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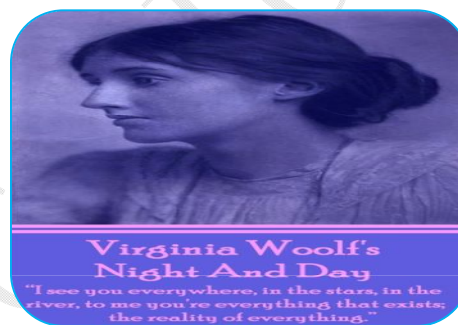
MATURITY AND TRANSFORMATION AFTER MARRIAGE IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S NIGHT AND DAY

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ABSTRACT:

Night and Day, the second novel by Virginia Woolf, first published on 20 October 1919, is set in Edwardian London. It is a story of four young people, the main character being Katherine Hilbery. Katherine is a beautiful and intelligent young lady of twenty-seven. She is the only child in one of the most distinguished families in London. Her father, Mr. Hilbery edits reviews and her mother, Mrs. Hilbery writes a biography of her father, Richard Alardyce, a poet. Katherine helps her mother with writing the book and running the household. Other main characters are William Rodney, a young poet and scholar, Katherine's first romantic interest, a friend of the two, Mary Datchet, who works in an organization's office campaigning for women's suffrage, and Ralph Denham, an attorney who occasionally writes articles for a Katharine's father edited journal. The main theme of the novel is courtship and matters connected with it. This part examines the position and opportunities of women in society, as well as attitudes and opinions on marriage among men and women and their transformations in British Edwardian society. It also displays Woolf's position in connection with these topics through her style and choice of characters.



KEYWORDS: Virginia Woolf, position and opportunities of women.

INTRODUCTION

The description of Katherine is not typical and her character is quite elusive, the reader has to put together a lot of pieces of information and hints come to the conclusion as to what Katherine Hilbery is. "The reader gradually and incompletely discovers them [Rachel Vinrace and Katherine Hilbery] in part of their own discourse and reflections, partly after effect on others. More elusive are they ..." (Bennett, p.

20). The following part will try to sum up features of her character put together from hints and scenes from the novel. These features are important for further examination of her background and social status analysed in this chapter.

Katherine does not talk much, "she was inclined to be silent; she shrank from expressing herself even in talk..." (*Night and Day* 32) and although she lives in a family of literary background, she prefers mathematics to

literature. She works on mathematics secretly in her leisure time, not letting anyone know. This interest is described as an unwomanly one in the book :

Maybe the unwomanly nature of science made her instinctively desire to hide her love for it. But the deeper reason was that she was directly opposed to literature in her mind by mathematics. She would not have cared to confess how infinitely she preferred to the confusion,

agitation, and vagueness of the finest prose the accuracy, the star-like impersonality of figures. (N&D, page 34)

The interest in mathematics signifies her manly side. Despite her womanly appearance she resembles men in gestures, as Rodney observes when the two of them share a tea: "He made a tea and Katherine drew off her gloves, and crossed her legs with a gesture that was rather masculine." (N&D 81) Her figure destroys the idea of a fragile beautiful young lady. She is used to being in charge of things naturally, not only of keeping the household going, but also in everyday life situations, such as when visiting with Rodney Mary Datchet at her place:

Mary found herself discussing old Italian pictures with William, while Katherine poured tea, cut cake, kept William's plate supplied that she seemed to have taken possession of Mary's room, and handled the cups as if they belonged to her. But it was done so naturally that in Mary it did not produce any resentment... "(N&D, p. 144).

She does that almost unwittingly; while people around her feel she is dominant and likes things to be done her way. "She does command, she isn't nervous; it comes naturally to her to rule and control." (N&D, p. 118) This applies to the arrangement of her romantic life as well. Early in the novel, Katherine becomes engaged to William Rodney. She tries to solve the problem relationship between love, marriage and happiness for a long time, and eventually leaves Rodney and marries Ralph Denham who is more appropriate for her.

The interest of Katherine in mathematics not only represents her manly side, but also epitomizes the problem she encounters with using words to express herself. Because of her goal of expressing feelings, she does not like literature: "Yes, I hate books," she continued. Why do you want to talk about feelings forever? That's what I can't tell. And all about feelings is about poetry—novels are all about feelings." (N&D, p. 120) Although she herself has big difficulties in expressing her feelings: "It was a desire, an echo, a sound; she could drape it in colour, see it in form, hear it in music, but not in words; no, never in words" (N&D, p. 243) she refuses literature, even though it may help her to learn more about them. She is also interested in stars, as she says: "I want to work out something in figures – something that hasn't got to do with human beings" (N&D, p. 119). Numbers and stars symbolize for her an escape to something remote from human interaction. "Katherine is unusually tacit and suspicious of speech, and her own language is silent, not demanding a listener" (Sellers, p. 39). Katherine does not need any listeners, but she demands solitude, some time for herself only, for thinking and for mathematics, she enjoys that kind of loneliness. Instead of trying to participate in talks about feelings "Katherine develops an alternative rational, algebraic language while coolly engaging in traditional courtship discourse" (Goldman, p. 48). For her, feeling is more intellectual than amatory, as is romance and courtship. As Goldman observes, "Katherine's pleasure in the rational is used subversively in scenes of love most effectively throughout the *Night and Day*" (Goldman, p. 48). She tries to get it under control via her rational side.

One of the main issues Katherine is dealing with is marriage, its connection with traditions and the question whether love and marriage can be combined. When she asks Rodney about marriage and whether he would recommend it to her, he replies: "Why, you're nothing at all without it; you're only half alive; using only half your faculties; you must feel that for yourself" (N&D, p. 52). She sees marriage as an obligation for a woman, it completes her, as her cousin Henry tells her: "You may be made more human by marriage" (N&D, p.166). It's probably something she needs and what's recommended by her surroundings, but she doesn't feel the urge to get married, her mind is busy with something else. "When you look at things like stars, our affairs don't seem to matter a lot, do they?" (N&D, page 166), is her answer to Henry. Marriage on the level of her own feelings is something so remote that even things like stars seem to be nearer and more appealing to her. Katherine is advised by her mother: "Ah, Katherine, when you marry, be quite, quite sure that you love your husband!" (N&D, p. 83). On the one hand, she desires marriage including romance and love but on the other hand, the idea clashes with the world and traditions she sees in the society surrounding her, the dream is inconsistent with reality. In her sleep, Katherine has a dream about a romantic hero being her husband, but "Waking up, she could contemplate a perfectly lovely marriage, as one did in real life, for perhaps the people who so dream are

the ones who do the most prosaic things" (N&D, p. 87). She also has her own rational reasons for marriage as she confesses secretly in her thoughts when leading imaginative talk with her cousin Henry: "To begin with, I'm very fond of William. You can't deny that. I know him better than anyone, almost. But why I'm marrying him is partly, I admit (...) partly because I'd like to marry. I want to have my own house. At home, it's not possible" (N&D, p. 162). All these reasons lead to submission of her mind: "Very well, she would submit, as her mother and her aunt and most women" (N&D 204) and to a promise of devotion: "William, she said, I will marry you. I will try to make you happy" (N&D, p. 207).

As Rodney believes, marriage validates women and they should be in one. On the top of that, "any indication of Katherine's independence threatens him and he believes she ought to give her present odious, self-centered" (N&D, p. 56) life, give up being a subject, and become an object" (Briggs, p. xxiii). This idea is absolutely unacceptable for Katherine even though she makes an effort and is willing to sacrifice a lot at first. Nevertheless, this subservience is not acceptable for her for several reasons. Firstly because of her character her masculinity and her desire to control and command, and secondly because of her inner life; her closet activities, interest in mathematics and stars. Her engagement to Rodney is mainly acquiescence to social and cultural conservatism. The feature of her manly side is very important throughout the book. It is one of the strongest reasons that save her from the "bad" decision of marrying Rodney because of traditions and social pressure: "Katherine's masculinity is a sign of modernity ... Instead, her masculinity challenges her husbands' traditional social expectations of marriage and the consent of women. This masculinity ultimately extracts her from a bad commitment ..." (Cohler, p.64). This may signal modernity in treating marriage. Also her new partner is a symbol of new choices for "New Women" (Briggs, p.xxv) as Julia Briggs calls them.

Katherine, as the heroin of the story, resigns from marriage pursued because of traditions. In order to be happy and satisfied she needs someone who will support her in her needs. Women are to "enjoy subjectivity equal to that of men" and Woolf observes "how will she cope with the subordination of self in marriage that William Rodney and many others would regard as essential?" (Briggs, p. xxv). Fortunately, there's a young man, Ralph Denham, who understands Katherine and can give her the kind of space and freedom she needs. She gradually realizes that between them there is a strong sympathy and understanding, "as she doubted, Denham's state of mind was connected with herself..." (N&D, p. 266), which climaxes when she finds herself able to confess what her secret needs are: "I went back to my room by myself and I did - what I liked." She had said that to him, and when she said that, she gave him a glimpse of possibilities, even confidences, as if he were the one to share her loneliness, whose mere hint made his heart beat faster and his brain spin faster" (N&D, p. 286). This gives her a new chance in marriage to be happy. "Katherine is amazed that love can be found without it being silenced..." (N&D, p. 356).

Her 'loneliness' is not destroyed by being shared. Rather it is enriched and protected: Katherine dwells now in possibility" (Sellers, p. 40). This is probably one of the best solutions for Katherine, although with her personality, and her disliking of women devoted to their work and old maids devoted to philanthropy, it is probably the only solution she is able to find. "Marriage to Ralph may have been the best that Katherine could have hoped for, since she could never have left her family and struck out on her own except by marriage, given her class position and personality" (Sellers, p. 41). There is the question of combining marriage and woman's selfhood, expressed equally as men's: "I really don't advise a woman who wants to have things her own way to get married," Lady Otway tells Katherine." (N&D, p.177) Katherine may have difficulties with that. She realizes that when Cassandra tells Katherine she hopes to have many children with William, because "he loves children" (N&D, p. 369). Katherine realizes that "she had known William for years, and she had never once guessed that he loved children" (N&D, p. 369). She does not think about that, as it would be normal for generations before her to think about having children. As Cohler writes, "Katherine's relationship to marriage and maternity reflects cultural transitions in women's roles" (N&D, p.66). On the other hand, there is the character of Mary, who epitomizes a woman fully devoted to her work. She also struggles with love, work, and the question of marriage and maternity. But as we find out at the end of the story, instead of romance and marriage, she chooses work. She symbolizes the other way around as the "new" independent woman. In

work, Mary finds self-fulfilment, in a tolerant husband, Katherine. "But her subsequent (and final) commitment to Ralph is supposed to promise a model of spiritual fellowship and contemporary disregard for lines and social hierarchy" (Cohler, p. 66).

In this story Virginia Woolf "evokes scenes that communicate what it felt like to be young" (Bennett, p. 5). Katherine Hilbery's character "has much in common with Woolf, including her background in the upper class and very literary family, her rejection of a clever suitor, and her acceptance of a man who had no money and came from a distinctly lower class but was full of passionate sincerity," (Briggs, p. xiv) and "like Katherine Hilbery in *Night and Day* [she] was patted on the head as child by many an eminent Victorians" (Singh, p. 8).

"Katherine, whose fears of entrapment within a masculine plot recapitulate her author's" is "like Woolf, she finds herself uneasily participating within a patriarchal plot" (Briggs, p. xxi). Katherine as a book heroine located in a patriarchal plot with the main theme of marriage, governed by men and conventions, and Woolf as an author in a genuine patriarchal society, both demand that they play a different role than expected. Katherine suffers from a language of distrust. She "displays a deep distrust of words and feelings, which corresponds to Woolf's own revulsion against patriotic rhetoric and sentiment ..." (Briggs, p. xii). Katherine has difficulties with subjectivity and arbitrariness of things people say and what they write in books. She feels this when she tries to help her mother who is writing her father's biography but has difficulties because it "cannot be written, in part because the traditional form of biography cannot accommodate the irregularities of the poet's private life" (Briggs, p. xxii). She is afraid that men do not fall in love with women but with an image they make in their mind, an image that is idealized and remote from reality, she desires to have a man that sees her "without any of this romantic nonsense" and she warns Rodney straight away: "I'm far more ordinary than I appear" (*N&D*, p. 323). She needs to escape the iconic image of her. That's why she "flies from the nets of language cast around her into a world of pure signs, mathematics, and inexorable laws governing celestial or earthly movements" (Briggs, p. xxi). She feels "Lies are told by everyone" (*N&D*, p. 73). Paradoxically, Woolf as an author of fiction creates a heroin "Who feels that books are just so much chat, a heroine suspicious of what Woolf loved and feared most" (Sellers, p.39).

Woolf's heroin is "developing a rational, algebraic alternative language" (Goldman 48) as opposed to traditional courtship discourse. Katherine is a beautiful woman with manly characteristics as a counterpart to suffragist women. This is quite surprising because traditionally this feature would be attached to suffragist women. "One might expect as Edwardian and conventional as some critics would have us believe, that the beautiful young woman would be feminine highlight the cultural masculinity of the suffragist." (Cohler, p.65) This does not challenge only the existing cultural perceptions, but shows changing desires of various women across classes and their nature. There are going to be women who choose marriage before work and vice versa. "Woolf presents the multiple and conflicting desires of these young women, and offers a promise of a changed social relation between men and women in Katherine's supposedly more equal' and modern' partnership with Ralph" (Cohler, p. 69). But there are still only two possibilities shown – life devoted to labor or to marriage, although including the promise of love and understanding and respecting each other. These two options symbolize resistance to old traditions, forecast the "New Woman" who can choose either life of work or marriage which is not barrenly built upon traditions and expectations of society. Also Woolf as an author creates a specific style by choosing an untypically non-feminine heroin with her own convictions and determination. Katherine looks for happiness, but is used to be in control and does it in spite of traditions and conventions as well as Woolf searches for her ideals as an author through her style and the choice of the main character.

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