislikes, leave- taking, recommending, criticising,

complaining, etc. Language is not a string of words. It is a means of communication, and the most important thing in communication is to achieve language functions by using strings of words.

### Functions of Language

Different linguists have classified language functions differently. I would like to mention different functions put forward by different linguists and intellectuals and the meanings attached to them. Halliday, a British linguist, asserts that language has got four basic functions. He also distinguishes seven initial functions, which I would like to mention here with special reference to communicative language teaching. The functions of language will be further discussed in section 3.

#### According to Halliday language has got four main functions:

- a. The Ideational Function: To organize the speaker's or writer's experience of the real or imaginary world, i.e. language refers to real or imaginary persons, things, actions, events, etc.
- b. The Interpersonal Function: To indicate, establish or maintain social relationships between people. It includes forms of address, speech functions, modality, etc.
- c. The Textual Function: To create written or spoken texts which cohere within themselves and which affect the particular situation in which they are used.
- d. Developmental Function of Language: According to Halliday, (1973: 48-71) a young child in early stages of development is able to master a number of elementary functions of language. Each of these functions has a choice of meaning attached to it. He also distinguishes seven initial functions:
  - e. Instrumental: This function is used for satisfying material needs.  
*I want a cup of coffee.*
  - f. Regulatory: This function is used for controlling the behaviour of others. *Do as I tell you.*
  - g. Interactional: It is used for getting along with other people.  
*Me and you.*
  - h. Personal: It is used for identifying and expressing the self.  
*Here I come.*

- i. Heuristic: It is used for exploring the world around and inside one. *Tell me why.*
- j. Imaginative: This function is used for creating a world of one's own. *Let's pretend.*
- k. Imaginary: It is used for communicating new information. *I have got something to tell you.*

**Another British linguist, John Lyons (1977: 637) classifies language functions as follows:**

- a. **Descriptive function:** This function of language conveys factual information, e.g. it must be well below ten degrees outside.
- b. **Expressive function:** It is used to supply information about the speaker, his/her feelings, preferences, prejudices and past experience, e.g. I am not inviting the Scandinavian again. The speaker didn't like Scandinavians.
- c. **Social function:** This function serves to establish and mention social relations between people, e.g. Will that be alright, sir? This kind of sentence most probably is used by a waiter in a restaurant, signalling a particular social relationship.

**Karl Buhler (1934: 288) who was interested in language from the cultural point of view; stated his contentions as follows:**

- a. **Expressive function:** The expressive being language that is oriented towards the self, the speaker.
- b. **Conative function:** The conative being language that is oriented towards the addressee.
- c. **Representational function:** The representational being Language that is oriented towards the rest of reality-that is, anything other than the speaker or the addressee.

**Britton (1971: 205-209) discusses three different functions of language:**

- a. **Transactional function:** This function emphasises the participant's role.
- b. **Poetic function:** This function states that the writer's role is more important than that of the reader.
- c. **Expressive function:** It deals with writing ability.

**According to Morris (1956: 87) the functions of language are:**

- a. Information talking: Informative function orientation to content
- b. Exploratory talking: Imaginative function i. ritual, ii. poetic
- c. Interactive function

**Jacobson (1964: 181-182) distinguishes six communicative functions, each of which is associated with a dimension of the communication process:**

- a. Referential function: contextual information
- b. Aesthetic (poetic) function: auto reection
- c. Emotive function: self-expression
- d. Conative function: vocative or imperative addressing of receiver
- e. Phatic function: checking channel working
- f. Metalingual function: checking code working

According to Jacobson, out of six functions only one is dominant in a given case. In other words, the dominant function is the poetic function. Here the word text is taken in the broadest sense, i.e. any piece of language is considered a text. In the case of the poetic function the focus is on the message itself. In communication theory, the functions mentioned above could be illustrated as in Figure 1:

In language teaching, communicative objectives should be paramount. In other words, content of the material to be taught or learned should be given priority rather than the form of it. Form of language can help functions be realized. Functions of language categorized by different linguists should be internalized by learners. The functions mentioned in Figure 1 need to be explained very briefly.

**Emotive function:** It belongs to the addresser. This function reects the psychological mood and attitude of the addressee. In distance learning it is almost impossible to form a rapport between learner (addressee) and teacher

**Figure 1:** Language Functions and Communication (bold items) (addresser) which means there will not be mutual understanding between learner and teacher and this function cannot be realized.

**Conative function:** This function belongs or it refers to the addressee. It is used to influence the addressee. In distance learning addressee and the addresser do not share the same place even though they might share the same time. Since teaching and learning is a sort of communication, most communication is realized with the help of body language, facial expressions, and one-to-one interaction in the same place. In distance learning and teaching, it is disputable how this can be realized.

**Phatic function:** This function directly refers to context. It is used to keep the social wheels turning, i.e. strengthening social ties between addressee and addresser. Through this function learners are expected to learn daily, informal language. In distance learning and teaching neither party can have the chance to talk in an informal way. For instance they cannot gossip; they cannot talk about personal problems. Even if they do so, it will be very limited.

**Referential function:** This function explains the relationship between language and non-language. Non-language is the other means of communication, such as body language, gestures, facial expressions, posture, etc. Again, it is unlikely that these functions can be realized in distance learning and teaching.

**Metalinguage functions:** This function refers to the other component of communication theory, such as common code system (language). In this case the discrepancy between the addresser's and addressee's level of English is important-message, channel, etc. This function is used to define and describe some objects in order to use sophisticated language.

**Poetic function:** This function is used to express the creative and aesthetic aspects of language. It is also very difficult to realize this function since distance learning is a kind of programmed instruction. In such programs i.e. distance learning; there is no room for creativity and the aesthetic function of language. Foreign language instruction presents special

instructional challenges not only because of the lack of immediate two-way interaction that characterizes many distance education programs, but also because of loss of face mimics, eye contact, lost visual details in video conference due to signal compression, especially detailed lip movements. As this has hindered the acquisition of L2 (second language) phonetics, since its conception, it also has created trouble with testing material. Apart from delivery, the problem arises when the student is required to complete assignments and tests. Online courses (distance learning) have had difficulty controlling cheating due to the lack of teacher control.

In other words, there are three main problems which may arise from distance learning:

**Problem 1:** The loss of visual detail-lip movement sound quality:

This is particularly problematic in the teaching of pronunciation skills since students often rely on facial expressions as well as perceiving the second language phones, intonation, etc.

**Problem 2:** Assessment: testing material

**Problem 3:** Cheating may arise due to lack of teacher control, Indeed, language learning and teaching is a social service and learners and teachers alike are concerned with such necessary issues. Considering the role of language functions in face to face foreign language learning, this paper supports the following hypotheses:

- a. Distance learning is not a learner autonomy environment, whereas face to face learning is a learner autonomy environment, as far as the learner's attitude is concerned.
- b. In distance learning teachers are assisting tutors, whereas in face to face learning teachers are part of the learning process.
- c. The face-to-face learning system is a problem-solving learning environment. It is difficult, however, to say the same thing for distance learning.
- d. The face to face learning system is interactive in many dimensions, such as teacher-student, student-teacher, student-student, whereas, distance learning is limited, to the interactive, but with complete teacher-student dimension.

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# Typologies of Womanhood In *To The Lighthouse*

**Sedef Güzelyurt <sup>1</sup>**

## **Abstract**

Virginia Woolf is the most prominent representative of the modern novel and she has contributed greatly to the development of the modern novel both in theory and in practice. Woolf searches for a technique in order to express “the stream of consciousness”, that’s why she is considered to be a major innovator in English literature. She experiments with this revolutionary concept, which attempts to explore the consciousness of characters by accumulating many details from their own environment. Her masterpiece, *To the Lighthouse*, serves as an excellent sample of Woolf’s literary theory and her experimental techniques. The consciousness of the characters is not blatantly described as in the naturalist style but filtered through showing the way the characters are thinking and interpreting events. Mrs. Ramsay is described through the technique of “interior monologue”, her inner conflict and her external conflict become clear when she talks to herself. This article will analyze this style by searching for Mrs. Ramsay’s everlasting dominance, her excellent motherhood and her being different from traditional women though having all these traditional roles as a woman who serves as a kind of hope for the birth of a new woman. Her hope and her ideal is Lily who is born as a new woman with a new point of view. The typologies of womanhood and the relationship between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily together with their differences and similarities will be discussed. The death of Mrs. Ramsay gives birth to Lily who is both the ideal of Woolf and Mrs. Ramsay together. This article

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will analyze the death of traditional, submissive women together with the birth of new woman by taking into consideration the development related to women right at the end of the nineteenth century.

**Keywords:** *Dominance, New Woman, Traditional vs New Woman, Motherhood, Art, Victim, Death of the Mother and Birth of the New Woman, Matriarchal, Patriarchal, Womanhood*

### **Typologies of Womanhood In To The Lighthouse**

The entire action and movement in *To the Lighthouse* is built around Mrs. Ramsay and the novel can only be understood through analyzing her interaction with the other characters. Mrs. Ramsay lives with the patriarchal burden like most women have had to in the 19th century. She helps to bring the world out of chaos and darkness with her positive nature and she is the source of light for the other characters in the novel. In the light of this information, I will focus on Mrs. Ramsay's and her relationships with Lily Briscoe, with her husband Mr. Ramsay and with her children. Mrs. Ramsay is vitally important for *To the Lighthouse*, the novel can't be considered without her, and even after her death, which can be called a 'matriarchal death', she is still dominant in the lives of the characters in the novel, but her death brings an end to the traditional women and symbolically gives birth to Lily who can be interpreted as the colour and the vision of the novel as she is an artist. Mrs. Ramsay's colourless life and her being stuck in her traditional roles are closely related with Lily, the eccentric woman character who is the hope and the symbol of the woman of the time.

Mrs Ramsay is introduced to us as a matriarch who is kind and tolerant; Mrs. Ramsay's first word in the novel is "yes", which discloses her affirmative and positive nature. At the beginning of the novel, her son James wants to go the lighthouse across the bay, while Mr. Ramsay tells that the weather doesn't permit, Mrs. Ramsay tells him there is the possibility of going. This attitude of her shows that she doesn't want to dash her young son's expectations. "Yes, of course, if it's fine tomorrow," said Mrs Ramsay. But you'll have to be up with the lark," she added." (1). She doesn't want to shatter the hopes of her son, in that it can be said that she seems to be hopeful about life, thinking that the beauties and pleasures

of life are all temporary, life will end one day so there is no need to be hopeless. Mrs. Ramsay is a mother in every fibre of her being; in fact, it is her full occupation, her personal and public life, her hobby and her passion. She believes that motherhood is invaluable, although motherhood is not frequently valued as a prestigious, viable career choice. People, who know Mrs. Ramsay recognize her uncanny talent for it, even to go as far as to say that she makes it into an art form. Apart from being a mother, Mrs. Ramsay is described with reverence, see she is loved and respected by all the characters in the novel, for instance, Mr. Bankes tells her that "*Nature has but little clay... like that of which she moulded you.*"(25). Charles Tansley believes that "*she is the most beautiful person he had ever seen and is proud to be allowed to carry her bag.*"(53). Mrs. Ramsay has all the attributes required to be respected by any men in the patriarchal British society. Woolf actually describes Mrs. Ramsay when she describes the Angel in her '*Professions for Women*':

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She sacrificed herself daily. She never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of the others.. she was pure ..(Such women) must charm ... must conciliate.. must -to put it bluntly --tells lies if they are to succeed.( Woolf 212)

Throughout the novel, her life seems to be terrifyingly simple, but underneath, in the mind of Mrs. Ramsay it is terrifyingly complex. Though she has a great burden on her which is the effect of patriarchal society, she manages to overcome her sorrows and behaves appropriately in front of her guests at dinner parties and gatherings, so she satisfies the social norms. She sacrifices herself and she constantly gives herself to others. Her natural balance in the novel makes her psychologically unbalanced; she begins to question her place in life. "*But what have I done with my life?*"(Woolf 70) She cannot "*be herself, by herself.*"(95). She is the victim, she is the giver. "*She is a giver, that is to say, she gives with no assurance that she will get back even some unexpected profit from what she puts out.*" (Cixous, 881). Mrs. Ramsay is really humble and she does everything without expecting any return.

Mrs. Ramsay, besides being positive and sympathetic, devotes herself to her family and friends, though it is not what she really wants. Her magical power as a great mother is quite obvious in the first section, she is the hostess of the dinner party and it is clear that she has a unifying force, a typical woman of 19th century. She embodies the virtue of duty, subservience, self-sacrifice and other qualities which are proper for a Victorian woman and wife. Actually, she is the representative of a transition period. She is in between, she can't be the ideal woman like Lily Briscoe and she is not satisfied with being a typical Victorian woman. Mrs. Ramsay is a reverential mother figure starting from the first chapter "*The Window*" where the mother is placed in the central position, she dies in the second part "*Time Passes*", in *To the Lighthouse* part she is still as dominant as she is in part three though she was dead.

Lily is the other central female character in the novel. "In Victorian fiction it is often the orphan to whom the quest is given, who has the heroic role and who the survival figure is. Therefore; it is suitable to end the novel with Lily's vision," (Lilienfeld 348) it is the same in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, the novel ends with the last vision of Jane. Lily, whose voice is Woolf's herself, sees Mrs. Ramsay as a mother figure because she herself is an orphan living with an aging father. Lily finds it impossible to be just like Mrs. Ramsay, but she still admires her strength, beauty, resolution and gaiety. Lily is just the opposite of Mrs. Ramsay in that Mrs. Ramsay can see her own deficiencies through Lily. Mrs Ramsay represents the submissive and traditional woman in patriarchal society, while Lily symbolizes Woolf's ideal woman, the new woman. The two woman have a complementary distribution in that they long for everything that each possesses, Lily loves Mrs. Ramsay's being at the heart of the house, while Mrs. Ramsay instinctively identifies herself with Lily as she is an artist. They are both creators though their medium is different; Lily is an artist and her medium is her paintings, while Mrs. Ramsay is a creator whose medium is human beings and her form is human relationships. In fact, as Helen Storm Corsa argues, "It is in Lily that the largely libidinal attachment to the mother is seen. Her love... in its totality and in its idealizing force, dominates the first part of the novel. Her grief over the loss of the mother has long preceded the real loss of Mrs. Ramsay."(qtd in Lilienfeld, 347) For Lily it is the death of the mother, not the death of Mrs. Ramsay that matters. Lily is therefore more powerful than Mrs. Ramsay.

Lily would be a threatening to the mother if she were known to be as powerful a perceiver as she is. Certainly Mrs. Ramsay isn't aware of Lily's secret powers, yet Lily is the only character who clothes Mrs. Ramsay in the appropriate shapes of imagery and whose penetration divines Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts. (Lilienfeld,348)

If Lily were really the daughter of Mrs. Ramsay, she would be a threatening figure for Mrs. Ramsay, but still Mrs. Ramsay wouldn't know how a powerful a woman she is, as Mrs. Ramsay is busy with "taking care of some man or other." (Lighthouse 37) Woolf places the emphasis on Lily Briscoe, while reading the novel; the story is like a journey of seeking after a hope for a new woman. Mrs. Ramsay makes up the deficiency of Lily's orphanage, Lily is the voice of Woolf in the novel, she symbolizes the unconventional and rebellious woman, the representative of the unwanted woman who should be abolished from that patriarchal society Lily underestimates herself in relation to Mrs. Ramsay, she feels less than a woman considering Mrs. Ramsay's role and her domination in her family as Lily is not traditional like Mrs. Ramsay.

Oh, but, Lily would say, there was her father; her home; even, had she dared to say it, her painting. But all this seemed so little, so virginal, against the other. Yet, as the night wore on, and white lights parted the curtains, and even now and then some bird chirped in the garden, gathering a desperate courage she would urge her own exemption from the universal law; plead for it; she liked to be alone; she liked to be herself; she was not made for that; and so have to meet a serious stare from eyes of unparalleled depth, and confront Mrs Ramsay's simple certainty (and she was childlike now) that her dear Lily, her little Brisk, was a fool. (Lighthouse 42)

Lily becomes more curious about Mrs. Ramsay. She accuses Lily of denying the universal law which is marriage, because Lily is adamant on remaining single. Mrs. Ramsay asserts that no matter what Lily has, it is not worthwhile as she is alone. Mrs. Ramsay is afraid of being alone and that's why she wants everybody around her and she has this unifying

force. She doesn't want her children to become grown-ups in order to control them. "*Mrs Ramsay, realising that James was tugging at her, to make her go on reading aloud the Fisherman and his Wife, she did in her own heart infinitely prefer boobies to clever men who wrote dissertations; Charles Tansley, for instance.*" (Lighthouse 47) In this way, when they are children she can control the boys but when they become grown-ups, they will become incomprehensible to her like their father Mr. Ramsay. She is unable to perceive their life as she is not wise enough to understand the professional issues.

Lily's painting is of great importance to the general direction of the novel, as it begins with Lily and her easel, paints and brushes in Ramsay's summer house and it ends with the last stroke of Lily in the same place. As Stewart tells in his *Light in To the Lighthouse*, "If Mrs. Ramsay relates to the light as essence Lily relates to colour as the contingent substance of reality and art"(Stewart, 441) Mrs. Ramsay is the light as she is the mother, while Lily is the one who represents colour as she is the artist in the novel. Her painting is a conventional challenge considering the time as the women at that time have no right even to go to college. It displays the strength in the representation of women; it is even a challenge to Mrs. Ramsay herself who has no time even to read. It is a struggle against gender conventions as said by Mr. Tansley "women can't write, women can't paint." (Lighthouse, 72) Lily proves that she can do it and her last stroke is the triumph representing the birth of new woman. Lily must have heard the voice of Helen Cixous who asserts that "Woman must write herself, must write about women and bring them to writing... Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement" (Cixous, 875). Through her painting Lily finds the hidden things in her unconscious, apart from going beyond the gender roles of the time. She attempts to discover and paint Mrs. Ramsay's beauty and gaiety just as Woolf reflects the portrait of her own mother through Lily. As Cixous suggests, Lily puts in the text what she lacks, she is lacking in motherhood and family; therefore, her painting the mother and child shows the scene that she never possesses throughout her life. She creates what she lacks and she portrays her deepest feelings towards Mrs. Ramsay through her painting. Lily's painting of James and Mrs. Ramsay suggests Mrs. Ramsay's character with a few lines and a bit of purple shadowing: "she had made no attempt at likeness." (Lighthouse



42) Lily attempts to capture something real in her portrait without being too meticulous about making the painting actually look like Mrs. Ramsay. Through this work of art, Lily isn't trying to paint Mrs. Ramsay's physical features, she's not trying to get only Mrs. Ramsay; apart from trying to represent the lasting bond between the mother and the child which is beyond expression, she endeavours to create her own perception of Mrs. Ramsay. Lily believes that Mrs. Ramsay has some magical power and she tries to obtain the magical power from Mrs. Ramsay by touching her physically,

Sitting on the floor with her arms around Mrs. Ramsay's knees, close as she could get, smiling to think that Mrs. Ramsay would never know that the reason of that pressure, she imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of the woman who was, physically, touching her, were stored, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out would teach one everything, but they would never be offered openly, never made public. What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chamber. (67)

Even after this attempt, Lily ends up in failure as she perceives that she can't be as powerful or magical as her and accepts her failure: "*Nothing happened. Nothing! Nothing!*" says as she leans her head against Mrs. Ramsay's knee. This attitude gives some clues about her untold sexual desire towards Mrs. Ramsay, though the time they live doesn't accept any deviation from heterosexual norms. Woolf gives some implications of the lesbian desire. Lily is unconventional and strictly rejects marriage, which Mrs. Ramsay disapproves, evaluating this situation as a deficiency. She strictly assures that "*An unmarried woman has missed the best of life.*" (Lighthouse 42) In her painting, Lily does not produce a woman holding her child which is the symbol of heterosexual fertility; it is interesting that she only produces Mrs. Ramsay in her own eyes. After she finishes her painting Lily says, "*I have had my vision,*" which indicates that Mrs. Ramsay is her own reflection, but she still doesn't dare to clarify the exact meaning of the picture. Though she prefers to have some assets of Mrs. Ramsay, she doesn't prefer to be traditional like her and her painting

will be left as a reminiscence of traditional woman, the new woman is here to symbolize some other assets of woman besides being a mother.

Lily Briscoe's artistic powers have been stimulated and she has brought a keen insight to bear on the Ramsay family. After ten years she had arrived at the answer to her vision, but could not say just what it was (Lighthouse 11). She knew something was "out of harmony"; as she walked on the shore "there was a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath. . . . It was difficult . . . to continue, as one walked by the sea, to marvel how beauty outside mirrored beauty within. (Pedersen, 598-599)

Lily knows that she even does not have to clarify the exact meaning of the painting though she is the artist. Lily is the only character who laments Mrs. Ramsay's sudden death "Giving, giving, giving, she had died." (Lighthouse 126) Woolf shows this struggle through the development of Lily's painting and in the end she "senses what Mrs. Ramsay might have been like without the burden of the Eve and Mary myth upon her" (Daugherty 299). Mrs. Ramsay, "relieved for a moment of the weight that the world had put on her" (269), becomes her 'self', "the thing itself before it has been made anything" (287). Lily herself produces a world for Mrs. Ramsay where the dominant patriarchy has no effect can't be felt any more as she thinks that she recreates her in her painting: "Cursed by patriarchal contempt, killed by patriarchal reverence, Mrs. Ramsay disappears from the novel. Accepted as human, named worthwhile, seen and valued for what she was, Mrs. Ramsay appears again" (Daugherty 300). Woolf kills the angel who is her own mother and she explains its reason in her *Professions for Women* "I did my best to kill her. Had I not killed her she would have killed me." (Lighthouse 3) Here there is the atmosphere as if Lily is speaking and if Mrs. Ramsay hadn't died, she would have killed Lily as she is the rebellious, the unwanted or the lesbian. By killing Mrs. Ramsay all of a sudden, Woolf rejects all the conventional, submissive female roles in patriarchal society. Though she kills her, Mrs. Ramsay is still as dominant as patriarchy itself, even her thoughts, her words and her wishes are still there and it can clearly be seen when the family go to the lighthouse at the end of the novel. The existence of Mrs.

Ramsay can only be understood from the light coming from the lighthouse that brightens the house at night, that light like her stops by each room of the house gently and touches every living being affectionately. As a mother figure she is the metaphorical lighthouse who is surrounded by family and gives light to everybody around, except her own self as she can rarely “be herself, by herself” (Lighthouse 95). As Stewart asserts in his article entitled as “Light in to the Lighthouse” – “Mrs. Ramsay sinks back to being herself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others.” (Woolf, 52) Though she is the light to all the characters in the novel, she is dark and pretends that she is an optimist. She is dark as she gets stuck in the traditional roles of women of the nineteenth century. As Ernst Carrier observes, “*light and shadow go together. The light manifests itself only in the shadow it casts.*” (qtd. in Stewart, 378) There is no light in her, her primary goal is to glitter everybody with the light coming from the lighthouse. She always “*embraces the lighthouse beam as an ultimate source of creative energy and is filled with Light. Her family and friends approach the lighthouse through her.*” (Stewart 379) The expedition to the lighthouse which is planned in part one and is undertaken in the last part is a journey to the glowing light of Mrs. Ramsay and it can be interpreted as the victory of Mrs. Ramsay as it is her beloved son’s wish to go to there.

Mrs. Ramsay’s dominance is prevalent in her attitude towards her children though they seem to be an ordinary family of the late nineteenth century. Mr. Ramsay is different from Mrs. Ramsay both as a husband and as a father. His fatherhood is shown at the beginning of the novel, when he tells his son that they can’t go to the lighthouse because the weather won’t permit. After that he is described as “*lean as a knife, narrow as the blade of one.*” (Woolf 4) Mr. Ramsay is sharp both physically and personally. It is the description in the eyes of James whom he thinks “*grins 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.*” (4) James feels murderous rage for his father and it can clearly be seen when he says, “*Had there been an axe handy, a poker, or any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father’s breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it*” (Lighthouse 4). James thinks that accepts that his mother is ten thousand times better than his father, which implies that his situation as a child can be interpreted as the Oedipus complex. James

has not got any close relationship till the end of the novel, when they go to the lighthouse. James is infatuated with his mother's compassionate love, however; he loathes his father. For James, his father is the reason he can't go to the lighthouse he desperately wants to visit, and his mother who allows the hope of going to the lighthouse As Mrs. Ramsay believes that hope is one of the most invaluable things in human life and she allows James to enjoy that.

Perhaps you will wake up and find the sun shining and the birds singing," said compassionately, soothing the little boy's hair, for her husband, with his caustic saying that it would not be fine, had dashed his spirits she could see. This going to the Lighthouse was a passion of her, she saw and then, as if her husband had not said enough, with his caustic saying that it would not be fine tomorrow, this odious little man went and rubbed it in all over again. (Lighthouse, 14)

Mrs. Ramsay is the source of comfort for James, while Mr. Ramsay is only harassment. "To James, Mrs. Ramsay is a source of peace and harmony and James witnesses the act of sexual sympathy by which she restores his father to himself and to his world."(Stewart 379) and he thinks that "Mrs. Ramsay's personal light is almost spent in sacrificing her energy for others"(379). James knows that both he and his father are in need of Mrs. Ramsay, but as he is growing, he begins to resemble his father as he needs the compassion and sympathy of his mother just like his father. However; James's feelings towards him are just like opposite to those of his mother's.

But his son hated him. He hated him for coming up to them, for stopping and looking down on them; he hated him for interrupting them; he hated him for the exaltation and sublimity of his gestures; for the magnificence of his head; for his exactingness and egotism (for there he stood, commanding them to attend to him) but most of all he hated the twang and twitter of his father's emotion which, vibrating round them, disturbed the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relations with his mother. (Lighthouse 32)

Through James's sentiments, Mr. Ramsay's character can be accessed. Mr. Ramsay is selfish and harsh due to his ongoing anxieties; he is a bighead considering he is always superior to his wife and always wants to be praised about his professional abilities. It is a typical patriarchal attitude, it is just the social norms assign men and women their respective roles and create a hierarchy between them. Though he acts patiently and kindly to the others, he has an inclination to be rude and impatient. As a metaphysician, he is a man of reason and science and thinks that men are burdened with the weight of their work just like Mrs. Ramsay thinks. He represents the rational masculine mind as opposed to him Mrs. Ramsay represents the emotional feminine nature. Woolf does not show him superior to Mrs. Ramsay; actually he is accessed as a superficial character not deep like Mrs. Ramsay. *"He seemed a young man; a man very attractive to women, not burdened, not weighed down with the greatness of his labours and the sorrows of the world."* (Lighthouse, 82) Mrs. Ramsay again sacrifices herself and she thinks that she has to stand by her husband in order to lessen the burden of her husband; she herself has the burden of all women living in 19th century Victorian England. Mr. Ramsay wants to be the centre of the world; he knows that he is in need of her. Mr. Ramsay wants to be remembered in future generations, just like Shakespeare. He is a very insecure intellectual. He suffers from an acute sense of his own mortality and insignificance. Mr. Ramsay's struggle between intellectual achievements and domesticity also shows how concern Mr. Ramsay is about his books and his name being remembered. Mr. Ramsay loves his family, but Mr. Tansley believes that if Mr. Ramsay hadn't got married he would have written better books. *"If Shakespeare had never existed, he asked, would the world have differed much from what it is today? Does the progress of civilization belong to men? Is the lot of the average human being better now than in the time of Pharaohs?"* (Woolf 36) He compares himself with Shakespeare and he knows that he will never be as valued as Shakespeare, which only makes him more insecure. Mrs. Ramsay subordinates herself to her husband because she suspects her husband's intellectual abilities though she hasn't got the ability to understand what he does. Mr. Ramsay needs to feel that he is at the centre of the world and it is only possible through the praise and appreciation of Mrs. Ramsay.

When it comes to the marriage of Mr. Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay, seemingly they have an ordinary marriage, but they both have some reservations about

their own selves. Mrs. Ramsay can't tell her love overtly to Mr. Ramsay though she knows that he really needs this revelation;:

He wanted something—wanted the thing she always found it so difficult to give him; wanted her to tell him that she loved him. And that, no, she could not do. He found talking so much easier than she did. He could say things—she never could. So naturally it was always he that said the things, and then for some reason he would mind this suddenly, and would reproach her. A heartless woman he called her; she never told him that she loved him. (99)

Mr. Ramsay wants his wife to tell him that she loves him. Therefore; he is not the oppressive patriarchal element after all. Mrs. Ramsay is not such a woman who can tell these pronouncements and this is the first thing that she rejects throughout her life. Though she is supposed to be full of love, she does not really love him, she is only under guard in the atmosphere of a family, and there is no just life for a woman outside a family. Her rejection is a revolt against the male-dominated society of Victorian England. Mrs. Ramsay is also disturbed when her husband recites sentimental poems to her but instead of showing her disturbance, “she is bowed and receives homage.”(Lighthouse, 90) Though the couples seem to appreciate each other, actually they don't. “He wanted sympathy. He was a failure.” (32) She thinks that he is always in need of her and actually he is, so she submits herself to her husband. Mrs. Ramsay is the figure that has the candidness and benignity to comfort everybody except her own self. While Mrs. Ramsay tries to be flawlessly wonderful, Mr. Ramsay can't fulfil the role of perfect father and husband. “She did not like, even for a second, to feel finer than her husband; and further, could not bear not being entirely sure, when she spoke to him, of the truth of what she said that Mr. Ramsay is not a failure.”(Lighthouse, 34) Woolf emphasizes that Mrs. Ramsay doesn't find comfort and self-satisfaction from anything throughout the novel, but she is always here to satisfy all the needs of her husband. “For her own self-satisfaction was it that she wished so instinctively to help, to give, that people might say of her, “O Mrs Ramsay! dear Mrs Ramsay... Mrs Ramsay, of course!” and need her and send for her and admire her?” Woolf here suggests that she is the one who is the giver, who always sacrifices



herself to everybody in the novel, irrespective of her own self, though she is always praised by the others in the novel. For instance; Mr. Bankes tells that “he respects her, she is not vain; she is entirely impersonal, she is finer than Mr. Ramsay; she is the finest human being that he knows.” However; she feels herself insufficient despite such overt reverence and dependence upon her throughout the novel. The tale that Mrs. Ramsay reads to is of great importance to the flow of the novel as, consciously or unconsciously, has a connection with her as she feels herself bad considering the wife of the fisherman in the novel. In this tale there is a fisherman and his wife: one day the fisherman finds a flounder who enchants him with being a prince in return for letting her stay alive. The fisherman releases the flounder, but when he returns home and tells the story to his wife, she forces him to go back, when he dies he finds the fish and it grants his wife’s request to have cottage. However the wife becomes greedy in time, she wants a palace, she wants to be the king, the emperor, the pope and at last God. Though the tale is chosen on purpose by Woolf, Mrs. Ramsay knows that she can’t go any further; she tells that she wants to read but she has no time to do so. The story and the novel are contradictory in that “*the tale’s punishment of a power-hungry woman transforms her “successful creation” (Lighthouse 33) into a fear of feeling or even appearing finer than her husband, “for then people said he depended on her.” (34). The tale reminds her to put things “right”: “they must know that of the two he was infinitely the more important, and what she gave the world, in comparison with what he gave, negligible” (33).* Mrs. Ramsay thinks that she is always inferior to Mr. Ramsay, no matter what she does she can’t be compared to Mr. Ramsay. As Daugherty says “*Ironically her fear of appearing superior to her husband is groundless, the men in the novel certainly assume his contribution is more important than hers, and in fact, think she hinders Mr. Ramsay’s career.*” Mrs. Ramsay can’t go any further, she can’t be better than what she is but she is not a stupid woman as Mr. Ramsay supposes. Actually he thinks that she is stupid like all the other women and her stupidity makes her beautiful. However; Lily makes a comment about her beauty, “Beauty was not everything. Beauty had this penalty – it came too readily, came too completely. It stilled life – froze it. One forgot the little agitations; the flesh, the pallor, some sight or shadow, which made the face unrecognizable ... It was simpler to smooth that all out under the cover of beauty. (148) For Lily, beauty is not everything; rather the thing under that beauty is of great

importance and Lily understands that Mrs. Ramsay's inner side has much to say: Lily is the voice of Mrs. Ramsay in the novel. Mr. Ramsay has great ambitions, he wants to be genius, and he wants to reach the letter Z, to be like Shakespeare. He wants to be assured that he lives in the heart of life. His need of sympathy renders him reliant on his wife's femininity. While both individuals seem to support one another, they have distinct approaches towards doing everyday life tasks. Mrs. Ramsay appears subordinate, because a practical approach could go against Mr. Ramsay's principles; Mrs. Ramsay is the more stable individual in their relationship. Ultimately; however, both individuals rely on one another for support and comfort.

Mrs. Ramsay is the most important figure and she doesn't lose her importance and effect even after her death. The family's going to the lighthouse at the end of the novel shows the improvement of Mr. Ramsay's personality and her dominant refinement at that house. Mr. Ramsay, with his visit to the lighthouse, tries to fulfil the wish of his wife and to create secure and lasting bonds with his children and which is the sign of Mrs. Ramsay's dominance even when she is not there anymore. Going to the lighthouse is a journey to Mrs. Ramsay herself as she is the glowing light of the novel. According to Stewart in his 'Light in To the Lighthouse', Mrs. Ramsay's function is akin to that of the Lighthouse beam. At her "festival" dinner, she undertakes "the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating" (70) orders the candles lit (149) "her face was all lit up-without looking young, she looked radiant" (83) (Stewart 383). Although Mrs. Ramsay appears to be the idealized version of a woman, being the angel, mother and light of the house, through her inner monologue it is seen inwardly that she questions gender roles, but she is aware that she can't take any action. She still wants Lily and her daughters to marry and to become mothers.

Mrs. Ramsay is living in a patriarchally controlled world, but Lily is the one who helps to improve the situation of women by refusing the traditional beliefs related to gender roles and her painting is a proof for that. The subtle difference between two women is given clearly by Annette Kolodny in her "Dancing through the Minefield"; "others, after us, may literally dance through the minefield" (Kolodny 2165). If women can prove their



significance and importance in the society just like Lily who breaks the gender chains with her painting, women can dance through the minefield, rather than Mrs. Ramsay who always fights in that minefield. Lily is the representative of hope for a new woman, while Mrs. Ramsay represents the traditional Victorian woman. Lily who “wants to die out of one shape into another”(Lilienfeld 354) is unable to make sacrifices like Mrs. Ramsay though she “wants to be the life in Mrs. Ramsay’s center”(354). Thinking that she is holy like the Virgin Mary and proving it with her painting of Mrs. Ramsay and her son, she “wishes to penetrate its holy place.”(354). As Lily is in pursuit of her own wishes and interests and selfish, unlike Mrs. Ramsay, she wants to be Mrs. Ramsay, she desires “her body to mingle with that of Mrs. Ramsay.”(354) She wants to be “this woman’s central core, Lily would become Mrs. Ramsay, replacing and killing her.”(354). Though Mrs. Ramsay is dead when Lily paints the last stroke, she recreates her and names it as her own vision which gives a sense of recovery from the malign disease called patriarchy. “*Mrs. Ramsay’s knees would serve as the doorways to the cave of birth and death for each woman.*”(Lilienfeld 354) Though Mrs. Ramsay is dead physically, she is there for the birth of new woman and her soul implores for a livable world with males and females, as Woolf suggests in her *A Room of One’s Own* “life is for both sexes” (41) and there is country and world for both of them.

In conclusion, when the family reaches the lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay achieves her vision, and that is a proof for her dominant presence which gains an everlasting quality. Her dominance is everywhere in her relationship with her husband, with her guests, with Lily, she is just like Zeus, the God of storm and lightning, who says the last word about the weather and she is certainly the one who decides on the atmosphere and the viewpoint of the novel. She serves as a giving mother figure for all the characters in the novel and she is worshipped for being just like the great mother of all like Gaia. When Lily succeeds Mrs. Ramsay’s power and when Mrs. Ramsay’s power has come back to the Ramsays, the chaotic atmosphere turns into the atmosphere of reconciliation, the atmosphere which Mrs. Ramsay embodies and inspires in others throughout her life in a selfless manner. After her death Lily finishes her painting and her last stroke is the birth of a new woman, Lily paints Mrs. Ramsay in order to make her permanent but only in paintings just like she lives throughout her

life. She lives the life of her husband, her children and even her guests but not her own life. She admires some assets of Lily without being noticed, she accepts that she has ruined her life saying “*what have I done with my life?*” (125). She even wants to curtail Lily’s independence by attempting to marry her off to William. Her death is the death of the traditional roles of the women and the birth for new women with their new artistic, usual and eccentric viewpoint. Lily is the one who will hold the flag as a successor of Mrs. Ramsay. Woolf and her artist Lily kill the angel and free the mother by giving a sense of hope as there is recovery from a bad illness called patriarchy both for the family and for the whole generation.

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# Reflections on Shelley's Poetry in the Light of his *A Defense of Poetry* Essay: Does the Poet Have a Divine Power?

**Ahmad al Burai**<sup>1</sup>

## **Abstract**

Percy Bysshe Shelley was stimulated to write his greatest well-known work of prose, a *Defense of Poetry*. Shelly was highly provoked by a friend "Thomas Peacock", who criticized the modern poetry and prompted Shelley to write his zealous defense where he questions whether a poet is a philosopher or a rational thinker? He also states that poetry's main focus is to reveal the exquisiteness of the world that is deceptively concealed in our busy world of ambiguity and darkness. Moreover, Shelley presents the poet as a person who has a considerate, mystical gratitude to nature; the poet has the authority to interpret the indefinite and hidden or unhurt certainties with the virtue of his individuality and heavenly supremacy he enjoys.

**Keywords:** *Poetry, Poet, Defense, Imagination, Divine Power*

Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote his essay "A Defense of Poetry" in 1821. In this essay Shelley insists that the creation of poetry is not a mere craft that anyone who fancies that he is able to produce poetry can do it. Rather, the genuine poet is a creative, inspiring dreamer who is able to accumulate all his imagination and abnormal qualities as a means of creating art and enlightening the world of the unknown. Shelley, in his essay, states that imagination is the power of inspiration that formulates the vision of the

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poet, who cannot be created by automatic writing or trained as a craftsman. Moreover, he argues that poetry is not only a practice of imagination but also is an expansion and a source of empathy, understanding, passion and love. He writes:

Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void forever craves fresh food. Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb.

As we shall observe by deeper reading of his masterpiece essay "A Defense of Poetry" and with its expressiveness, we shall understand that it mainly describes the qualities of both poetry and the creator of it. His defense of these two concepts i.e. the poet and his poetical talent or as he calls it "poetical faculty" is a great representation of the vision and dream of the creator of the imagination which ultimately leads to the production of a masterpiece poem that reveals and embodies deep passion and feelings of its writer who tries to reflect on the society he is living at.

Commencing by a deep insight of the essay, it starts with an elegant introduction about the nature and perception of poetry, though some of the critics claim that it lacks cohesion and coherence of the main stream of his thoughts, Shelley, undoubtedly, succeeded in symbolizing his notion of the poet who represents an idealistic vision of the art to the extent that it reaches a divine power that competes the qualities of the creator of the universe. Shelley through the utilization of the imaginative and innovative process of the poet's talent used neat language that reflected the divine ability of the poet who is able with his abstract qualities and characteristics along with being able to utilize the aesthetic effects of his production to reach the peak of passion and beauty and this was highly stressed throughout the whole essay. In one of his masterpiece poems "Ode to Liberty" Shelley's imagination is demonstrated in a very magnificent manner:

And many a warrior-peopled citadel,  
Like rocks which fire lifts out of the flat deep,  
Arose in sacred Italy,  
Frowning over the tempestuous sea  
Of kings, and priests, and slaves, in tower-crowned majesty;

The core essence of the essay is to reflect the main stream vision of poetry as he writes “poetry is ever-accompanied with pleasure and it lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world”. According to Shelley poetry’s main focus is to reveal the exquisiteness of the world that is deceptively concealed in our busy world of ambiguity and darkness. Later he stresses the main crux of his essay which is “poetry acts in a diviner manner”. He claims that poetry’s purpose is not just to generate moral perfection but also to stimulates and arouses the mind to conquer and dive in deep uncertain areas of passion and blends of beliefs.

He crystalizes his view by emphasizing that poetry’s abilities is to decode the stereotypes and challenge the already-static and typical prejudices adopted by the society. This adaptation of the attitude would give the reader an opportunity to perceive the so-called truth from a completely different perspective. Poetry is the messenger or the mediator that have the divine power to uncover and expose these underlying truths and this reminds me with the Utopia and how Plato argued that a poet is to be a genuine creator not an imitator to assist the humans see the truth beyond the physical values they appreciate. Likewise, Shelley discusses that the poet is able and entitled to expose the corruption of the material physical world and lead the humans to the mere truth that is hindered by the short-sight assessment and beliefs imposed by the authoritative and dictating society.

From another different dimension, Shelley suggest that there must be a balance between proper goodness and the power of imagination “The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause”. Thus, his aim is to bridge this gap between the reader and poetry by digging deep in the cause utilizing the power of imagination. Subsequently, the reader will start adopting the art the poet produces immediately after admiring it, where he writes “poets

are as mirrors in which the spectator beholds himself' and this also is a unique feature of Shelley's poetry that saves the reader the knowledge and esteem to impersonate nature through self-reflection and understanding. According to Shelley's understanding, poetry is not an imitation of nature that aims at delighting and pleasing readers. He writes one of the most critical sentences in this regard saying "a great poem is a fountain forever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight". This seconds the belief that a poet in Shelley's perspective is not a normal man he has unique qualities and merits that empower him with a divine power that leads him to utilize his creativity and imagination to create genuine products rather than imitating the imitation of the material world.

Going deeper in the text and the flow of the ideas, Shelley takes the reader to another different spot where he states that tragedy is the best source of poetry "sweeter than the pleasure of pleasure itself", ironically, tragedy is the best form to reveal and uncover the concealed pleasure that blends, naturally, with grief and sorrow. Interestingly, the other sources of pleasure such as love and joy are not excluded or disregarded in his ideas but the paradox of, or the juxtaposition of pleasure and pain in the form of a tragic poem is a unique feature that he offered in the essay, stating that tragedy is a core genre that a poet should master specifically to stimulate and awaken commanding emotion and feelings among the readers. Thus, he simply lay emphasis on the universality that welds that reader with the tragic experience that is not away from his real life and that leads by return to the creation of delight and pleasure.

Is the poet a philosopher or a rational thinker? Shelley argues that the world has been stunned by reasonable thinking, and poetry "creates new materials of knowledge, and power and pleasure". He delicately explicates that the "poetical faculty" is characterized by a divine power. He writes "poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of will". This shall take us to a deeper insight of the religious context of the essay and Shelley himself. It is well-known that Shelley was an atheist and he was proud of this. He denied all divine power to the extent that he wrote on this topic in 1811, "The Necessity of Atheism" which was a treatise on atheism in which he confirms that there is no God. Interestingly, that Shelley's doctrine is evidently conflicting the view of God in Christianity.



Shelley felt profoundly uncertain about structured creed, predominantly Christianity. However he frequently embodies the poet as a symbol or the character of a prophet mainly Christ, in other words, he represents the poet as a replacement for Jesus. He presents the poet as a martyred of the society and the values of traditions and conventions. Jesus is revived by the supremacy of nature and his peculiar fancy is disseminated by his farsighted prophecies. For Shelley, Christ is a symbol and a representation of the romantic poets and himself as well.

Shelley's attempted to demonstrate that a poet cannot appreciate his own production and to what extent it will be famous and worthy among the readers. The poet is a nightingale in Shelley's opinion "a nightingale, which sits in the darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds". Then he goes further to claim that "poets are prophets". Therefore, for Shelley a poet is someone dignified and has the superiority over the others. A poet is a person who has abnormal abilities and is revered and gifted with unique merits and qualities.

Shelley's ideas on poets' super characteristics and his argument on their superiority are questionable as he lacks the rational logic of reasoning and the proof to maintain the idea that societies would elevate poets and their art. His claim, on the other hand, that poets are the greatest and their distinction is not analogous with any other as he writes poets are "institutor of human life" he also is not convincing in his reasoning as it lack rational proof that defends his assumption of elevating poets to the level of wise men and to consider them the institutors of life. Shelley believes that poets are dependable; nonetheless, a poet is regarded in a glorious status and is beheld to have a divine power that supports him to produce his creative and innovative poetry. Shelley's poet appears to have little control over his gifts to create poetry or appreciate what he has generated.

The poet mind is "a fading coal" and his production is an outcome of inspiration, therefore, when a poet creates his mind and imagination is being inspired by his own super power that distinguishes him from others. Shelley writes that "the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet". As the poetry is being created, the inspiration or

originality is slowly declining. However, if the poet is never fully conscious of the brilliance of his poems, or even in control of the muse or generation of his poetry, how is the poetry ever being attributed to its unique outset? Shelley perceives a poet as a person who functions as a container of some superior heavenly and divine expression who has little competence or consciousness of the inspired talent intricate with the conception of the art. The poet's work is the "record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds" which hints that the person who reads to trust the poet who does have some sentient adoptions in his effort of producing and original form of creativity and novelty. However, this may oppose Shelley's aforementioned concepts of the poet. Shelley aims to boost the paramount poets as "men of the most spotless virtue". It is undoubtedly agreed and well perceived that a poet is a person who should have righteous and honorable features of his life. However, Shelley and in his essay is perplexing and confusing the readers by stating that "spotless virtue" of the poet which is a choice of extremism is the main feature of a genuine poet. Whereas, in prior arguments he writes: "the state of mind produced by them is at war with every base desire"

Such contradictions may lead the person who reads to feel a slightly misled when Shelley earlier states that the poet's mind is rebelling "base" wishes. The degree of the words is what makes the person who reads quail since the word "base" has a very undesirable implication and "virtue" has a constructive inference. Shelley's recklessness to designate the gorgeous outcome of poetry and its originator denies his earlier delineated beliefs. The febleness Shelley's argument begins to gleam through his stunning expressions and images.

Going back to the idea how such a perception of the poet would affect the framing of poetry understanding in Shelley's perspective. Poetry swiftly is converted from the talent that boosted the shroud to expose the attractiveness of the world. It aims to reveal the outcome of the poet that reserves not only the antiquity of the world but also the lovely and beautiful connotations and inclinations of the word. Then it is altered into something that he writes about saying: "turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed".

A very shocking image is presented to the poet in the depth of the essay as Shelley claims that the poet is no longer interested in uncovering the exposing the corruption and venality of the society but sometimes he tends to disguise it and not attempting to reveal it particularly when such a truth is completely deformed and would lead to uncovering the hidden contradiction of the society. The poet tends, in his poetry, not only to reveal the hidden beauty of the world but also to maintain exquisiteness and truth. Moreover, he has the ability to manipulate things that are not so inspirational into charm. Shelley is now challenging Plato's arguments and perceptions of truth. Shelley argues that the poet no longer discloses the venality but guises it if it is too distorted to ascertain the concealed beauty which would only sustain Plato's apprehensions of the ethics of poets to ruin the truth by generating another malformed copy of the already despoiled material world.

Shelley aims at indicating that poetry is, unquestionably, something virtually too godlike and imperceptible, it not man or prophet "poet" who could conceivably have created it could have well-ordered the determination to craft it. This perception of the concept of poetry and its originator is enormously persuasively and divinely inscribed, picturing glowing imageries of a lovely work that generates astounding and heavenly talent. This talent of creating genuine art would in turn moves the sentiments of people and divulges numerous effects about the world the readers live in.

Inopportunately, Shelley's stunning and articulate works cannot fur the feebleness of his assertions, opinions, and philosophy entirely. The cohesiveness of his thoughts and ideas that poetry contributes to the world and those inhabiting this world, since the poet has a unique merit that enables him see through the physical world to expose and uncover the uncertain and ambiguous truth. Tactlessly, Shelley's essay is unable to crystalize or enforce such ideas with more than theorizing what he is proposing; he does not have a clear track or vision of what poetry does or supposed to be doing and he cannot truthfully or coherently designate a solid description of the qualities of the poet. There are numerous arguments within his thoughts and philosophies that challenge one another and he does not maintain reasonable thinking or indication to provide a provision of his assertions. His imageries are rather intangible or "divine"

characteristics to both poems and its originator leading the person who reads to have faith in that these two effects are somehow above everyone else or should be dignified above any other work.

It can be said that the dominant apprehensions of Shelley's poems are fundamentally matching subject matters that demarcated Romanticism, exclusively amongst the earlier English poets of his era: exquisiteness, the desires, nature, political freedom, inspiration, and the purity of imagination. What makes his handling of these subject matters exceptional is his theoretical connection with his theme, which was better established and expressed than any other poet of the romanticism school at his era. Moreover, Shelley's personality, which was astonishingly delicate and approachable even for an idealistic poet, and which haunted an unexpected dimensions for pleasure, affection, and hopefulness. Shelley passionately thought in the likelihood of comprehending the superiority of human joy as grounded on magnificence, and his instants of obscurity and hopelessness, which are clear especially in a number of his long poems virtually continuously commence from his discontent at understanding and comprehending the ultimate forgone flaw.

When compared to his peers at his era, it is known that Keats supposed that both beauty and aesthetic are appreciated for the sake of beauty and aesthetic, whereas Shelley's passionate state of mind about exquisiteness and manifestation of beauty are recognized in his work of genius poems; "Ode to the West Wind" and "To a Skylark," in which Shelley summons images from the beauty of nature to portray his affiliation to his talent and products of poetry. Shelley, unlike other poets of his era, underlined the association between loveliness and heavens, or thought enthusiastically in the influence of art's sentimental and emotional effects summarized in the theme of joy to recover the world and its societies. Shelley is certain of that poetry creates a sort of people and humanity that is much more better; he believes that poetry is immersed with this gentle sort of stimulated honorable brilliance, which he anticipated that would shake his readers sentimentally, mystically, and magically.

To sum up, it can be observed that in Shelley's poetry, the character of the poet or Shelley himself is not merely a gifted performer or writer or even

a sensitive philosopher but rather an exceptional, heart-rending, prophetic hero with a visionary and divine insight. Shelley presented the poet as a person who has a thoughtful, spiritual indebtedness to nature; the poet has the supremacy to decode the unknown and unrevealed or untouched truths with the virtue of his uniqueness and divine power he enjoys. Through imagination the poet is able to do what others cannot and even can do more that a prophet can do. Thus, his poetry develops to be with the divine power of the prophet to be a sort of divination and prophecy to the world, and through his verses, a poet has the power and authority to not only create but also inspire change of the whole world for the better and to generate civil, collective, and divine transformation. According to Shelley, a poet is a redeemer, a savior a knight in shining armor; who has the capacity to use the divine power in saving the world. Like Christ, the poet is destined to grieve and is doomed to be burned to enlighten others. A poet has the idealistic and visionary power that distinguishes him from a normal man because he is victimized by a oppressive rule, or for the reason that they are stifled by conservative creed and middle-class standards. In the end, nevertheless, the poet conquers for the reason that his fine art is memorable, enduring the domination of control, conviction, and civilization to motivate fresh groups of the inspired society.

Finally, Shelley uses nature as his chief cradle of elegiac creativeness. In his poems as “The Mask of Anarchy” and “Ode to the West Wind,” Shelley advocates that the regular world clutches an inspirational supremacy over his imagination. This supremacy appears to come from an unfamiliar person, more spiritual place than merely his thankfulness for nature’s exquisiteness or magnificence. Captivatingly, though nature has imaginative clout over Shelley because it is a source of creativeness, he touches that his thoughts has inventive influence over nature. It is the fancy or the capacity to constitute sensual insights that makes us able to designate nature in diverse, innovative concepts and methods, which help to outline how nature look like and, consequently, how it subsists. As a consequence, the influence of the social awareness becomes equivalent to the authority of nature, and the understanding of prettiness in the natural world converts to be a sort of partnership between the person who perceive and the one who is alleged. For the reason that Shelley cannot be sure that the magnificent influences he feels in nature are only the consequence

of his exceptional thoughts, he claims that it is hard to appoint nature's guidance to only one God. The poet has a genuine role in shaping the beauty and novelty of such a divine source of power.

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# A Study on the “Things” in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*

**Burcu Erdağ<sup>1</sup>**

## **Abstract**

*This study examines the reasons of the fall of the Umuofia tribe and the main character, Okonkwo. There are certain events, both internally and externally, caused things to fall apart. This study divides these “things” into two main subtitles: “Okonkwo’s dreams that fall apart” and “The tribal system that falls apart”. These subtitles include main influences of the changes that occur in the book. The first chapter includes the events such as Ikemefuna’s death, Nwoye’s conversion, Okonkwo’s desire to rule the tribe etc. The second chapter includes the reasons for Okonkwo’s exile, the arrival of Christianity, the death of python, tribe’s not acting as one, etc.*

**Keywords:** *African, Ibo, Culture, Postcolonial Literature, Agbala, Tribe, Christianity, Heritage, Disintegration, Masculinity, Conversion, Religion, Civilization, Modernity, Postmodernity*

Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* was published in 1958. It is regarded as a classic work not only in the African literature but also in the world literature, taught in African literature classes (Samatar 61). That is because this masterpiece of Achebe is seen as the heritage of the next generation, as a record of the history of his culture.

*Things Fall Apart* is a book depicting the coming of European colonizers to West Africa from the point of view of inhabitants of a tribe, the Umuofia.

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As the name of the book suggests it is a story of disintegration of both tribe and an individual man, Okonkwo (Samatar 63). When reading, one can easily understand the emphasis made on Igbo culture in the first half of the book. There are no statements about West. Achebe clearly wants us to feel as if we are one of the members of the tribe. Therefore, we can easily realize the changes that western people make in the next parts of the text. Samatar says:

The steps that make the desecration possible are clearly outlined: the missionaries proceed from proselytizing in chapter sixteen, to building a church on tabooed land in the Evil Forest in chapter seventeen, to co-opting the tabooed bodies of outcasts and shaving their long hair, the mark of their taboo, in chapter eighteen. By chapter twenty the church in Umuofia has gained a certain acceptance. (63)

When disintegration is examined, it is impossible to move beyond without mentioning the concept of modernization. David Harvey describes the process of modernization as a condition leading to an "overwhelming sense of fragmentation, ephemerality, and chaotic change" (11). In the Achebe's novel we see this fragmentation through the religious motives; people haven't only one god.

### **Okonkwo's Dreams that Fall Apart**

The character of Okonkwo in the book is obsessed with the idea of being a "real man". He is always trying to prove his masculine character which is actually the main reason for his own fall. He thinks he has proven his masculinity by beating his wives and son.

From the very beginnings of the book, Achebe allows the reader to read the mind of Okonkwo. He never shows any sign of fear or weakness. Although Okonkwo is described as fearless, powerfull wrestler and meaning so much to village as it stated following lines, the reader sees this character as a total loser by the end of the book.



Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honor to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino. Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things. .... Although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time. Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered. (Achebe 3, 8)

He promises to himself that he will be the opposite of his father whom “people laughed at because he was a loafer and they swore never to lend him any more money because he never paid back” (Achebe 5). In the novel, Okonkwo does many things in order to see in the respect of people, proving that he is a “real man”, and achieving his dream of being the leader of the tribe. He never shows any sign of weakness. However, the things he did actually prepared his downfall.

In the novel, Okonkwo is always beating his wives and son, Nwoye. It is because he fears being thought of being as a weak person. He thinks that his son Nwoye looks like his father and he cannot bear this feeling. This is the main reason why Okonkwo never hesitates to punish or beat Nwoye every time. Even, one day when Nwoye was cutting the yams, Okonkwo came and gave a treatment to Nwoye because the size of the yams. According to Okonkwo, Nwoye was cutting with a wrong size and said: “*if you split another yam of this size, I shall break your jaw*” (Achebe 32). This masculine character of Okonkwo was the main reason for the conversion of Nwoye. His dreams about Nwoye have fallen apart because of himself. His desire to hide his emotions for his son actually drove a great distance between father and son. Therefore, during Okonkwo’s exile years, Nwoye converted to Christianity. Additionally, Nwoye abandoned most of the traditions and customs of his own tribe.

Another important factor that divides Nwoye and his father Okonkwo was tribal law. Nwoye never understood the taboo on twins and he has always questioned the murder of Ikemefuna who had been like a brother to Nwoye. Samatar listed the reasons of Nwoye’s fall apart:

Nwoye is moved by the preaching of the Christians; he seeks a refuge in the new religion from what terrifies him in his own: *"the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed"* (137). Twins are taboo for his clan and are thrown into the forest as infants to die; Ikemefuna, a boy from another village who lived with Okonkwo for three years and was like a brother to Nwoye, was killed by a group of Umuofia men, Okonkwo among them, as a ritual revenge for the death of a woman from their own clan. Nwoye's refusal or inability to accept such incidents sets him apart from his father, who upholds the law even when it goes against him, paying the fine when he beats his wife during the Week of Peace (32) and going into exile without protest after he accidentally kills a young man of Umuofia (117). In contrast to his father, Nwoye finds Umuofia's laws intolerable. He is one of those marginalized members of Okonkwo's society who, like the *"low-born and the outcast,"* find solace in the new way of thinking represented by the Christian religion. (65)

The case of Ikemefuna is the other example of Okonkwo's fear of weakness. Ikemefuna is a boy from the tribe of Mbaino. His father has killed a girl from Umuofia and he is given to Okonkwo for three years. During this period, Okonkwo was asked to care for the son. In these three years, Ikemefuna got used to the family of Okonkwo and saw them as if they were his real family. However, everybody in the family revealed the same emotions of Ikemefuna except for Okonkwo. It is not surprising that Okonkwo has done this once again for fear of being thought of as a weak man. His has only one emotion, anger. One day Okonkwo learned that tribe decided to kill Ikemefuna. Okokwo was strictly warned not to take part in the killing of Ikemefuna, because Ikemefuna was calling him "father". However, he did not do what was said to him and killed Ikemefuna with his machete. Once again being afraid of weakness, he ended the life of Ikemefuna. The inner voice of the Okonkwo clearly shows his affection for Ikemefuna, loving him more than his own son, Nwoye. However, his emotions did not stop him. At this point readers see how his life has been dominated by fear.

Okonkwo breaks many rules through the book; he beats his wife in the week of Peace, he beats his son, etc. However, he takes the worst punishment this time and kills a boy from his own tribe. As a result he is exiled for seven years. The reader can guess the arrival of this punishment when Okonkwo kills Ikemefuna because in the book it is strictly demonstrated that if someone disobeys the Oracle, he will be punished for his disobedience.

After the death of Ikemefuna, Ezeudu dies and during his funeral Okonkwo commits another unforgivable fault, accidentally killing Ezeudu's sixteen year old son. This costs Okonkwo dearly. One can conclude that all of these things Okonkwo causes in his life is a result of the fear of weakness that totally controls his life. His dream of being the leader of the tribe is missed because when he returns from exile, nothing was the same. Everything was deeply changed. He was a stranger in his homeland.

After the seven years of exile, Okonkwo and his family return to their homeland. He was regretful that he was not in Umuofia over the last seven years. This time Okonkwo was different. Samatar stated that:

Okonkwo could not do anything about the white men. He was miles away from Umuofia and still had a few years left before he could return. For once, he was unable to make "masculine moves" and take charge. If only he knew to the extent what was really going on in his village. The white men were spreading Christianity all over. They were getting the villagers to break their traditions, escape their culture, and believe their gods were dead. They even demanded that the villagers attend church every seventh day to worship their god. They were destroying the Evil Forest and building houses for themselves. Surprisingly, no one was stopping them. It was as if the villagers did not care that their lives were being taken over and would soon be changed forever. By the time Okonkwo would return, everything would be different. (65)

He knows that he has lost everything, even his dream of being the leader of the tribe. However, there was still a little hope in him. This hope actually symbolizes his total downfall in the end. In other words, if he did not want to

be the leader of the tribe again, how can we consider him a loser in the end?

Okonkwo's greatest fears were failure, being thought of as being weak, and being seen to be just like his father. When he committed suicide at the end of the book, he did the only thing he feared. He became a total loser just like his father. No matter what he did, he could not escape his fate. Therefore, we can see the irony, the tragedy of the Okonkwo. All he wanted to do was to be the leader of the tribe and live happily after. However, his masculine character and the arrival of the white people did not let that happen.

### **The Tribal System that Falls Apart**

It can be said that Okonkwo's exile was a failure for both himself and his tribe. When Okonkwo returned from exile, he believed that if he had not gone to exile, his tribe wouldn't be in this situation. In other words, he felt extreme regret for what he had done. His homeland was now a different place anymore. White men made many changes without native support.

The most important change whites wanted to change on the native people was with "*religion*". In the book *Things Fall Apart*, the gods of the natives were made of stones and wood. They had more than one god, each representing different aspect. Their main god was called Chukwu and the natives thought that he created the sky and the earth. Chi was their personal god, if someone says "*yes*"; chi is believed to say the same. They were very obedient to their gods. When there is a war situation, if their gods told them not to fight, they would not fight. If someone breaks the rules, they are strictly punished. For example, one day Okonkwo beat his wife during the week of Peace and he was punished. There was no tolerance for those who disobeyed the laws. That is because the people of Umuofia believed that "if one finger brought oil, it soiled the others" (Achebe 87).

Samatar also concentrates on a different aspect that in the partition of the Umuofia tribe, the tribe itself plays a role.

The power of the new religion is firmly established by chapter twentytwo, when one of its followers unmasks and thereby kills an ancestral spirit (171). Umuofia is "thrown into confusion"

(159). The spirit has been unmasked, not by a stranger, but by one of Umuofia's own. This is the moment of disintegration, of which Okonkwo's suicide is merely an effect: "it seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming—its own death". (171,172)

Samatar argues that "when *things fall apart* and Umuofia's independence is lost, it is due to cracks in its own structure; unhappy and outcast people whose desire for a different way of life allows Christianity, and with it the colonial project as a whole, to take root" (65). Therefore it can be concluded that the Umuofia tribe actually did not really act as one or speak as one. If we consider the last part of the book in which Okonkwo killed the messenger with his machete, some people asked "why did he do it?" and this situation is revealed in the book with these words:

How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan no longer acts like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. (162)

While converting the natives to Christianity, white men also humiliated the gods of the people of Umuofia, telling the natives that their gods are no good and they are not alive. They have totally different gods. For the whites, their god created earth and sky and even the god of the native people. That clearly explains why the whites want the natives to convert to Christianity. Greenberg points out the issue saying:

The white man believes in one God which he believes to have made heaven and earth. Also said his God made the entire world and the Umuofia's gods. He wanted the people of Umuofia to abandon their gods and follow his own religion. The white men belittle the people of Umuofia's gods by saying different things about their gods. The white man says that the people of Umuofia's god are gods of deceit who tell them to kill their

fellow and destroy innocent children. The white man says that their gods are not alive and cannot do them harm and that they are made of piece of wood and stone. Hearing and seeing all these from the white man, the people of Umuofia were not happy with the white man's religion which was a reason for a culture conflict. (9)

There were ones who already had doubts about their religion. Therefore, it was easy to convert them to Christianity. At this point Achebe's sentence from the book clearly shows the situation, "*He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart*" (176). Okonkwo's son, Nwoye was the one of those who converted to Christianity. That was a real disaster for Okonkwo.

The arrival of whites did not bring them happiness, civilization or modernity as the whites suggested. The religion of the natives that endured for centuries was changed by whites. Additionally, it was said that this conversion was for the love of God. However, if the reader read between the lines of the Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, they can surely understand that it is not for the love of God but for love of money and power. Gikandi explained the situation:

By introducing Christianity into the villages, and creating conflict amongst the natives, they were able to gain a foothold into the psyches of the tribe's people. Converted Christians, having been ostracized by the rest of their communities, were forced to rely on the British for support. The presence of natives loyal to the Queen gave the British blanket jurisdiction over the entire village, and the Royal administrative and judicial system could now enforce British law over the Ibo. (45)

Additionally, the famous quote from Desmond Tutu is worthy to mention, "Before the White man came, we had the land and they had the Bible. Now we had the Bible and they had the land." Further evidence of this situation is found the last part of the book. A District Commissioner who explained the death of Okonkwo in one paragraph, decided to title his book the "Pacification of the Tribes of the Lower Niger". Here the

word “pacification” explains their “real” aim which was to colonize. The Commissioner could have used the words such as “conversion” or “salvation”, but he preferred to use “pacification”.

The changes in religion were not enough for the whites. They also altered the economy of the Umuofia tribe. The economy of the people of Umuofia was based on agriculture. If one has lots of barns, that meant they were one of the richest amongst the tribe. People worked really hard to plant yams, working as a family; father, wife, son and daughter. Farming was really important for them. They even celebrate a festival every year giving thanks to this yams. However, here again the natives conflicted with the whites, as in the case of religion, because whites values were very different than the native’s.

Whites did what was appropriate for their interests. They made agriculture worthless because what was important for them was nothing but money. Therefore, whites introduced their own trade and this destroyed the economics value of the Umuofia tribe. “Money” can buy everything now. Everything that natives worked really hard could be bought with “money”. The rich people are poor and the poor are rich. Whites in a way turned the natives upside down. Before the whites came, there was a hierarchy. This hierarchy showed similar features to patriarchal society. In this society, the father was the head of the family, their wives and children respect them. Readers clearly see this alteration in the relationship of Nwoye and Okonkwo. After Nwoye converted to Christianity, he did not want to visit his father. In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe says about Nwoye ““he told Mr. Kiaga that he had decided to go to Umuofia, where the white missionary had set up a school to teach young Christians to read and write” (102). As it is stated, the people of Umuofia tribe strictly obey the laws. However, white people destroyed the beliefs of the tribe and did the kind of things which were prohibited in the tribe. For example white people came and built a church in the Evil Forest. According to the natives, the ones who went there were expected to die within four days. However the natives saw that nothing happened. As a result, natives went through a chaos thinking that white people had incredible power.



Another point of view Samatar reveals is that natives believed that their god will take their revenge, "*a prophecy that fails to materialize*" (67). There are some facts that Okonkwo has been already familiar with. This issue is also revealed in the poem of "The Second Coming" which is located at the beginning of the story. The line of "*The falcon cannot hear the falconer*" is the reference to the generations in the book, Okonkwo and his son Nwoye. Samatar points out that:

Okonkwo knows that the "*white man's god*" represents a new order, a dissolution of the intimate relationship between past and present. He also knows that he belongs to the old way, which until now was the eternal way: he and his father's will await worship and sacrifice together, and in vain. When Umuofia's sons abandon its gods, its sacred time is shattered, giving way to a time in which the past is no longer experienced as before and a new, modern reality must take its place. It is in the context of this jarring re-ordering of the world that Okonkwo hangs himself. (67)

The generation gap is one of the most important issues of the book. One can conclude that the "*falcon*" refers to Nwoye, the young generation, and the "*falconer*" to the Okonkwo, old generation. Therefore, this lack of intimacy is one reason for the falling apart not only for son and father, but also for the tribe. Additionally, the masculine character of Okonkwo is another reason of this partition.

At the end Okonkwo has no option and kills himself "*when war is no longer possible*" (Samatar 69). However, there are other characters such as Nwoye and Obierika who survive at the end of the book. Harold Scheub declares that "*we do not, in this novel, witness the death throes of a society*" (98). Another important reason comes to mind when Greenberg's essay Okonkwo and the Storyteller is read:

Since Igbo people did not construct a rigid and closely argued system of thought to explain the universe and the place of man in it, preferring the metaphor of myth and poetry, anyone seeking an insight into their world must seek it along their own way. Some of these ways are folk tales and proverbs. (161)



Okonkwo hangs himself and Commissioners and the people of his tribe find his dead body. This final paragraph clearly shows that the novel *Things Fall Apart* can “most readily be perceived to be confronting colonial discourse, presenting the reader with the Commissioner’s callous and self-satisfied musing” (Ten Kortenaar 32).

*Things Fall Apart* not only reveals the history of African culture, but also provides a general overview of the Igbo society; their customs, traditions, life style, fears, laws etc. We cannot deny the effect of the novel, that is, after approximately 50 years, the book still touches on contemporary issues. Therefore, its importance survived and will survive in the modern times in which the definition of history must be “discovered and defined from within the maelstrom of change” (Harvey 11). Achebe’s novel proves its uniqueness with both its historical and literal value.

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# A Performative View of Gender Roles: Judith Butler

**Büşra Çınar<sup>1</sup>**

## **Abstract**

*This paper presented a view regarding to the concept of performativity in gender roles. This concept was supported with Judith Butler's ideas and the embodiment of binary oppositions described in gender norms and gender roles. The normative structure of gender was determined through naturalization of norms and reproduction of these norms by society. This approval of heterosexuality in society was described with a feminist approach.*

**Keywords:** *Performance, Performativity, Gender, Gender Role, Imposition, Heterosexuality, Norm, Normative*

## **A Performative View of Gender Roles: Judith Butler**

The concept of gender is exposed to particular norms in society, and causes people to think within the context of binary oppositions such as male and female, man and woman, nature and culture. Some sort of identities and gender forms are imposed on people. A person experiences some threats such as isolation, othering, being cast out of society in the event that he/she does not fit into all these norms that are imposed on them. In this study, types of identities are discussed through the argument of the artificiality of genders, gender roles and gender norms. They are represented as unnatural categories produced and reproduced by society.

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The concept of gender does have a specific role in sexuality and captures a person's ability and right to choose on a large scale. Unless the concept of gender abandons thinking in the context of binary oppositions and perpetuates its norms insistently, it will not be open to necessary changes and differences. According to Judith Butler, the concept of gender must be extended by accepting variations, forms and views that do not fit into norms. Butler defines the concept of gender as follows: "Gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized" (Butler, "Gender Regulations" 43). In other words, gender is a concept that reflects limitations, stability and reconstruction, supported by the notion of heteronormativity, which means the acceptance of heterosexuality as a natural and social norm. So, this permanent, long and well- established structure of genders may be destructed through the subversion of gender roles and creating different performances.

Judith Butler, in her prologue that she wrote in 1999 to *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, describes her book as a provocative intervention to feminist theory and one of the basic texts of queer theory. She explains her aim in this way: "*In 1989 I was most concerned to criticize a pervasive heterosexual assumption in feminist literary theory*" (Butler, 7).

Actually, Butler objects to the concept of gender's being performed on masculinity, femininity and its being reduced to this. She thinks that feminist theories that make their discussions and defenses by accepting these norms limit themselves. She is oppose to accepting certain notions of sexuality as stereotyped norms. She explains clearly that her aim is not an insistence of certain realities or patterns about gender on the reader.

According to Butler, it must be possible to evaluate some sexual practices that exist as minority and make them be considerable in the matter of gender. Because, the reproduction of gender roles within the feminist theory drags itself to an exclusive attitude. "Briefly, one is a woman, according to this framework, to the extent that one functions as one within the dominant heterosexual frame and to call the frame into question is perhaps to lose

something of one's sense of place in gender" (Butler 11). That is to say, the sovereignty of heterosexuality that exists in society is powerful enough to determine the functions of man and woman. In the event that a person questions this, it threatens the man and the woman - especially the woman - in the matter of decreasing or disappearing of the sense of belonging.

Butler expresses that the normative structure of sexuality might manage the gender. The determinant nature of gender does not allow people inevitably to question gender roles and norms. Butler includes Catharine MacKinnon's opinions in her first prologue of *Gender Trouble* and criticizes her idea by quoting. According to Catharine MacKinnon, the hierarchical structure between man and woman creates the concept of gender. On the other hand, according to Judith Butler, the one that creates gender is not this hierarchy between man and woman, but the determinant heterosexuality in society.

Butler claims that there is a difference between the two approaches about gender: The approach related with sexuality and the feminist approach. In the approach related with sexuality, the dominant idea is that a woman might be a woman only through the approval of heterosexuality. On the other hand, in the feminist approach, there is a defense about the fact that gender must be eliminated. The two approaches are contrary to each other.

Performance is the totality of acts and behaviour of a person in life according to their genders and sexes in society. However, a performance is not related to sexuality or sexual practices according to Butler. She does not make a definition of the concept of performativity. Furthermore, she mentions that it is difficult to say what it is and what it is not. "*The anticipation conjures its object*" (Butler 14). She approaches to the concept of performativity with this reading and she envisages that this concept must be evaluated in this way: "*Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration*" (Butler 15). Here the author claims that performativity is not a temporary concept. Besides, it might be seen as a habit that is suitable for being repeated. That is to say, the concept of performativity must be maintained through different and new performances without limiting ourselves with gender roles. Performances are changeable, but they might be described as habits that can be repeated.

Butler asserts that the thing that we name as the interior is actually something that we produce ourselves. She thinks that the interior of the soul must be questioned. While she mentions her own experiences about gender, she refers to works, researches and activities that the concept of gender initiates and expresses that she is satisfied with her text's attracting attention out of the academy, too.

Butler states that it is difficult to show the violence and determination in the structure of gender. She explains this with two acceptances of society. Firstly, gender is the shape of existing of sexualities. Secondly, this concept is a cultural norm that is not possible to be changed easily. *"It was difficult to bring this violence into view precisely because gender was so taken for granted at the same time that it was violently policed. It was assumed either to be a natural manifestation of sex or a cultural constant that no human agency could hope to revise"* (Butler 19-20).

Butler accepts her effort to *"denaturalize"* (20) gender and emphasizes that the reasons behind this are not transitory. She questions whether or not there is a probability of living without fitting into certain norms, limitations, and leaving the act of being a normal human being as norms require. Criticizing the system of normative structured society, Butler alludes to a real life example to the situation of making other(s) in society and mentions what her uncle has experienced. She talks about her uncle who was taken away from his family, friends and kept in a hospital due to the fact that his body shape was abnormal in that it did not fit into the norms of society actually. This personal example given in the prologue of the text puts forth Butler's point of view about gender and its rules. As parallel to her opinions can be said: The factor of gender stands as a mountain in front of people who do not fit into its norms and takes their right to see the sun and be able to survive.

Established binary oppositions that exist in the society's mindset, such as man woman, rich poor, strong weak, bring limitations to society and people's lives. They do not give an opportunity to think a third alternative and they remove the probability of accepting different situations that are contrary to norms.

Butler actually shows a part of the reality of violence that remains behind gender by giving a personal example although she says it is difficult to show this. At this point, the author questions some sort of restrictions imposed on the human body and this comes together with the concept of performativity. The author explains that she does not propose such a dogma that elimination of gender makes life beautiful. She presents two evaluations as normative and descriptive related with the concept of gender. The descriptive evaluation involves thinking gender and the conditions that ensure its existence. The normative evaluation discusses the suitability of gender expressions. According to Butler, discussing this shows the normative structure behind the system in any case. Therefore, gender's being described might not be thought separate from its normative structure.

Butler continues her argument with a question: How does the normative gender place its boundaries as to accept or not to accept certain norms? She questions the determinant structure and limits of the concept of gender. She argues that there is "the sense of gender reality" (Butler 22) in every person and we base the reality of gender on the body that we see through this sense.

If one thinks that one sees a man dressed as a woman or a woman dressed as a man, then one takes the first term of each of these perceptions as the "reality" of gender: the gender that is introduced through the simile lacks "reality" and is taken to constitute an illusory appearance (Butler 22).

Here Butler discusses the concept of performativity with these statements. She questions people's probable mistakes in their frame of mind and visual perception. She shows that our established point of view and norms might make a mistake. By putting forth this reality, she proves that the concept of gender is changeable, convertible, questionable and reproduceable.

As a response to the normative structure of gender, Butler suggests the concept of "drag" in addition to "performativity" as a solution. She claims: *"Drag is an example that is meant to establish that 'reality' is not fixed as we generally assume it to be. The purpose of the example is to expose the*

*tenuousness of gender 'reality' in order to counter the violence performed by gender norms*" (Butler 23-4). To move on with this thought, in addition to the fact that rules that gender reveals are determinant, and they regard themselves as responsible to declare what is legal and illegal. Butler's concept of drag is a concrete example that will resist this sovereignty.

Butler shows that her theory, especially her concept of performativity, does have not only theatrical but also linguistic dimensions with these statements: *"Moreover, my theory sometimes waffles between understanding performativity as linguistic and casting it as theatrical. I have come to think that the two are invariably related, chiasmically so, that a reconsideration of the speech act as an instance of power invariably draws attention to both its theatrical and linguistic dimensions"* (Butler 25).

To look at the author concept of performativity only as theatrical or only as linguistic will bring us to a wrong evaluation on the way of being a starting point to the concept of gender.

In her article titled *"One Is Not Born a Woman"*, Monique Wittig questions the building of concepts that we accept as natural about gender and makes an explanation about what we naturalize as human beings.

By admitting that there is a *"natural"* division between women and men, we naturalize history, we assume that "men" and "women" have always existed and will always exist. Not only do we naturalize history, but also consequently we naturalize the social phenomena which express our oppression, making change impossible. (Wittig, *"One Is Not Born a Woman"*)

Here Monique Wittig shows the reality that a human being, who is accustomed to the process of naturalization of certain norms in society reproduces and rebuilds these norms, and she claims that it removes the probability of change. Butler, when they are compared, is more hopeful than Wittig about the probability of change in the matter of gender.

"The loss of gender norms would have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, and depriving the



naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their central protagonists: ‘man’ and ‘woman’ (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 187). With this statement, it seems that gender identities are produced forms. They must not be described as natural. It seems probable that they might be changed or eliminated.

In her article “Gender Regulations”, Butler also talks about the effect of norms on gender. The gender norms not only determine what enters their area but also dominate over what surrounds them. Any base related to gender might be evaluated only through the opposite of itself or a principle that is different from itself.

Judith Butler brings the concepts of performativity, drag –which means wearing clothes that are associated with the opposite sex as a performance– as solutions to the gender by which heterosexuality is accepted naturally. While she suggests gender must be developed and broadened, she also makes an effort at this point. She puts forth performativity against the naturalization of gender identities and its fulfilment. So this natural state of genders and gender roles must be questioned. Some sort of identities imposed on genders must be reconsidered through the concept of deconstruction and subversion of gender roles.

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# ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MEDIA, CULTURE AND LITERATURE

## INTRODUCTION

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No Author Given	(A Handbook of Korea 241-47).	A Handbook of Korea. 4th ed. Seoul: Korean Overseas Information Service, Ministry of Culture and Information, 1982.
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