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On Borrowed Time:

An examination of the representation of time in *To the Lighthouse*

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Abstract: This study elaborates on the relationship between the representation of time and how it is perceived in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Therefore, this paper will explore the link between time, modernism and the structure of *To the Lighthouse* by doing a close reading and using a narratological approach. In addition, to understand how time is perceived, I will relate this paper to research on Henri Bergson and his theories along with a more recent philosophical study by literary scholar Martin Hägglund. The main reason for this study is to gain a deeper understanding of Virginia Woolf's writing and creative process, as well as provide an insight to the modernist movement that emerged during the early twentieth century. My conclusion is that Woolf's invention of a new narrative style allows her to depict real life as accurately as possible.

Keywords: *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf, Time, Moments of Being, Henri Bergson, Modernism, Narratology, Perception, Chronolibido.

”Här stod den stilla, tiden. Det är med förändringar man mäter tidens gång, jag har ingenting att mäta den med.”

— Hjalmar Söderberg

Abbreviations of works by Virginia Woolf

TTL – To the Lighthouse

MF – Modern Fiction

MB – Moments of Being

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Introduction

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century, as well as one of the most prominent figures of the modernist movement along with writers such as James Joyce, Marcel Proust and T.S Eliot. Her novel *To the Lighthouse* first published in 1927 is an impressive and innovative literary experiment, and it is without a doubt her most famous literary effort alongside her essay *A Room of One's Own*. Her works are multifaceted and have throughout the years provoked a myriad of responses from both critics and readers alike, and feminism and politics are usually recurring topics when one studies Virginia Woolf. But she was also deeply concerned with the aesthetic aspects and the form of the novel, as well as topics such as time, intuition and memory that all assume significant roles in her literary aesthetics (Gilles, 108).

The representation of time is fundamental in much of Woolf's fiction, as she was part of the modernist movement which abandoned the traditional chronological narration of previous literary movements such as Victorian realism. The modernists did not simply seek out to reject realism; their goal was to create a more authentic experience of the real than the realist movement possibly could (Wallace, 19). As the modern novel throughout the last centuries felt the impact of every intellectual movement and, after the influence of theorists such as Newton, Einstein, and Bergson, it could no longer avoid the scientific necessity that was calling for a new concept relating to the notions of time and space (Kohler, 15). Hence, Woolf did declare that the modernist writer should aspire to: "[...] record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order, in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness" (MF, 2089-2090).

Woolf was one of the modernist writers that was experimenting with a non-linear narrative in favour of interior monologues portrayed as a stream of consciousness, which was quite revolutionary at the time. Woolf's multi-personal point of view "differentiates it from the unipersonal subjectivism which allows only a single and generally a very unusual person to make himself heard and admits only that one person's way of looking at reality" (Auerbach, 536). The thoughts of her characters move in a non-chronological way from one place to another, unifying past and present through their recollections and forecasts. As a result, time is not

experienced conventionally in *To the Lighthouse* since to the modernist writer “life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (MF, 2089). In fact, “the traditional plot-led structure was a source of frustration” (Jensen, 112) for Woolf, as “she believed that it did not reflect what it felt like to be alive” (Ibid, 112). So, she set out to record the “daily little miracles” (TTL, 176) in life. Since, life is more than a chronological sequence of events; it is all these accidental past and present moments that are happening at the same time. *To the Lighthouse* can be seen as a way to conceptualise the modern human being’s perception of time in modern England after the break with Victorian England.

This essay will examine the notion of time, how time is conveyed in *To the Lighthouse*. I claim that *To the Lighthouse* is overtly philosophical in its narrative as it exemplifies a concern for the temporality of life, upon which human beings look helplessly. Undoubtedly, Woolf’s representation of time in *To the Lighthouse* does create an elaborate temporal narrative that is meant to underline the destructive force of the universe and mirror life as it is. Admittedly, Woolf thought that life mirrored in fiction is not an objective existence in a neatly ordered universe; on the contrary, fiction attempts to capture a state of mind – these random subjective experiences which she called “moments of being”. More precisely, I will argue that Woolf in *To the Lighthouse* tries to crystalize these “moments of being” in art to give life meaning in an age of anxiety, and this is reflected in characters of the novel, especially in Mrs. Ramsay, Mr Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Therefore, I will examine and compare Mrs. Ramsay’s, Mr Ramsay’s and Lily’s rather different temporal experiences and concerns for the past, present and future, by examining them from a narratological point of view, as well as relating to Mary Ann Gillies research on Henri Bergson’s theories of time. Since one might argue that Bergson’s theories influenced Woolf and her fellow modernist writers. In addition, there will be allusions to Woolf’s autobiographical writings and recent research by literary critic and philosopher Martin Hägglund. Furthermore, I will also look at the concept of a subjective and internal time, in contrast to an objective and external time, by using Bergson’s theories, as I believe that these contrasting notions are visible in the different parts of the novel. For instance, in the first and third part, Woolf depicts a subjective and internal experience of time; her characters contemplate and comment

on the passage of time. This is in contrast to the middle section in which time appears objective and external and all these moments are merely incidental and out of hand.

Time in modernist fiction is more than just merely a subject; in fact, it governs its formal experiments (Banfield, 48). Arguably, it gains a critical role in understanding life outside of fiction and is a way to reflect reality and that becomes quite obvious when one is reading *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf declares in her essay “Modern Fiction”, that she sought to “examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day” (2089). Since “the mind receives a myriad of impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel” (MF, 2089). Hence for that to be possible there was a need to develop a new narrative formula, a formula that would convey time as it occurs in reality and, at the same time, capture how humans perceive the passage of time. This study will therefore implement a narratological approach to analyse *To the Lighthouse*. Since, narratology focuses on the structure of the narrative and how it affects the perception of the reader. Narratology can be described as the study of the structure of narrative and, as for the definition of a narrative, it is the representation of a series of events. (Narratology 5-6). Thus, a narrative is not a series of events, but more precisely the representation of a series of events and how the reader perceives them.

The following is a short overview of the phenomenology and key concepts of time represented within narrative and it concentrates on the temporal aspects of verbal narration. Broadly defined, time is a constituent element of the physical world, though doubts have been cast about its validity; however, it is still a fundamental category of human experience, as in fact we continuously regulate our lives by it (Rimmon-Kenan, 43). Strictly speaking, time is not observable though, we can perceive it in various changing events and moments. According to literary critic Shlomith Rimmon Kenan, there are two opposite extremes of time, and that is the natural and the personal, and in between we will find what she calls the mainstream of temporal experience outlining “time as an intersubjective, public, social convention which we establish in order to facilitate out living together” (44).

Obviously, the passing of time in narrative texts is a complicated matter. As Rimmon-Kenan points out within narratology, there are two central distinctions of narrative time, and those are text-time and story-time (44). Story-time is the passing of time in the imaginary world that the author has constructed, such as, the passing of ten years in the middle section of *To the Lighthouse* (44). Therefore, in order to

examine the story-time, one has to study “time as the textual arrangement of the event component of the story” (Rimmon-Kenan, 43). Text-time, on the other hand, is a spoken or written discourse which undertakes the telling of an event, that is to say it is the portion of the text that is devoted to the telling of the above mentioned ten years of story time (44-45). That is to say, text-time is a spatial dimension, it is the actually text on the page that accounts an event.

In addition, French structuralist Gerard Genette set out to examine the relation between story-time and text-time while suggesting that one should approach a narrative as though it is a discourse (Rimmon-Kenan, 46). Gerard Genette points out three significant terms in which time may be viewed in the events within the narrative – order (when?), duration (how long?) and frequency (how often?) (Rimmon-Kenan, 46). The most interesting of these concepts is in fact, duration, which refers to how much time that is devoted to the telling of an event in the story e.g. how much story-time the author uses in contrast to text-time (Rimmon-Kenan, 51). By “taking constant pace as a “norm”, we can discern two forms of modification: acceleration and deceleration” (Rimmon-Kenan, 52). To achieve the effect of acceleration the writer must devote a short segment of the text to a long period of the story (53). Whereas the writer achieves the effect of deceleration by the opposite process, that is by dedicating a long segment of the text to a short period of the story (Rimmon-Kenan, 53). Consequently, time is more than a commonly used theme in narrative fiction; it is also a fundamental aspect of both story and text: “the peculiarity of verbal narrative is that in it time is constitutive both of the means of representation (language) and of the object represented (the incidents of the story)” (44).

Closely related to this field of study is the philosophical work of the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) who asserted that time was subjective and experienced as a flow of interpenetrating moments, which he called “duration”, *la durée* (Banfield, 48). This conception is subjective, in contrast to the scientific spatialised time that is measured by clocks and consists of discrete units, which according to Bergson is objective (Banfield, 48-49). Hence, according to Bergson’s philosophy, one experiences two different types of time – mechanical time or clock time, that captures the relentless progress of life in seconds, minutes, days, years, and decades. It is what history is made of. The other type is the personal, temporal experience of the human mind, which one might interpret as flexible; constantly in

flux as it can be compressed and extended, forgotten and remembered. This personal experience of time is also known as psychological time and is referred to as “time on the mind” (Gilles, 52). As a result, Bergson’s philosophical view of time became popular amongst many of his contemporaries, and especially among the modernist writers of his time. Michael Whitworth claims that, “Bergson’s idea of a personal, psychological time which was more real than publicly agreed clock time was attractive to many novelists” (121). Admittedly, this so-called psychological time correlates with Woolf’s own observations on what she calls “moments of being” and it is easy to understand that scholars have pointed out Bergsonian influences in Woolf’s work, even though she herself said she never had read anything by Bergson (Banfield, 49). Also, one should keep in mind the fact that some might argue that Bergson’s theories are not relevant today as he has faded into obscurity. But putting his theories in an historical context as next to the works of Virginia Woolf, he becomes valuable for this study in addition to the obvious fact that an essential part of Bergson’s philosophy is time and how one perceives it.

Additionally, in this essay, I will relate to a recent study of *To the Lighthouse* by philosopher and literary critic Martin Hägglund which exemplifies a concern for time and its destructiveness; Hägglund calls this newly coined experience of human life as “chronolibido” (8). Simply put, his theory of “chronolibido” is described as an “investment in survival” (13) since time is not forgiving, and we will all be forgotten under the veil of time. This resonates well with *To the Lighthouse* as it was written at the beginning of the twentieth century – “the age of anxiety”, in the aftermath of the First World War. In fact, the angst brought about by the Great War is a major subject throughout the novel. For instance, the first part, “The Window” depicts a pre-war world. Then the war begins in “Time Passes” and has a great impact on the characters of the novel and the world around them. Lastly, Woolf depicts the post-war world and the ravages of war in “The Lighthouse”.

The first chapter of this study will examine how three of the main characters perceive the passage of time as well as how they in turn choose to cope with it through different creative acts. Furthermore, the chapter will also explore how Woolf illustrates these experiences. Chapter two will revolve around the structure of the novel and the contrast between and depiction of subjective time as opposed to objective time, and how the shifting narrative focus helps her represent life in her art.

Chapter One: Time on the Mind

Woolf herself thought *To the Lighthouse* to be her most important novel which she wrote as an elegy after her own parent's death, and it is regarded as one of the most significant novels of the twentieth century. *To the Lighthouse* became famous for its “stream of consciousness” narrative that does not heavily rely on any omniscient narrator or long descriptive passages. Hence, the representations of events that traditionally made up a story were not of importance to Woolf; what mattered to her was the impression these events made on the characters that experience them. Consequently, the narrative becomes rather complex as it interweaves the thoughts and reflections of several different characters as the point of view shifts between the inner minds of these characters. All of these shifts between points of views usually happen through flashback, associations of ideas and momentarily impressions that are in a continuous flux. For instance, literary critic Shiv Kumar said about Woolf’s narrative style that: “Of all the stream-of-consciousness novelists, Virginia Woolf alone seems to have presented a consistent and comprehensive treatment of time, time with her is almost a mode of perception, a filter which distils all phenomena before they are apprehended in their true significance and relationship” (64).

To the Lighthouse focuses on the Ramsays and their family visits to their summer home in the Hebrides west of the rocky coast of Scotland. Mrs. and Mr Ramsay bring along their eight children to the summer home, as well as a number of friends and acquaintances. The houseguests include Lily Briscoe, a young, aspiring painter who is struggling with her creative process. Furthermore, the houseguests also include the unsympathetic Charles Tansley who admires the academic work of Mr Ramsay, while disapproving the works of women, since according to him they can neither write nor paint. As for the structure of the novel, it consists of two sections each separated by a middle section, a corridor. The first part takes place during an afternoon that slips into evening; the second part describes the passing of ten years. Whereas the third section is a return to the lighthouse and takes place for the duration of a morning.

As mentioned earlier, the passage of time is a central theme in *To the Lighthouse*, as past, present and future are all happening at the same time – time is simultaneous. And most of the characters in the novel are in some ways obsessed with the concept of time, such as, the perception of it as well as its destructiveness.

For instance, Mrs. Ramsay cannot help but notice how the present moment becomes the past; therefore, she is looking for bits and pieces in the external world to ground her in the moment. But she is also preoccupied with creating “daily little miracles” (TTL, 176) by bringing people together for example, through hosting dinner parties and engaging in matchmaking as she encourages people to go out with each other. Her husband, on the other hand, is obsessed with the future, and especially the future of his career. Mr. Ramsay is preoccupied with predicting whether or not he will be remembered for his work in the future.

One key aspect to analyse the perception of time in *To the Lighthouse*, is the previously mentioned concept of “moments of being”. That can be described as a sudden sensation that hits one like a surging tidal wave from nowhere, and, for the duration of these rare moments, one becomes alive, and fully aware of one’s immediate surroundings as well as aware of one’s place in history (Gilles, 109). Woolf describes these sensations in her autobiographical essay *A Sketch of the Past*, as an unexpected shock from which she derives a philosophy:

From this I reach what might be called a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we - I mean all human beings - are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock. (MB, 67)

For instance, Woolf refers to how she has one of these shocks as a child while she is fighting with her brother Thoby on the lawn. “We were pommelling each other with our fists” (MB, 71). And at that point in time she becomes aware of the moment: “just as I raised my fist to hit him, I felt: why hurt another person? I dropped my hand instantly, and stood there, and let him beat me” (MB, 71). And then she describes how she had a sudden sensation out of nowhere: “it was a feeling of hopeless sadness. It was as if I became aware of something terrible; and of my own powerlessness. I slunk off alone, feeling horribly depressed” (MB, 71). Similarly, Woolf recounts another one of these sensory experiences from her childhood, and describes it as the following:

Then, for no reason that I know about, there was a sudden violent shock [...] I was looking at the flower-bed by the front door; “That is the whole”, I said. I was looking at a plant with a

spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower. (MB, 71)

Not only are these moments described as being ecstatic but they are also agonizing at times. The first example infuses a feeling of hopelessness in comparison to the second example that instils a feeling of contentment and joy. Woolf's own comment on these sudden sensations she experiences is that "two of these moments ended in a state of despair. The other ended, on the contrary, in a state of satisfaction" (MB, 71). These pressure points with the pulsating substance of real are events where one becomes fully aware of the present moment and the mysteries of life seem to unravel as one is in contact with the essence of things. That is to say, Woolf's moments of being are instances of pure duration, in terms of Bergson's philosophy, for the reason that past and present appears to coexist and one is also aware of that (Gilles, 119-120). During these temporal moments, the veil of our symbolic fictions is lifted, as what she calls the cotton wool of everyday life tears open, and that is what one should seek out to depict in art (MB, 73). Consequently, it could be said that life fully occurs in each individual moment, and to be able to represent life in art, one would need to represent the moment. As we shall see, Woolf attempts to depict the moment as it is experienced by the perceiving mind, which is repeated throughout the novel.

Furthermore, the second key aspect to analysing *To the Lighthouse* is by using Martin Hägglund's previously mentioned theory of "chronolibido". Hägglund's theory of "chronolibido" derives from a philosophical tradition spanning from Plato to psychoanalysis, which connects our fear of death with our desire to overcome the grasp of time and become eternal. On the contrary, Hägglund claims that this desire for permanence is not about longing for immortality per se; instead, it is about the desire for survival (Hägglund 13-14). Thus, "chronophilia" and "chronophobia", desire and fear of time, form the opposite sides of "chronolibido" (9). Furthermore, Hägglund argues that modernism "continues to be read in accordance with a desire for immortality" (2). However, that is not the case according to Hägglund, who claims that the fear of death and time is not about transcending life, but investment in life:

The key argument here concerns the co-implication of *chronophobia* and *chronophilia*. The fear of time and death does not stem from a metaphysical desire to transcend temporal life. On the contrary, it is generated by the investment in a life that can be lost. It is because one is

attached to a temporal being (chronophilia) that one fears losing it (chronophobia). Care in general, I argue depends on such a double bind. On the one hand, care is necessarily Chronophilic, since only something that is subject to the possibility of loss – hence temporal – can give one reason to care. On the other hand, care is necessarily chronophobic, since one cannot care about something without fearing what may happen to it. (Hägglund, 9)

So we cannot wish for or care for anything without a prior awareness that nothing will last, “it is because of temporal finitude that one cares about life in the first place” (Hägglund, 8). Therefore, it is the temporality of the moment that creates the desire to crystallise it (Hägglund 57). So, when we seek to transcend time, we do so because our time-bound lives can be lost. Hence, I believe that Hägglund’s notion of “chronolibido” can be used to explain the character’s struggle in *To the Lighthouse* to make meaning out of life by crystallising the moment, whether it is in the form of art as Lily’s painting, Mrs. Ramsey’s dinner parties or as Woolf herself tries to depict life as real as possible in her own writing.

To begin with, Mr. Ramsay is put down by the weight of his own inescapable demise. He experiences what Hägglund calls “chronolibido” and it is triggered by the awareness that nothing will last. Thus, Mr. Ramsay becomes aware of his own mortality and the temporality of life, and as a result he looks for a way to make an investment in survival. His anxiety for the future materialises in the following passage:

And his fame lasts how long? It is permissible even for a dying hero to think before he dies how men will speak of him hereafter. His fame lasts perhaps two thousand years. And what are two thousand years? (asked Mr Ramsay ironically, staring at the hedge). What, indeed, if you look from a mountain top down the long wastes of the ages? The very stone one kicks with one’s boot will outlast Shakespeare. His own little light would shine, not very brightly, for a year or two, and would then be merged in some bigger light, and that in a bigger still. (TTL, 41)

Mr. Ramsay becomes aware of his place in history and that he cannot find any comfort in knowledge, as he questions his academic aspirations, wondering whether or not they will last through the ages. He is also conscious of the fact that nothing is permanent, not even the works of the great Shakespeare, as life is in a constant flux, clearly he “is obsessed by the durability of human effort, art (Shakespeare), and of course his own work” (Caracciolo, 255). So he attempts to capture the moment through his academic reputation and writing, which he wants to live on beyond his own life; therefore, it is only logical that he seeks to make an investment in survival

by devoting time to his academic work and reputation. “A temporal being is constantly ceasing to be and can only perpetuate itself by leaving traces of the past for the future” (Hägglund, 6). Thus he will leave his legacy in form of his academic achievements so that the memory of him lives on, because “[...] to crystalize the moment is not to render it eternal but to record it so it may *live on* in time” (Hägglund, 57).

Mrs. Ramsay, on the other hand, is concerned about her children growing old; as she has a sudden shock, followed by the desire to crystallise James’ and Cam’s childhood:

Oh, but she never wanted James to grow a day older or Cam either. These two she would have liked to keep for ever just as the way they were, demons of wickedness, angels of delight, never to see them grow up into long-legged monsters. Nothing made up for the loss. (TTL p.64)

Obviously, Mrs. Ramsay experiences “chronolibido” in this moment, as she is aware of the destructiveness of time, asking herself “why must they grow up and lose it all?” (TTL, 67). Therefore, Mrs. Ramsay wants to freeze this instant in time. Because it is “the temporality of the moment” (Hägglund, 56) that precipitates her “desire to crystallise it” (Ibid, 56). She wishes to prevent time from taking her children from her. One way for her to deal with the knowledge of the inescapable end, is to bring people together, that is her way of dealing with it, “making Minta marry Paul Rayley” (TTL, 67). In fact, she muses on how she is driven by saying “that people must marry; people must have children” (TTL, 67). So, this relates to Hägglund’s idea of chronolibido, how one makes an investment in survival for the future to come. In addition, Hägglund points out, that the most obvious moment of Mr Ramsay’s efforts to halt time is in the first part of the *To the Lighthouse*, where she brings family and friends together during the dinner scene, and contemplates on moment as something that will endure time (59). Thus, further reinforcing the bringing people together is Mrs. Ramsay’s way of dealing with the passing of time.

Furthermore, Mrs. Ramsay is also aware of the destructive force of nature and time as she muses on how transient life is, just like a rainbow. With the sudden realisation that nature will take back what it rightfully owns and the fact that the island inevitably will slip into the sea and become devoured by nature as time passes, she has a shock, much like those Virginia Woolf describes from her own childhood:

but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow – this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror. (TTL, 20)

These moments may seem insignificant and ordinary; however, they are not as Woolf has a talent for capturing life as it is: “but simple and trivial as are the ideas which arise one after the other in Mrs. Ramsay's consciousness, they are at the same time essential and significant” (Auerbach, 537). This is in accord with Woolf's own view of art and that one should set out to capture an “ordinary mind on an ordinary day” (MF, 2089). In addition, as pointed out by Hägglund earlier, the chronophilic hope for and chronophobic fear of what may come is what makes that moment important; consequently, Mrs. Ramsay's moments of being are not insignificant on the contrary, they are meaningful.

Lily, similarly to Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, is also aware of the destructive nature of time. Therefore, she too sets out to crystallise the moment or “to make of the moment something permanent” (TTL, 176). The following passage describes Lily's view of art as a device to crystallise the moment so that it may survive the grasp of time:

One must keep on looking without for a second relaxing the intensity of emotion, the determination not to be put off, not to be bamboozled. One must hold the scene—so—in a vise and let nothing come in and spoil it. One wanted, she thought dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time, It's a miracle, it's an ecstasy. (TTL, 218)

That is to say, when Lily experiences a moment of being, she seeks to capture it in a painting, because, similar to Mr. and Mrs Ramsay, she recognises – a moment that is in the process of being lost, never to return again therefore one needs to “hold the scene”. Thus, Lily is also struggling against the destructiveness of time as she is determined to crystallise these passing moments by ways of her art. Through her painting she is trying to freeze time in a crystal of essence, only to understand how fragile that crystal is (Caracciolo p. 275). Furthermore, as Lily reflects on the inescapable force of time, she comes to the insight that eventually her art will be destroyed:

Quickly, as if she was recalled by something over there, she turned to her canvas. There it was – her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at

something. It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? She asked herself, taking up her brush again. (TTL, 255-256)

In fact, as Hägglund points out, there is a double bind to Lily's aesthetic ambition to crystallise the moment that is inherent in any act of living on (59). Through her painting the "passing and flowing" (TTL, 176) of time is supposed to be "struck in to stability" (Ibid, 176) and preserved in the moment. Yet, she is conflicted as "Yet the very form of preservation is itself temporal" (Hägglund, 59). The spatial painting that crystallises a temporal moment, may only remain for a future that eventually will obliterate it (Hägglund, 59). Lily is obviously aware of the fact that her art will be destroyed as time passes. She acknowledges this when she contemplates on how her painting will end up hung in an attic somewhere, forgotten in time. "It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed" (TTL, 225). Lily Briscoe is clearly aware of the moment, and its essence, but she does not know how to represent it (Gilles, 121). She struggles just like Woolf with how to depict life in art, and it is not until the end of the novel that Lily finishes her painting, "It was done; it was finished" (226) and "I have had my vision" (226), corresponding to how Woolf herself had finished writing *To the Lighthouse*.

What we have seen so far is that Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay as well as Lily Briscoe share the knowledge that life and the world around them are transient – that nothing last forever, that they are living on borrowed time. We have seen that Mr. and Mrs Ramsay as well as Lily Briscoe all employ different strategies for making their lives significant and meaningful as they seek to crystallise these temporal moments of being. Finally, we have seen that Woolf manages to capture the "ordinary mind on an ordinary day" (MF 2089), as an attempt to depict life as real as possible. This, she accomplishes by incorporating her own concept of "moments of being" and allowing the characters in the novel to experience those moments.

Chapter Two: Time Passes

While the first chapter addressed the subjective experience of time, e.g. how the characters experienced time within their minds and reflected on the passing of time, this chapter will focus on the objective passage of time. One might argue that the middle section, “Time Passes”, is representing objective time, for the reason that it essentially just states that time in fact just passes, because there are few elaborate passages dealing with the character’s inner thoughts. While the first part and the last part “The Window” and “The Lighthouse” arguably is representing subjective time where the narrative jumps between the inner thoughts of multiple persons.

The structure of the novel is what sets it apart from previous literary works. Its structure consists of two sections, not more than a few hours in duration, separated by a middle section in brackets that contains the events of ten years, consequently compressed to only a handful of pages (Gilles, 120). What we have seen in the previous chapter is that *To the Lighthouse* is dominated by “inner processes, that is, movements within the consciousness of individual personages” (Auerbach, 529). However, there is one exception and that is in the middle passage, where the “inner processes” takes a step back in comparison to the “outer processes” which then become central. By that I mean that she, to an extent, abandons the main characters and their inner thoughts. Instead, she focuses on the passing of time and the decay of the summerhouse through an unknown third person narrator and that contrast shows the significance of those themes to the modern artist.

As a result, “Time Passes” expresses a well thought out “Elaboration of the contrast between “exterior” and “interior” time” (Auerbach, 538). Because, Woolf had struggled with the issues of representation of the split between subject and object in previous works, and she believed that to depict life as real as possible she had to develop a new style of writing (Gilles, 108). We have already seen part of that style in the form of a narrative mode, known as stream of consciousness. What is interesting about the middle section is that there are no elaborate depictions of the characters’ doings and whereabouts; Woolf has excluded that almost entirely in “Time Passes”. Instead the passing of time becomes a spatial matter, whereas its effect on inanimate objects becomes central. For instance, spatial objects such as household items “the bare legs of tables, saucepans and china already furred, tarnished, cracked (TTL, 141), faded clothes “a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some

faded skirts and coats in wardrobes” (141), as well as descriptions of the surroundings, the interior and exterior of the summer house make up almost all of the text in “Time Passes”. Even though, there are external spatial elements in *To the Lighthouse* such as “the window” and “the lighthouse”, they only occasionally appear between the movements within the consciousness of the characters in the first and second part of the novel. In “Time Passes,” however, the objects appearing almost exclusively are external spatial elements. In fact, most of the story-time in “Time Passes” is devoted to the external world and inanimate objects in contrast to the internal world, and the consciousness of the characters, as we can see in the following passage:

Night after night, summer and winter, the torment of storms, the arrow-like stillness of fine weather, held their court without interference. Listening (had there been any one to listen to) from the upper rooms of the empty house only gigantic chaos streaked with lightning could have been heard tumbling and tossing, as the wind and waves disported themselves like the amorphous bulks of leviathans whose brows are pierced by no light of reason, and mounted one on top of another, and lunged and plunged in the darkness of the daylight (for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together) in idiot games, until it seemed as if the universe were battling and tumbling, in brute confusion and wanton lust aimlessly by itself. (TTL, 147)

Evidently, “Time Passes” does not express the same sort of phenomenological concern for time as we have seen in the first chapter of this essay for the reason that there is very little human activity going on in it. Here, we are only informed about the passing of day, changing of seasons and the passing weather. Thus, one might draw the conclusion that Woolf’s use of shifting temporal rhythm vividly conveys the broader sense of the instability and change that the characters strive to comprehend in the narrative, and, by doing so, it captures the fleeting nature of reality that exists only within and as a collection of the various subjective experiences of reality. As a result, she is close to mirroring life as it is. Woolf is experimenting with the narrative sequence “in order to create the impression of life’s chaos bounded by the restraints imposed on it by the rational mind” (Gilles, 120). Because, “Again, earlier writers, especially from the end of the nineteenth century on, had produced narrative works which on the whole undertook to give us an extremely subjective, individualistic, and often eccentrically aberrant impression of reality, and which neither sought nor were able to ascertain anything objective or generally valid in regard to it” (Auerbach, 536).

In the words of Hägglund, Woolf depicts the relentless negativity of time that destroys the moments to which it gives rise, as in the middle section of *To the Lighthouse* (56) because, in “Time Passes” Virginia Woolf almost exclusively focuses on the passage of time in its natural form in contrast to its personal form, as mentioned in the introduction. Thus, the subjective impressions received by various individuals are not as important in middle section, at least not to the same extent as in the first and the last part where the subjective experiences are central. For instance, in the middle section, it becomes clear that time passes invisibly, but it passes nonetheless and “eventually nature will engulf the humanized world of the island, but there will be no one there to witness its final triumph” (Caracciolo, 255).

Furthermore, the pursuit to capture life as real as possible is enhanced in the middle section of *To the Lighthouse*, which could be seen as further literary advancement for modernist writer. Because, the middle part is objective in its presentation as Woolf focuses on the effects of the passing of time, and how it affects the house and its contents rather than human development and emotions. So, Woolf abandons the main characters and their inner thoughts. Instead, she focuses on the passing of time and death through a third person narration and shows the pertinences of such themes to a modern artist.

For example, human life is described as incidental in “Time Passes” and Mrs. Ramsay’s death challenges the conservative Victorian literary tradition by refusing to indulge in sentimentality. Her death is presented in just a sentence enclosed by brackets: “[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty]” (TTL, 140). Woolf is sparse with her words as she is informing the reader about the death of Mrs. Ramsey. “Placing her death in parenthesis makes this central event in the novel only one incident in the unceasing flow of life” (Gilles, 121). By doing so Woolf underscores the primacy as well the ravages of time. We know from before that the significant events of a narrative are usually given in detail; they are decelerated, whereas less important events on the other hand are accelerated. However, what Woolf is doing here is quite the opposite; she takes the most significant event of the novel and compresses it to one sentence, since “[s]ometimes the effect of shock or irony is produced by summing up briefly the most central event and rendering trivial events in detail” (Rimmon-Kenan, 56). Another example of deceleration is the telling of Prue’s death, which is also told in

brackets: “[Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said. They said nobody deserved happiness more]” (TTL, 144). Additional examples are Andrew’s death as well as Mr. Carmichael’s publication of his first volume of poetry. All of these events are presented in parentheses subordinated to the descriptions of the summerhouse’s decay, the passing of the seasons, and the flux of time. Thus, reinforcing the notion of how time passes out of hand in the perpetual flow of life in other words, we as humans create significance; nature and time hold all events and creatures as the same – ephemeral and trivial (Gilles, 121).

As we have seen in this chapter, Woolf exemplifies a more objective approach to the passing of time in contrast to the subjective experience that was examined in the first chapter of this study. Evidently, her juxtaposition of internal subjective time and external objective time between the different sections of *To the Lighthouse* create an innovative twist to the construction of the modernist narrative.

Conclusion

This study has examined the representation and perception of time in Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*. This has resulted in a demonstration of how Woolf in a way transformed the art of the novel to convey the complexities of temporal experience and depict life as real as possible. We have seen in the study that one of Woolf's fundamental ideas regarding her writing was to examine an "ordinary mind on an ordinary day" (2089).

For the purpose of this close reading of *To the Lighthouse*, I have used a narratological approach and, to present the central argument in this study, I have ensured to exemplify how some of the main characters are conscious of the temporality of life and the destruction of it brought on by the passing of time. In turn I have also shown how they choose to cope with it by means of different creative outlets. This study has pointed out that the knowledge of one's children growing old, one's artwork being forgotten or one's academic reputation living on, are all signs that, in the end, time wins the fight and will bring about the demise of the Ramseys and their friends. Because those moments in life are fleeting, one seeks to keep them as a memory by crystallising them, investing in one's survival so that one, to some extent, may live on in time.

Furthermore, this study has explored the link between time, modernism and the structure of *To the Lighthouse* in terms of Virginia Woolf's notion of "moments of being" as an integral part of life, since the essential idea in *To the Lighthouse* is that, if one seeks to represent life, one needs to represent the moment, since life occurs fully in each individual moment. By doing so Woolf is able to reflect life as real as possible in her writing.

This study, then, has given an insight regarding the passage of time, how it is perceived and the life-affirming role it plays in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. In her work, Woolf manages to penetrate numerous issues that are at the core of the human existence, because she sees life as it really is, and she captures that in *To the Lighthouse* without any self-deceit, which is what makes it so compelling.

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