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A Study of Time on *To the Lighthouse* by
Virginia Woolf

MIREIA CALABUIG VARGAS



UNIVERSITAT ROVIRA I VIRGILI
DEPARTAMENT D'ESTUDIS ANGLESES I ALEMANYS

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TUTORA: Dra. Nerea Tera Faba

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Abstract

This project is centered on the novel *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf and how it portrays and expresses time through its three parts. The aim of this final dissertation project is to study if Virginia Woolf was influenced by modernism when writing the novel. The dissertation is divided into two main sections. First, there is a theoretical framework in which I briefly talk about Woolf's life and give a background of modernism. Moreover, in this section, I explain the characteristics of modernist literature and how time was portrayed in this literary movement, and what links Virginia Woolf to modernism. In the second part of the dissertation, I briefly summarize the novel, and then, I proceed to start the analysis of time. I analyze and study in more detail time through the three parts of the novel; "The Window", "Time Passes", and "The Lighthouse". After the analysis of time in the novel compared to modernism, I have come to the conclusion that the writing process of *To the Lighthouse* was influenced by modernist techniques.

Keywords: modernism, time, literature, *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf.

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And finally, I would like to dedicate this final dissertation to my grandparents, Pepita and Carles. I hope you are proud of me up there. Especially you, “iaia”. I know you have been next to me through everything I have come through since you left, you are always there. You would be my number one supporter if you were here. This is for you.

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1. Introduction

There is a quote that Mrs. Ramsay repeats from a song in *To the Lighthouse*¹ while being in the companion of her husband, Mr. Ramsay, that resonated within me when I read the novel for the first time, and that it is also in harmony with one of the main objectives of this dissertation:

And all the lives we ever lived
And all the lives to be,
Are all full of trees and changing leaves

(Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 96)

The feeling that *To the Lighthouse* left me was similar to the meaning of this quote from Mrs. Ramsay. The novel gives the impression that life, like a tree, is always changing. There are times when the tree blooms its flowers and leaves but with the passing of time, they change their color, whiter, and finally fall.

At the end of this final dissertation, who read this would have been through the different techniques that both Virginia Woolf and modernists used to portray time. Therefore, the reader will be able to identify the similarities and differences between Woolf's novel and modernist literature with regards to the depiction of time.

In short, one of the aims of this dissertation is to reflect on something that Reid² remarks in this Virginia Woolf article, "perception in her novels is fluid, as is the world she presents" (Reid, 2022). This quote recalls the introduction of this project where I talked about one of the main important aspects of Woolf's writing and one of the objects of study of this essay, the treatment of time.

¹ Woolf, V. (1927). *To the Lighthouse* (2008 ed.). Oxford University Press.

² Reid, P. (2022, March 24). *Virginia Woolf*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://t.ly/OrVK>

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To continue, I am going to proceed to explain more in detail the objectives of this dissertation.

A Study of Time on *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf

1.1. Objectives

The main objective of my final dissertation is to analyze time in the novel, *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf, and compare it to the modernists' techniques to get to the conclusion if Woolf was influenced by modernism or not.

As it is an experimental novel, there are different factors that are important when constructing the atmosphere and, in a sense, the fictional world where the story of the Ramsay's takes place. In addition, one goes through the passing of time almost without noticing as Woolf creates an effect of realism throughout the narration process.

The novel begins on a September evening in the first part of *To the Lighthouse*, "The Window", then ten years are briefly described in a short but intense second part, "Time Passes", and the novel finishes with "The Lighthouse" that narrates some important events that create a sense of closure set on a September morning in the summer house ten years apart from the start of the novel.

These remarkable asymmetries between the time spans covered in the different parts of *To the Lighthouse* are especially relevant to study the time setting in Woolf, and to analyze the differences and connections that can occur between *To the Lighthouse* and modernist literature.

Therefore, as mentioned before, the main question posed at the beginning of this dissertation is resolved through the analysis of examples and thoughts of various literary critics, so that the reader should have a clear vision of the difference and similarities between Woolf's novel and modernist literature.

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1.2. Methodology

This dissertation takes a close look at the novel *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf, in other words, I have read the book in detail in order to extract all the different examples of the techniques and strategies used to depict time.

The process followed consists of four main parts. The first one is the first read of the novel to get in contact with it and to familiarize myself with Virginia Woolf's writing. The second one is the research of different publications, articles, and books related to the novel, *To the Lighthouse*, to the author, Virginia Woolf, and to the other object of analysis, the modernist movement. The third part is a rereading of the novel extracting all the examples of the strategies used by Woolf to treat time in the novel. And finally, the fourth part is the analysis and comparison of the examples found in *To the Lighthouse* with the typical portrayal of time in modernist literature.

This process of work has led me to come to a conclusion about the influence of modernism on Virginia Woolf's novel that I explain at the end of this dissertation.

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2. Theoretical framework

To the Lighthouse was published in 1927 during modernist times. As Panthea Reid says in an article about Woolf in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*³, Virginia Woolf, “determined in 1908 to ‘re-form’ the novel by creating a holistic form embracing aspects of life that were ‘fugitive’ from the Victorian novel” (Reid, 2022). This is how the novelist stated at an early age her willing to write differently from what was relevant at that moment.

It is important to mention that the entire theoretical framework related to Virginia Woolf's life has been extracted from the article mentioned above, *Virginia Woolf, Encyclopedia Britannica* (Reid, 2022).

Adeline Virginia Stephen, Virginia Woolf's original full name, was born on January 1882. She was part of a Victorian family, and her father was a notorious editor while her mother had connections within society and artistic surroundings.

Virginia Woolf's family usually went to the Cornwall coast in summer which created a contrast between the life in the city of London and the life Woolf had in the countryside. The separation between these two different worlds made her feel a sense of liberation from what she lived in the city. However, these trips to the Cornwall coast ended when Woolf's mother died at an early age. Woolf overcame several deaths through her teenage years that caused her a depression that she carried through most of her life.

In 1908, she participated in the gatherings of writers and artists of London known as the Bloomsbury group. It was during these meetings when Woolf decided to move on from the established Victorian ideas and techniques, such as materialism, idealism, the moral purpose, and industrialization, to write whatever she wanted, freely without following any preestablished rules.

³ Reid, P. (2022, March 24). *Virginia Woolf*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://t.ly/OrVK>

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Later on, in 1912, she married Leonard Woolf⁴ (1880-1969), and worked on the writing of her first novel *The Voyage Out* (1915). During this period, Virginia Woolf's mental health was not good as she felt that she was not achieving what she was supposed to in her position as a woman and as a writer.

Woolf's mental health kept deteriorating while she wrote personal diaries, reviews, and novels. However, after living away from London in the Cornwall coast, in 1924, Woolf came back to her residence in Bloomsbury and published her major works (Reid, 2022). She published *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando: A Biography* (1927), *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and *The Waves* (1931).

Following more deaths in her family and the Second World War, her mental health went worse and as Reid says, "Woolf found herself unable to write" (Reid, 2022). And on March 28, 1941, Woolf committed suicide.

Furthermore, after this brief introduction to Virginia Woolf, I will continue with the theoretical framework of my dissertation by introducing modernist literature.

2.1. Modernist literature

For a better understanding of how modernism portrayed time, first I am going to briefly explain the most basic and principal ideas of the modernist movement.

As it is mentioned in the article *Modernist Literature Guide: Understanding Literary Modernism*⁵ (Masterclass, 2022), there are five main ideas that form modernism literature; experimentation, individualism, multiple perspectives, free verse, and literary devices. Now I am going to briefly explain these concepts; experimentation means that

⁴ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2021). *Leonard Woolf*. Encyclopaedia Britannica. <https://t.ly/E5Nev>

⁵ Masterclass, E. (2022, February 25). *Modernist Literature Guide: Understanding Literary Modernism*. Masterclass Articles. <https://t.ly/goHs>

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modernist writers broke with the conventional rules of narration, including nonlinear texts, stream of consciousness, etc. In addition to this, modernist focused on human beings, rather than on the plots of their stories by making use of individualism. They also created narratives from the point of view of different characters which is known multiple perspectives and abandoned the traditional structure to write free verse. Furthermore, some of the literary devices used by modernist writers were juxtaposition, absurdity, nonlinear narratives, language with multiple meanings and symbolism as I am going to talk about in the following paragraph.

Moreover, as Josh Patrick says in *The Main Characteristics of Modernist Literature*⁶ (Patrick, 2022) and I mentioned above, another of the main characteristic of this movement was the symbolic dimension of its works, “the modernist writers infused objects, people, places and events with significant meanings” (Patrick, 2022).

Victorian movement tried to idealize life instead of depicting it from a realistic point of view, crafted characters that were mostly plain, and the narrative was very simple according to Jesse Matz on his article “The Novel” on *A Companion to modernist Literature and Culture*⁷ (Matz, 2006). Whereas modernist writers found inspiration in *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-1927) where Marcel Proust uses the stream of consciousness to go more in-depth into the memories of the main character being well known for the strategies used to depict the crumbs of a madeleine with warm tea. Moreover, the idea that time is fluctuating by Henri Bergson and the technique of Proust were a big influence on those writers who wanted to disrupt from the established.

⁶ Patrick, J. (2022). “*The Main Characteristics of Modernist Literature*”. The Pen and Pad. <https://t.ly/ry4c>

⁷ Matz, J. (2006). The Novel. In Lavoine, S. (Eds.), *A Companion to modernist Literature and Culture*. (pp. 215-225) <https://t.ly/AleI>

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The combination of these characteristics is what defined the modernist movement. Modernism started in the late nineteenth century and more or less ended in the mid-twentieth century (Masterclass, 2022). According to both articles mentioned above, industrialization and the First World War influenced writers to change their writing style and become more “emotional and experimental” (Masterclass, 2022).

Global society underwent major changes in a relatively short period of time and writers reacted to these events by disrupting the previous literary ideas to create new ones according to this global change.

Looking at modernist characteristic ideas, writers made the individual the center of the universe, and as Patrick says, “the individual is more interesting than society” (Patrick, 2022). How the individual can challenge every adversity that has to face and adapt to all the changes that constantly occur impressed modernist writers. This individuality also made writers want to experiment with the forms of writing both in poetry and prose. Modernists disrupted from all the conventional techniques and strategies to use their free imaginations and be completely creative. Moreover, modernists wrote from the point of view of different characters to emphasize the individual and add more perspectives to the storyline. Consciousness should also be included in this list of characteristics of modernism as it became one of the main strategies to make the individual relevant. The reader gets to know every thought and feeling of the character without any restriction as part of the narrative technique used in modernist writings.

The importance of the individual made writers use distinctive strategies to stand out the characters of their writings. For example, stream of consciousness, internal monologue, emotions on the extreme, unreliable narrators, epiphanies, irony, and absurdity.

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To continue with the theoretical framework of modernism, I am going to briefly introduce how modernists treated time and space in their writings.

2.2. Time in modernism

The French philosopher Henri Bergson said in his book *Creative evolution* (1907), “Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future, and which swells as it advances. And as the past grows without ceasing, so also there is no limit to its preservation”⁸ (Dettmar, 2006) which modernists took as a guide to work on the concept of time in their writings.

Bergson influenced many modernist writers with his idea about the transition passage from past to present. The philosopher called that the *durée*⁹ (Byrtusová, 2020), he saw time as a bridge from the present moment to the future. Emphasizing the present, the duration of things, and the ordinary, transforming daily life into what was most important to Bergson.

As mentioned above, in the modernist movement writers gave much importance to the individual, and the techniques they used were to emphasize the present moment, what the character felt through the narration, and whatever they felt or thought without any filter, using the stream of consciousness. For this reason, the treatment of time is really relevant in this movement.

Moreover, while wanting to detach themselves from Victorian ideas, the representation of the individual consciousness made modernist artists be more aware of

⁸ Dettmar, K.J.H. (2006). Introduction. In Lavoine, S. (Eds.), *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*. (pp. 1-5) <https://t.ly/AleI>

⁹ Byrtusová, K. (2020). *Perception of Time in the Novels of Virginia Woolf*. <http://t.ly/7uLX>.

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the passing of time (Vieira, 1989). Therefore, writers started to be concerned about the idea of death and how fast time passes.

Vieira says in the publication *Henri Bergson's Theory of Time and Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse and The Waves*¹⁰, “time arises the inexorability of death. This is one of the reasons why the problem of time bears so powerfully on human emotions” (Vieira, 1989). That is to say that writers became much more aware of the inevitable death and relied on the character’s emotions to express themselves and manipulate time as they wanted.

Another vital concept related to the modernist treatment of time is “chronotope” created by Mikhail Bakhtin. The philosopher claimed that both time and space coexisted together in literature. Time and space are always present either in the storyline or in the character’s narration and most times both are fused together in one same entity.

Another modernist concept is as Kevin J.H Dettmar mentions in his introductory article to *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*, the “epiphany”, a word termed by James Joyce, “a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or the gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself” (Dettmar, 2006) which modernists writers used several times to express these “moments of being” (Dettmar, 2006).

In conclusion, as Pamela L. Caughie mentions in her article “Virginia Woolf: *To the Lighthouse*”¹¹ also included in *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*, modernists rejected realism because their aim was to depict a “‘truer’ reality” (Caughie, 2006).

¹⁰ Vieira, J. R. (1989). *Henri Bergson's Theory of Time and Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse and The Waves*. <https://t.ly/ve63>

¹¹ Caughie, P.L. (2006). Virginia Woolf: *To the Lighthouse*. In Lavoine, S. (Eds.), *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*. (pp. 486-497) <https://t.ly/AleI>

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2.3. Virginia Woolf and modernism

The geographical context in which Virginia Woolf lived indicates, as Whitworth says in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*¹², that she might have met some modernist philosophers or writers even though she never read Henri Bergson. However, the meetings in the Bloomsbury group and having met Sigmund Freud, stimulated Woolf for a change of writing, to start using experimental techniques, such as the stream of consciousness, individualism, symbolism, multiple narratives, or juxtaposition.

Virginia Woolf rejected the Victorian idea of time and realism (Whitworth, 2000) as she was born at the end of Victorian times and at the beginning of the modernist movement. Woolf also gives a stately vision of the city while the characters of her novels live in the countryside. In other words, in Woolf's fictional world, relevant and pleasant events take place in the summer house where the characters are safe, while tragedies and death occur outside the isle where they spent their vacations. In a sense, the rejection of Victorian techniques brought Virginia Woolf closer to modernism.

Moreover, Woolf has an intricate way to see time. She used perception fused with memories, therefore, she mingled past and present. And, as mentioned by Michael Whitworth, these ideas of "rejection of the linear form" (Whitworth, 2000) would be associated with Woolf's criticism of patriarchy.

The conjunction of all these techniques in Woolf's works led to a different use of time as writers of her period were used to. For example, Woolf writes her characters as possible to reconcile with the past as well as live in the present.

¹² Whitworth, M. (2000). Virginia Woolf and modernism. In Roe, S. & Sellers S (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*. (pp. 146-163). Cambridge University Press. <https://t.ly/YQNL>

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Virginia Woolf depicts time as a flux along the same lines as Henri Bergson¹³ (Vieira, 1989a). In addition, John Graham¹⁴ (Vieira, 1989b) says that Woolf's concern with time, accentuates her consideration towards memories, changes, and the idea of death, *To the Lighthouse* contains multiple examples of this attention to the temporal dimension of her works, such as the ten years apart through the middle part of the novel, "Time Passes".

One of the narrative techniques most frequently used by Woolf to convey the flux of time, as Bergson said, was the stream of consciousness, which is the flow of the characters' thoughts without any filter within the text. This literary device allowed Virginia Woolf to denote both time and space on her fictional narration. Along with this idea, it is relevant to mention that Woolf also used the stream of consciousness to illustrate the ordinary through the elements of time and space as Frost mentions in the publication cited above, "*Her feeling had come too late*": *Emotion and Time in Virginia Woolf's Modernism*¹⁵.

Furthermore, as Frost explains (Frost, 2021), Virginia Woolf's writing revolves around the association of "time-space-emotion" (Frost, 2021) as the same publication says, "In Woolf's novel (. . .) time and place shape emotion" (Frost, 2021). Proof of it is the original way in which Woolf structures her novels to add a stream of consciousness and at the same time portray time and space.

Woolf also uses symbolism in her writing, for instance, the lighthouse, which is idealized by Cam and James during their childhood. Ramsay's children associated the

¹³ Vieira, J. R. (1989a). *Henri Bergson's Theory of Time and Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse and The Waves*. <https://t.ly/ve63>

¹⁴ Vieira, J. R. (1989b). *Henri Bergson's Theory of Time and Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse and The Waves*. <https://t.ly/ve63>

¹⁵ Frost, M. (2021). "*Her feeling had come too late*": *Emotion and Time in Virginia Woolf's modernism*. <https://t.ly/fnHi>

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lighthouse with the idea of exploration and discovery as children, and also with the opportunity of spending time with their father, but once that goal to reach the lighthouse is accomplished as teenagers, the illusion of the children vanishes. Cam and James liked the idea and the memories they had about the lighthouse, but not the reality of the physical tower itself. Therefore, the lighthouse is used by Woolf to express symbolically her rejection of the Victorian era materialism.

Up to this point, I have explained the theoretical framework of the dissertation and now, I continue with the analytical part of the project with a brief and general introduction to the novel *To the Lighthouse*.

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3. *To the Lighthouse*

The novel begins on a September evening in the Ramsays' summer house in the Isle of Skye. The family has invited some friends over and one can experience the evening with them until the moment they have dinner and finally go to bed. Relations, memories, reflections, and emotions surface during the evening together in each one of the characters of the novel.

The second and middle part of the novel, "Time Passes", portrays ten years of the summer house without anyone going to visit it. Just the housekeeper, Mrs. McNab, comes and goes. Throughout these pages, Woolf uses brackets to explain significant events that occur to the Ramsays and their guests throughout these years, without interfering with the description of the effects of time on the house. The impersonal and cold style, devoid of all emotion of the notices given in between these brackets heavily contrasts with the poetic description of the passing of time in the house.

That is to realize that the flux of time continues no matter what happens, and the decay of the empty house continues even though important people have died and a war is taking place. For instance, the death of Mrs. Ramsay is announced between brackets but even though her role is central to the novel, the storyline does not stop.

As Josalva Vieira says in the publication *Henri Bergson's Theory of Time and Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse and The Waves*¹⁶ (Viera, 1989), "Time Passes" does not include concrete reference to time, such as dates, because there is nobody in the house, no human interference, so that the house continues its decay due to the action of the true protagonist of this section, the unstoppable passing of time.

¹⁶ Vieira, J. R. (1989). *Henri Bergson's Theory of Time and Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse and The Waves*. <https://t.ly/ve63>

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However, the protagonists of the last part of the novel, “The Lighthouse” are again the surviving members of the Ramsay family and some of their guests. This section brings the story together by finishing the circle that started in the first part of the novel, “The Window”. All storylines that were created on that particular September evening conclude in some way or another in this last part on a September morning.

The originality of this novel lies in the formal structure that Virginia Woolf devised to narrate these events. She wanted to create a novel shaped as a corridor as Jane Goldman explains in the article “*To the Lighthouse’s* Use of Language and Form” from the publication *The Cambridge Companion to To the Lighthouse*¹⁷ (2014) “in simple diagram ‘two blocks joined by a corridor’” (Goldman, 2014), in which the first and third part of the novel - the blocks - cover a short period of time in two lengthy sections, while the middle part, which links both, covers a whole decade in a few pages.

Moreover, as Goldman says, Woolf also experiments with time through the use of spatial juxtapositions, especially in the third part when describing two parallel actions: Lily finishing her portrait in the garden and Mr. Ramsay with Cam and James navigating on a boat to the lighthouse. Again, the author is playing with the flux of time and how it is perceived by the reader, both actions take place at the same time therefore, Woolf uses juxtaposition to fuse time and space in the same instant.

Also, Woolf does not give a clear reason for the Ramsays not visiting the summer house for ten years. According to Frost (Frost, 2021) Woolf might have wanted to express

¹⁷Goldman, J.. (2014). *To the Lighthouse’s* Use of Language and Form. In Pease, A. (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to To the Lighthouse*. (pp.30-44). Cambridge University Press. <https://t.ly/pf-t>

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how life is sometimes unexpected, as the Ramsays left their belongings there as if they were planning to come back any time.

Here is a brief summary of *To the Lighthouse* to contextualize the next sections of the dissertation:

On a September evening, the Ramsay's spend their time with some friends at their house on the Cornwall coast. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, their eight children Cam, James, Prue, Jasper, Andrew, Rose, Roger, and Nancy - and the family friends invited, Lily Briscoe, Augustus Carmichael, William Bankes, Minta Doyle, Paul Rayley, and Charles Tansley.

Altogether share the evening while Lily Briscoe tries to paint a portrait with the discouragement of Mr. Tansley, Mrs. Ramsay tries that Paul Rayley declares himself to Minta Doyle, and Cam and James try to persuade their father to bring them to the lighthouse situated on an isle near the house. After dinner, all candles are blown down.

This darkness proceeds to become a ten-year period of time where nobody but the housekeeper, Mrs. McNab, enters the house to do some cleaning. In these years, Mrs. Ramsay suddenly dies, Prue dies due to childbirth, and Andrew is killed in the war. The house stays empty and in continuous decay, without any sight of the life it used to have.

However, on a September evening, some guests come over again. In the third part, Mr. Ramsay and his children, Lily Briscoe, and Mr. Carmichael come back to the summer house they shared ten years ago and spend a morning there. Lily decides to continue the portrait she left unfinished ten years ago, and Mr. Ramsay finally takes Cam and James to visit the lighthouse.

The novel concludes when Mr. Ramsay lands with his children and Lily Briscoe has an epiphany and finishes her portrait.

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3.1. Time in *To the Lighthouse*

As mentioned above, the main focus of Virginia Woolf's novel is her wish to experiment with new techniques and formal structures to express the passing of time. In this novel, time and its effects on space frequently mirror the characters' emotions and feeling which the reader can directly access through the stream of consciousness technique, used by Woolf to depict every characteristic and situation of ordinary life.

Following, I will start the analysis of the time examples that have been extracted from the novel in order to study and compare them to the techniques used in modernist literature. The analysis is divided into three parts that match the different sections that conform *To the Lighthouse*. First, I will be analyzing time in "The Window", second, "Time Passes", and third, "The Lighthouse".

3.1.1 "The Window"

"The Window" is the first part of the novel, and therefore, it provides the reader with a contextualization of the events that will develop in *To the Lighthouse*¹⁸. To set the novel, Virginia Woolf establishes the temporal background of the story, and on the first pages of the book says, "It was September after all, the middle of September, and past six in the evening" (Woolf, 2008 ed., p.20). These references of time occur several times throughout the novel. Woolf keeps breaking the stream of consciousness by giving the reader little notes on how the evening is passing by. For instance "it was dawn, she could see the sun rising" (Woolf, 2008 ed., p.43), "so that she would finish the story, though it was past bedtime" (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 51), "it was growing quite dark"(Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 52), and "and its being the end of the day and their having quarrelled about going to

¹⁸ Woolf, V. (1927). *To the Lighthouse* (2008 ed.). Oxford University Press.

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the Lighthouse” (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 100). All the references mentioned help the reader to follow the flux of time through this first section.

Moreover, “The Window” also includes several instances of embodiment of time. A good example would be the fragment where Woolf describes Lily Briscoe and William Bankes’s emotions while looking at a sea landscape, “excited by the moving waves; and then by the swift cutting race of a sailing boat, which, having sliced a curve in the bay, stopped (. . .) after a swift movement, both of them looked at the dunes far away (. . .) with a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest” (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 20). In this occasion, Virginia Woolf assimilates time and the movement in the waves that surround the summer house.

Also, time is reflected in the way in which Lily Briscoe refers to Mr. Ramsay’s philosophical work. She says that it resembles “a scrubbed kitchen table” (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 22), meaning that while the work seems chaotic, it symbolizes progression and effort through time.

As mentioned before, time is bound to space all throughout the novel, hence, there are many scenes in which Woolf joins the description of a given space and stream of consciousness to experiment with the expression of the duration of time. In the next fragment, for example, a room is described by Mrs. Ramsay through the stream of consciousness, “the mat was fading; the wallpaper was flapping. You couldn’t tell any more that those were roses on it. Still, if every door in the house is left perpetually open, and no lockmaker in the whole of Scotland can mend a bolt, things must spoil” (Woolf, 2008 ed., 26). This short extract belongs to a lengthy internal monologue where Mrs. Ramsay reflects on several matters while performing a menial chore. Woolf slows the time of the narration by having Mrs. Ramsay give a very detailed description of the room

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and making it clear that, in spite of their length, the woman's thoughts cannot have lasted more than a few seconds.

The stream of consciousness technique is used by Woolf, as mentioned before, to merge time, space, and emotion throughout the first section, "The Window". To demonstrate this, next I am going to present several examples of this time-emotion connection expressed through the stream of consciousness.

Without a doubt, one of the most characteristic examples of time-emotion is the thoughts of Mrs. Ramsay about her children growing up. For instance, she thinks "children were growing up; she often felt she was nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotions" (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 29). Following the same theme Mrs. Ramsay also thinks to herself:

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 they were, demons of wickedness, angels of delight, never to see them grow up into long-legged monsters (. . .) should they grow up so fast? Why should they go to school? She would have liked always to have had a baby (. . .) They were happier now than they would ever be again [Why must they grow up and lose it all? Never will they be so happy again. (Woolf, 2008 ed., pp. 50-51)

Mrs. Ramsay's desire to stop the course of time to keep her children forever happy and innocent resembles modernists' awareness of the inexorable pass of time and therefore, of the mortal condition of humans. Here Woolf shows a connection with modernist ideas and leitmotifs.

Other examples of time in "The Window" would be the obsession of Mr. Ramsay for the A to Z. This character has a fixation with the idea of his philosophical work being

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forgotten and deemed inconsequential after his death. This obsession is no doubt linked with angst over an awareness of his own mortality. To Mr. Ramsay, making a significant contribution to the philosophical field would ensure his lastingness in this world, if not physically, at least through an enduring contribution to human knowledge. From this fear of death and obliteration, stems Mr. Ramsay's obsession to reach the letter Z, which is the maximum level of knowledge:

How many men in a thousand million, she asked himself, reach Z after all? Surely the leader of a forlorn hope may ask himself that, and answer, without treachery to the expedition behind him, 'One perhaps'. One in a generation. Is he to be blamed then if he is not that one? provided he has toiled honestly, given to the best of his power, till he has no more left to give? (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 32)

Moreover, Woolf uses Mr. Ramsay's obsession over reaching the letter Z almost at the end of "The Window" to illustrate the contrast between Mr. Ramsay's thoughts at the beginning of the evening and at midnight. The character evolved from trying to reach a certain position in society, which is closer to a Victorian theme, to accepting that not many people are able to reach the letter Z, "But now, he felt, it didn't matter a damn who reached Z (if thought ran like an alphabet from A to Z). Somebody would reach it – if not he, then another" (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 97).

In addition, during dinner there are some elements in Mrs. Ramsay's stream of consciousness that also revolve around the passing of time and the survival through other people's memories. A good example would be when Mrs. Ramsay thinks:

They would, she thought, going on again, however long they lived, come back to this night; this moon; this wind; this house: and to her too. It flattered her, where

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she was most susceptible of flattery, to think how, wound about in their hearts, however long they lived she would be woven. (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 92)

Again, Woolf uses the importance of the individual to talk about time. Mrs. Ramsay desires to be remembered forever and make that dinner memorable. Her aim is that her guests have a good memory of that present moment in the future. This idea is related to the description of the flux of time by Bergson, and especially to his concept of *durée*. The events of that evening will be remembered in time, for instance, by Minta Doyle and Paul Rayley who got engaged before dinner that day. Therefore, everything that happened that September evening had an impact on the future.

To complete the analysis of time in the first part of the novel I will explain the last example that is linked to modernist individualism. After dinner, Mrs. Ramsay seems to be more relaxed and comfortable with herself. If this passage is analyzed according to the modernist frame of reference, I would say that Mrs. Ramsay feels safe as a part of society, because belonging to a group produces a sense of order that individuals crave. This idea is depicted in the following fragment, “Her world was changing: they were still. The event had given her a sense of movement. All must be in order (. . .) insensibly, approving of the dignity of the trees stillness” (Woolf, 2008 ed., p.91).

Subsequently, I am going to continue the analysis of the examples extracted from the novel in the second chapter, “Time Passes”.

3.1.2 “Time Passes”

The middle part of the novel is a great example of the experimentation with the temporal dimension that Virginia Woolf wanted to conduct in *To the Lighthouse*. As mentioned before, she wanted to create a middle section in the novel that resembled a kind of corridor

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linking one evening with another ten years apart. She achieved it by creating fluidity through time in the text.

Throughout the central section of the novel, “Time Passes”, Woolf portrays the decay of the Ramsays’ summer house during the ten years of absence in which the family does not visit it. This poetic description is just interrupted by several texts in brackets that inform the reader of important events that happened to the family and its friends during this decade away. The use of brackets becomes a narrative device to not stop the narration flow of the passing of time and its effects over the abandoned summer house. In other words, the author resorts to them to show the reader that no matter how important the events that occur to human beings, such as the death of Mrs. Ramsay, or the deaths of Andrew and Prue, the world does not stop, and the flux of time continues its course.

As we have already mentioned, the events in brackets do not disturb the flux of narration, since its contents are disconnected from the description of the passing of time and the deterioration of the house. For instance, the death of Mrs. Ramsay is narrated in an impersonal and distant tone as a simple action within the fluctuation of time. Therefore, it conveys the idea that the passing of time is indifferent to the individual destinies of human beings. It can be seen when the narration says, “[Mr. Ramsay stumbling along a passage stretched his arms out one dark morning, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before he stretched his arms out. They remained empty.]” (Woolf, 2008 ed., p.105). Moreover, there is also Andrew’s death announced between brackets, “[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.]” (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 109) and the publication of Mr. Carmichael volume of poems that succeeded, “[Mr. Carmichael brought out a volume of poems that spring, which had an unexpected success.

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The war, people said, had revived their interest in poetry.]” (Woolf, 2008 ed., p.110). All these elements in brackets are used to continue with the sense of fluctuation that Woolf creates through the stream of consciousness.

In this section of the novel, there also are a few passages depicting the passing of time that are relevant to the way in which Virginia Woolf joined emotions, landscape, and time in the same passage. For instance, in the next sample, Woolf depicts the never-ending succession of nights with a poetic language in opposition to the bare style of the notices in brackets, “A short space, especially when the darkness dims so soon, and so soon a bird sings, a cock crows, or a faint green quickens, like a turning leaf, in the hollow of the wave. Night, however, succeeds to night” (Woolf, 2008 ed., p.104). In the next example, Woolf continues describing the flux of time through a description of the landscape that now mirrors the beginning of war, “The nights now are full of wind and destruction; the trees plunge and bend and their leaves fly helter skelter until lawn is plastered with them and they lie packed in gutters and choke rain pipes and scatter damp paths” (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 105).

The description of the empty summer house also reflects, albeit indirectly, the passing of time and the evolution of war. In the next fragment, for instance, the abandonment and ruin of the residence becomes a symbol of the unavoidable effects of time over matter:

The house was left; the house was deserted (. . .) that here once someone had lived; there had been a house (. . .) If the feather had fallen, if it had tipped the scale downwards, the whole house would have plunged to the depths to lie upon the sands of oblivion. (Woolf, 2008 ed., pp.112-114)

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Furthermore, there are also a few references to objective time in this second part of the novel, in specific, to three important moments where the narration refers to the present time. The first one occurs at the very beginning of “Time Passes”, still in the evening of the dinner, when in brackets, the reader is informed of the time when all the lights in the house turned off, “[Here Mr. Carmichael, who was reading Virgil, blew out his candle. It was past midnight.]” (Woolf, 2008 ed., p.104). This blowing of the last candle off symbolizes emptiness and absence since no candle will be turned on again in a span of ten years after that moment in Mr. Carmichael's room.

The second occurrence of time reference in this section is as follows, “A summer neared, as the evenings lengthened, there came to the wakeful, the hopeful, walking the beach, stirring the pool, imaginations of the strangest kind” (Woolf, 2008 ed., p.108). Here there is a reference to the change of seasons that fulfills a double function: firstly, it informs the reader of the chronological passing of time in the story and, secondly, it expresses that time never stops its course, in spite of the tragedy that strikes the world in the form of the Second World War. Finally, the last time reference is located at the very end of the chapter and announces the arrival of people in the summer house after a long period of absence. Between brackets, the reader is informed that Lily Briscoe and Mr. Carmichael arrived at the house on a September evening, “[Lily Briscoe had her bag carried up to the house late one evening in September. Mr. Carmichael came by the same train.]” (Woolf, 2008 ed., p.116). Therefore, the middle section of the novel, “Time Passes”, begins and ends with a reference to time and to the inhabitants of the house.

Last but not least, I am going to finish the analysis of time in the novel by examining the last chapter of the novel, “The Lighthouse”.

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3.1.3 “The Lighthouse”

In the last part of the novel predominates the nostalgia over memories lived in the house as for example, “At the same time, she seemed to be sitting beside Mrs. Ramsay on the beach” (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 141), and:

How ‘you’ and ‘I’ and ‘she’ pass and vanish; nothing stays; all changes; but not words, not paint. Yet it would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be rolled up and flung under the sofa; yet even so, even of a picture like that, it was true. (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 147)

Moreover, the character of Lily Briscoe and her willingness to finish the painting she started ten years ago, is also depicted through the stream of consciousness and related to the fluidity of time. For instance, in the next fragment that narrates the moment in which Lily decides to pick up the painting again:

Suddenly she remembered. When she had sat there last ten years ago there had been a little sprig of leaf pattern on the table-cloth, which she had looked at in a moment of revelation (. . .) It had been knocking about in her mind all these years. She would paint that picture now. (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 122)

It is also important to highlight that Lily’s unfinished painting also links *To the Lighthouse* with modernism because it alludes to a frequent theme in this movement: the notion of “epiphany”. During her years of absence, Lily Briscoe was unable to forget this failed painting. Now, in the third part of *To the Lighthouse*, Lily’s aim is to finish what she started, while the process of painting allows her to reflect about the meaning of life, her role as a woman artist who wants to break free from patriarchal ties, the imperfection of art as a form of communication, and above all to come to terms with the tragic events, especially Mrs. Ramsay’s death, that she has endured during the last decade. This theme

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is also portrayed through the stream of consciousness as can be seen when the narration says, “Phrases came. Visions came. Beautiful phrases. But what she wished to get hold of was that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything” (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 158). While struggling to finally complete her painting, Lily experiences a moment of revelation, equivalent to Joyce’s idea of “epiphany”, named “vision” or “revelation” in Woolf’s words:

Her mood was coming back to her. 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 vice 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. (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 164)

Lily’s vision is also one of the full circles of the novel and probably the most important one since the novel ends with Lily Briscoe finishing the painting:

It was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in the extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 170)

The other event, started in the first section of the novel, “The Window”, that also culminates in this third part is Mr. Ramsay, Cam and James’s visit to the lighthouse, “they were going to the Lighthouse, Mr. Ramsay, Cam, and James. They should have gone already (. . .) And Cam was not ready and James was not ready” (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 121). Throughout this passage the three characters reconcile themselves with their past, because the trip to the lighthouse postponed ten years ago due to harsh weather conditions,

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allows the characters in the boat to ponder over past events and significant memories. For instance, Mr. Ramsay thinks about Mrs. Ramsay, who is no longer there, and James reflects on his relationship with his father, Mr. Ramsay. With Lily finishing her painting and Mr. Ramsay bringing Cam and James to the lighthouse, Woolf links the three parts and closes the continuous fluctuation of time. Moreover, Virginia Woolf creates a parallelism between Lily completing her painting ashore, and Mr. Ramsay, Cam and James reconciling themselves with the hardships they have faced in the last ten years, while the boat navigates to the lighthouse.

In this section of the novel, the repetition of quotes appears once again as in part one, "The Window". What Mr. Tansley used to tell Lily ten years ago continues undermining her, "and she heard some voice saying she couldn't paint, saying she couldn't create" (Woolf, 2008 ed., p.131). These poisonous words have chased Lily Briscoe all these years, even though she has not kept contact with Charles Tansley, "Can't paint, can't write, she murmured monotonously, anxiously considering what her plan of attack should be" (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 131).

Furthermore, in this last part, Lily Briscoe resumes a matter that concerned Mrs. Ramsay in the first section of the novel. As already mentioned, Mrs. Ramsay was disturbed by the thought of her children growing up. However, she has not lived to see them reach adulthood. Instead, Lily is the one that reflects on the fact that Cam and James are now seventeen and sixteen years old while she contemplates the scene in the following fragment, "And it struck her, this was tragedy – not palls, dust, and the shroud; but children coerced, their spirits subdued. James was sixteen, Cam seventeen, perhaps. She had looked round for someone who was not there, for Mrs. Ramsay, presumably" (Woolf, 2008 ed., p. 123).

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Altogether, this has been the analysis of time examples extracted from *To the Lighthouse* and its comparison with modernism. To conclude, I finish this dissertation with the last section, the conclusion.

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4. Conclusion

Throughout this final dissertation, I have worked on the treatment of time on Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. First, I have given the theoretical framework to modernism and Virginia Woolf to contextualize the paper within the object of discussion. Then I continued with some details and a summary of *To the Lighthouse* and finally, I analyzed time in the novel compared to modernist techniques.

Nevertheless, the previous research altogether with the theoretical background helped me to see the similarities between modernism and *To the Lighthouse*. Having reflected on the analysis I have become aware of the usage of the stream of consciousness both by Virginia Woolf and modernist writers, which portrays the character's feelings and mind thoughts to an extreme. Moreover, Woolf is also centered on the individual as modernists did when she focuses on the character and their inner self, as well as, on the different perspectives of various characters when writing. Woolf used experimentation in her writing and literary devices as the embodiment of time, repetitions of sentences and references to time, and more mentioned above. Throughout the novel, the symbolic meaning of different elements is also relevant, as well as the allusion to individuality, the criticism of patriarchy when Cam and James are in the boat with Mr. Ramsay, the presence of Joyce's term "epiphany", and the synthesis of time and space.

Even though Woolf never read Bergson, as I mentioned on the theoretical framework of this project, all the publications and articles that I have read, and the analysis of the time examples extracted from the novel, point out that Virginia Woolf's strategies and techniques are similar to the ones used by modernists. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that *To the Lighthouse* was written under the influence of modernism. This understanding of the completed analysis gives an answer to the question

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I made at the beginning of this dissertation. Additionally, Virginia Woolf is known nowadays as one of the main authors of modernist literature as her novels are experimental and they share with other modernist works the use of certain literary devices such as the multiple narrative perspective, like it has been reflected throughout the analytic part of this dissertation.

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