



Woolf's Voyage Out To Marriage : A Fillmorean Frame Semantic Study of *The Voyage Out*

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the literary history of the matrimonial tussle between the characters of Virginia Woolf vis-a-vis the complex relationship with her husband, Leonard Woolf. Woolf uses matrimony to frame the perception that marriage serves as the tool to secure one's position in the society, upending it as an establishment of a social status that entitles women to a certain show of respect. Using the Fillmorean Frame Semantics Theory Like the author's life, Woolf's heroines articulate many of the conflicts that the couple were no longer willing to acknowledge in their matrimonial bond.

Keywords: Semantic Analysis, Fillmorean Frame Semantics, Virginia Woolf, Matrimonial Tussle, Gender, Society

Introduction

Woolf began working on her first novel, *The Voyage Out* in 1910 and had finished an early draft of the novel by 1912. The novel had a long and difficult gestation and was not published until 1915. It was written during a period when Woolf was psychologically vulnerable and attempted suicide during this period of depression. Woolf tied nuptial bond

with Leonard Woolf on August 10th, 1912 and was said to be living an intricate marital life by this time. The publication of *The Voyage Out* was again followed by a suicide attempt. The entries in her diary few months before the publication of her first novel clearly elucidate her suicidal tendency, which could also be a consequence of her unhappy marriage. This serves to construct the following hypothesis:

- 1) Did marriage make Woolf pursue the path of death?
- 2) Was marriage actually “not easy” for Woolf and her characters?

Samples

Further, to test the cognitive prototypicality effect of cynicism regarding marriage in *The Voyage Out* the study formulates the following analytical groups, which shall also provide the base of analysing the corpus of the text alongside the diaries and letters written by the author during this time. Now let us have a look at some of the selected diaries, letters and textual evidences, which shall work as the sample of analysing the hypothesis.

S.No	Date	Diary Entries
1.	January 5, 1915	<i>Does the weather prompt suicide?</i>
2.	January 12, 1915	<i>The odd thing about the Woolf family, to me, is the extreme laxness of it... Perhaps the Woolfs haven't a family tradition. It gives a sense of freedom anyhow.</i>
3.	January 13, 1915	<i>The afternoons now have an elongated pallid look, as if it were neither winter nor spring.</i>
4.	January 16, 1915	<i>I thought how happy I was, without any of the excitements, which, once, seemed to me to constitute happiness. L and I argued for sometimes about this.</i>
5.	January 19, 1915	<i>But L was melancholy. When I analyse his mood I attribute much of it to sheer lack of self confidence in his power of writing; as if he mightn't be a writer after all; and being a practical man, his melancholy sinks far deeper than the half assumed melancholy of self conscious people like Lytton and Sir Leslie and myself. There's no arguing with him.</i>
6.	January 20, 1915	<i>When L pulled the curtains this morning, practically no light came in; there was a kind of greyish confusion outside- soft swirling incessant snow.</i>
7.	January 25, 1915	<i>L had sworn he would give me nothing, and like a good wife, I believed him. But he crept into my bed, with a little parcel, which was a beautiful green purse... I don't think I've had a birthday treat for ten years.</i>
8.	January 31, 1915	<i>O dear! We quarrelled almost all the morning and it was a lovely morning... Which began it? Which carried it on? God</i>

		<i>knows. This I will say: I explode and L smoulders.</i>
9.	February 14, 1915	<i>Rain again today.</i>

S.No.	Date	Letters
1.	May 1, 1912	<i>It seems to me that I am giving you a great deal of pain—some in the most casual way—and therefore I ought to be as plain with you as I can, because half the time I suspect, you’re in a fog which I don’t see at all...I say to myself. Anyhow, you’ll be quite happy with him; and he will give you companionship, children, and a busy life—then I say By God, I will not look upon marriage as a profession...So I go from being half in love with you, and wanting you to be with me always, and known everything about me, to the extreme of wildness and aloofness. I sometimes think that if I married you, I could have everything—and then—it is the sexual side of it that comes between us? As I told you brutally the other day, I feel no physical attraction in you. There are moments—when you kissed me the other day was one—when I feel no more than a rock.</i>
2.	August 4, 1913	<i>You’ve been absolutely perfect to me. It’s all my fault. But when we’re together and I go on thinking- it must be all right... When you say sleepy you mean tired, poor beast... Goodbye, darling mongoose.</i>
3.	December 7, 1913	<i>Goodbye Mongoose, and be a devoted animal, and never leave the great variegated creature.</i>
4.	March 14, 1914	<i>Do come back a brisk well mongoose, with a feather in your cap. My pet, you would never doubt my caring for you if you saw me wanting to kiss you and muzzle you in my arms. After all, we shall have a happy life together now, won’t we?</i>

S.No.	Reference	Textual Evidence
1.	Discussion on Susan’s marriage	<i>She was thirty years of age, and owing to the number of her sisters and the seclusion of life in a country parsonage had as yet had no proposal of marriage.</i>
2.	Arthur proposing Susan for marriage	<i>She was struck motionless as his speech went on, and her heart gave great separate leaps at the last words... So then it actually happened to her, a proposal of marriage.</i>
3.	Susan giving prominence to marriage over everything	<i>Marriage, marriage, that was the right thing, the only thing, the only solution required by everyone she knew, and a great part of her meditations was spent in tracing every instance of discomfort, loneliness, ill-health, unsatisfied ambition, restlessness, eccentricity, taking things up and dropping them again, public speaking and philanthropic activity on the part of men and particularly on the part of women to the fact that they wanted to marry, were trying to marry, and had not succeeded in getting married. If, as she was bound to own,</i>

		<i>these symptoms sometimes persisted after marriage, she could only ascribe them to the unhappy law of nature which decreed that there was only one Arthur Venning, and only one Susan who could marry him...a voyage like this.</i>
4.	Evelyn stressing the importance of marriage before Terrence	<i>But one has to makeup one's mind... Or are you one of the people who doesn't believe in marriages and all that?</i>
5.	Terrence speculating on the decision of getting married	<i>That was the real problem, for the miseries and agonies could not be endured, and it was necessary that he should make up his mind. He instantly decided that he did not want to marry anyone. Partly because he was irritated by Rachel that the idea of marriage irritated him... He tried all sort of pictures, taking them from the lives of friends of his, for he knew many different married couples, but he found all the pictures an 'unpleasant' one.</i>
6.	Terrence's views on unmarried women	<i>When on the other hand, he began to think of unmarried people, he saw them active in an unlimited world...the women he most admired and knew best were unmarried women. Marriage seemed to be worse for them than it was for men.</i>
7.	Terrence's view on the nuptial bond of Ambroses.	<i>Even the Ambroses, whom he admired and respected profoundly- in spite of all the love between them, was not their marriage too a compromise? Perhaps Rachel had been right then, when she said that night in the garden, 'We bring out what's worst in each other- we should live separate.'... No Rachel had been utterly wrong! Every argument seemed to be against undertaking the burden of marriage until he came to Rachel's argument which was manifestly absurd.</i>
8.	Terrence thinking about proposing marriage to Rachel.	<i>I worship you but I loathe marriage, I hate its smugness, its safety, its compromise and the thought of you interfering in my work, hindering me; what would you answer?... No longer able to consider marriage, or to weigh coolly what her nature was, or how it would be if they lived together, he dropped to the ground and sat absorbed in the thought of her and soon tormented by the desire to be in her presence again.</i>
9.	Rachel's thought on marriage	<i>Marriage! Well, it's not easy.</i>
10.	Terrence to Rachel	<i>You're not beautiful, but I like your face. I shall be in love with you all my life, and our marriage will be the most exciting thing that's ever been done!</i>

Methodology

On the basis of above provided samples, following analytic groups could be formed to assess the protoypicality effect to support the hypothesis.

- (a) Married couple as unequal to each other.

- (b) Feeling of discontentment with each other.
- (c) Idea of imprisonment in wedlock.
- (d) Craving for freedom while being together.
- (e) Insecurity of losing the individuality.
- (f) Marriage constantly associated with pejorative expressions.

S.No	Analytic Groups	Mr and Mrs Ambrose	Susan and Arthur	Rachel and Terrence
1.	Living together as unequal	+	+	+
2.	Discontented with each other	-	-	+
3.	Sense of imprisonment	-	+	+
4.	Craving for freedom	-	+	+
5.	Insecurity of losing individuality	+	+	+

All the examples of prototype based categorical structure involve relations of similarity both on literal and figurative level. All these bits of frame knowledge can be assembled to fill in the details of a larger composed frame that Woolf held a cynical view about marriage right since the beginning of her literary career. The above mentioned passages will be useful to consider its intended interpretation.

Analysis

The novel was written during a period when Woolf was psychologically vulnerable and attempted suicide during this period of depression. Woolf tied nuptial bond with Leonard Woolf on August 10th, 1912 and was said to be living an intricate marital life by this time. In 1912, Woolf was thirty years old and was on the brink of becoming a spinster. Eager to escape the status of spinsterhood, despite of feeling repelled by heterosexual or intimate relationship she entered in a conjugal relationship in the attempt of disassociating the tag of an “old maid”. Marrying Leonard Woolf, whose Jewishness she loathed but could dominate with her genius and madness, although solved the problem of spinsterhood but created a host of new problems. When Woolf wrote a letter to Leonard Woolf, accepting his proposal on May 1, 1912, she emphasizes on the theme of “giving pain” which recurs throughout *The Voyage Out* as well. Interestingly, the words “I am giving you a great deal of pain” are repeated almost verbatim, twenty nine years later in the suicide note she leaves him.

As per Woolf’s biographer, Hermoine Lee, Woolf treated the conjugal intercourse as rape and refused to submit to Leonard sexually. Almost thirty years later, having rejected idea of divorce and personal independence as existential options, her only way out of the marriage was suicide. Woolf’s marriage did not rest on mutual obligations but rather rested on her career as a mad woman and Leonard’s as a caretaker. Woolf’s marriage offered her dual role of being a sane writer and mad wife.

Results

On placing the above mentioned vignettes in larger context, it is palpable that the characters and their actions provide a reflection of Woolf’s distressed conjugal life. In order to test the hypothesis precisely, let us analyse few of the selected samples using the Fillmorean Frame Theory, which provides an assertive indication of Woolf’s cynical attitude towards marriage. When the textual samples are placed vis-a-vis the diaries and letters samples, the results turn out to be similar for most of the integral ideas.

S. No .	Frame Elements in Novel	Frame Elements in Diaries and Letters	Lexical Units	Comment
1	<i>I worship you but I loathe marriage, I hate its smugness, its safety, its compromise and the thought of you interfering in my work, hindering me; what would you answer?</i>	<i>Perhaps the Woolfs haven’t a family tradition. It gives a sense of freedom anyhow.</i>	“thought of you interfering in my work” and “It gives a sense of freedom anyhow.”	Just like Woolf who craves for freedom within the marriage, Terrence Hewet believes Rachel will interfere and hinder his work once they get married, resulting to the loss of his freedom and craving for independence.
2	<i>You’re not beautiful, but I like your face. I shall be in love with you all my life, and our marriage will be the most exciting thing that’s ever been done!</i>	<i>As I told you brutally the other day, I feel no physical attraction in you. There are moments—when you kissed me the other day was one—when I feel</i>	“you’re not beautiful” and “I feel no physical attraction in you.”	Woolf’s characters just like herself emphasize on physical attributes rather than being concerned with each others’ emotions, which further results in

		<i>no more than a rock.</i>		making the characters astray.
3	<i>That was the real problem, for the miseries and agonies could not be endured, and it was necessary that he should make up his mind.</i>	<i>It seems to me that I am giving you a great deal of pain—some in the most casual way</i>	“miseries and agonies could not be endured” and “I am giving you a great deal of pain”	The idea of marriage is concerned with misery, agony and pain.
4	<i>Marriage, marriage, that was the right thing, the only thing, the only solution required by everyone she knew.</i>	<i>I say to myself. Anyhow, you’ll be quite happy with him; and he will give you companionship, children, and a busy life—then I say By God, I will not look upon marriage as a profession.</i>	“Marriage, marriage, that was the right thing, the only thing, the only solution required by everyone she knew and “he will give you companionship, children, and a busy life—then I say By God, I will not look upon marriage as a profession.”	Neither Woolf nor her characters enter into nuptial bond by choice, love or commitment. Marriage seems to be conventional, obligatory and essential for a living.

Conclusion

Through the character of Susan Warrington, Woolf epitomizes the idea of conventional marriage while the character of Helen Ambrose serves to personify the essence of an unconventional marriage. As the “voyage” in the novel begins, we get a glimpse of Woolf’s marital voyage with the way she presents her characters and how they perform in the given circumstances. Not only does the introduction of Richard and Clarissa Dalloway prefigures the tension in author’s conjugal life which accentuates in *Mrs Dalloway* but is shrewdly placed at the beginning of the novel when the voyage begins, indicating that the “voyage like this” as Susan says stands as the connotation of marriage. As a prelude to the evolving relationship between Terrence Hewet and Rachel Vinrace, Woolf provides a traditional engagement of Arthur Venning and Susan Warrington. Woolf makes it apparent that Susan is more concerned with the idea of marriage rather than the reality of Arthur as she aspires to “join the ranks of the married women” in order to “escape the long solitude of an old maid’s life”.

This further highlights the hegemonic societal structure of Woolf's era where the husband usually appears blind to the power structure that shape his responses to women which Froula terms as the "male defender of the marriage plot." The above mentioned vignettes questions the standard marriage plot in *The Voyage Out* and highlights the subtle dangers inherent in intimacy and particularly in marriage in Woolf's characterisation.

Virginia Woolf's disinclination to marry was fuelled by the fear of sex and the adulterated emotional involvement. She was not physically attracted to Leonard Woolf and the very fact that he was a Jew was not in his favour in her eyes. Woolf had mixed feelings about marriage where sometimes she wanted "everything- love, children, adventure, intimacy and work" and at other times "she feels no more than a rock", in addition Woolf sincerely resented the role prescribed for women in British society. She was also repelled by the idea of consummation with a man after the brutal trauma she experienced in her childhood wherein she was molested by her two elder half brothers. In a letter written to Leonard Woolf on May 1st1912, Virginia Woolf bluntly talks about her anxieties and reservations not holding back her true feelings-

"The obvious advantages of marriage stand in my way. I say to myself. Anyhow, you'll be quite happy with him; and he will give you companionship, children and a busy life- then I say, By God, I will not look upon marriage as a profession... Possibly, your being a Jew comes in also at this point. You seem so foreign. And then I am fearfully unstable, I pass from hot to cold in an instant, without any reason; except that I believe sheer physical effort and exhaustion influence me."

Virginia Woolf and Leonard Woolf got married on August 10th 1912. It was during this time that Leonard Woolf became first aware of her distressed mental state. In 1913, Woolf attempted to commit suicide with a large dose of Verona, a sedative, resulting to which she was discouraged by the doctors to have children as she struggled with her mental illness. Despite of her aversion to sex, Virginia Woolf found it heartbreaking. It was only 25 years later, Woolf talked about a pleasant consummation with her husband in her diary, "Love making- after 25 years can't bear to be separate...you see it is enormous pleasure being wanted: a wife. And our marriage so complete."

The early fictions of Virginia Woolf's *Melymbrosia*, *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* and Leonard Woolf's *The Wise Virgins* and *The Village in the Jungle* create a complex

structure of comments upon one another along with the issues of engagement, marriage and passion in which their authors were themselves caught up between 1906 and 1919. Particularly, *Night and Day* seems both a response and comment on Leonard Woolf's *The Wise Virgins*. Their early fiction might be read as a conversation between the writers in which their confusions and fears, their hopes and demands are refracted.

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