View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk

brought to you by CORE

provided by St. Catherine University

St. Catherine University
SOPHIA

Antonian Scholars Honors Program

School of Humanities, Arts and Sciences

4-2013

Modernist Manipulation: Virginia Woolf's Effort to Distort Time in Three Novels

Carly Fischbeck
St. Catherine University, crfischbeck@stkate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://sophia.stkate.edu/shas_honors

Part of the Modern Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
Fischbeck, Carly, "Modernist Manipulation: Virginia Woolf's Effort to Distort Time in Three Novels" (2013). *Antonian Scholars Honors Program*. 28.
https://sophia.stkate.edu/shas_honors/28

This Senior Honors Project is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Humanities, Arts and Sciences at SOPHIA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Antonian Scholars Honors Program by an authorized administrator of SOPHIA. For more information, please contact amshaw@stkate.edu.

MODERNIST MANIPULATION: VIRGINIA WOOLF'S EFFORT TO DISTORT TIME IN THREE NOVELS

by

Carly Fischbeck

A Senior Project in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Honors Program

ST. CATHERINE UIVERSITY

April 1, 2013

Acknowledgements

My sincerest thanks go to Geri Chavis, my committee chair and exceedingly patient editor of my many drafts. Her topics course sparked my interest in Virginia Woolf as a writer and modernist, an interest that will continue long after this project's completion. I am thankful to Joanne Cavallaro for her faith in me as a student and scholar since my first semester at St. Catherine's, and for her continued support and advice throughout this project. I would like to extend my gratitude to Amy Hamlin, for not only providing me with ample resources but also for her patience with my many questions in the field of Art History. I am grateful to Cecilia Konchar-Farr for her insistence that I begin my first draft and for her questions that allowed me to elucidate key ideas.

I am grateful for the rare opportunity to focus my creative ambitions on a project through the Antonian Scholars Honors Program, coordinated by Gayle Gaskill. Many thanks to her for the updates, reminders, and check-ins she provided throughout this process.

Finally, I am tremendously grateful to family and friends for the love and support throughout this process. I would like to extend special thanks to my mother for enduring the long nights of revisions, to Andy for always lending a patient ear, and to Sarah for the evenings of Honors projects and pizza.

"With her foot on the threshold she waited a moment longer in a scene which was vanishing even as she looked, and then, as she moved and took Minta's arm and left the room, it changed, it shaped itself differently; it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past." – Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (111)

Virginia Woolf is known for her attempts to record the way one perceives and experiences time with authenticity in her work. A prolific writer during the modernist period, she examined different ways of expressing time, particularly in her novels. Modernist novels are characterized by both their concern for the depiction of human experience and their experimentation with form. This experimentation includes the use of interior monologue, rhythm, stream of consciousness, and other techniques to manipulate such factors as perception, consciousness, and emotion (Childs 3). Woolf used a variety of techniques in her novels to construct and clarify her understanding of how one perceives and experiences time. One of Woolf's primary concerns was with what she called "moment[s] of importance," the seemingly inconsequential occurrences of everyday human experience ("Modern Fiction" 106). Focused on finding a way to represent the spirit of such moments, Woolf engaged different devices throughout her works to manipulate the way that both her characters and her readers perceived the experience of time. *The Voyage Out,* Woolf's first novel, maintains a traditional plot structure, but focuses on characters rather than plot as the author grapples with ways to indicate the characters' perceptions of temporal experience. *To the Lighthouse* retains plot as well, although it contains fewer sequences of events than *The Voyage Out.* However, in this later work, Woolf distends and shrinks time, yielding different senses of time in the same work. *The Waves* is even further removed from a traditional plot and sense of time, using seashore imagery as markers between monologues that show moments and experiences in the characters' lives rather than a sequence of events. These novels show Woolf's evolution as a modernist writer who became more radical as she experimented with distorting time in an effort to capture the human experience of individual moments with authenticity. Virginia Woolf's struggle to authentically depict the experience of time in *The Voyage Out* anticipates the much more experimental manipulations of time she employed in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves.*

"An Incessant Shower of Innumerable Atoms": Woolf as a Modernist Author

Formal experimentation and manipulation are characteristics that typify the modernist movement. During this time, writers and artists communally debated the meaning of such terms as "perception," "reality," and "experience." They wrote new fiction pieces, such as novels and short stories, to explore the ideas they discussed, as well as writing about their art forms. Perhaps the most famous group during this time period was the Bloomsbury Group, a collection of friends who discussed one another's work, the meaning of reality, the state of Britain, and a myriad of other topics. Woolf was involved in the group alongside her sister, Vanessa Bell, her husband, Leonard Woolf, and other famous writers, painters, and critics of the modernist era including Roger Fry and Wyndham Lewis. Another prevalent voice in this group was novelist E.M. Forster, author of *Aspects of the Novel* (1927). In this work, Forster explains the novel's different facets, including the story, plot, and characters. He notes that, though it is lamentably boring and has nothing to be admired, every novel must contain a story, "a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence – dinner coming after breakfast, Tuesday after Monday, decay after death, and so on" (47). Without the story, Forster claims, the novel could not exist. Yet, though the story is common to all novels, it is inadequate on its own, as it does not truly depict the experience of life. Other devices must be incorporated in order to show the varying perceptions and experiences of human life. As novels until the modern period had focused on the story at the expense of sense perception, Forster believed it was now time to create other literary devices, moving beyond the simple device of the story.

It would seem that Woolf at least partially agreed with Forster. In her 1919 essay, "Modern Fiction," Woolf discusses the popular fiction of the day as well as fiction written prior to her time, concluding that they lack a realistic representation of experience. She writes, "[L]et us hazard the opinion that for us at this moment the form of fiction most in vogue more often misses than secures the thing we seek. Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide" ("Modern Fiction" 105). Despite the popularity of these novels, something about the human experience was absent from them, though Woolf struggled to name just what it was. Therefore, in order to better construct an authentic depiction of experience, Woolf encourages writers to experiment with the form and content of their works of fiction, writing,

> [T]he problem before the novelist at present, as we suppose it to have been in the past, is to contrive means of being free to set down what he chooses. He has to have the courage to say that what interests him is no longer 'this' but 'that': out of 'that' alone must he construct his work. … At once, therefore, the accent falls a little differently; the emphasis is upon something hitherto ignored; at once a different outline of form becomes necessary, difficult for us to grasp, incomprehensible to our predecessors. ("Modern Fiction" 108)[1]

She presses writers to use a different focus with their work, to have the confidence to write not what is popular but what centuries of writing have ignored.

Woolf also instructs readers not to "dictate" their opinions to the author while reading, as such closed-mindedness does not allow for full appreciation of the work ("How Should One Read a Book?" 2). Instead, Woolf suggests,

> [I]f you open your mind as widely as possible, then signs and hints of almost imperceptible fineness, from the twist and turn of the first sentences, will bring you into the presence of a human being unlike any other [the author] …
>
> It is not merely that we are in the presence of a different person – Defoe, Jane Austen, or Thomas Hardy – but that we are living in a different world. ("How Should One Read a Book?" 2)

If the reader is to understand the world the writer constructs, s/he must be open-minded so as to appreciate the beauty and authenticity of individual sentences as well as that of the work as a whole. In this way, a modernist writer can construct the world of their novel as they see fit, including their interpretations of the perceptions and lived experiences of the characters, while the open-minded reader readily receives this new form for the novel without judgment.

Modernist writers, in their struggle to depict human experiences as they are perceived in everyday life, wrestled with the formulaic nature of plot and its relationship to the depiction of time in their works. Woolf writes of plot as the writer's struggle, noting that "The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability" ("Modern Fiction" 106). Forster's sentiments towards plot were similar; he, too, felt that readers demanded a plot, and that plot produced a cause-and-effect relationship in different events throughout the novel. He differentiates the plot from the story in *Aspects of the Novel*, stating, “A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. … The time sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it” (Forster 130). Forster further points out the need to move away from the plot because it does not cover the range of human expression: “In the novel, all human happiness and misery does not take the form of action, it seeks means of expression other than through the plot, it must not be rigidly canalized” (142). Because plot as a tool merely gave the writer a sense of time sequence and “an air of probability” or cause and effect, Forster and Woolf argued, it was not the best tool for the modernist writer. What, then, was such a writer to do? Woolf questions whether novels must adhere to plot, imploring readers, “Let us 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. Let us not take for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small” (“Modern Fiction” 107). A focus on the sensations, emotions, and perceptions rather than a rote sequence of events of daily life, Woolf and her counterparts believed, would provide a more faithful, authentic representation of human experience.

Also influential to Woolf’s work were the form experimentations of modernist artists. Woolf’s work, despite its literary format, is closely related to visual art forms, in part because of her association with artist and critic Roger Fry. As both were involved with the Bloomsbury Group, and Woolf was even asked to write a biography after his death, it is assumed that the two discussed art and the connection between art and literature (Roberts 835). Fry believed that, as art had moved on from its “photographic representation” through the works of Picasso and Cézanne, so, too, “‘writers should fling representation to the winds and follow suit’” (qtd. in

Roberts 836). John Hawley Roberts points out that Woolf seems to have done so, throwing out "representation" in the photographic sense as well as plot as it is conventionally recognized (836). Woolf's literary ambition to create an authentic yet dynamic description of moments with the "innumerable atoms" falling "incessant[ly]" matched Fry's challenge to writers to explore beyond static means of representation.

Woolf additionally found Fry's theory that art demands unity and order worthy of exploration in her novels. In "An Essay in Aesthetics" (1909), Fry claims that art, as an object created for human use, must have some definable qualities that are preferred. He notes, "the first quality that we demand in our sensations will be order, without which our sensations will be troubled and perplexed, and the other quality will be variety, without which they will not be fully stimulated" (Fry 19). He argues that while nature would seem to have such qualities existing simultaneously, nature does not provide us with the same reaction as art, as it does not possess the sense of purpose that art provides. Art, created by an artist who intends to incite specific sensations, causes us to have a relationship with the artwork that we cannot have with nature. Thus, we crave this unique mixture of order and variety, one which is set forth by an artist with the intent to engender a precise sensation (Fry 19-20). Further, Fry asserts that for a work of art to achieve this necessary order, it must have unity: "unity of some kind is necessary for our restful contemplation of the work of art as a whole" (20). When art has the balance that unity provides, we are able to observe the work, both the order and variety it contains, undaunted by the complexity within the individual components of the work. Woolf's works, particularly *To the Lighthouse*, embody Fry's assertions. While the individual components are chaotic and widely varied, her use of different "nuclear" subjects creates order and holds the work together, allowing the reader to contemplate the work's individual elements, as well as the novel as a whole.

Roberts notes that the physical place and linear time Woolf provides constitute the frame of her works, but that the novels also have an inner rhythm, providing the unity and continuity Fry believed art needed (Roberts 840). Woolf's unique depiction of time and how her characters perceive it becomes a unifying force as her works develop.

Woolf's time manipulations parallel ideas asserted by those involved with the Futurist movement in the realm of modernist art. Futurism was a movement centered in Italy and begun by Filippo Tomaso Marinetti, who had the first "Futurist Manifesto" published in 1909 (Childs 121). In the manifesto, Marinetti asserts, "We affirm that the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed … *Time and Space died yesterday*. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed" (Harrison and Wood 147, emphasis added). The Futurists, claiming distance from conventional time and space, concentrated on the dynamic qualities of movement. Giacomo Balla's *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* (1912) illustrates the significance of movement within Futurism. The painting (Figure 1) shows a dog, held by a leash, and part of its owner, moving as they walk. The dog's tail, legs, and leash are shown in constant motion rather than in one instant of time, as indicated by the multiple sets of legs and the various depictions of the leash and tail. Similarly, the owner is shown with not just two feet, but two feet in motion. The painted figures represent what Umberto Boccioni called "*dynamic sensation*," in which "all things move, all things run, all things are rapidly changing. A profile is never motionless before our eyes, but it constantly appears and disappears … moving objects constantly multiply themselves; their form changes like rapid vibrations, in their mad career. Thus a running horse has not four legs, but twenty, and their movements are triangular" (Harrison and Wood 150). Of equal importance is the subject of the painting. Rather than a glorious cathedral or a historical painting, the artist chose to paint a dog with its owner, elevating a quotidian subject to the status of art. Just as novelists were studying everyday objects and moments in life, reevaluating the previously mundane to explore newness, so too were modernist painters.

Another significant work of art both in the Futurist movement and in relation to Woolf's focus on time is *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2* (1912), a painting by Marcel Duchamp (Figure 2). The painting shows abstract shapes that appear to form a human figure in motion down a turning staircase. The range of triangular shapes and change in color from dark to light and translucent to opaque as the viewer's eye reaches the foreground indicate the figure's dynamic movement in the picture. Duchamp's figure, though more geometric and abstract than Balla's painting, similarly attempts to depict movement and describes a number of instances in the same picture. Neither picture represents a single moment in time; in attempting to capture motion, the artists also partially capture the progression of time through moments, an undertaking Woolf grappled with on a literary front. Woolf's works, though they are tied to time and even frequently mention time, are also closely linked to the Futurist movement. Her interest in time was not static time, but dynamic time. Her use of time as moving and flowing creates artistic unity in her works, incorporating a literary version of "*dynamic sensation.*"

Figure 1 – Giacomo Balla, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, 1912. Oil on canvas. http://library.artstor.org/library/ExternalIV.jsp?objectId=8CJGczI9NzldLS1WEDhzTnkrX3kvflp1eSo%3D (access to ARTSTOR required)

Figure 2 – Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2,* 1912. Oil on canvas. http://library.artstor.org/library/ExternalIV.jsp?objectId=8D1OdjArJCxdLS04ejV2R3ksXw%3D%3D (access to ARTSTOR required)

Another prevalent artistic movement during the modernist period was Vorticism, a movement related to Futurism but concentrated in Britain that was officially set in motion in 1914. Vorticism, though connected to Futurism, had distinct qualities: "[W]hilst Futurist paintings often involved blurring of forms to suggest speed, Vorticist paintings were characteristically hard, harsh and angular, evoking what *Blast* [a Vorticist magazine] called 'the forms of machinery, factories, new and vaster buildings, bridges and works'" (Chilvers 643). Wyndham Lewis, Bloomsbury Group member and contemporary of Virginia Woolf, was a central figure in instigating the Vorticism movement. Though Vorticist works were often harsh and bold, he believed that the Vortex was the calm "in the maelstrom of life," and accounted for the lucid construction of his works (Chilvers 643). His understanding of chaos (the maelstrom) and order (the Vortex) is related to Fry's belief that there must be both order and variety in a work to maintain unity. Woolf's works show this sense of unity, particularly through the wave imagery found in most of her books, in which the waves represent both a calming force and a destructive force, whether in perception or in the physical reality of the novel. One of Lewis's paintings, simply called *Crowd* (Figure 3), parallels this idea of unity as well as Woolf's concern with the "moment of importance." *Crowd* is a depiction of a series of frames piled on top of one another, in which each frame shows a partial depiction of an everyday scene, such as a tall building or a figure walking. The use of bold color, geometric shapes, and sharp lines to depict quotidian objects draws attention to them as new rather than mundane, much like Woolf did with everyday tasks or "moment[s] of importance" such as knitting, eating dinner, and meeting friends throughout her works. Additionally, the frames present in *Crowd* provide a grounding for the work, a sense of order amidst the chaos of the jumbled together depictions of everyday life. These frames are similar to the frames Woolf uses for her later works to maintain some linear structure, in the form of books that separate the different days of *To the Lighthouse* and the sun and wave imagery that plot out the lifespans of the characters in *The Waves*. As Lewis was acquainted with Woolf through their mutual association with Roger Fry as well as their affiliation with the Bloomsbury Group, it is likely that his works, including the ideas that encouraged him to establish Vorticism, helped shape Woolf's ideas about the novel.

Figure 3 – Wyndham Lewis, *Crowd*, 1914-5. Oil on canvas.
http://library.artstor.org/library/ExternalIV.jsp?objectId=8CJGczI9NzldLS1WEDhzTnkrX3kjcV9ydiA%3D (access to ARTSTOR required)

Modernists were experimenting with their art forms, moving away from traditional styles and reinventing their forms in the context of emerging scientific theories. At the time Woolf was writing about perception and the "moment of importance," scientists were debating hypotheses regarding reality and relativity, creating theories that changed the way people perceived the world. Some researchers, like Neils Bohr, investigated the composition of atoms, making discoveries about small, invisible components of the universe, while others, including Edwin Hubble, studied light, finding that light was in motion and occurred in particular patterns ("Physicist"). Physicist Albert Einstein studied speed and motion, while George Lemaitre was the first to propose the Big Bang Theory as a way to explain the origins of the universe, forever altering our understanding of the world (“Physicist”). These scientists and their discoveries impacted basic thoughts about how our world began and what it was composed of, causing writers and artists to reexamine objects and phenomena that had once seemed commonly understood and orderly but were now found to be quite different from our previous conceptions.

Woolf was aware of Einstein’s discoveries regarding time and space, and applied parts of his theories to her novels. Paul Tolliver Brown notes Woolf’s decreased use of a narrator in relation to Einstein’s theory of time as nonlinear. Brown states that she “would have found his theory of a non-absolute spacetime continuum of particular interest to the development of her own writing style. The role of a central narrator increasingly diminished in her novels and was replaced by the internal monologues of – and sometimes internal *dialogues* between – different characters in relative motion to one another” (Brown 40). As space and time were no longer solid or linear, using a narrator to provide this linear structure in fiction became unnecessary. While *The Voyage Out* still includes an omniscient narrator, there are moments when one character garners more attention than others, taking the spotlight away from even the narration or adherence to the plot. *To the Lighthouse* further employs this strategy, using the thought process of various characters to explain different events as well as characters’ experiences of those events. *The Waves* removes the narrator almost completely, engaging the characters in monologues depicting their experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Woolf’s work, particularly her focus on time, seems to be therefore at least in part influenced by Einstein’s theory.

The scientific focus on concepts and objects previously thought to be understood caused many to turn to such subjects of study as light, motion, and time. Studies of light in particular revealed fascinating and contradictory truths about light, truths that also changed the common understanding of time. Brown notes that in the early 1900s, during experiments with light, physicists "revealed the baffling fact that light and matter express the paradoxical properties of being both particles and waves" (50). Further experimentation by Einstein led to the discovery that time had a measurable speed at which it moved. These discoveries changed the notions of how light and time appear to the human mind. Something once thought instant and constant was now found to be not only in motion – in two different ways at the same time – but also in motion that could be measured in increments of time.

These scientific discoveries inspired a dramatic shift in the way artists and writers considered the object of their work. Art Berman points out major issues the new understanding of light and time caused regarding common metaphors. After the discovery of the velocity of light, he states, "What was once thought to be an instantaneous transmission takes on a finite velocity. No known aspect of natural reality is afterwards exempted from a formulaic description of motion in time. Nothing the senses can observe is outside the measurable dimension of time. Even the traditional metaphor of light can no longer be used to represent the timeless" (Berman 151). The methods artists had used for centuries to represent visually and in the written word the timelessness of moments was suddenly proven not only irrelevant – it was wrong. The new understanding of light as simultaneously particles and waves, combined with what this new knowledge stipulated about time as finite and measurable, impacted the metaphors and concepts artists used to depict human experience. Significantly, Woolf uses the metaphors of both light and waves extensively in her works, often to illustrate the movement or experience of time as it is felt by the characters. Whether this is directly because of scientific discoveries or because of Woolf's own understanding of the human mind's sense of perception is unclear. However, it is certain that Woolf was in conversation with both scientists and other artists regarding the meaning of time, and her work demonstrates that Woolf felt their influence.

Scientists applied the scientific method to more than their experiments on the physical world; they had also begun to see the mind as an appropriate area of study. As Berman notes, scientists began to believe that “Knowing, thinking, believing, feeling, and willing are no longer simply the ‘givens’ of experience” (128). As an object, the mind may – possibly even must – be studied and can be understood objectively. The science of Psychology flourished during this time period, with Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theories – including the study of the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious mind – at the forefront. The scientific focus on the mind’s inner workings influenced writers and artists as well. Because the mind had observable qualities to offer the world of science, perhaps its insights could be useful in the depiction of experience through art and writing. Artists sought to do their own experiments with the mind, including how it perceives and thinks, and how it experiences art and even life itself.

Modernist artists and writers focused on different mental experiences within their works, including the minds sense of the passage of time. Many writers grappled with the use of time in novels as a sequence, noticing that the sense of time commonly used lacked certain qualities present in the lived experience of time. Forster concerns himself with time in *Aspects of the Novel*, determining that there can be two types of “life,” one represented less accurately by consecutive time and the other marked by experiences and sensations. He writes,

> Daily life is also full of the time-sense. We think one event occurs after or before another, the thought is often in our minds, and much of our talk and action proceeds on the assumption. Much of our talk and action, but not all; there seems to be something else in life besides time, something which may conveniently be called “value,” something which

> is not measured by minutes or hours, but by intensity, so that when we look at our past it does not stretch back evenly but piles up into a few notable pinnacles, and when we look at the future it seems sometimes a wall, sometimes a cloud, sometimes a sun, but never a chronological chart. … So daily life, whatever it may be really, is practically composed of two lives – the life in time and the life by values … (Forster 48-49)

According to Forster, human experiences cannot be metered out chronologically, but are measured rather differently. If artists are to uncover the actual feeling of daily life, their work must reflect this different measurement of life.

Though aware of the scientific community's revelations and Forster's thoughts on time as it relates to life, Woolf also experimented with her own ideas of time, creating a different method than a linear sequence by which to measure human experience. Her thoughts were focused on the depiction of everyday life in the novel:

> Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being 'like this'. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives *a myriad impressions* – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, *an incessant shower of innumerable atoms*; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the *moment of importance* came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. ("Modern Fiction" 106, emphasis added)

Her works, including *The Voyage Out*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*, explore the "myriad impressions" upon the mind, manipulating different aspects of time in relation to her characters. *The Voyage Out*, an earlier work, shows Woolf beginning to dabble with various ways of representing human experience, but struggling with the constraint of the plot. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf used the plot and characters more to her advantage, holding one item constant while manipulating others. *The Waves* further removes itself from such constraints and moves into a completely different sense of time-space – one in which characters develop through monologues and move together through time without a focus on consecutive events.

Attacking "The Problem Before the Novelist": *The Voyage Out* as Experimentation

Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out,* depicts the journey of Rachel Vinrace, a young Englishwoman, to South America. Rachel leads a sheltered life, but is finally able to explore the world when her aunt invites her on a trip abroad. In the course of the novel, Rachel travels to South America, meets a great many new people, rides a riverboat to explore the forests, and falls in love with a man named Terence Hewet. Rachel and Terence have been engaged for two weeks when Rachel falls ill; only two weeks after becoming ill, she succumbs to the fever and dies.

The Voyage Out has been criticized for lacking the radically modern aspects of her subsequent novels. Indeed, the author herself had little confidence in it even during her writing process, feeling as though the work was simply "bad". In a letter to Clive Bell, she wrote, "I dreamt last night that I was showing father the manuscript of my novel; and he snorted, and dropped it on to a table, and I was very melancholy, and read it this morning, and thought it bad. You don't realize the depth of modesty in to which I fall" (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume One 1888-1912* 325). She often wrote to members of the Bloomsbury group regarding her writing process, most notably that she was “struggling” with the work (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume One 1888-1912* 331): she wrote to Clive Bell that she was “slashing at” the manuscript (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume One 1888-1912* 334) and that she was “screwing it out” (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume One 1888-1912* 340), but wrote to Vanessa Bell of her determination that she was going to “carry it through” (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume One 1888-1912* 366). Even after she had written other novels and essays, Woolf condemned *The Voyage Out* for its lack of modernist style and development. The first novel written after *The Voyage Out*, entitled *Night and Day*, though she later denounced it as well for being underdeveloped, was for her an improvement from her first work: “In my own opinion *Night and Day* is a much more mature and finished and satisfactory book than *The Voyage Out*; as it has reason to be” (*A Writer’s Diary* 10). For all the criticism *The Voyage Out* has received from critics, writers, and from Woolf herself, one must wonder if the novel is truly deserving of such a bad reputation. While it lacks the sophistication and the radical modernist features of her other works, *The Voyage Out* contains evidence of Woolf’s developing style. Woolf experimented with various techniques in the novel, including using an omniscient narrator to manipulate readers’ and characters’ senses of time and making generalizations of happenings around the world to distance the work from the plot. Additionally, *The Voyage Out* calls attention to Woolf’s ongoing struggle with the dichotomy between consecutive time and experienced time.

Woolf’s first attempt to manipulate a character’s sense of time, though only partially effective because it does not make use of the character’s own perceptions, calls on an omniscient narrator to indicate these aspects of human experience. While her later works engage the reader more fully in the character’s mindset, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the character’s experience, this work uses the narrator to explicitly and implicitly provide information regarding time and the characters' reactions to various events. The narrator is often overt in noting the characters' sensibilities regarding time. For example, as Rachel rides on her father's ship, not knowing she is about to embark on a cross-continental journey, the narrator comments, "The sense of untapped resources, things to say as yet unsaid, made the hour significant, so that in future years the entire journey perhaps would be represented by this one scene, with the sound of sirens hooting in the river the night before somehow mixing in" (*The Voyage Out* 161). Though Rachel is perhaps unaware, the narrator knows and confirms for readers that this moment bears significance. The use of a narrator rather than the character herself distances the reader from the character, falling short of the modernist goal to directly explore the character's experience. Yet, Woolf was grappling with the concept of anticipation as it related to time, focusing on this modern aspect of the novel – the feeling of anticipation – rather than on the plot itself.

There are other times throughout the novel where the narrator mentions time or shows the characters' lack of awareness about time, calling attention to the fact that there is something significant happening with the characters' sense of time. When Rachel falls in love with Terence, she begins to look for him everywhere, becoming restless and often staring out the window towards his hotel room. The narrator notes, "The time passed without her noticing it" (*The Voyage Out* 330). Though this comment does not directly explore the character's experience, the reader notes a difference in the way Rachel is experiencing time in this moment – she does not notice it passing, being too busy looking for Terence. This attempt to portray time as fluid is a starting point for the more direct experience of not noticing time found in Woolf's later works.

The Voyage Out's omniscient narrator, though prevalent throughout the novel, does provide some information more implicitly, leaning toward the character's actual experience of sensations and events. While Rachel is still riding on her father's ship, during conversation with her uncle, Woolf writes, "She was haunted by absurd jumbled ideas – how, if one went back far enough, everything perhaps was intelligible; everything was in common; for the mammoths who pastured in the fields of Richmond High Street had turned into paving stones, and boxes full of ribbon, and her aunts" (*The Voyage Out* 197). Though the narrator must explain Rachel's feelings first, even explicitly stating that she is "haunted" by the ideas floating through her head, the rest of the sentence provides a glimpse into Rachel's thoughts. She contemplates both time and space, thinking of a specific street and the changes it has endured over the course of time. She also mentions her aunts, who ignore and subdue Rachel's emotions, preferring order and habit, but notes their insignificance in the greater understanding of life. Her aunts, with their imposed sense of order, represent the irrelevance of humans in the larger understanding of the world, as Rachel notes that that the mammoths of the past had become not only "paving stones, and boxes full of ribbon," but also her aunts. Her aunts, lacking understanding of Rachel's experience, are only as relevant to the world as boxes of ribbon and paving stones. Rachel's contemplations, though still guided by the narrator, provide insight into her perceptions of the past, present, and the space they occupy.

When Rachel falls ill, the narrator becomes even further removed as Rachel struggles to maintain awareness of the outside world. Woolf uses a combination of the narrator's comments and Rachel's own sensations to show Rachel's detachment from any sense of time, writing:

> Helen was here, and Helen was there all day long; sometimes she said that it was lunchtime, and sometimes that it was teatime; but by the next day all landmarks were obliterated, and the outer world was so far away that the different sounds, such as the sounds of people moving overhead, could only be ascribed to their cause by a great effort

> of memory. The recollection of what she had felt, or of what she had been doing and thinking three days before, had faded entirely. On the other hand, every object in the room, and the bed itself, and her own body with its various limbs and their different sensations were more and more important each day. She was completely cut off, and unable to communicate with the rest of the world, isolated alone with her body.
>
> Hours and hours would pass thus, without getting any further through the morning, or again a few minutes would lead from broad daylight into the depths of the night. (*The Voyage Out* 420)

The narrator still makes some overt comments, including, “by the next day all landmarks were obliterated” and “The recollection of what she had felt, or of what she had been doing and thinking three days before, had faded entirely” (*The Voyage Out* 420). Yet, these comments are less obvious than those at the beginning of the novel, when Rachel was well. Woolf seems to use overt comments at the beginning of *The Voyage Out* to work her way into the novel, eventually moving to more subtle comments as Rachel’s own perceptions become clear. Though Rachel is ill during the end of the novel, her own sensations are most clear to her at this time, perhaps because illness can be acutely felt by the reader more easily than other feelings such as boredom or tiredness. Her lack of time-sense but increased sense of her own body conveyed by the narration frame modern questions regarding time and human experience. The insights into Rachel’s perceptions, including Rachel’s lack of control over her own sense of time and where she is in space, are the inroads Woolf was beginning to take into modernism.

Woolf also frequently uses generalizations in *The Voyage Out,* perhaps in order to distance her work from strict adherence to the plot. When Rachel is thinking, often her mind drifts to what other people or things in the world are doing. The narration is generalized, so that it appears to the reader that many people are doing the same thing. This technique did not allow for strict adherence to the plot, which benefitted Woolf's experimentation. Yet, such generalizations often become oversimplifications, and still do not allow the reader to learn something about the experience of life – events are happening to people across the globe, but no one is truly "living" by realizing their experiences. For instance, during her first few days at sea while Rachel is traveling with her father, aunt, and uncle, the novel moves to a broad view:

> In thousands of small gardens, millions of dark-red flowers were blooming, until the old ladies who had tended them so carefully came down the paths with their scissors, snipped through their juicy stalks, and laid them upon cold stone ledges in the village church. Innumerable parties of picnickers coming home at sunset cried, 'Was there ever such a day as this?' 'It's you,' the young men whispered; 'Oh, it's you,' the young women replied. All old people and many sick people were drawn, were it only for a foot or two, into the open air, and prognosticated pleasant things about the course of the world. As for the confidences and expressions of love that were heard not only in cornfields but in lamplit rooms, where the windows opened on the garden, and men with cigars kissed women with grey hairs, they were not to be counted. (*The Voyage Out* 167)

The novel leaves it unclear whether these words are Rachel's thoughts or simply a part of the narration, but it does remove the story from a plodding plotline for the duration of the paragraph. Such a generalization lacks modernity in that the reader still is not privy to these peoples' experiences, thoughts and perceptions – it is only clear that old ladies have cut dark red flowers and layed them in churches. The reader remains distant from these women and their experience of cutting and laying flowers. Yet, this experimentation with generalization does allow the novel to stray from a strict plot – the reader does not even know who is thinking or seeing these images, if they are real, or if they are even important to the story.

Woolf also used generalization to show the passage of time in a more modern way than previous authors had managed to portray. While in South America, the novel follows day after day of the various characters, their activities, and their building relationships. One way to break the monotony of these days is to go beyond these characters to a wider scope of humanity. Woolf moves to unspecified people sleeping to signify all those in the hotel when she writes:

> Between the extinction of Hewet's candle and the rising of a dusky Spanish boy who was the first to survey the desolation of the hotel in the early morning, a few hours of silence intervened. One could almost hear a hundred people breathing deeply, and however wakeful and restless it would have been hard to escape sleep in the middle of so much sleep. Looking out of the windows, there was only darkness to be seen. All over the shadowed half of the world people lay prone, and a few flickering lights in empty streets marked the places where their cities were built. (*The Voyage Out* 234)

This passage is narrated vaguely, noting the "hundred people breathing deeply," that the novel is set in "the shadowed half of the world," and simply that "people" are lying in bed. Additionally, the sentences are constructed so that time happens to the characters rather than being noticed or somehow determined by them. Woolf notes that the silence "intervened," and that "it would have been hard to escape sleep in the middle of so much sleep," indicating the intrusion of time on the sleepers. The vague language use and the sense of time happening to the characters avoids association with any single character and his or her specific experience, but does indicate the aura of a large space where all are asleep, an experience specifically designed for the reader. Time is mentioned openly as well as being experienced by the reader through the generalized language. Woolf writes of the "early morning" and the "few hours of silence" between night and day, clearly indicating the time of day. Yet, the explanation of sleepers taking deep breaths, the darkness, and the few lights of the cities also reveals the time of night, allowing the reader to experience the silence and darkness of a hotel at night. Though Woolf was able to develop generalization and other techniques to help readers experience different aspects of time in her later works, *The Voyage Out* shows the initial territory Woolf used for exploring her ideas.

The Voyage Out was more than simply a testing ground for different writing techniques, however; Woolf also explored concepts of modernism within this crucial work, taking advantage of the hotel setting and of Rachel's varied thoughts to explore the gap between consecutive time and time as it is lived, or the "live by values," as Forster called it. John Graham writes of this dichotomy, noting that consecutive time is "linear time, of past, present, and future, in which we are subject to unremittent and uncontrollable flux," while the other kind of time, which he labels "mind time" is "an inner world of thought and imagination" in which a person is able to process the chaotic experiences that occur in linear time, creating order out of them (Graham 28). Graham notes that either these worlds must both exist, or one of these worlds does not truly exist. Woolf, he argues, set about in her novels to find out which was the case. *The Voyage Out* was a novel that began the exploration of this question, to which no answers were found but considerable questions were raised (Graham 28). Thus, throughout the novel, linear time and mind time fight for control.

One place in which the two types of time wrestle with each other is in Rachel's mind. Woolf identifies Rachel with both types of time at once, even noting the clock-like mechanisms in Rachel's head. Woolf writes,

> The morning was hot, and the exercise of reading left her mind contracting and expanding like the mainspring of a clock. The sounds in the garden outside joined with the clock, and the small noises of midday, which one can ascribe to no definite cause, in a regular rhythm. It was all very real, very big, very impersonal, and after a moment or two she began to raise her first finger and to let it fall on the arm of her chair so as to bring back to herself some consciousness of her own existence. She was next overcome by the unspeakable queerness of the fact that she should be sitting in an armchair, in the morning, in the middle of the world. Who were the people moving in the house – moving things from one place to another? And life, what was that? It was only a light passing over the surface and vanishing, as in time she would vanish, though the furniture in the room would remain. (*The Voyage Out* 245-246)

Rachel's head moves between the clockwork of linear time, working like the springs from her reading, and the much looser form of mind time. In mind time, she finds her experience of sitting in an armchair incredible and contemplates the future, of life going on without her. Though in *The Voyage* Out, it remains unclear whether linear time or mind time is the "real" time, this novel became a sounding board for Woolf to ask herself and her modernist counterparts this question of time and how it relates to reality.

Woolf also raised more general questions about linear and experienced time, showing the effects of each on the hotel guests. The main hall of the hotel has a clock, which ticks throughout the novel to remind guests what time it is, particularly during moments in the text where they have forgotten. Woolf describes the guests' movements as the clock guides them through the day's activities:

> The paper lay directly beneath the clock, the two together seeming to represent stability in a changing world. Mr Perrott passed through; Mr Venning poised for a second on the edge of a table. Mrs Paley was wheeled past. Susan followed. Mr Venning strolled after her … As midday drew on, and the sun beat straight upon the roof, an eddy of great flies droned in a circle; iced drinks were served under the palms; the long blinds were pulled down with a shriek, turning all the light yellow. The clock now had a silent hall to tick in, and an audience of four or five somnolent merchants … Simultaneously, the clock wheezed one, and the gong sounded, beginning softly, working itself into a frenzy, and ceasing. There was a pause. Then all those who had gone upstairs came down; cripples came, planting both feet on the same step lest they should slip; prim little girls came, holding the nurse's finger; fat old men came still buttoning waistcoats. The gong had been sounded in the garden, and by degrees recumbent figures rose and strolled in to eat, since the time had come for them to feed again. (*The Voyage Out* 239-240)

While the clock ticks on, the passage is simultaneously filled with mind time – the characters pass by, as if the reader is watching them go, vaguely aware of their existence. Flies buzz in the background, and the sensations of cold drinks and yellow light fill in the details of experience that are lived rather than linear, even though they are guided by the hall clock. Though the linear time keeps the guests moving to their various activities, the time in between – the mind time, in which drinks are served, shades are pulled down, and flies drift in lazy circles – is equally poignant. Though Woolf remains silent – in this novel – on which of the two times, if not both, is the more authentic depiction of human experience, the back-and-forth struggle between the two is a signal of her more modern works and interpretations of time to come.

While there were many blocks to Woolf's creation of a truly modern novel, including the problems of plot, narration, and linear time, *The Voyage Out* was the first experimentation that began breaking down such barriers. The narrator maintains an unnecessary distance between the character and the reader, but conveys to the reader information about how the character feels about time – both time by values and time by the clock. The plot confines Woolf to a plodding series of events, but her focus on the characters leads the reader's attention away from the plot, so that it is the experience and perceptions of the character within specific situations that matters rather than the situations themselves. Though the battle between clock time and mind time is only beginning in *The Voyage Out,* these initial questions Woolf asked regarding how characters feel about time were a springboard for the sense of time displayed in her later novels. These early struggles with plot, narration, and time brought Woolf to the significantly more modernist work found in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*.

A Nucleus for Chaos: Exploring the "Myriad Impressions" in *To the Lighthouse*

Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* explores vastly different interpretations of time, both in comparison to *The Voyage Out* and within its own pages. The novel is divided into three books: "The Window," "Time Passes," and "The Lighthouse," each distinctive in style and with its own manipulations of time. The first book comprises one day in the life of the Ramsay family during late September, toward the end of their stay at their summer home. The second encompasses ten years, during which the Ramsays leave this home, many of the characters die, and the house falls into disrepair until the Ramsays send word to their staff that they will shortly be returning. The third book, again detailing only one day, shows the return of the Ramsays and the voyage to the Lighthouse, a trip that had been promised to the character James in the first part of the novel ten years earlier. In each of these books, time passes in ways that are contradicted by the size of each book: sections showing only one day are ironically substantially larger than the section covering ten years. The first book, though it records only one day, takes up most of the novel. The second book, which spans ten years, is the shortest section of the book. Woolf uses the books segmenting her novel to indicate the irony in our tendency to place greater value over "what is commonly thought big" rather than "what is commonly thought small" ("Modern Fiction" 107).

In each book of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf created a central nucleus as a stabilizing force, placing around this nucleus the chaos of moments in daily life. While most authors prior to Woolf's time (and even some during it) focused on the plot, using it as a nuclear and stabilizing force in the novel, Woolf utilized the idea of the nucleus to manipulate other areas of the novel. Using a nucleus allowed her to explore areas of interest such as a character's perceptions in a specific moment, focusing on those areas rather than on plot development. In the first book, the character Mrs. Ramsay is the nucleus; her character is the calming force for other characters, and her sense of time differs from that of the other characters. In "Time Passes," the space the house occupies remains stable while time erodes the physical presence of the house. In the third book, Mrs. Ramsay reappears – although her character has died – in the form of a painting that another character, Lily, had begun of her ten years ago. Each of these different nuclei allows Woolf to place her attention on various aspects of time, space, and the human experience.

During the course of the first book, and arguably throughout the novel, Woolf's character Mrs. Ramsay becomes the nucleus. Mrs. Ramsay alone has the power to calm her husband and children, who are continually causing a ruckus in some form or another. She also appears more perceptive than the other characters, being able to "freeze" time and float above a scene even while she participates in it so as to watch and further understand what is happening. Using Mrs.

Ramsay as her focus allowed Woolf to manipulate time in one of the ways Kohler notes in his article, “Time in the Modern Novel.” Of the different ways authors can treat time, he states, “it [time] can also be pushed downward to reveal the depth and intensity of that [human] experience. Modern man cannot escape the *sense of the past* that rises, layer after layer, toward the present … Thousands of impressions are felt to be crowding in upon the present and pressing for recognition in the modern consciousness” (Kohler 19). Woolf uses Mrs. Ramsay as a pivoting point to hold together a novel that addresses different characters’ perceptions, the cacophony of noises and sensations that occur to them in a given moment, highlighting their experience rather than their march through a consecutive plot. Mrs. Ramsay’s nuclear status colors the consciousness of the other characters, as she is able to calm them, offering grounding against chaos. While her role as the nucleus partially ends when her character dies during the second book, the remaining characters are still governed by their thoughts of Mrs. Ramsay even after her death, indicating that she does have staying power throughout the novel.

Mrs. Ramsay is the center of her family, holding it together amidst the chaos of the other characters, including family members and friends. As she is able to manipulate and “freeze” time, Mrs. Ramsay becomes the grounding force that allows for a deeper look into the consciousness of the other family members. This manipulation of time is the primary foundation onto which Woolf affixes her experimentations with consciousness. Thus, Mrs. Ramsay quietly knitting in the room holds the novel together, even though the plot does not move and Woolf often dives deep into a different character’s experience. Mrs. Ramsay’s presence and unique understanding of time allow Woolf the flexibility to suspend time, ignore plot, and focus on experiences in a specific moment.

Two of the characters Woolf examines as a result of this manipulation of time are James, Mrs. Ramsay's youngest child, and Mr. Ramsay. Woolf starts the novel with a family argument, in which James wants to go to the lighthouse. Mrs. Ramsay tells him that if the weather is good the next day, he will be able to go. Mr. Ramsay dashes his son's hopes by telling him that the weather will turn sour, making them unable to make the trip. Mrs. Ramsay's nuclear status, combined with her ability to influence time, allows James and his father to work through their emotions and experiences while she supports the novel. First, the reader is provided with the ecstatic perspective of a child whose wish is about to be fulfilled. Mrs. Ramsay sits, pausing in time and plot as if she is holding it steady while Woolf turns her attention to James's joy:

> James Ramsay, sitting on the floor cutting out pictures from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores, endowed the picture of a refrigerator, as his mother spoke, with heavenly bliss. It was fringed with joy. The wheelbarrow, the lawnmower, the sound of poplar trees, leaves whitening before rain, rooks cawing, brooms knocking, dresses rustling – all these were so coloured and distinguished in his mind that he had already his private code, his secret language … so that his mother, watching him guide his scissors neatly round the refrigerator, imagined him all red and ermine on the Bench or directing a stern and momentous enterprise in some crisis of public affairs. (*To the Lighthouse* 3-4)

The plot barely moves during this description of James's happiness. While the reader is aware that Mrs. Ramsay is still in the room, perhaps even that she is the catalyst for his experience, the focus has turned to James. It is as though time has stopped, because the "moment of importance" is in James's excitement and the background noises that reflect his joy. However, it is only because Mrs. Ramsay is used as a base that Woolf can write with such detail and focus on James.

Mrs. Ramsey is in the background, holding the scene and the reader in that moment, allowing for an exploration into James's consciousness.

Mrs. Ramsay is equally the nucleus when Mr. Ramsay corrects his wife's statement on the weather. As Mr. Ramsay intentionally and continually disenchants James by telling him he will not be able to go to the lighthouse, the reader sees James's anger build. Though no conversation occurs in this text, Mr. Ramsay's presence causes his son's anger to rise, almost as if they are speaking. Rather than clinging to a sequence of events detailing the father and son's argument, the reader is forced to focus on the permanence of Mrs. Ramsay as Woolf provides a glimpse into the chaos of James's mind, indicating how his father's stance and figure affect him:

> Had there been an axe handy, or a poker, any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it. Such were the extremes of emotion that Mr. Ramsay excited in his children's breasts by his mere presence; standing, as now, lean as a knife, narrow as the blade of one, grinning sarcastically, not only with the pleasure of disillusioning his son and casting ridicule upon his wife, who was ten thousand times better in every way than he was (James thought), but also with some secret conceit at his own accuracy of judgement. (*To the Lighthouse* 4)

James's anger in this moment is not caused by a single event in linear time so much as by his perceptions of his father across time. James' perceptions accumulate as a part of mind time, when the mind attempts to find order in the events of consecutive time. The passage above indicates that Mr. Ramsay's actions are those of habit – he must point out the truth to his son, despite knowing (and perhaps even hoping) the truth will upset him. Thus, the accumulation of these feelings over time result in the more experiential time-sense the reader glimpses in James, when one simple action causes him to want to stab his father with a hot poker. James' time-sense is located in mind time rather than consecutive time, as he has created order out of the various actions his father has taken and unconsciously decides to hate him. Woolf's characters' experiences are a deep diversion from the traditional plot structure of a novel, but the work is held together by Mrs. Ramsay, the nucleus. Holding Mrs. Ramsay in the background of this scene, Woolf temporarily stops time in order to explore James's emotions amidst the chaos of sensations his father provides with a sarcastic grin, his "secret conceit," and his "lean" stance.

The focus then returns to Mrs. Ramsay as she calms the chaos of James's mind, eventually morphing into her own thoughts as she comforts him by insisting that the weather will be satisfactory. By calming the argument, she slips into her own thoughts, and time flows in its fits and starts in her mind. The reader nearly forgets that James's father ever disappointed him, being swept up in Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts of the child with a bad hip cooped up in the lighthouse for so many months. Because she has calmed the storm of James's emotions, the novel's concentration returns to Mrs. Ramsay's perceptions, moving the reader through the time of the novel as it is seen through her eyes rather than through plot.

Woolf's use of Mrs. Ramsay as the nucleus for a new interpretation of human experience is further evidenced in Mrs. Ramsay's own perceptions during the first book of *To the Lighthouse.* For a significant portion of the first book, Mrs. Ramsay reads a book to James, easing his disappointment about the lighthouse. Yet, while the plot would seem to be simply that Mrs. Ramsay is reading a book to him, the emphasis is on Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts rather than the plot of reading the story. Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts are written alongside various quotes from the story she reads: "''Well, what does she want then?' said the Flounder.' And where were they now? Mrs. Ramsay wondered, reading and thinking, quite easily, both at the same time; for the story of the Fisherman and his Wife was like the bass gently accompanying a tune, which now and then ran up unexpectedly into the melody" (*To the Lighthouse* 56).The story of the Fisherman, as well as the plot of the novel itself, is the undercurrent, not the focal point. Rather, the center of Mrs. Ramsay's attention is her own thoughts. She is consciously contemplating her own thought process rather than the story she reads to her child. This story she reads, with its formulaic plot, is merely supplementary to her experiences. Woolf emphasizes perception over a consecutive timeline to such an extent that even her character notes how the plot merely accompanies her own thought process.

Woolf's use of metaphorical language in the passage with the Fisherman story is another way in which she manipulates time. The passage of time has a musical quality, with various acts occurring simultaneously in a sort of harmony. The Fisherman story is labeled the "base" to a song, which runs into the "melody" of Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts. The "music" of the two simultaneous experiences also has a wavelike quality, as the base runs "unexpectedly" into the melody. Her thoughts weave in and out of the story she reads to James, a story that flows like a gentle undercurrent. The symbol of waves as a metaphor for the passage of time becomes clearer in her later novel, *The Waves*. It is also significant that Woolf chose reading as an activity during which Mrs. Ramsay could explore her thoughts. The reading of a highly traditional children's tale, a linear story with a common theme, is a meta-fiction for the novel in which the reader is immersed, one imbued with modern techniques. The inclusion of the linear Fisherman story within Mrs. Ramsay's bending, curving story draws the reader's attention to their experience of reading Woolf's novel, highlighting how radically modern Woolf's interpretation of plot and time in *To the Lighthouse* is.

Woolf also uses Mrs. Ramsay's character as her foundation for an exploration of space as it relates to a character's experience of time. Mrs. Ramsay not only thinks about her perceptions of a specific moment; she is able to experience the moment within a space that is different from and above the space she actually occupies in order to further contemplate these perceptions. This dissociation from the moment in space in order to further examine it happens while knitting, a pastime of Mrs. Ramsay's. As she knits the stocking, she thinks of how she can simply be alone, not needing to think, only to be. She thinks,

> All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, *a wedge-shaped core of darkness*, something invisible to others. Although she continued to knit, and sat upright, it was thus that she felt herself; and this self having shed it attachments was free for the strangest adventures. … This core of darkness could go anywhere, for no one saw it. They could not stop it, she thought, exulting. There was freedom, there was peace, there was, most welcome of all, a summoning together, a resting on a platform of stability … Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir; and there rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity" (*To the Lighthouse* 62-63, emphasis added).

Mrs. Ramsay continues knitting, fulfilling the novel's need for a plot. Yet, as she does so, her character becomes the nucleus for two simultaneous experiences – that of the Mrs. Ramsay knitting and that of the Mrs. Ramsay who has become the "wedge-shaped core of darkness." A simple plot – if indeed the knitting is enough to be considered plot – is overshadowed by the fantastical image of Mrs. Ramsay with all her commitments and actions falling away from her, revealing the form that is her true self. Although she continues knitting, time seems to pause, allowing her to explore the freedom of space and thought her consciousness provides.

Mrs. Ramsay's knitting is also noteworthy for its metaphorical relationship to plot and time. As Mrs. Ramsay engages in her thoughts, allowing herself to drift into mind time, the plot of the novel is carried on by her knitting. Knitting by nature is a linear process, accomplished stitch by stitch and row by row. The knitting is representative of consecutive time, of the plot relentlessly plodding on row by row through the novel. Though it is not plot in the conventional sense, not constituting enough action to sustain a traditional novel, knitting is enough to push Mrs. Ramsay and *To the Lighthouse* forward in time while still allowing Woolf the freedom to explore Mrs. Ramsay's sense of herself in relation to time and space. Through her knitting, Mrs. Ramsay is able to both explore her own perceptions and guide the novel forward, sustaining her role as the nucleus.

Mrs. Ramsay's nuclear status in the first book also gains her a position at the center of social activities, during which she can explore time and her perceptions of other characters while maintaining control of the physical goings-on. The pivotal scene in which Woolf uses Mrs. Ramsay as the nucleus to both stem the chaos of different characters' colliding perceptions and to explore these perceptions is the dinner scene. The entire Ramsay family comes to dinner, along with all the guests staying at the house with them. Mrs. Ramsay, orchestrating the dinner, realizes that she is outside of their group, having a different perspective of her guests than they do of themselves or one another. The narrator uses Mrs. Ramsay as a center for upholding plot and exploring perception: "Raising her eyebrows at the discrepancy – that was what she was thinking, this was what she was doing – ladling out soup – she felt, more and more strongly, outside that eddy; or as if a shade had fallen, and, robbed of colour, she saw things truly …

Nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her" (*To the Lighthouse* 83). While she is in the physical space of the dining room, she is also in a space in her consciousness, which flows and eddies, enabling her to see how her guests fit or do not fit together. Mrs. Ramsay's experience of her consciousness falls outside of a consecutive sense of time, as the reader forgets she is ladling soup, focusing instead on the different characters and the forms of their experiences. Because Mrs. Ramsay is the nucleus, thus adhering her to the requisite plot, Woolf is able to further explore her sense of consciousness, including her perceptions of others' consciousnesses.

As the guests begin to eat and mingle, Mrs. Ramsay even further detaches herself from the physical scene, enjoying the different sense of space and time offered by studying her perceptions. She seems able to actually suspend time, moving to a different space in the room mentally, in order to fully enjoy her sensations and perceptions. Of Mrs. Ramsay's out-of-body experience, the text reads:

> Just now (but this cannot last, she thought, dissociating herself from the moment while they were all talking about boots) just now she had reached security; she hovered like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy which filled every nerve of her body fully and sweetly, not noisily, solemnly rather, for it arose, she thought, looking at them all eating there, from husband and children and friends; all of which rising in this profound stillness (she was helping William Bankes to one very small piece more, and peered into the depths of the earthenware pot) seemed now for no special reason to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together. Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all round them. (*To the Lighthouse* 104-105).

Woolf employs parenthetical references to ground Mrs. Ramsay within the plot. This grounding provides Woolf the opportunity to explore Mrs. Ramsay's sense of her guests, distancing her from the time and space in which the dinner is happening so that Mrs. Ramsay may analyze her own perceptions of the guests, the scene, and the passage of time. Though the novel is still told through a narrator, the novel dives so deeply into Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts that the reader is engaged with her, being able to see inside her consciousness much more clearly than the characters in *The Voyage Out*.

In the second book, Woolf changes her focus from Mrs. Ramsay to the physical space of the house. The Ramsays leave the house, planning to return, but war and the deaths of family members delay them by ten years. During that time span, the house rots away. Woolf uses the space as a stabilizing force to experiment with time, showing its effect on the building. As there are no significant characters on which to hang the plot, the plot of land on which the house rests must suffice. The wind and plants are personified, showing the movement of time through the house. The reader is unaware of how much time passes during this interlude, as the attention is focused on the wind moving through the space. Consecutive time falls away while the novel is grounded by the physical space the house occupies:

> So with the house empty and the doors locked and the mattresses rolled round, those stray airs, advance guards of great armies, blustered in, brushed bare boards, nibbled and fanned, met nothing in bedroom or drawing-room that wholly resisted them but only hangings that flapped, wood that creaked, the bare legs of tables, saucepans and china already furred, tarnished, cracked … So loveliness reigned and stillness, and together made the shape of loveliness itself, a form from which life had parted … Loveliness and stillness clasped hands in the bedroom, and among the shrouded jugs and sheeted chairs

> even the prying of the wind, and the soft noise of the clammy sea airs, rubbing, snuffling, iterating, and reiterating their questions – 'Will you fade? Will you perish?' – scarcely disturbed the peace, the indifference, the air of pure integrity, as if the question they asked scarcely needed that they should answer: we remain. (*To the Lighthouse* 128-129)

The personification of the wind as not only part of an army, but as "stillness and loveliness" provides two different conceptions of time at once: one of a continually advancing sense of time, and one of a soft, quiet, stillness that does not move forward. The reader experiences the sense of time more fully, as they are not merely subjected to a plodding, consecutive time, but are engaged in the flowing sense of time that is at once reckless and tranquil.

As consecutive time and the wind do further damage to the house, the sense of time changes. Woolf uses pairings of opposites and stronger language to indicate the ravaging effects of time on the space once familiar to the reader:

> 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) from the upper rooms of the empty house only gigantic chaos streaked with lightning could have been heard tumbling and tossing, as the winds 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 or 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 wonton lust aimlessly by itself. (*To the Lighthouse* 134-135)

Although the reader still has no sense of how much consecutive time has passed, the mention of both days and seasons indicates that the Ramsays' last visit was long ago. The winds have changed from slow, loving breezes moving about the house to enormous, battling creatures. Whether they battle each other or the house is unclear, but their effect upon the house's physical nature is. The reader, though unaware of exact consecutive time, senses time experientially, illustrating Woolf's attempt to authentically describe the human experience of time. Woolf accomplishes this sense of time without the use of character; only the house is relevant. Thus, as there is only the house to be affected by time (with no characters present to experience it), the reader is the only one who must form these perceptions of time from the sensations provided.

The third book opens when the Ramsays finally return to the house, attempting to rebuild a semblance of their old lives before war and death ruined them. Woolf alters the center of the novel yet again, back to a representation of Mrs. Ramsay. Though Mrs. Ramsay has died, a guest at the house, Lily Briscoe, had begun a painting of her sitting on the porch ten years earlier. As Lily returns to the house and is inspired to begin working on that painting again, the painting itself becomes not only a connection to the past with Mrs. Ramsay, but also to the present time, in which the Ramsays are rebuilding their life and connections amongst each other.

The book's first few chapters indicate the chaos that reigns in Mrs. Ramsay's absence. Mr. Ramsay is listless, wandering, and the children run about but seem not to know what to do with themselves without their mother. Lily, not having seen the Ramsays for many years, is not comfortable being back in the house without the grounding presence of Mrs. Ramsay. Lily sits in the kitchen alone:

> What does it mean then, what can it all mean? Lily Briscoe asked herself, wondering whether, since she had been left alone, it behooved her to go to the kitchen to fetch another cup of coffee or wait here. What does it mean? – a catchword that was, caught up from some book, fitting her thought loosely, for she could not, this first morning with the

> Ramsays, contract her feelings, could only make a phrase resound to cover the blankness of her mind until these vapours had shrunk. For really, what did she feel, come back after all these years and Mrs. Ramsay dead? Nothing, nothing – nothing that she could express at all. (*To the Lighthouse* 145)

Lily, unable to find her grounding, feels confused and lost. She tries to determine what it is she actually feels, but cannot seem to express it. What will now ground the characters in plot? she seems to ask Woolf and her readers. In the subsequent pages, Woolf answers her question by using Lily's own painting as a way for Lily to express her sensations, as well as to once again ground the novel.

Remaining at the table, Lily is the one to now notice the myriad parts that compose the family and their overlapping experiences. As the others get ready for their trip to the lighthouse, she ponders, "Going to the Lighthouse. But what does one send to the Lighthouse? Perished. Alone. The grey-green light on the wall opposite. The empty places. Such were some of the parts, but how to bring them together? she asked" (*To the Lighthouse* 147). The "parts" are not even people, but the people's perceptions and experiences. This chaotic assortment makes Lily feel as though she must escape before she is swept up in it. Yet, as she sits there, she realizes a way to create order:

> Suddenly she remembered. When she had sat there last ten years ago there had been a little sprig or leaf pattern on the table-cloth, which she had looked at in a moment of revelation. There had been a problem about a foreground of a picture. Move the tree to the middle, she had said. She had never finished that picture. She would paint that picture now. It had been knocking about in her mind all these years. (*To the Lighthouse* 147)

The chaos in Lily's mind that has been inside for ten years, as well as the chaos of the return to the house, seems to be solved in the recollection that Lily can move the tree and fix her painting. In painting the picture, she brings Mrs. Ramsay back to the novel in the form of a triangular shape, connecting the novel back to the first book and the wedge of darkness Mrs. Ramsay felt was her true self. This return of Mrs. Ramsay also provides a calming force for the chaos in the family since her death.

This shape is more than simply a representation of Mrs. Ramsay, however; it is also a call back to the flow of time that Mrs. Ramsay embodied in the first book. Though the characters have arrived at the third book much changed, the chaos that results from the supposedly ordered, exacting figure of Mr. Ramsay and his children still needs the calming force of "time by values," that disorderly but flowing, experiential sense of time. Mrs. Ramsay, while not physically present and thus unable to pause or distend time for her family, regains a new presence in this shape. The shape grounds the picture, bringing not only Mrs. Ramsay but also the sense of her presence, of her understanding of the flow of experience through time and space, back to her family.

It is also fascinating from a scientific perspective that a shadowy triangle should represent Mrs. Ramsay. Brown notes the suitability of the triangle for both Mrs. Ramsay's character and the concept of relativity, which Einstein famously explored. The triangle is important because it was used by Cologne Minkowski, Einstein's former math teacher, to show how space and time work together in a lecture he gave in 1908 called "Space and Time." Brown states, "To help illustrate the special theory of relativity, he [Minkowski] advocated thinking of time as one side of a right triangle, space the other, and spacetime as the hypotenuse" (46). The triangle's legs are representative of previous understandings of time and space, showing how they come together to form the hypotenuse that is the modern understanding of relative timespace, time and space melded together in a configuration that according to theory requires and is relative to the observer. The “wedge-shaped core of darkness” that represents Mrs. Ramsay is therefore not only a symbol of the woman herself, but of the effect she had on the other characters and their experience of time.

Woolf’s explorations of time in her early stages of writing resulted in significant achievement in *To the Lighthouse*. This novel incorporated different senses of time within the sections of the novel, whether or not there were even characters to experience those senses. Woolf was able to move beyond the use of the omniscient narrator, using the characters extensively to explore their own and each other’s perceptions of time and experience. She also used the plot to her advantage, using it when necessary but pushing it down while using characters or space to support the novel while she delved into the characters’ minds. Her use of different forces in the novel as nuclei enabled her to examine various parts of the consciousness as well as study and manipulate time. Yet, while it accomplished so much, Woolf had yet to be satisfied with her work. After the work’s publication, Woolf wrote to her sister, Vanessa Bell, that “At the moment it seems to me inconceivably bad – in which case, it will be a success I daresay, like Bunny’s book, about which Lytton, Raymond and I agree – it is unspeakably bad” (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three 1923-1928* 335). Even if it were successful, similar to the work of many authors (particularly “Bunny”), she would still see it as “unspeakably bad,” though she did not note in her letter why she felt this way. Thus, as *To the Lighthouse* had not yet satisfied her creative endeavors, she continued to ponder what life and time truly were, truly felt like, and how to represent the reality of those sensations in *The Waves.*

"Writing to a Rhythm"[2]: Impressions and Time Symbols in *The Waves*

Though *To the Lighthouse* incorporates what is normally labeled a modernist interpretation of time, Woolf continued to struggle with authentically depicting time. Her continued questioning about how to render an authentic depiction of time led her to refine its portrayal in *The Waves.* In *The Waves*, rather than focusing on a series of events, six characters provide monologues of their own impressions and perceptions, as well as their perceptions of another character who is not given a voice, Percival. The six, who include Bernard, Jinny, Louis, Rhoda, Susan, and Neville, each provide internal monologues in turn during the same time period in their lives, such as when they are all at school or when they all reach middle age. These various points in their lives are separated by lyrical depictions of the sun and waves metaphorically representing the point they have reached in life. In order to accomplish such a non-traditional, modern novel, Woolf focused on her use of literary devices. She discarded some, such as plot and narration, in favor of others, including interior monologues and metaphor. These literary choices, including the distinct lack of a narrated plot, the metaphorical use of the seashore imagery to indicate the passage of time, and the characters' struggle between clock time and mind time push *The Waves* further into a modernist interpretation of time.

In *The Waves*, it is quickly apparent that Woolf's modernist ponderings were focused on the problem of plot, as this work avoids the use of plot even in the ways that it was present in her previous works. Daiches notes this lack of plot as a defining characteristic of *The Waves*. He writes, "There is no 'plot' in the sense that *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* possess a plot – a careful patterning of ideas and impressions which enables everything to come together in an extremely complex integration" (108-109). The plot is not simply missing from this work; it was left out by design. In "Modern Fiction," Woolf recognizes that writers are "constrained ... to provide a plot," but wonders, "Is life like this? Must novels be like this?" (106). Woolf questions plot as a device; it does not allow the author full movement, full description of perceptions. As it was the description of perceptions as people moved through time that most concerned Woolf, she worked to move one step closer to those temporal perceptions than *To the Lighthouse* had brought her.

In order for an author to let go of his or her novel's plot, it is first important to understand the purpose of the plot and how it is both helpful and harmful to the author's purpose. Woolf realized that the sense of causality Forster labeled crucial to plot was simply a rope for readers, a way to help them "hang on" throughout the story. Woolf, feeling that plot could carry a story only so far, denied herself the convenient tether that plot provided, looking for other ways to tie together a story that did not include plot but still had places for the reader to take hold. This experimentation began with the use of different nuclei in *To the Lighthouse*, in which the narrator explains characters' changing perceptions of themselves and each other, particularly their perceptions of themselves in time. Rather than use a narrator to depict how perceptions change, however, Woolf experiments in *The Waves* with monologues delivered in a sort of perpetual present. The monologues provide readers with a sense of the characters, their perceptions of events, and their perceptions of a seventh friend, Percival. Readers learn of Percival only through the monologues provided by the other six characters, never through plot or action. For example, when they meet for a send-off dinner celebrating Percival's upcoming trip to India, the characters narrate Percival's arrival:

> "Now," said Neville, "my tree flowers. My heart rises. All oppression is relieved. All impediment is removed. The reign of chaos is over. He has imposed order. Knives cut again."

> "Here is Percival," said Jinny. "He has not dressed."
>
> "Here is Percival," said Bernard, "smoothing his hair, not from vanity (he does not look in the glass), but to propitiate the god of decency. He is conventional; he is a hero. The little boys trooped after him across the playing-fields. They blew their noses as he blew his nose, but unsuccessfully, for he is Percival. Now, when he is about to leave us, to go to India, all these trifles come together. He is a hero." (*The Waves* 68)

Everything the reader knows about Percival, including his personality traits and the way others feel about him, is learned not from narration or an extensive linear plot, but from the other characters' perceptions. The reader has no sequence to read in which they realize that Percival is a hero, with little boys following him since his youth and imitating him. Rather, the reader must trust the fragment of Bernard's memory, a brief image of Percival on the playing field, in order to understand who Percival is to Bernard and in the world. The sense of traditional time and plot in which the reader gets to know a character is thrown out, challenging the reader to learn about Percival and his six friends in a new way.

The lack of narrated plot also pushes the novel's characters into a perpetual present or "now," significantly altering the sense of time as it is normally understood in the novel. A narrator, who normally describes events and provides visual information, does not help the reader along in *The Waves*. The lack of plot and narrated information means that the reader must rely on only the impressions of the six characters giving monologues, and is limited to take in information at the exact moment that the characters see or think it. Thus, rather than reading a past-tense version containing a series of events, the reader is bombarded with the "myriad impressions" Woolf sought to portray. Even when the characters reflect or remember, the reader is transported with those memories so that they become the present, because they are presently in the mind of the character. The reader sees each character's thought as if it were emblazoned on a screen, but then the screen shifts to show yet another image, forcing the reader to drop the image of just one moment ago to focus on the new one, happening now.

The characters' language also reflects a strangely present-oriented novel. The monologues consist partly of declarations of things the characters see, and partly of the analysis of those images. Overwhelmingly, as the characters note what they see, they use "now" to clue the reader in to the present. For example, as the children are playing at the same house while the servants prepare food, they all note their different impressions:

> "Now Biddy scrapes the fish-scales with a jagged knife on to a wooden board," said Neville.
>
> "The dining-room window is dark blue now,' said Bernard, 'and the air ripples above the chimneys."
>
> "A swallow is perched on the lightning-conductor,' said Susan, 'and Biddy has smacked down the bucket on the kitchen flags."
>
> "That is the first stroke of the church bell," said Louis. "Then the others follow: one, two; one, two."
>
> "Look at the tablecloth, flying white along the table," said Rhoda. "Now there are rounds of white china, an silver streaks beside each plate." (*The Waves* 5)

The characters, children at this point, make note of everything their gaze passes over. Things that are newly occurring, such as the cook scraping fish scales, or that have somehow changed, such as the color out the window, are explained with "now" to show the immediacy and novelty of the observation. Everything is happening "now," and in an effort to keep up, all the things that happened such a short time ago must be forgotten in order to focus on the present.

This technique of mentioning "now" and exactly what the characters notice, whether important or minute, is more prevalent at the beginning of the novel than the end, perhaps because it lends itself easily to a child-like understanding of the world, in which everything seen is fascinating and worthy of a comment. Regardless, it is used throughout the novel and forces the reader into a different frame of mind regarding time. Rather than be a passive observer of events just past, they must watch with the characters as impressions fly through their minds, perpetually in the present.

While the characters keep the reader oriented in the present moment, it is the poetic sun and wave imagery placed between the sets of monologues that orients the reader concerning when in the characters' lives this present is occurring. *The Waves* is divided into nine parts by a description of the sun and waves, complete with the sun's location in the sky, the color of the waves, and the response of flowers and birds to the sun's rays. The sun rises higher in each depiction, until it reaches its full height and must sink again until it sets. The sun metaphorically portrays the time in the characters' lives – whether they are school children, young adults, or elderly. The first sentence of each section indicates the position of the sun, with the rest of the passage detailing the relationship amongst the sun, waves, and the birds and flowers. In the first passage depicting the metaphorical seashore, for example, Woolf writes, "The sun had not yet risen" (*The Waves* 3). She then describes the sea like a sheet, with the waves sighing in and out like a person sleeping. The sun begins to rise, looking, as Woolf details, "as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow spread across the sky like the blades of a fan" (*The Waves* 3). As the sun inches closer to the horizon, Woolf continues the image of the woman with the lamp, stating,

> Then she raised her lamp higher and the air seemed to become fibrous and to tear away from the green surface flickering and flaming in red and yellow fibres like the smoky fire that roars from a bonfire … Slowly the arm that held the lamp raised it higher and then higher until a broad flame became visible; an arc of fire burnt on the rim of the horizon, and all round it the sea blazed gold. (*The Waves* 3)

The bursting of the sun over the edge of the horizon is metaphorical for the birth and introduction of the characters, both into the world and to the reader. At this stage, all the characters are children playing in the garden, finding interest in bugs and leaves.

The sun sections out their lives in this manner, climbing into the sky until it reaches its apex, in their young adulthood. It is in this passage that the reader learns Percival has been thrown from his horse and is dead. The poetic sun imagery becomes harsher, showing a time when they have now reached adulthood and responsibility, and when life can be similarly harsh. Woolf writes,

> The sun had risen to its full height. It was no longer half seen and guessed at, from hints and gleams … Now the sun burnt uncompromising, undeniable. It struck upon the hard sand, and the rocks became furnaces of red heat, it searched each pool and caught the minnow hiding in the cranny, and showed the rusty cartwheel, the white bone, or the boot without laces stuck, black as iron, in the sand. It gave to everything its exact measure of colour … It beat on the orchard wall, and every pit and grain of the brick was silver pointed, purple, fiery as if soft to touch, as if touched it must melt into hot-baked grains of dust. (*The Waves* 82)

The writing contains a sense of the time in the severe glare of the sun, both in terms of the bright gleam of young adults setting out into the world and in the harsh death of Percival. While no specific time is ever stated, the reader knows that it is approximately noon – the height of life and the time when the sun – as well as life itself – is most harsh.

While the sun metaphorically determines the time of the characters' lives, from their beginnings as children not yet old enough to go to school until their eventual deaths, the waves represent the pulse of life. Graham observes the importance of the waves as a metaphor, writing, "The book is dominated by the rhythm of waves: in the poetic passages between sections … the thoughts of the characters eddy and swirl restlessly; the style surges and subsides with brilliant intensity" (Graham 35). Thus, the waves and sun represent not only a way of understanding the character's time of life, but the internal rhythms of life as they come. When the children are sent away to school, being separated for the first time, the dancing, dappled sunlight of early morning heightens their nervousness during such a stressful and exciting time. But the waves roll on, as it is that time in life when the children must go to school. The last line of the passage reads, "Meanwhile the concussion of the waves breaking fell with muffled thuds, like logs falling, on the shore" (*The Waves* 15). Though the breaking of the waves has a slightly ominous tone with the log imagery and "muffled thuds," a reminder of the changes to come, the waves become the steadying element in a tumultuous time.

The waves appear in the lyrical passages to indicate time, as well as in the characters' perceptions and thoughts throughout their monologues. They recognize their minds as eddying, sometimes swiftly rushing and sometimes calm and smooth, though always with the pulse of the moving waves. For example, when they are all running around as children, Jinny feels her blood pumping through her body like waves crashing through her. In her monologue, she says, "Everything in my body seems thinned out with running and triumph. My blood must be right red, whipped up, slapping against my ribs … There is nothing staid, nothing settled, in this universe. All is rippling, all is dancing; all is quickness and triumph" (*The Waves* 24-25). Her personality later comes out as dancing and sensual, so the quick beat of her pulse matches these characteristics. The waves she feels inside her are her body as well as her mind, portraying a sense of her internal clock as she moves through the world. The waves are a symbolic representation of the rhythmic nature of a person moving through and experiencing time.

While it seems at first as though the sun images and wave images match one another, providing a linear and an experiential sense of time, respectively, *The Waves* also depicts a struggle between these two senses of time, returning to the original question Woolf posed in *The Voyage Out*: which sense of time is most authentic? The characters vacillate between consecutive time and mind time, sometimes seeing the world in terms of their lived experience and then remembering they live in a world governed by the clock. This uncertain balance between the two types of time harkens back to Woolf's early struggles between them in *The Voyage Out*, but achieves a more sophisticated balance in that the characters come to understand clock time as having an effect on their experience, but not so much as mind time, which is the undercurrent of their lives.

Clock time in the novel has some governing power over the characters, ticking on as the characters move through various life stages. As children, the characters notice clock time, but see it as incidental – it is one of many impressions they receive, not a guiding force in their lives. In the first section of the novel, Louis notes the sound of the church bells, which often toll the hours: "'That is the first stroke of the church bell,' said Louis. 'Then the others follow: one, two; one, two; one, two'" (*The Waves* 5). As Louis notices the church bells, Rhoda notes the white of the tablecloth, Neville a bee flying past his ear, and Jinny the water beginning to boil in a pan. The clock time is present, but simply one of many things to be noticed, a mere sound in the background. By the time they reach the next section, when they are to be sent off to school, clock time has begun to have an effect on them. Bernard notes the faces of the clock staring at him, thinking, "'Now the awful portals of the station gape; "the moon-faced clock regards me". I must make phrases and phrases and so interpose something hard between myself and the stare of housemaids, the stare of clocks, staring faces, indifferent faces, or I shall cry'" (*The Waves* 16). Now that Bernard is older, with the clock telling him it is time to leave his friends, linear time has significant meaning and control in his life. Much later, in Bernard's last monologue before the characters die and the novel ends, the clock signals the drive with which clock time moves, ending the moment even when he does not want it to. Bernard notes, "'The clock ticks; the woman sneezes; the waiter comes – there is a gradual coming together, running into one, acceleration and unification'" (*The Waves* 165). As he thinks, time marches on, accelerating until the dinner and eventually life is over.

While clock time indicates the onward movement of time, regardless of whether the characters want time to move on or not, "mind time" struggles with and triumphs over clock time in *The Waves*. The mind time is often associated with the waves, eddying and moving through the characters' minds. It is their more natural state, as it is imbued in their lives, while clock time is simply imposed upon them. When the children are released from school, home for the summer, Rhoda feels the return of her mind time, of life, as the forced life by the clock is left behind at school. She ruminates,

> "So I detach the summer term. With intermittent shocks, sudden as the springs of a tiger, life emerges heaving its dark crest from the sea. It is to this we are attached; it is to this we are bound, as bodies to wild horses. And yet we have invented devices for filling up the crevices and disguising these fissures … This I say is the present moment; this is the

> first day of the summer holidays. This is part of the emerging monster to whom we are attached." (*The Waves* 35)

Her relief to leave school and life guided by the clock is so strong that she feels as though life is flooding back into her. The "life" she speaks of is her mind time, as it is her lived experience. "Life" in this way is not bound by the clock; rather, Rhoda feels physically and mentally attached to the experiences, perceptions, and impressions which compose her life, the "moment[s] of importance."

These moments do not disappear as the characters age. Later, when Jinny and Neville visit one another as adults, Neville notices the ticking of the clock, but denies its importance:

> "Why, look," said Neville, "at the clock ticking on the mantelpiece? Time passes, yes. And we grow old. But to sit with you, alone with you, here in London, in this firelit room, you there, I here, is all … There can be no doubt, I thought, pushing aside the newspaper, that our mean lives, unsightly as they are, put on splendor and have meaning only under the eyes of love." (*The Waves* 99)

He notes the sound and place of the clock, acknowledging the passage of time. But his focus is on the love the two of them share. Their lived experience, the life of their relationship, is more important than the clock on the mantelpiece. Though it holds a special place in the room, centered over the fireplace, its importance is diminished by the blaze of love and life that is the two characters together. The lived experience of being together, whether it is metered out in clock ticks or not, holds Neville's profound interest.

Even in the characters' deaths at the end of the book, the undercurrent of life or mind time eclipses clock time. Bernard acknowledges his age, noting the ongoing schedule he '"must, must, must – detestable word"' follow (*The Waves* 165). Yet, as he speaks and death approaches, the movement of the waves becomes more prevalent in his speech. He feels the waves coming up to take him, the end of life, and they rise up, no longer the undercurrent but a sweeping, driving force. In his last paragraph, he states,

> "And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back. I am aware once more of a new desire, something rising beneath me like the proud horse whose rider first spurs and then pulls him back. What enemy do we now perceive advancing against us, you whom I ride now, as we stand pawing this stretch of pavement? It is death. Death is the enemy … I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!" (*The Waves* 167)

Though Bernard resists, fighting death, the waves, the rhythm of life, come to swallow him. The ticking of the clock is forgotten as he focuses on the wave of experience coming over him. Though up until the end of the novel, the characters have wavered between considering clock time and life or mind time important, Woolf's last line crushes any uncertainty about the triumph of mind time over clock time: "*The waves broke on the shore*" (*The Waves* 167). The waves, symbolic of the rhythm of life, have now reached the shore and the end of their lives. So, too, have the characters. The rhythmic flow of their lives reaches an end as the waves reach the shore. As clock time cannot govern when waves will break on the shore, all mention of clocks is forgotten in this last passage in favor of the rhythms of the waves.

The Evolution of a Writer: Virginia Woolf's Shift from the Conventional to the Radical

Virginia Woolf fashioned modernist works by breaking convention and experimenting with the form of the novel. Concerned with fashioning an authentic depiction of human experience, Woolf grappled with many of the same inquiries other modernists were addressing at the time, including questions of our own perceptions and how to best depict or even construct reality. The fascination in Woolf's work, however, is her devotion to the human experience of time. Woolf began with a traditional plotline in *The Voyage Out*, but questioned whether this plot and the sense of time it evoked was authentic. She had refined her work significantly by the time she wrote *To the Lighthouse,* a work hailed for its modernist form and exceptional manipulation of time. Yet, even this modern work was not sufficiently radical for Woolf, leading her to write *The Waves*, a novel that is as much poetry as novel, as it is so different in form from the conventional novel.

The evolution evidenced by an examination of these three novels reflects how a novelist's writing style and ability to manipulate the form of the novel change as the writer explores their work. Thus, readers may consider works of writing not as static, but as moments in life of their author, a concept Woolf herself seems to have believed. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf states, "For books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately" (87). Though she spoke of books by different authors, her words hold true for the learning that results from the study of a single author across time. A study of Woolf's novels demonstrates the significance of her earlier novels as well as her later works. Though substantially less famous, her early works contained the seeds of modernism that manifested themselves much more radically in her later works. *The Voyage Out,* though insufficiently modern by Woolf's standards, was nevertheless equally as important as her other novels, as it allowed her to explore and question ideas and techniques that appear as more refined versions in her often-extolled later works. Readers can thus come to appreciate such an early work for the modernist features that it does contain, as well as the ways it foreshadows Woolf's achievement in subsequent works.

Appendix

The inspiration for this project was sparked by my fascination with *Night and Day*, a lesser-known novel by Virginia Woolf. The novel was assigned to me as part of a course I took entitled "British Writers and the Woman Question." In writing a paper discussing the novel, I found an entry in Woolf's diary noting her disappointment with the work for its lack of modernity. As this novel was the only work I had read from the modernist era, I was shocked to find that aspects I had found so modern in *Night and Day* were a mere taste of the modernism found in her later works. This discovery inspired my continued research of the seeds of modernity I recognized in *Night and Day* and prompted me to examine other works by Woolf. An interest in Woolf's manipulation of time developed as I studied Katharine and Ralph, two characters in *Night and Day*, and the temporal aspects of their relationship. Woolf created a different time-sense between these two characters than in the rest of the novel, partly to show their growing relationship and partly as a modernist experiment. A reading of *To the Lighthouse* proved that Woolf had persisted in her endeavor to authentically depict and manipulate time. Thus, what began as a simple question regarding why Woolf was disappointed by her own work became a focused study on Woolf's manipulations of time across three of her novels.

I began working on this project by reading novels by Woolf mentioned in works referenced for the *Night and Day* paper assignment. In addition to *Night and Day*, I read *The Voyage Out*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *The Waves*. I read each through once to understand the content and to make general observations about Woolf's use of time. I then began collecting resources about Woolf's life, her manipulations of time, the ways modernists depicted and distorted time, and other movements occurring within modernism that may have influenced Woolf's work. As I began reading through these resources and focusing my ideas, I narrowed my project to three books. As I wanted to explore the beginnings of Woolf's modernist techniques and how these beginnings influenced later novels, I chose Woolf's earliest novel, *The Voyage Out*. I then selected *To the Lighthouse*, one of Woolf's most successful books in terms of modernist techniques as well as critical reception. I chose this novel over *Mrs. Dalloway* because I felt that it contained more various techniques to manipulate time than those I found in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Finally, I chose *The Waves,* a novel written after *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* that garnered less attention but seemed to me even more radically modern than *To the Lighthouse*, a work many believe to be the pinnacle of Woolf's modernist work. After narrowing my project to these three works, I reread each of the novels looking for specific examples and patterns in Woolf's distortions of time, writing the paper after I had finished reading all three.

The most significant problem faced with the completion of this project was the difficulty in maintaining a narrow focus. This difficulty, though common to academic writing, was compounded by the subject matter of this paper. Both the subjects of modernism and Virginia Woolf are expansive, with one idea leading to the next. Modernism was an extensive movement that spanned art forms of all kinds, including visual and written art, which formed in response to social, historical, and scientific pressures. Socially, modernists were rejecting the Victorian ideals of the early 1900s, abandoning conventional forms in favor of radical experimentation. Historically, Europe was facing an international crisis with the devastating effects of World War I. Scientifically, discoveries about the most basic materials of the universe altered common conceptions about everyday objects. These pressures caused modernists to reevaluate the forms of their arts, both literary and visual, encouraging formal experimentation and public conversation about the meaning of art and literature. The vastness of the modernism movement and its influences pose difficulties in retaining a narrow focus.

Virginia Woolf as a subject of study also poses a similar problem. As she is often studied, there is a wealth of information about her life and works, including both primary and secondary sources. She wrote novels, short fiction, and essays on writing, exploring the successes and failures she found in her own works as well as the aims of the modernism movement. In addition to her self-analyses, other authors, critics, and scholars also studied Woolf's life and her works. In order to even begin to study Woolf, one must delve into works by other scholars, entering the scholarly conversation surrounding Woolf's intentions and the manifestations of her ideas. The vast and varied aims of Woolf herself also proved problematic, as one element of modernism in her work could and frequently did serve multiple functions. These interlocking ideas were important to consider, but needed to be carefully filtered so as to keep the paper focused.

Two avenues that I rejected were looking at time manipulations through specific characters and studying both time and space as equal parts of the paper. I began my research by looking at specific characters Woolf used to depict her different senses of time, but in studying *To the Lighthouse*, I found that in some cases, time was manipulated in the absence of characters. In book 2 of *To the Lighthouse,* the decay of the summer home while no characters are present is a poignant example of the effects of time. *The Voyage Out* also presented a problem in terms of characters: my analysis of *The Voyage Out* showed that Woolf seemed to be experimenting with various techniques, which later became honed and were focused on specific characters. Though characters had elements of manipulated time in their perceptions in *The Voyage Out*, these elements were not developed such that they could substantiate a section of my paper on their own. Thus, in order to focus more completely on time and its depiction, I decided to forego character analysis, concentrating on Woolf's various manipulations of time.

I also began my paper with an interest in the connection between time and space, particularly because of the term "time-space" so prevalent during the modernist movement. While I am still interested in this connection, this study was simply to short to devote equal attention to Woolf's manipulations of time and space. As I was interested in the manipulation of time shown through the space of the house in *To the Lighthouse*, I determined that my focus would be on time manipulations, with space sometimes used as a medium through which Woolf manipulated time. This understanding of Woolf's use of space allowed me to incorporate space into my project while still devoting the necessary energy to studying Woolf's depiction of time.

While this paper did not thoroughly discuss Woolf's use of space, it is an avenue for further study, particularly regarding *To the Lighthouse*. Mrs. Ramsay is set off from the other characters through Woolf's depiction of her perceptions of time and space. Though this paper focused on Mrs. Ramsay's experiences with time, a study of her experiences with space could prove equally fruitful. The physical space of the summer home, briefly explored through Woolf's manipulation of time, could be the focus of further study, as the use of space is another modernist avenue Woolf took, whether in relation to time or not.

Another point of significance I found in my readings of various Woolf novels was her use of both light and wave imagery. In light of the scientific discovery that light acts as both particles and waves, a discovery that changed the way people and especially modernists understood the world, a study of Woolf's metaphors regarding light and wave imagery is likely to be productive. These avenues of further study are merely a few of the possibilities for studying Woolf and her works, as her fiction works as well as her essays, letters, and diary entries provide scholars with a wealth of information about her writing process and her modernist experimentations.

Notes

1. Woolf frequently used “he” as a generic term for all novelists, as was common at the time. In her later works, such as *A Room of One’s Own*, the use of “he” is significantly reduced, perhaps because of the term’s lack of gender neutrality.
2. “Writing to a rhythm”: As she began writing *The* Waves, Woolf noted in a letter to composer Ethel Smyth that she believed she was “writing to a rhythm and not to a plot” (Parsons v).

Works Cited

Balla, Giacomo. *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*. 1912. *ARTStor.* JPEG file.

Berman, Art. *Preface to Modernism.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994. Print.

Brown, Paul Tolliver. "Relativity, Quantum Physics, and Consciousness in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 32.3 (2009): 39-62. *MLA International Bibliography.* Web. 6 Nov. 2012.

Childs, Peter. *Modernism: The New Critical Idiom.* 2nd ed. London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2008. Print.

Chilvers, Ian. *A Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Art.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Print.

Daiches, David. *Virginia Woolf*. 2nd ed. New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1963. Print.

Duchamp, Marcel. *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2*. 1912. *ARTStor.* JPEG file.

Forster, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel*. New York: HBMC-Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927. Print.

Fry, Roger. "An Essay in Aesthetics." *Vision and Design*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Murray Printing Company, 1947. 11-25. Print.

Graham, John. "Time in the Novels of Virginia Woolf." *Readings in Literary Criticism 8: Critics on Virginia Woolf.* Ed. Latham, Jacqueline E.M. Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1970. 28-44. Print.

Harrison, Charles and Paul Wood, eds. *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc. 1997. Print.

Kohler, Dayton. “Time in the Modern Novel.” *College English* 10.1 (1948): 15-24. *JSTOR.* Web. 20 Nov. 2012.

Lewis, Wyndham. *Crowd.*1914-5. *ARTStor.* JPEG file.

Nicolson, Nigel and Joanne Trautmann, eds. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume One 1888-1912*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1975. Print.

Nicolson, Nigel and Joann Trautmann, eds. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three 1923-1928.* New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1977. Print.

Parsons, Deborah. Introduction. *The Waves.* By Virginia Woolf. 2000. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited. Print.

“Physicist.” *Wikipedia.* Wikimedia Foundation, 11 March 2013. Web. 14 March 2013.

Roberts, John Hawley. “‘Vision and Design’ in Virginia Woolf.” *PMLA* 61.3 (1946): 835-847. *JSTOR.* Web. 20 Nov. 2012.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Writer’s Diary*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1954. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. “How Should One Read a Book?” *Collected Essays.* Vol. 2. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967. 1-11. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. “Modern Fiction.” *Collected Essays.* Vol. 2. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967. 103-110. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own.* New York: Fall River Press, 2007. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. A Room of One’s Own *and* The Voyage Out. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2012. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse.* San Diego: Harvest-Harcourt Brace and Company, 1989. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000. Print.

Works Consulted

Apter, T.E. *Virginia Woolf: A Study of her Novels.* New York: New York University Press, 1979. Print.

Banfield, Ann. "Time Passes; Virginia Woolf, Post-Impressionism, and Cambridge Time." *Poetics Today* 24.3 (2003): 471-516. *MLA International Bibliography.* Web. 6 Nov. 2012.

Batchelor, John. *Virginia Woolf: The Major Novels.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Print.

Bell, Anne Olivier. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume One: 1915-1919*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977. Print.

Bell, Anne Olivier. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume Two: 1920-1924*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978. Print.

Bell, Clive. *Art.* New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company. n.d. Print.

Bell, Quentin. *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*. New York: Quality Paperback Book Club (in arrangement with Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), 1972. Print.

Bennett, Joan. *Virginia Woolf: Her Art as a Novelist*. 2nd ed. London: Cambridge University Press, 1964. Print.

Broe, Mary Lynn and Angela Ingram, eds. *Women's Writing in Exile.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989. Print.

Chadwick, Whitney. *Women, Art, and Society.* New York: Thames and Hudson, 1990. Print.

DeSalvo, Louise and Mitchell A. Leaska, eds. *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf.* New York: William Morrow and Company, 1985. Print.

Duplessis, Rachel Blau. *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of 20th Century Women Writers.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985. Print.

Ellmann, Richard and Charles Feidelson, Jr., eds. *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965. Print.

Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. *War of the Words.* Vol. 1 in *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. Print.

Hasler, Jörg. "Virginia Woolf and the Chimes of Big Ben." *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 63.2 (1982): 145-158. *MLA International Bibliography.* Web. 6 Nov. 2012.

Kuehn, Julia. "*The Voyage Out* as Voyage In: Exotic Realism, Romance and Modernism." *Woolf Studies Annual* 17 (2011): 126-150. *MLA International Bibliography.* Web. 20 Nov. 2012.

Ma, Jin. "James Joyce's Epiphany and Virginia Woolf's 'Moment of Importance.'" *Studies in Literature and Language* 2.1 (2011): 114-118. *Literature Resource Center.* Web. 20 Nov. 2012.

Mepham, John. *Criticism in Focus: Virginia Woolf.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. Print.

Nicolson, Nigel and Joanne Trautmann, eds. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume Two 1912-1922*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1976. Print.

Roe, Sue and Susan Sellers, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Print.

Sanders, Andrew. *A Short Oxford History of English Literature*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.

Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing.* Expanded ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977. Print.

Stewart, Jack F. "Spatial Form and Color in *The Waves*." *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal* 28.1 (1982): 86-107. *MLA International Bibliography.* Web. 6 Nov. 2012.

Tindall, William York. *Forces in Modern British Literature 1885-1946*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1947. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway.* Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1996. Print.