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BAKHTINIAN ACT OF "DECROWNING" IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

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Abstract

The father figure in Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse *makes himself seem strong and authoritative although in reality he needs the others' support and help. Mr Ramsay, who heavily depends on the ideas of certainty and stability in every respect, does not accept women's independence. However, Mr Ramsay is constantly belittled by Mrs Ramsay, Lily, and the narrator. Mr Ramsay's authority is ridiculed and mocked. In this regard, the novel becomes suitable for an analysis in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "decrowning" that widely takes place in the discussion on "carnival," one of Bakhtin's main focuses in his works. The act of decrowning in Bakhtin's works is a physical act of dethronement of a symbolic king during the carnival. Decrowning suggests a constant change of everything. In this way, Mr Ramsay's decrowning suggests Woolf's desire to see the change in women's condition. This study analyses Virginia Woolf's* To the Lighthouse *as a platform on which the main father figure is often ignored as an authoritative male figure. And this emasculation of Mr Ramsay is likened to the act of decrowning, which is one of the acts that take place during carnivals in Bakhtin's works.*

Keywords: *Virginia Woolf, Mikhail Bakhtin,* To the Lighthouse*, decrowning*

VIRGINIA WOOLF'UN *DENİZ FENERİ* ROMANINDA BAKHTİN'İN "TAHTTAN İNDİRME" OLGUSU

Öz

Virginia Woolf'un Deniz Feneri *adlı romanındaki baba figürü güçlü ve otoriter olarak gözükmesine rağmen başkalarının destek ve yardımına muhtaç birisidir. Her alanda kesinlik ve istikrar gibi düşüncelere bağlı olan Bay Ramsay kadınların bağımsızlıklarını kabul etmemektedir. Fakat Bay Ramsay, Bayan Ramsay, Lily ve anlatıcı tarafından sürekli küçümsenmektedir. Bay Ramsay'ın otoritesi ile alay edilmektedir. Bu anlamda, roman, Mikhail Bakhtin'in eserlerindeki en önemli yeri tutan "karnaval" esnasında yer alan "tahttan indirme" olgusu açısından incelenmeye uygundur. Bakhtin'in eserlerindeki tahttan indirme, karnaval sırasında sembolik bir hükümdarın tahttan indirilip tacının alınmasıdır. Tahttan indirme olayı her şeyin her zaman*

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değişmek durumunda olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu bağlamda, Bay Ramsay'ın tahttan indirilmesi, yani otoritesinin kabul edilmemesi, Woolf'un kadınların durumunu değiştirmek istediğini göstermektedir. Bu çalışmada, Woolf'un Deniz Feneri *romanı, baba figürünün çoğu zaman otoriter bir erkek figürü olarak kabul edilmediği bir ortam olarak incelenmektedir. Bay Ramsay'ın güçsüzleştirilmesi, Bakhtin'in eserlerindeki karnaval zamanındaki tacın alınması olayına benzetilmektedir.*

Anahtar kelimeler: *Virginia Woolf, Mikhail Bakhtin,* Deniz Feneri*, tahttan indirme*

Introduction

Virginia Woolf's feminist politics and aesthetics are mainly based upon her claim that women should be free from the constraints imposed on them by patriarchy, and as a result, her works are informed by women's inability to escape from their domestic responsibilities. Such a life of an ordinary middle class woman is strictly confined to a so-called female domain where she is supposed to perform her duties as a wife, a sister, or a mother. One of the ways in which Woolf reconfigures the female domain in her novels is by emasculating the source that holds a woman entrapped. She portrays father figures who lose their power. Her fiction suggests the destabilization of the blatant patriarchal order. Her female characters are portrayed as enthusiastic figures to assert their values against patriarchal precepts. *To the Lighthouse* (1926) can be called now a classic in Woolf's oeuvre that can be discussed in terms of the dethronement of the patriarchal figure. Besides many themes and topics discussed so far with reference to the novel, it also expresses Woolf's desire to reveal the weakness of the male figures who lack self-sufficiency. They need female support to sustain their authority and sometimes fail to control the women of their household. This novel, more than any other novels among her works, depicts Woolf's attempt to show the possibility and significance of undermining the authority of a father figure. This study analyses *To the Lighthouse* against the background of Mikhail Bakhtin's "carnival" concept, or to be more precise, the concept of "decrowning;" the study depicts the decrowning of patriarchal authority and specify the similarities between the acts of decrowning in this novel and in Bakhtin's thought. The study also stresses that Woolf's novel tends to depict

the female characters' disregard for patriarchal authority in their mental spheres rather than in the form of concrete, visible actions.

Bakhtin sees the act of crowning/decrowning as one of the significant aspects of carnival. "Crowning/decrowning is a dualistic ambivalent ritual, expressing the inevitability and at the same time the creative power of the shift-and-renewal, the *joyful relativity* of all structure and order, of all authority and all (hierarchical) position" (Bakhtin, 1984a: 124). Bakhtin gives priority to the idea of constant change and renewal in these acts suggesting the inevitable end of all authority. The link that binds Woolf's novel and Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalistic acts of crowning/decrowning is the eagerness to mock and ridicule the figures of power in ways that often include humour.

Mr Ramsay's Authority

The figure of the authoritarian father governing his family appears in *To the Lighthouse*. He controls and decides; he solves the problems and is the centre of attention. However, what Woolf foregrounds is the female characters' potential to undermine the male authority; the father in the novel is emasculated and challenged. Although the father is not physically beaten, as it happens with the mock kings during the carnival in Bakhtin's discussion, the ways female characters disregard the father figure's authority suggest the act of decrowing. As Clair Wills claims, carnival reveals some distortions as it travels through time and space: "Shifted from public sphere to the bourgeois home, carnival ceases to be a site of actual struggle, but the conflicts of the modern private sphere may have generated a social force on to which the bodily energies of carnival have been displaced" (Wills, 1989: 96). Thus, although Woolf's novels do not explicitly manifest the crowning/decrowning of a king, they display the emasculation of authority. *To the Lighthouse* presents scenes of undermining male authority mainly through mental constructions rather than in a more concrete way or through characters' physical actions. The female characters' undermining of the father figure's authority in the novel appears mainly in their minds. Some of the actions of these women also suggest an attempt to ridicule the male characters, but it is on a minor level.

Mr Ramsay, the father of the big family, is depicted as the figure who tries to express and establish himself as a representative of the strong sex. However, he is revealed as weak and sometimes laughable man by the female characters and the narrator. In other

words, it is possible to state that the subtly humorous ways in which his authority is challenged carry the traces of the Bakhtinian notion of decrowning. According to Bakhtin the "primary carnivalistic act is the *mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king*" (Bakhtin, 1984a: 124). This definition pertains to carnival as a ritual. Bakhtin states that the essence of the act of decrowning in literature is the focus on the inevitability of change. "Under this ritual act of decrowning a king lies the very core of the carnival sense of the world – *the pathos of shifts and changes, of death and renewal*" (Bakhtin, 1984a: 124). Bakhtin identifies laughter as an important component of decrowning (Bakhtin, 1984a: 168). He gives an example from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*; Raskolnikov sees a dream in which people laugh at him "louder and louder" (Bakhtin, 1984a: 168). Bakhtin states that this is "the image of communal ridicule on the public square decrowning a carnival king-pretender" (Bakhtin, 1984a: 168). In other words, when the act of decrowning takes its place in a literary work it loses its image of a mock king's physical decrowning. Yet, at least, it keeps the nature of being loud and visible to everybody. Woolf's scenes, however, are muted in this regard: the decrowning mainly takes place in the minds of the characters.

Mr Ramsay is an embodiment of order and stability. As a patriarch, he makes the members of his family uneasy because he seeks to enforce control over them. Bakhtin calls such behaviour in literary works "self-appointed *elevation*" and attributes it to "carnival logic" (Bakhtin, 1984a: 169). A character elevates himself above the others after which comes an inevitable "falling *downward*" (Bakhtin, 1984a: 169); a character's decrowning takes place. Such self-appointed elevation of Mr Ramsay becomes evident when he holds his patriarchal stance of a repressive father figure when his little son James wants to visit the lighthouse and Mrs Ramsay supports her son in this. "'But,' said his father [Mr Ramsay], stopping in front of the drawing-room window, 'it won't be fine'" (Woolf, 2007: 10). The idea of the window in this scene has some important connotations. Such objects like windows and doors suggest the fusion with the world, the disappearance of a boundary between a private self and the world. Mr Ramsay pronounces his reluctance to go to the lighthouse in front of the window which suggests his unwillingness to share his private world or the private world of his family. He does not want to become one with the others. Indeed, the title of the first part of the novel, where the family members try to decide on their journey to

the lighthouse, is "The Window." It represents the idea of merging with the world, an effort to escape domesticity. The sea is seen as a space that challenges the notions of stability and certainty, two significant elements on which patriarchal ideology depends. For Mrs Ramsay, the journey to the lighthouse is a kind of escape from her ordinary existence. The idea of a sea voyage suggests the shattering of the notion of domesticity which constraints female characters.

The scene in which Mr Ramsay's self-elevation is visible contains the signs of his decrowning. The narrator's attitude towards Mr Ramsay's self-elevation depicts Mr Ramsay's tendency to dramatize himself as a figure of authority. When Mr Ramsay disagrees about the journey to the lighthouse and tries to show his authority, he "straighten[s] his back and narrow[s] his little blue eyes upon the horizon" (Woolf, 2007: 10). His physical characteristics that the narrator reveals debunk his authoritarian stance. Mr Ramsay has to change his body's position in order to seem powerful; otherwise, the curled back and little eyes suggest frailty and pettiness. In other words, Mr Ramsay's posture does not contribute to his desire to be the authority. He has to change his physical appearance to support his ambitions. But even this change is not efficient. The narrator reveals this and makes it evident that Mr Ramsay will be undermined further in the novel as a figure of authority.

Mr Ramsay's thoroughgoing attitude of objection to the others' search for pleasure cuts James' desire short and intensifies the hatred the boy feels towards his father. Violent hatred of his father makes James imagine a way of killing Mr Ramsay, which merely intensifies James' situation of complete lack of force to fight back. "Had there been an axe handy, a poker, or any weapon that would have dashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it. Such were the extremes of emotion that Mr Ramsay excited in his children's breasts by his mere presence" (Woolf, 2007: 10). James' innermost thoughts may make the reader understand the gap between the son and the father which has been erected by the latter's desire to dominate. Apparently, James is not alone in his negative attitude towards his father as feelings infused with repulsion seem to fill the other children, too. Cam, the daughter, cannot forget "that crass blindness and tyranny of his which had poisoned her childhood and raised bitter storms, so that even now she woke in the night trembling with rage and remembered some command of his; some insolence; 'Do this', 'Do that'; his dominance: his 'Submit to me'" (Woolf, 2007: 184).

Moreover, by hindering James, Mr Ramsay overpowers and unsettles his wife because Mrs Ramsay exhibits the desire to make James happy by promising him the journey. As a result, as Frank Kermode claims, Mr Ramsay is "happy with the chance to disillusion his son and ridicule his wife" (1992: xx). In other words, the politics of Mr Ramsay is to subjugate the members of his family and to make them understand that the actions should be done under his control. Even when he takes his children to the lighthouse years later at the end of the novel he does it in a way to enforce his power on them: "He had borne them down once more with his gloom and his authority, making them do his bidding, on this fine morning, come, because he wished it, carrying these parcels to the Lighthouse; . . . so that they lagged after him, and all the pleasure of the day was spoilt" (Woolf, 2007: 179). For James, then, Mr Ramsay's movements during this journey to the lighthouse remind his ambitions. "He rose and stood in the bow of the boat, very straight and tall, for all the world, James thought, as if he were saying, 'There is no God'" (Woolf, 2007: 223); as if he wants to say that the God of this family is he.

Mr Ramsay clings to the notions of reason, truth, and stability in every circumstance: "What he said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all of his own children" (Woolf, 2007: 10). Lack of truth or reason in an utterance drives him mad: nothing should extend beyond the confines of these notions. Rachel Bowlby holds that Woolf "constantly associates certainty and conventionality with a complacent masculinity" (1997: 15). When Mrs Ramsay promises James to go to the lighthouse, Mr Ramsay clearly shows that "the folly of women's minds enraged him;" he sees Mrs Ramsay's promise to go to the lighthouse as an "extraordinary irrationality" (Woolf, 2007: 38). He thinks that Mrs Ramsay's promise to James is "lies" because they cannot be sure of the weather (Woolf, 2007: 38). He seems stuck in his desire to promote reason, certainty and stability in everything. "Mr Ramsay is driven by a utilitarian rationalism that Woolf critiques throughout the text" (Groover, 2014: 222).

For Mr Ramsay, who "stands for masculinity and reason" (Prakash, 2014: 69), the lighthouse is a "fabled land" (Woolf, 2007: 10) which shatters the truth he endorses. This truth is sustainable at his home and leaving this home for the lighthouse, for Mr Ramsay, means leaving truth for a fable. So, he builds a dichotomy between home and the lighthouse, truth and fable. The lighthouse is on the

sea, on the constantly fluctuating surface of the water. A voyage there, for Mr Ramsay, is a purposeless act. He cannot grasp the purpose for the journey because for him, a tiny change of an atmosphere or a location does not mean anything as it does a great deal for his wife and children. His sole urge is to feel the solidity of the earth, stability of family life, certainty in his relationships. Thus, Mr Ramsay does not want to leave his idealized world of truth and stability, his home. Woolf's portrayal of Mr Ramsay is her way of questioning his ideas and the dominant patriarchal ideology. As Jeanette McVicker claims, Woolf's "subtle rendering of the tyranny that can be exerted by an obsession with facts, reason, and the compulsion to order life and manipulate truth is a masterful critique of patriarchy" (1991: 42).

Mr Ramsay's ideas about women are quite conventional. He does not show respect for women's opinions. He wants the women around him to follow his way of thinking. When he talks about Andrew's education with Mrs Ramsay, he shows his attitude towards his wife's opinion about scholarships. "He wished Andrew could be induced to work harder. He would lose every chance of a scholarship if he didn't. 'Oh scholarships!' she said. Mr Ramsay thought her foolish for saying that, about a serious thing, like a scholarship" (Woolf, 2007: 75). From his opinion about Mrs Ramsay's statement, it can be seen that for him women do not understand anything just because they disagree with him on such a serious matter. He expects his wife to take his side in every circumstance. Furthermore, for Mr Ramsay, women's place is their houses. "Mr Ramsay is presented as an advocate of absolute sexual polarization, the Victorian assumption that each sex is assigned its sphere and must remain in it" (Zwerdling, 1986: 183-184). Mr Ramsay cannot think that a woman can be as equipped with knowledge as a man. He even mocks his daughter Cam thinking that her knowledge of the world around her is limited. "Didn't she know the points of the compass? He asked. Didn't she know the North from the South?" (Woolf, 2007: 181) "He liked that men should labour and sweat on the windy beach at night, pitting muscle and brain against the waves and the wind; he liked men to work like that, and women to keep house, and sit beside sleeping children indoors, while men were drowned, out there in a storm" (Woolf, 2007: 178-179). Mr Ramsay likes exaggeration and indulges in imagining. He exaggerates life's conditions outside and overrates men's efforts because he wants to show their power which women lack. Indeed, such ideas add a subtle sense of humour to the

novel. He imagines that the world outside is very harsh and that men risk dying while they work to earn money. In this way, women are quite safe at home. His desire to imagine himself working outside in such a difficult condition actually shows his pettiness because only through his imagination he is an influential patriarch for the weak females at home. And this is quite ironic because these female characters do not think that he is that powerful over them.

Mr Ramsay's anger is well-known by every member of his family. The novel is replete with his display of fury. He becomes angry, for example, when Augustus Carmichael, one of the guests, asks for another plate of soup: "He was screwing his face up, he was scowling and frowning, and flushing with anger" (Woolf, 2007: 103). Mr Ramsay's aggression and rage, in fact, reveal his fear of loss of his power to command. His fury shows his desire to be the centre of the world: "He loathed people eating when he had finished" (Woolf, 2007: 103). He becomes angry with his children when they tend to disobey. He storms at them when he sees that nothing is ready to go to the lighthouse when he at last decides to take them there: "And Cam was not ready and James was not ready and Nancy had forgotten to order the sandwiches and Mr Ramsay had lost his temper and banged out of the room. 'What's the use of going now?' he had stormed" (Woolf, 2007: 159). Mr Ramsay's pained fury and aggression in this scene depicts the idea that he is disturbed by seeing the others' reluctance to obey. According to Zwerdling, Mr Ramsay's portrayal as an angry man serves Woolf's aim because "[o]ne of her consistent targets is male aggression and domination" (1986: 54-55). Male aggression and domination are not the signs of power. On the contrary, Woolf shows this aggression and desire to dominate in male characters to elaborate on the lack of power.

Decrowning of Mr Ramsay

Notwithstanding Mr Ramsay's tendency to govern the others, this patriarchal figure is decrowned in different ways by Mrs Ramsay, Lily Briscoe, and the narrator. Through Woolf's display of Mrs Ramsay's stream of thoughts it is possible to see her undermining her husband's authority. Mr Ramsay's movements, for example, remind Mrs Ramsay "of the great sea lion at the Zoo tumbling backwards after swallowing his fish and walloping off so that the water in the tank washes from side to side" (Woolf, 2007: 39). Although Mrs Ramsay associates her husband with a sea lion, it is an

imprisoned sea lion which tumbles and wallops, suggesting submissiveness and weakness. Her vision of her husband includes her sense of humour which reveals her attitude towards her husband; she does not see him as a threat or danger. Indeed, Mrs Ramsay's vision of Mr Ramsay as a sea lion at the Zoo anticipates Lily's observation of Mr Ramsay as a "king in exile" (Woolf, 2007: 162) towards the end of the novel. In both scenes Mr Ramsay is drawn as a potent figure but with reduced power. Both women have the power to laugh at the figure of authority, in their minds, by envisioning him in these humorous ways. John Mepham states that the "binary opposition is simultaneously constructed and internally undone" as the "female is domineering" in the novel (1992: 75). The female characters domineer because they do not internalize the authority of Mr Ramsay.

In some rare instances, Mrs Ramsay undermines the way her husband sees himself not only within the confines of her mind but also through the ways she acts and speaks visibly in front of Mr Ramsay. When he thinks about his abilities to act in the same way as he used to do in the past, Mrs Ramsay's behaviour and thoughts suggest just the opposite. Mr Ramsay wants to show off his freedom and strength to walk long distances and be away from home for a long time.

> When he was Andrew's age he used to walk about the country all day long, with nothing but a biscuit in his pocket and nobody bothered about him, or thought that he had fallen over a cliff. He said aloud he thought he would be off for a day's walk if the weather held. . . . Yes, she said. It annoyed him that she did not protest. She knew that he would never do it. He was too old now to walk all day long with a biscuit in his pocket (Woolf, 2007: 76).

In this example, Mr Ramsay loses his power as an authority figure both in the eyes of the reader and in his own when Mrs Ramsay's thoughts are expressed. She undermines his physical abilities and renders visible his weakness. In this passage, again, Mr Ramsay's exaggeration of himself and dramatization of his situation are visible. The narrator reflects Mr Ramsay's exaggeration of the importance of walking in this way alone because the latter wants to stress his power and courage to perform such an activity. In fact, such ideas deflate Mr Ramsay's desire to seem serious; they transform his figure into an image open to ridicule.

Mrs Ramsay, on the other hand, overshadows Mr Ramsay's superiority because she overweighs him in terms of energy and vitality. The narrator depicts her as a source of energy; she is seen "to pour erect into the air a rain of energy, a column of spray, looking at the same time animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating" (Woolf, 2007: 44). And Mr Ramsay tries to taint the production of this energy because "into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare" (Woolf, 2007: 44). Mrs and Mr Ramsay stand for life and death, respectively. Bakhtin states that "all carnivalistic symbols are of such a sort: they always include within themselves a perspective of negation (death) or vice versa. Birth is fraught with death, and death with new birth" (Bakhtin, 1984a: 125). Hence, it is possible to state that Mrs and Mr Ramsay are two sides of the same coin; they constitute a carnivalistic pair. This pair can be likened to another carnivalistic pair which is seen in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*: the protagonist Prince Myshkin – "*bright*, almost *joyful*" (Bakhtin, 1984a: 173) – and the heroine Nastasya Filippovna – "*gloomy*, *infernal*" (Bakhtin, 1984a: 173). While Mrs Ramsay's atmosphere is bright, Mr Ramsay's atmosphere is gloomy and serious. Yet, their atmospheres interact; they feel each other creating a sense of fantastic communication. Bakhtin discusses such an interaction between two opposite characters; they "intersect, intertwine in various ways, and are reflected in each other according to the laws of a profound carnival ambivalence" (Bakhtin, 1984a: 173-174). For example, when Mr Ramsay wants to protect Mrs Ramsay and to be close to her, but cannot approach her, Mrs Ramsay infers his thoughts. "For he wished, she knew, to protect her" (Woolf, 2007: 73). There is a kind of a muted communication between the two which suggests a different existence, a world that is not an ordinary familiar world. Their interaction, despite their opposite tendencies, creates a different atmosphere into which other characters cannot penetrate. In this way, Mrs Ramsay's bright atmosphere hinders Mr Ramsay's tendency to dominate. She is capable of transforming his energies into vital sources. If he is the death side of one coin, she makes it a regenerative death by infusing her life energies into it.

When Mrs Ramsay feels that her husband demands sympathy and wants to be needed "all over the world," she goes on sending energy and life around her in a "confident" way (Woolf, 2007: 45). What is more, she laughs (Woolf, 2007: 45). She is sure of her

strengths especially at the moment when Mr Ramsay is not, when he wants "to be assured of his genius" (Woolf, 2007: 44).

> Flashing her needles, glancing round about her, . . . she assured him, beyond a shadow of doubt, by her laugh, her poise, her competence . . . that it was real; . . . If he put implicit faith in her, nothing should hurt him; however deep he buried himself or climbed high, not for a second should he find himself without her (Woolf, 2007: 45).

By her laughter, which is in no sense mocking, Mrs Ramsay makes it evident that however hard Mr Ramsay tries to impose his authority over the others, she knows Mr Ramsay is dependent on her and submits to her authority: he is "like a child who drops off satisfied" (Woolf, 2007: 45). Mr Ramsay's portrayal as a man who needs to be assured of his genius and be sympathized with reveals his dependence on the others; and, this makes his weakness evident. Only through the eyes of his wife does he seem great and powerful. Woolf widely discusses women's function of exaggerating men's image in *A Room of One's Own*: "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (Woolf, 1992: 45). And in this novel she depicts her ideas through the portrayal of Mrs Ramsay. Mrs Ramsay's vision of her husband makes him a patriarch. Without her, Mr Ramsay is reduced; he loses his throne.

Furthermore, Mr Ramsay's power as a great man of science diminishes if Lily Briscoe's ideas about him are taken into consideration. Mr Ramsay is a great man of science in the eyes of his friends, William Bankes and Charles Tansley. According to Mr Bankes, Mr Ramsay "had made a definite contribution to philosophy in one little book when he was only five and twenty" (Woolf, 2007: 30). Similarly, "Charles Tansley thought him the greatest metaphysician of the time" (Woolf, 2007: 44). Lily, on the other hand, does not think so because she does not understand Mr Ramsay's occupation. Lily's way of comprehending Mr Ramsay's professional ideas is humorous; she dumbs them down. Andrew, Mr Ramsay's son, suggests to Lily a way to understand better what Mr Ramsay does.

> Whenever she 'thought of his work' she always saw clearly before her a large kitchen table. It was Andrew's doing. She asked him what his father's books were about. 'Subject and object and

> the nature of reality,' Andrew had said. And when she said Heavens, she had no notion what that meant. 'Think of a kitchen table then,' he told her, 'when you're not there.'
>
> So she always saw, when she thought of Mr Ramsay's work, a scrubbed kitchen table (Woolf, 2007: 29-30).

Lily brings down Mr Ramsay's abstract thoughts to the level of concreteness and simplifies his effort. She moves Mr Ramsay's great effort of his work to the kitchen, the place that is supposed to be the realm of women. In Bakhtinian terms, it can be termed "degradation" and linked to grotesque realism: "The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level" (Bakhtin, 1984b: 19). In Bakhtin's study of Rabelais, degradation is the subversion of the dominant ideology based on abstract ideas of religion. In Lily's case, she sabotages the patriarchal dominance based on the abstract ideas of stability, certainty and truth. She goes on viewing Mr Ramsay in an ironic manner.

> Naturally, if one's days were passed in this seeing of angular essences, this reducing of lovely evenings, with all their flamingo clouds and blue and silver to a white deal four-legged table (and it was a mark of the finest minds so to do), naturally one could not be judged like an ordinary person (Woolf, 2007: 30).

The way Lily attributes extraordinary qualities to Mr Ramsay because of his work suggests a hint of humour. She "profanes" his work in a Bakhtinian sense by associating it with an old kitchen table; his work becomes devoid of any sacred or unworldly importance. At the same time, however, she thinks that a person who does this work is not an ordinary one. Indeed, for Lily, Mr Ramsay is an ambivalent figure. She cannot understand "why so brave a man in thought should be so timid in life; how strangely he was venerable and laughable" (Woolf, 2007: 52). Thus, although she accepts that Mr Ramsay deserves respect, she thinks that he is an object of laughter because of the incongruity between his ambitions and his individuality: "[I]f his little finger ached," thinks Lily, "the whole world must come to an end" (Woolf, 2007: 53). According to Lily, Mr Ramsay positions himself at the centre of the universe while at the same time he is blind because he cannot see that the others are aware of his pettiness. She

remembers, for instance, how she and Paul Rayley, a guest at the Ramsays, laughed at Mr Ramsay's fury.

> They had laughed and laughed, like a couple of children, all because Mr Ramsay, finding an earwig in his milk at breakfast had sent the whole thing flying through the air on to the terrace outside. . . . But he had built round him such a fence of sanctity, and occupied the space with such a demeanour of majesty that an earwig in his milk was a monster (Woolf, 2007: 214-215).

Lily sees that Mr Ramsay thinks too highly of himself. Her laughter, however, shows that she does not accept his dominance.

Furthermore, after Mrs Ramsay's death, when Lily once more visits the Ramsays, she becomes aware that Mr Ramsay still demands sympathy from the people around him (Woolf, 2007: 164). However, she cannot enter into a serious dialogue with him when Mr Ramsay approaches her demanding her attention. "His immense self-pity, his demand for sympathy poured and spread itself in pools at her feet, and all she did, miserable sinner that she was, was to draw her skirts a little closer round her ankles, lest she should get wet" (Woolf, 2007: 166-167). The narrator reflects Lily's ideas about her attitude towards Mr Ramsay. Lily stresses the sharp contrast between Mr Ramsay's demand from her and her reaction to it.

> 'What beautiful boots!' she exclaimed. She was ashamed of herself. To praise his boots when he asked her to solace his soul; when he had shown her his bleeding hands, his lacerated heart, and asked her to pity them, then to say, cheerfully, 'Ah, but what beautiful boots you wear!' deserves, she knew, and she looked up expecting to get it, in one of his sudden roars of ill-temper, complete annihilation (Woolf, 2007: 167).

Lily does not want to sympathize with Mr Ramsay and her way of escaping it is to channel the topic of their dialogue to something else. And this happens to be his boots. This image with the boots resembles the image of the kitchen table; Mr Ramsay's grave disposition towards Lily is replaced by her simple amusement at his boots switching the topic to a petty everyday object. Lily's exaggeration of Mr Ramsay's grief reveals her laughter at Mr Ramsay's behaviour.

In addition, when the process of Mr Ramsay's thoughts about his "splendid" (Woolf, 2007: 40) mind is observed, his weakness inside becomes evident. It becomes obvious that Mr Ramsay's thoughts have halted at a particular point and do not progress further. The vision of the working mind is described through concrete examples by associating the paths of thoughts with alphabet: "For if thought is . . . like the alphabet . . . ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one" (Woolf, 2007: 40). Mr Ramsay knows that he is able to reach Q but cannot see his going beyond it: "He dug his heels in at Q" (Woolf, 2007: 41). Mr Ramsay's desire to transcend Q and move to R depict his desperate attempts at progress. Yet, Mr Ramsay fails: "On to R, once more. R –" (Woolf, 2007: 41). Eventually Mr Ramsay acknowledges the idea that he "would never reach R" (Woolf, 2007: 42). The great and powerful father of the Ramsays is depicted as a weak figure who is not capable of moving beyond his present situation in his professional ideas.

Although the novel does not give many details about how other characters see Mr Ramsay, Mrs Ramsay's thoughts reveal that they, too, laugh at him. Mrs Ramsay is aware of the fact that her husband likes spending time with the young – his daughters and Minta Doyle who stays with them for the holiday. Young girls treat Mr Ramsay as if he is their peer: "They might cut his hair for him, plait him watch-chains, or interrupt him at his work, hailing him (she heard them), 'Come along, Mr Ramsay; it's our turn to beat them now,' and out he came to play tennis. . . . How many pipes have you smoked today, Mr Ramsay?" (Woolf, 2007: 107). Mrs Ramsay likes such a relationship between the young girls and her husband. "She was grateful to them for laughing at him" (Woolf, 2007: 107). In other words, Mr Ramsay's figure as an authoritative and serious father is shaken and "decrowned" because young people regard him as a man with whom they can play. Mr Ramsay's playing with the young girls suggests an image of a decrowned mock king from Bakhtinian carnival. "The ceremonial of the ritual of decrowning is counterposed to the ritual of crowning: regal vestments are stripped off the decrowned king, his crown is removed, the other symbols of authority are taken away, he is ridiculed and beaten" (Bakhtin, 1984a: 125). However, Mr Ramsay is not literally beaten. His stance as a serious father figure is taken away, his authority vanishes and he is merely seen as a peer with whom the young can play.

However hard Mr Ramsay endeavours to present himself as an authority figure, he confronts his own limits. Besides the others' disregard for his authority, he debunks himself, too, and finds himself on the perils of losing his authority. Merrill Turner likens Woolf to Chekhov in terms of her portrayal of male figures. Turner states that both authors portray men as "pathetic and insecure, habitually seeking sympathy. . . . Both Chekhov's and Woolf's men often seem weak, in need of reassurance, while the women operate – against type – as pillars of strength" (2013: 401). Both authors yearn to dissipate the fog upon the myth of masculinity; male authority turns out to be not as strong as it is usually accepted. Mr Ramsay's authority, for example, dissipates when he demands sympathy. He debases himself. "There he stood, demanding sympathy" (Woolf, 2007: 44) from his wife because he acknowledges that "[h]e was a failure" (Woolf, 2007: 44). As a man of science he wants to compensate for that with his wife's projection of his greatness. "It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius, . . . warmed and soothed" (Woolf, 2007: 44). He wants his wife to show him how great and smart he is.

When Mrs Ramsay dies, Mr Ramsay seeks for another figure who can reflect his greatness. "And then, and then – this was one of those moments when an enormous need urged him, without being conscious what it was, to approach any woman, to force them, he did not care how, his need was so great, to give him what he wanted: sympathy" (Woolf, 2007: 165). He needs to be recognized as a powerful figure. He wants sympathy from his children, as well. "He would make her [Cam] smile at him" (Woolf, 2007: 182). He even approaches James with affection and praises him for his success in leading the boat: "'Well done!' James had steered them like a born sailor. . . . His father had praised him" (Woolf, 2007: 221-222). It seems that Mr Ramsay focuses all his energy on his drive to get sympathy; he wants to be sure that the others support him and that they believe in his power to sustain his authority. So he demands his authority back. "Sitting in the boat he bowed, he crouched himself, acting instantly his part – the part of a desolate man, widowed, bereft; and so called up before him in hosts people sympathizing with him; staged for himself as he sat in the boat, a little drama" (Woolf, 2007: 180). Zwerdling summarises the male characters' condition in Woolf's fiction as follows: "Woolf shows us that far from being self-confident, principled, secure, the rulers of the family are often deeply unsure of themselves, as subject to panic and self-doubt as those

whose lives they control" (1986: 198). So, as it is seen in the examples above, Mr Ramsay tries hard to prove that he is a powerful patriarchal figure that can control and rule the others at home; yet, he betrays his innate and inevitable weakness in front of female characters and his children by his behaviour, thoughts and bodily movements.

Conclusion

Despite his desire to dominate, Mr Ramsay is revealed unable to justify his superiority. Being aware of his weakness, Mrs Ramsay and Lily undermine his authority. In this way, Mr Ramsay, who wants to seem as a strong father figure, is mentally decrowned by the female characters. And this decrowning can be likened to a king's decrowning in Bakhtin's theory. Mrs Ramsay leads a mental struggle against her husband. She and the other female characters overcome and decrown the father figure through their ideas which are transformed into behaviour only in some instances. Therefore, a loud act of decrowning of a father figure is not possible in an atmosphere where the patriarchal authority still holds its power. In other words, as Bakhtin claims, the modern world is not possible to turn into a coherent world where people can come together and enjoy their equality and their merging with the rest of the world. He stresses the modern world's tendency to separate human beings from the rest of the world and isolate them from each other, which mostly happens in the problems related to gender differences. And in this way, people gradually become hostile to each other as it is seen in Woolf's portrayal of women oppressed by the patriarchal laws.

To conclude, reading Woolf's novels in the light of Bakhtin's carnivalistic act of decrowning enables one to recognize the wealth of Woolf's fiction in terms of its ways to free women characters from patriarchal oppression. In this way, Bakhtin's notion of decrowning gains its feminist hue. The fact that both Woolf and Bakhtin were fighting against oppressive systems makes it possible to juxtapose them. Thus, what comes to the fore is that an oppressive ideology always has the same essence although it changes its visible shell. Bakhtin imagines carnival as a space where it is possible to transcend the social divisions between people. Woolf also assigns people's togetherness a high place, but, within the framework of her oeuvre, her characters try to create a healthy union by staying out of gender hierarchy. In short, both authors struggle against the powers that try

to divide human beings into separate hierarchical groups and they both imagine a community based on a balanced and peaceful co-existence of different voices, consciousnesses and bodies.

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