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Virginia Woolf's Journey to the Lighthouse A hypertext essay exploring character development in Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, and To the Lighthouse

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Laura Miller

Virginia Woolf's Journey to the Lighthouse:

A hypertext essay exploring character development in
Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, and To the Lighthouse

Eng 498: Honors Thesis Project

Spring 2011

Director: Dr. Seshagiri

Second Reader: Dr. Papke

Content

The intended format for this essay is as a hypertext. I have printed out the webpages making up the hypertext essay and have attempted to retain the organization of my essay in this folder.

The URL for the essay in its intended format is:

<http://web.utk.edu/~miller02>

[Tab 1: The entrance page: Click the wax seal to enter the website...page 3](#)

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[Tab 3: The title page containing links to Tab 4, Tab 5, and Tab 14...page 5](#)

[Tab 4: About section which links back to Tab 3...page 6](#)

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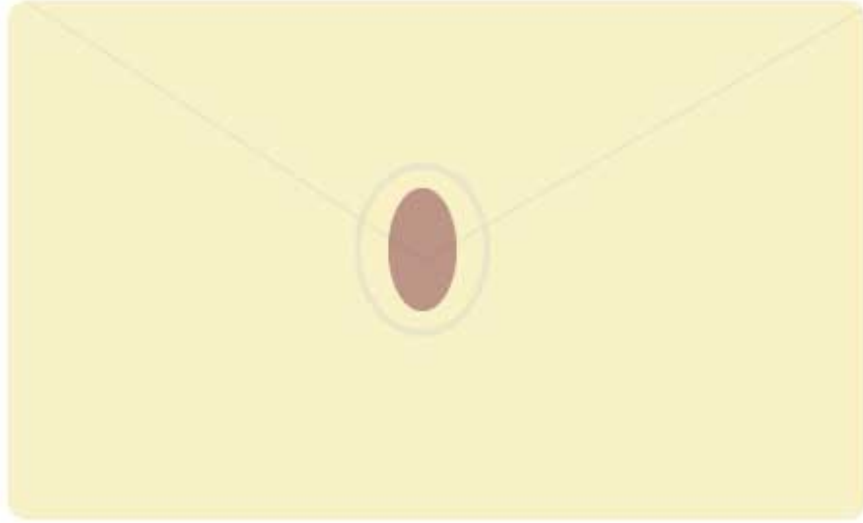
[Tab 12: *To the Lighthouse* which links to Tab 13...page 48](#)

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Entrance



Transition Page



"Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." Modern Fiction

Title Page

Virginia Woolf's Journey to the Lighthouse

A hypertext essay exploring character development in
Jacob's Room, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse*

About	Content	Works Cited
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Honors Thesis Project
Completed by Laura Miller
Spring 2011
Director: Dr. Seshagiri
Second Reader: Dr. Papke

About

This essay consists of a series of section essays linked together by an overarching argument about Woolf's development of character portrayal. Text as well as visual and spatial components contribute to the presentation of this overarching argument. The section essay could stand alone, but with the structure of visual and spatial organization of a hypertext essay, they combine and build together an overarching argument about the 'envelope' of Woolf's artistic life.

The essay explores the "development" of Woolf's narrative portrayal of characters in *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse*; however, I didn't want to present this exploration by forcing her into a mold of linear development setting her writing as beginning from a point of undeveloped, primitive writing to a self-realized enlightened and polished voice which a traditional essay, by its construction of introduction, flow of argument from point to point, conclusion, risks doing. Very little about Woolf's writing was linear, including, as I argue in this essay, her writing development, and to approach the exploration of her writing with such a mindset is mismatched with her writing style. In this essay, I hope to show a cohesion and coming together of many strands of Woolf's thoughts on character culminating in the harmony and balance of *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf's artistic vision to portray characters in the novel through the way they live their lives embodies several contradictions that must be juxtaposed in such a way that all components of the narrative work together. The essay marks a clear development in the clarity of this vision between *Jacob's Room* and *To the Lighthouse*, but Woolf's conception of character does not change between them. It is a continuation to realization of the same vision.

A hypertext essay allows for the inclusion of interactive visuals to provide a structure to organization that is a technological update on Woolf's use of symbolic, concrete objects to

encompass complicated and metaphysical concepts. The reader must move through the essay, not linearly page by page like a traditional essay format, but in a circular motion. A hypertext essay provides a presentation style that alters the linearity of a traditional essay which begins in the introduction and flows in a clear and set path to a conclusion. Though a chronological order emerges dictated by publication dates and an overarching linearity in argument must be preserved for the sake of communication, this presentation style allows a certain degree of resistance to linearity and fixedness in a way that contributes meaning to the essay.

As my essay will explore, the narrative that arises in the shifts in the narrative presentation of character in *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* mirrors Lily Briscoe's painting process in *To the Lighthouse*, one where all the components of her painting, and for Woolf her concept of character, existed from the beginning, it is a balance that must be found between contradictions that allow the emergence of an organic unity and a sense of completion which Woolf accomplished in *To the Lighthouse* and Lily in her painting. It is thus that, after the introduction which explains Woolf's concept of character as presented in her essays "Modern Fiction" and "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," a replica of Lily's painting becomes the organization scheme for this essay. Each component of the painting has an embedded link to sections of my essay exploring certain contradictions in Woolf's character in her essays and *Jacob's Room* and *To the Lighthouse*.

When you click "Content," you will be taken to the essay's introduction which presents the essay's overarching argument and discusses briefly the components of the essay to come. The next page will be the essay's center which consists of an imagined reproduction of Lily Briscoe's painting from *To the Lighthouse* broken into pieces; each piece is a link to a section of the essay. With a main page containing links to each section of the essay Woolf's writing can

exist as an organic whole. To navigate from section to section the reader must always return to a core page. The reader must navigate in many directions to understand the whole, but contained on one level, in one place, in one moment is the entirety of the selections of Woolf's writings that this essay considers; each essay could stand alone, but taken together emerges an larger argument.

While the reader, after the introduction, may decide the order in which this essay is read, I recommend reading the *To the Lighthouse* section last to retain a sense of linear structure in the argument. The order of the other sections does not matter as after each you will return to the page of Lily's broken up painting to choose the next section.

The dark triangle (a shadow/Mrs. Ramsay in Lily's painting) links to the mini-essay "The Universality of the Life-spirit and social roles and the effect on the individual." William Bankes comments on the presence of Mrs. Ramsay and James in Lily's first painting as a universal image.

The light blue triangle (French doors/window) links to the mini-essay "Granite and Rainbow: Connecting the ethereal to the concrete and the transitory to the lasting." A window represents this section well as windows are translucent yet solid; durable yet easy to break.

The green triangle (trees) links to the mini-essay "Penning the Butterfly: Movement and Cessation." Trees are stationary and rooted, yet still retain movement as they grow or blow in the wind.

The long blue quadrilateral (the hedge/garden wall) links to the mini-essay "The Divide of Narrative and Character Conflicts: Disruptions to the flow of life." The garden hedge

represents this section because in the novel the hedge operated as a symbol of divide when Mr. Ramsay paces in the garden.

The purple odd shape (the house wall) links to the mini-essay “Historical Continuity: The Flow of Time in Woolf’s Narrative.” The house is a lasting necessity (at least to our present minds) that remains a constant need throughout time.

The long red cylinder (the lighthouse) links to the mini-essay “‘I have had my vision:’ The Lighthouse as the Central Line.”

After the section on *To the Lighthouse*, you will be taken to a page with Lily’s painting as a whole, operating as a visual conclusion to the essay.



Introduction

Virginia Woolf's writings, her essays and novels, convey the significance she places on character and character portrayal in a novel. In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" she explicitly states her belief on the central role of character to a novel:

I believe that all novels, that is to say, deal with character, and that it is to express character- not to preach doctrines, sing songs, or celebrate the glories of the British Empire, that the form of the novels, so clumsy, verbose, and undramatic, so rich, elastic, and alive, has been evolved. 199

The author Arnold Bennett, who criticized Woolf's character and whose characters were criticized by Woolf, also shared this belief; Bennett writes "the foundation of good fiction is character-creating" (MBMB 193). Though they both stressed the importance of character, they obviously have very different ideas of what constitutes a good character, a matter recognized by Woolf in her essays: character, she writes, "will strike you very differently according to the age and country in which you happen to be born" and then character is further defined by the temperament of the writer and reader (MBMB 199). Woolf's historical moment in Britain was one of tremendous and chaotic uncertainty; one of world war, the death of a generation of men, social shifts in gender and class roles, and technological developments that allowed for the partial mastering of nature: all of these intertwined to contribute to a shift in human character and human relations and "when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature" (MBMB 195). Without the shift in literature of form, content, and style to reflect the shift of human experience as historical time passes, the life of characters in novels dissipates and become mere

puppets mimicking a past literature and time; life has moved on and the modern writer must shift the point of interest of novels in character to retain that sense of life. “For the moderns “that,” the point of interest, lies very likely in the dark places of psychology,” in the conveyance of “this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit;” it is there, in the internal flux of impressions, feelings, and forces that character of the modern age resides (288). It is not enough to know where or what; readers can only come to know the character through a sense of how and the why a character lives in a chaotic and uncertain modern world.

Woolf reflects on the nature of modern life of her age and generation in the essay published in 1927 “The Narrow Bridge of Art” and identifies the essential experience of modern life as being shaped by “an attitude which is full of contrast and collision; an attitude which seems to demand the conflict of one character upon another, and at the same time to stand in need of some general shaping power, some conception which lends the whole harmony and force” (GR 12). If it is, as she exerts in “Modern Fiction” the task of modern novelist to “convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit [by which we live], whatever aberration or complexity is may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible” then that must take into account a multitude of contractions weighing on the mind of a generation; how:

The mind is full of monstrous, hybrid, unmanageable emotions. That the age of the earth is 3,000,000,000 years; that human life lasts but a second; that the capacity of the human mind is nevertheless boundless; that life is infinitely beautiful yet repulsive; that one’s fellow creates are adorable but disgusting; that science and religion have between them destroyed belief; that all bonds of union

seem broken, yet some control must exist- it is in this atmosphere of doubt and conflict that writers have now to create... *Granite and Rainbow* 12.

It is this infinitely complex and contradictory experience of life that Woolf seeks to reflect in her characters. The juxtaposition of contradictory elements in character necessarily means contradictions in the narrative structure as it strives to portray the flux of a character's mind through a fixed medium. The life spirit of the character she wishes to portray is animated by never-ceasing motion; yet she attempts to capture the evanescent and ethereal with the exactingness of words, which once written never change. The life spirit is a universal energy that animates the mind of everyone, yet the universal life spirit must jointly coincide with the individuality of character; for thematic exploration, characters must fulfill certain roles at the risk of their individuality as well. She must also breakdown a divide between character and narrative internal through the alignment yet separation of narrative and character conflict. She recognizes historical continuity in literature and human nature, yet what order can conventions of the past offer to a drastically different and chaotic modern world? And a smooth and cohesive connection must arise between the mind and body, the internal and external. All of these contradictory aspects, Woolf identifies in the essay "Modern Fiction," the first draft written in 1919.

These contradictory aspects appear in the novels *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse*; the narrative that emerges from these novels depicts an increasing balancing of tension in narrative between these conflicting ideas culminating in the harmony and cohesion of *To the Lighthouse*. The presence of the lighthouse in the novel as ordering symbolic object provides a framework for mental and metaphysical thought that brings into resolution the

narrative contradictions explored in this essay by acting as a bridge between, character and narrative internal so that Woolf achieves her artistic vision for the portrayal of characters through their experience of life.

Though a sense of linear development emerges through publication dates, the development of Woolf's novels did not occur as a series of "gig lamps symmetrically arranged" as she moved from an elementary and primitive concept of character and character portrayal to a more refined and complete one. But more closely resembles a semi-transparent envelope containing conflicting elements of character that over the course of these novels, the content of the envelope becomes less chaotic, jumbled, and contradictory and slowly merge together into a cohesive organic unity. The exploration of Woolf's writing development in connection her famous line about the life experience "life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" emphasizes the connection of her artistic vision and development to the life experience she sought to portray in her novels (MF 287). Though the semi-transparent envelope would encompass Woolf's entire career, this essay zooms in on the particular narrative of development that arises in the cross-section spanning "Modern Fiction" to *To the Lighthouse*. The contents of the envelope at the point of "Modern Fiction" exist in a perpetual chaotic mass of contradiction and confusion, of inconsistencies and contradictions and tensions that need to be brought into balance and clarity.

Woolf's artistic development is not the changing of the essence of the contents, but the reordering, sorting, and reconciling of the inner-contents that allow for the constant shift of external influences on the narrative coming from the characters internal movement and still retain harmony.

Within the envelope in the time span there is a growing cohesion of its content for the final organic unity in *To the Lighthouse* that corresponds with the ending of the novel where Lily Briscoe achieves a moment of internal clarity and harmony reflected in her painting. Lily's painting is strongly connected to Woolf's writing and operates as a symbolic organic object providing an external projection for the structure of the harmony of contradictions that Lily achieves and the completion of her vision and of Woolf's vision. Like the process of Lily's painting, all the elements were present in the first attempt to render her vision in JR; it is the search of balance and unity between these elements in the narrative and Lily's painting that give her vision a sense of completion. The sense that *To the Lighthouse* marked a completion of a vision started in *Jacob's Room* is supported by Woolf's diary entries. Before beginning *Jacob's Room*, Woolf wrote with excitement in her diary:

[I] arrived at some idea of a new form for a new novel. Suppose one thing should open out of another- as in 'An Unwritten Novel'- only not for 10 pages but 200 or so- doesn't that give the looseness and lightness I want: doesn't that get closer and yet keep form and speed, and enclose everything, everything? January 26, 1920

She acknowledges *Jacob's Room*, or at least the idea behind JR, as a marked moment in her process towards stylistic, thematic, and aesthetic cohesion where many strands of conflicting ideas begin to come together in a recognizable shape. As she finished TL, Woolf made another diary entry signaling a completion of a certain vision in her fiction:

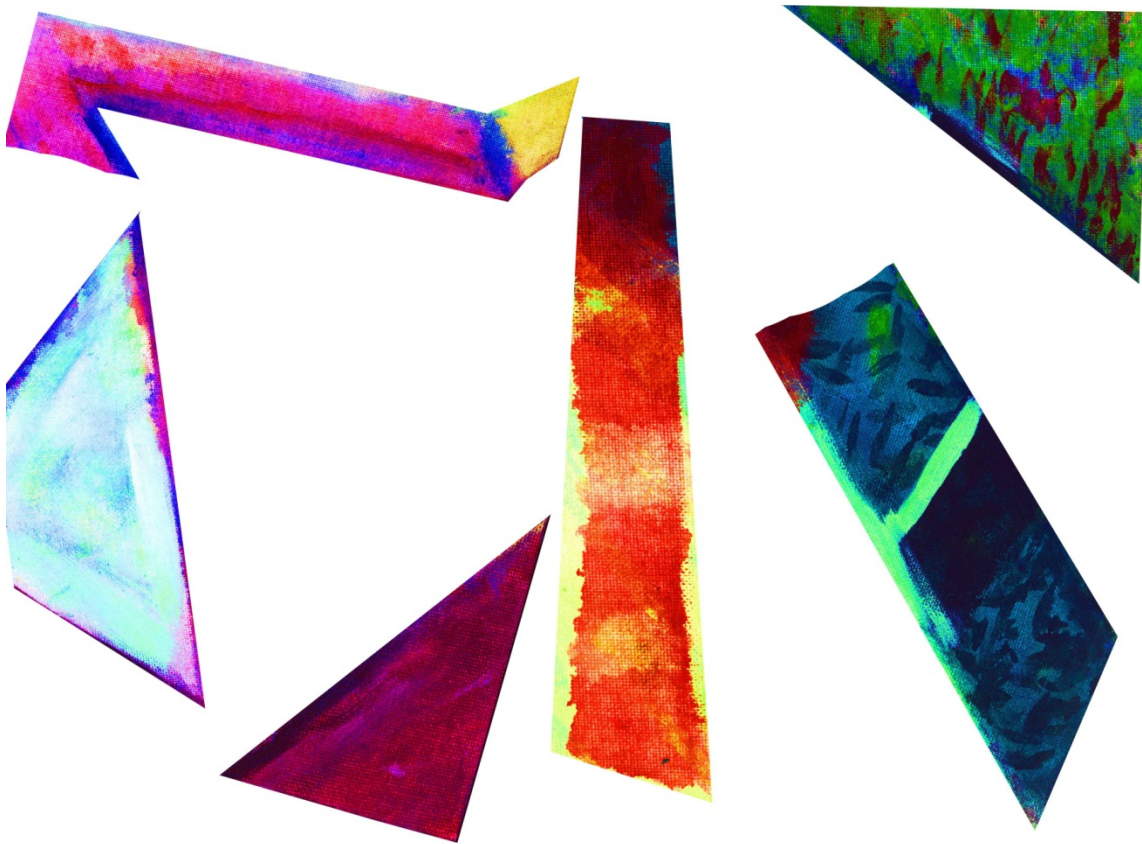
My present opinion is that it is easily the best of my books: fuller than J.'s R. and less spasmodic, occupied with more interesting things than Mrs. D., and not complicated with all that desperate accompaniment of madness. It is freer and

subtler, I think. Yet I have no idea yet of any other to follow it: which may mean that I have made my method perfect... November 23, 1926

To the Lighthouse marks a point of cohesion and balance that sustains multiple contradictory elements of character and is paralleled by the last line of the novel, “Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision” (209).



Lily's Painting in Pieces



On the website, each painting pieces functions as a link to the following sections:

[Tab 8: Granite and Rainbow which links back to Tab 6](#)

[Tab 9: Universal which links back to Tab 6](#)

[Tab 10: Divide which links back to Tab 6](#)

[Tab 11: Past and Present which links back to Tab 6](#)

[Tab 12: *To the Lighthouse* which links to Tab 13](#)

Penning the Butterfly: Movement and Cessation

In “Mrs. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” Woolf characterizes the concept of character as “the figure of a man, or a woman, who said, ‘My name is Brown. Catch me if you can’” (MBMB 193). The chase that ensues requires finesse yielding as a net the unruly pen that records words which by their nature are permanent and unmoving; follow to timidly and the narrative scrambles in the footsteps of the character, imitating the impressions the character leaves upon others in his wake or approach too quickly and too boldly, the narrative tackles the character to the ground, the character smiles wryly and turns to dust under the pen. The “life or spirit, truth or reality, this essential thing” that Woolf seeks in the chase after her Brown hinges upon the infinite movement and variety of the character’s mind as it lights from impression to impression, to feeling and feeling (MF 287). The spirit of life and thus of character, as Woolf describes in her essays, is in constant flux, ever-moving, ever-shifting; the nature of the spirit’s existence depends on its extreme unfixed movement from moment to moment, an never ceasing mixing of external and internal motion: “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” (MF 287). An innate contradiction therefore arises when Woolf seeks to “record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order they fall;” an attempt to capture the mind in a specific moment with the permanence of words compromises the movement of the spirit; the moment the atoms are recorded, life becomes set - it is no longer as free to move as it like but is pinned to the page in an exacting order of specific moments (MF 288).

Nick Bramham, a painter in *Jacob’s Room* experiences the same contradiction in his artwork. He sits trying to paint a portrait of Fanny Elmer; she sits stiff and still before him. He reflects that beauty “is like the light on the sea, never constant to a single wave. They all have it;

they all lose it. Now she is dull and thick as bacon; now transparent as a hanging glass” (JR 92). Any art form, sculpture, painting, literature that seeks to capture and preserve beauty risks being fit only “to be set on the mantelpiece and never dusted” for “no one can count on it or seize it or have it wrapped in paper” (JR 92). To capture the woman in a single moment of beauty sucks the beauty from her; to capture life in a single moment of existence destroys the spirit by which we live; the woman and life become a “dapper brunette complete from head to foot [that] serves only as an illustration to lie upon the drawing room table,” a caricature of beauty and life (92). He finishes his painting in frustration (“by God it’s bad”) and Fanny resumes motion; the moment she does beauty “flew through the room, shone there for a second” (JR 92). For painting or literature to capture the beauty of the essence of life, some balance must be sought out that puts in harmony the exactingness of an art medium and the evanescent, ever-fluxing spirit of life. For the fulfillment of Woolf’s artistic vision, this means arriving at a point of narrative balance loose enough to allow for movement yet exacting enough to communicate a clear view of character to the reader.

The narrative flow of *Jacob’s Room* retains the movement of the general life spirit but it does not meet the internal movement of character animated by this spirit. The narrative of *Jacob’s Room*, reflects the essential movement of the ordinary mind in that throughout it sustains a constant flow of a myriad of impressions, objects, characters, and scenes in connection with Jacob. The flow of the narrative as it takes in a flood of impressions Jacob makes on the narrator, other characters, and objects corresponds with the accounts Woolf makes in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” on the daily experience of life by the ordinary mind. Talking to her reader, she says

You have overheard scraps of talk that filled you with amazement. You have gone to bed at night bewildered by the complexity of your feelings. In one day thousands of ideas have coursed through your brain; thousands of emotions have med, collided, and disappeared in astonishing disorder. 212

The overall flow of the narrative in its trueness to the working of the ordinary mind on an ordinary day is held in miniature in this passage of the narrative:

Then two thousand hearts in the semi-darkness remembered, anticipated, travelled dark labyrinths; and Clara Durrant said farewell to Jacob Flanders, and tasted the sweetness of death in effigy; and Mrs. Durrant, sitting behind in the dark of the box, sighed her sharp sigh;...and...and...In short, the observer is choked with observations. 53

Throughout the novel, like in this scene, the narrator fills the role of an observer and the narration portrays the myriad of atoms falling upon the narrator's mind as she/he takes in the many impressions of Jacob, other characters, and scenes and is led in many incongruous directions of thought. For example, in a scene in King's Cross Chapel, the narrator in a single page of space discusses the service ("look as they pass into service, how airily the gowns blow out, as though nothing dense and corporeal were within"), draws a connection between the service and the presence of a lantern in the forest ("...if you stand a lantern under a tree every insect in the forest creeps up to it- a curious assembly"), and touches on the absence of women at the service as akin to the absence of dogs ("No one would think of bringing a dog into church") (23). The narrator mentions Jacob only in parentheses: "and Jacob looked extraordinarily vacant, his head thrown back, his hymn-book open at the wrong place" (23). Though Jacob is present, the scene in which he is place creates a wide assortment of impressions and sends the narration

through a variety of related but unconnected reflections springing up from Jacob's external movement and position.

The narration follows a strict division between Jacob's internal and external motion, never breaking the surface but using the surface to create an uncertain impression of what moves within. Looking at the emotions streaming across Jacob's face, the narrative attempts to conjecture their source:

It is brewed by the earth itself. It comes from the houses on the coast. We start transparent, and then the cloud thickens. All history backs our pane of glass. To escape is vain.

But whether this is the right interpretation of Jacob's gloom as he sat naked, in the sun, looking at the Land's End, it is impossible to say; for he never spoke a word. Timmy sometimes wondered (only for a second) whether his people bothered him...No matter. There are things that can't be said. Let's dry ourselves, and take up the first thing that comes handy... 37

Though the narrative flow operates as the ordinary mind would, this flow does not meet Jacob's internal movement, tracing only his external motion, the narrative only projects a vague sense of the general movement of a mind onto his character, and "[Jacob] slips through [Woolf's] fingers" leaving only a shadow of what was there, a ghost as Leonard Woolf put it (Nov 23, 1926, MBMB 207).

Mrs. Dalloway shifts the relation of character movement to narrative movement to more closely align. The constant flow of the narration filtering in and out of the characters' internal lives retains the sense of movement essential to the life-spirit: when the narrative lifts from the

character in a specific moment, the character resumes internal movement to into another specific moment upon which the narrative lands. The narrative briefly pins characters to specific stylized and dramatized moments of internal life following the flow of external movement. The narrative remains fixed on that moment only briefly before flowing to another moment experienced in the context of another external influence of the same or another character. When the series of moments are taken together, there emerges a succession of snapshots portraying internal character in jerking motion.

Throughout the novel, external events or objects operate as a portal to the internal mind of a character as the narrative conveys the influence of external movement on the internal motion of the mind. In the novel's morning, an airplane flies overhead; onlookers look up simultaneously and stand transfixed gazing into the sky in a trancelike state. This external spectacle has excited the minds of crowd, as it fades and they resume motion, the narration delves into the impressions the plane left upon several characters: The narrative enters into Septimus's perception of the plane; for him the plane is a unknown language: "So thought Septimus, looking up, they are signaling to me. Not indeed in actual words; this is, he could not read the language yet" (21).

The narrative continues, briefly bringing to light the fleeting impressions of others; for an old woman it reminds her of what she had not been able to do and what men could; for a labor, "an aspiration; a concentration; a symbol of man's soul; of his determination to get outside his body, beyond his house, by means of thought, Einstein, speculation, mathematics, the Mendelian theory" (27). The narrative, in this scene, takes a snapshot of the internal of characters as he/she reacts to an externally introduced spectacle.

The airplane is an extreme example of pinning internal motion in place to convey the mind in one moment of time; generally the narrative offers a series of internal moments of a character strung along by external movement, such as Mrs. Dalloway's morning walk through London to buy the flowers. As she walks, her internal animation follows the pattern of the external sights she sees: the traffic, the park, Hugh, the shop windows. Throughout her walk, the narrative constructs a clear connection between external stimuli and the flow of Clarissa's mind, exerting a precise control over the meeting of a flow of external objects and the mind so that the two align but in a rigid and not quite true manner. The movement of the narrative meets in pulses the internal movement of the character, more closely connecting the narrative's internal flow with the internal flow of the character's life, but the inner-life of the characters is not allowed complete freedom, always stepping to the rhythm of external motion.

A point of equilibrium between the pinpointing of the narrative and the perpetual and evanescent movement of a character's life-spirit must emerge to "convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit" without eliminating the freedom of movement upon which the essence of her characters depend (MF 288). In *Jacob's Room*, Jacob was allowed the utmost freedom of internal movement as the narrative did not attempt to break into the movement; in *Jacob's Room* the external motion of the narrative followed the pattern of Jacob's movement; his movement through life dictated the spaces in which the narrative could land. *Mrs. Dalloway* moves closer towards the point of balance between narrative movement and character internal movement, but the movement of internal character that emerges is jerky and strung along by external and internal narrative movement. Movement for character and narrative must emerge

jointly and build off on another in harmony without one overriding the other.



Granite and Rainbow: Connecting the ethereal to the concrete and the transitory to the lasting

In Woolf's essays she aligns realistic, living character in modern novels with the portrayal of the experience of life by a character, of capturing the life-spirit animating the mind of that character; she sees in a writer's endeavor to create character through the spiritual rather than the material the emergence of a novel that more suits the writers and readers of her generation. But this life-spirit does not operate free from the body and physical; a mind unanchored to anything physical or tangible lacks believability and cannot be manifested or sustained in the reader's mind. Woolf recognizes the responsibility of the writer to "get into touch with his reader to put before him something which he recognizes, which therefore stimulates his imagination, and makes him willing to co-operate in the far more difficult business of intimacy" (MBMB 206). For novelists, Woolf writes that "it is of the highest importance that this common meeting-place should be reached easily, almost instinctively, in the dark, with one's eyes shut" (MBMB 206). The narrative then, must not only find some way to connect the body and mind, the physical and metaphysical to portray a character's life spirit more true to the experience of life of the common person on an ordinary day, but also to function as a bridge between narrative, character, and reader connecting the airy and elusive to the concrete, imaginable, and easily accessible. Therein, there emerges the idea of a common language that relies on the meeting of the ethereal and the concrete, the fading and the enduring, the internal and the external, of granite and rainbow (to borrow the terms Woolf uses for the title of a collection of essays). The common language can be communicated based through organic symbols that coexists in the narrative and the life of the character it wishes to portray. For a flow between the narrative, character internal and reader, the organic symbol needs to function consistently in the narrative and the character's internal and external; it ought to be an

imaginable object elastic enough to flow with the movement of the character's internal throughout the narrative.

When describing the workings of the mind in her essays, Woolf relies on symbolic objects that embody what she wishes to express; their concreteness is firm enough to hold a specific idea, but fluid enough to play in the readers mind, its implications shifting and striking various chords as the flow of Woolf's writing continues and the image expands to encompass her continuation of thought. Woolf uses the idea of a "semi-transparent envelope" to represent life experience, submersing the concrete with the ethereal, the visual with the unseen; the transitory idea of life experience is held in in a concrete object. In "MBMB" Woolf again uses a series of symbolic and dynamic objects to encompass what she wishes to say with the scene in the train, placing the concept of character in the body of Mrs. Brown, and using the train sequence to encompass the struggle of the artist, to animate the reader's mind in imagining the scene and the many impressions contained in it.

In a diary entry Woolf made before she had begun to write *Jacob's Room*, she expressed apprehension of the success of the vision she imagines for her new novel, "for...the approach will be entirely different this time: no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist...a light spirited stepping at my sweet will" (Jan 26, 1920). The vision she says she imagines for this new novel, *Jacob's Room*, has at its core the bricks operating as a structure for the more ethereal and transitory: the fading dusk, a brightly burning fire through the mist, a spirit under control of Woolf's pen; but still, all of this relies on the bricks concealed beneath the mist; something concrete and sturdy anchors the spirited in her vision of the portrayal of the character through their life experience in the medium of a novel; some organic symbolic object that is the framework for the characters

internal life, that is at once concrete and easily accessible but fluid and constantly altering in the reader's mind that can act as a bridge between the internal of the character, narrative and reader.

The narrative of *Jacob's Room* relies on the impressions Jacob makes on the external to form some kind of loose shape around his internal character; the narrative, through the external impression he leaves, creates a hazy outline of his character with an empty center. The objects do not bridge into Jacob's internal, but become external manifestations signifying an impression of him from a certain point of view removed from his internal life. The narrative breaks down Jacob's character into an external accumulation of objects and impressions (in others characters and in scene) reflective of his external actions, appearance, and speech from which internal thought, feeling, and life can only be guessed at with great uncertainty. From his childhood environment and activity (keeping the cow skull and collecting butterflies), his college discussions, rooms and the books and objects contained there, and his adult romances revealed from the perspective of others, the narrative attempts to sketch his character. In the ending scene of the novel, he is dead but the narrative continues as always, exemplifying his character from the impressions of other characters garnered from the remnants of his external action ("Nothing arranged...Did he think he would come back?") and symbolized through his shoes and rooms as it had the entire novel; his death is irrelevant to the novel: the inner life has passed yet the narrative is able to express his character as it has the entire novel in the presence of that inner life (143).

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the characters reflect manifestations of internal feelings onto the external and physical world; investing inner-feelings into imagined objects, operating as a way to make sense of the impressions and fluxing of the mind and spirit. These manifestations reflect in the narrative's structure, but are too rigid and fleeting to encompass the characters internal

beyond a specific moment or to function in the narrative beyond the communication of a certain idea.

Lady Bruton, after giving a luncheon to Hugh Whitbread and Richard Dalloway, imagines the connection lasting between them manifested as a thin tread of a spider web; she applies a metaphysical idea to a concrete and imaginable concept, thinking

And they went further and further from her, being attached to her by a thin thread (since they had lunched with her) which would stretch and stretch, get thinner and thinner as they walked across London; as if one's friends were attached to one's body, after lunching with them, by a thin thread, which (as she dozed there) became hazy with the sound of bells, striking the hour or ringing to service, as a single spider's thread is blotted with rain-drops, and, burdened, sags down. So she slept (109).

The idea of the characters being connected by a web emerges in the flow of the narrative as it interweaves the internals of the novel's characters; but this symbolic object is maintained only fleetingly in Lady Bruton's mind and operates in the narrative only so much as to reflect the flow of the narrative between characters.

Clarissa, in a similar allocation of internal experience onto external stimuli, invests strands of her being in the outer world:

somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people

she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself (9).

These external manifestations the characters project internal feelings onto provide a translucent, unsteady bridge into the character's mind, existing only in that moment but not fluid or elastic enough to stretch into a lasting bridge the narrative is able to maintain through the shifting of the characters' internal .

Clarissa also expresses the divide she feels between people, the extreme mystery of life, in terms of rooms, how "here was one room; there another," imaginary reappearing in the narrative (125). This provides a consistent bridge into Clarissa's experience through a visual concept imaginable and familiar to the reader that is significant both to the character and the narrative construction. But, this also provides a bridge only into a portion of her perceived divide between people, reappearing in the narrative only in moments Clarissa experiences the divide or when the walls breakdown. Through her party, Clarissa creates a moment of unity, and all the people are contained in a single room; when she feels a divide between the guests, she enters a separate room for the narrative to signify the divide. The symbolic object of the rooms, while significant to Clarissa's internal experience and the narrative's construction is only able to convey reoccurring moments of divide and is not elastic enough to contain significance in between these moments.

There is no anchor in *Mrs. Dalloway*, an object function in the narrative that the internal workings of the characters' minds can be projected onto and altered with the fluxing of the character's internal life. Without some consistent and imaginable object, no sustained connection between the internal and transient to the external and lasting, the mind to the body

emerges. In a diary entry Woolf made as she was completing *To the Lighthouse*, she refers to *Mrs. Dalloway* as “spasmodic” (Nov. 23, 1926). The flow between the internal character and their connections and associations with the physical (whether imagined or real) flows in constant flux, providing no overarching connection of the mind with the body, the external with the internal, and the physical with the metaphysical.



The Universality of the Life-spirit and social roles and the effect on the individual

Throughout her writing, Woolf pulls off a peculiar juxtaposition of the universal and the individual, characterizing the universal, creating the sense of the individual as both a part of and embodying the universal. In “Modern Fiction” the life spirit is presented as an energy that runs through everyone, that animates us all. It is something much bigger than us, taking individuals into a whole but then it also spills out onto individual character with a face and peculiarities like Mrs. Brown, Woolf’s character symbolizing character. When Woolf talks about the ordinary person’s experience of life on an ordinary day, she attributes an all-encompassing and all-animating force, “whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing” she discusses, is a common pulse animating the minds of everyone. It is a naturally arising universal spirit that encompasses common humanity and animates the individual with life energy; it is a similarity consistent across individuals so that occasionally, if only in passing, we can be connected. Despite a definite sense of aloneness and divide between characters in the novels, something like ‘universal love’ permeates in the novel; this idea animates the flow of the narrative of all Woolf’s novels as it slips from person to person as if something larger than the individual connects us all. The narrative style of the *Jacob’s Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* weaves multiple voices, flowing seamlessly from one character to another; throughout the novel, the walls that divide become momentarily translucent and a common identity permeates through crowds of people as they stare up into the sky at modern technology or attend a party. A sense of a sublime, inherent connection arises; while modernism does emphasize the isolation and anonymity of life, it also depicts moments of complete unity with another person made possible through shared humanity and experiences.

Then there is the socially constructed universal: that force that creates encompassing roles society needs filled in mass for continuation: the role of mother, wife, hostess; father, husband, politician ordered by a sense of proportion and duty. The individual can still function within these universals as its own entity, but these universal forces threaten to swamp the individual taking over the character, or to completely break the character in two. The narrative, as it pursues this character, exerts a third universal threat upon the character's individuality, similar to the social constructed threat: that of creating and allocating a character off to a certain department to fulfill a certain role as a thematic tool for narrative commentary on modern life and literature.

The narrative of *Jacob's Room* is overtaken by the sense of the universal life spirit. A sense of the universal life spirit that animates us all and carries with it "this varying, this unknown and uncrisumscribed spirit" with a never ceasing flow of "atoms as they fall upon the mind" emerges in the flow of fragmented impressions of the narrative that rests briefly on one scene before moving to another, seemingly unrelated scene (MF 288). The flow of scenes does not create a traditional linear flow of plot, but instead it resembles the internal, jumbled contents of the mind taking in impressions of an external world, processing, and somewhat organizing them into a flow of expressible thought.

The characters of *Jacob's Room*, including Jacob fall into roles of narrative tools meant to explore themes relating to modern society in their contrasting relationships. For example, in the narrative of the relationship that emerges between Jacob and Fanny Elmer: Fanny Elmer fills the role of 'modern woman,' living in an apartment in the city, participating in city's nightlife and art life, and interested in modern literature. Jacob, in relation to Fanny Elmer, fills the role of traditional masculine influence and limitations on women. He dismisses her interests in

modern novels and recommends her the more traditional novels of Fielding “if she must read novels” (97). With Jacob, she is drug back into the conventional ordering of gender roles.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, characters function as a narrative tool for the thematic exploration of contemporary society and the chaos and uncertainties rippling through it, with moments of shining individuality. Peter and the doctors, Sir William and Holmes are animated with remnants of conventions and a way of life from before the war, seeing the certainty and assuredness of the continuation of society through marriages and balance it has always relied upon for order.

Peter returns to London from India, still playing with his pocket knife and falling in love as he always has, and falls back into the comfortable society of London before the war, relishing in its conventions and history:

A splendid achievement in its own way, after all, London; the season; civilization. Coming as he did from a respectable Anglo-Indian family which for at least three generations had administered the affairs of a continent (it's strange, he thought, what a sentiment I have about that, disliking India, and empire, and army as he did), there were moments when civilization, even of this sort, seemed dear to him as a personal possession; moments of pride in England; in butlers; chow dogs; girls in their security. Ridiculous enough, still there it is, he thought. And the doctors and men of business and capable women all going about their business, punctual, alert, robust, seemed to him wholly admirable, good fellows, to whom one would entrust one's life, companions in the art of living, who would see one

through. What with one thing and another, the show was really very tolerable; and he would sit down in the shade and smoke. 54

He is portrayed as stuck in the past and completely ignorant to the ripples of change coursing through English society: he thinks of the ambulance presumably going to retrieve Septimus's body as a "miracle of civilization" when it is the same civilization that has caused the accident for which it goes to clean up (147). Though he is constructed as a thematic tool, elements of his individuality flow into the characterization as his inner experience of life tempers the narrative. For example, as he dozes on a park bench, he thinks

Nothing exists outside us except a state of mind, he thinks; a desire for solace, for relief, for something outside these miserable pigmies, these feeble, these ugly, these craven men and women. But if he can conceive of her, then in some sort she exists, he thinks, and advancing down the path with his eyes upon sky and branches he rapidly endows them with womanhood; see with amazement how grave they become; how majestically, as the breeze stirs them, they dispense with a dark flutter of the leave charity, comprehension, absolution, and the, flinging themselves suddenly aloft, confound the piety of their aspect with a wild carouse.

56

The narrative then pulls out of his mind and comments "such are the visions which proffer great cornucopias full of fruit to the solitary travellers" (56).

Septimus, contrasting with Peter and the doctors, represents a hyperawareness of the ripple of chaos running through society, especially felt by soldiers returning from war who are unable to reintegrate into society. Invested in his character is the recognition of the complete

changed in society and the inability for it to continue as it has. The name ‘Septimus Smith’ engenders a dual narrative in the character of Septimus. As Smith, he embodies the “many millions of young men London [had] swallowed up,” who had gone off to war fighting for a certain England and returned from the war unable to reintegrate themselves into a society based on pre-war conventions (84). Prior to war, Septimus had meshed with conventions of society. Septimus goes to war to save a certain England and in war he operates as a successful emblem of proper English patriotism and masculinity; “he developed manliness; he was promoted...he had gone through the whole show, friendship, European War, death, had won promotion, was still under thirty and was bound to survive” (86). The post-war Septimus shows a complete break with his pre-war character.

Upon his return from war, Septimus is unable to reintegrate into the society he had left. He rejects the traditional systems and gender roles that dictated pre-war life to ensure the continuity, prosperity, and security of British society. There is a complete alienation of the character of Septimus before the war and the Septimus after the war, disrupting the continuation of character through the chaotic events and doing so necessarily signifying the need for a shift in social order after the war. Though Septimus does fill the role as foil to the other characters, he does so in accordance to an individuality as modern artist (though filling the role of modern artists threatens to slip him into another slot of narrative themes) who renders “diagrams, designs...circles traced round shillings and sixpences brandishing sticks for arms...his writings; how the dead sing behind rhododendron bushes; odes to Time; conversations with Shakespeare” (147). Though his character is constructed around his individuality, he falls into a universal narrative role for thematic exploration.

Elizabeth offers a perspective on the change from a female and younger perspective; she represents a generation coming to age in the chaos of the changing society, a generation disengaged with the traditions of society. Elizabeth rejects the conventional gender roles of societies, a rejection made easier by the disruption and chaos of war. Mrs. Dalloway's "old Uncle William used to say a lady is known by her shoes and her gloves" but the war disrupted the production of gloves and Elizabeth "cared not a straw for either of them" (11). She accepts as given and unquestionable that she will take up a career of vet or farmer, something nondomestic and outside the traditional occupations of women.

The clash in the narrative's portrayal of character between universal forces and individuality jars the flow of life between character and narrative. The forces, felt in real life, must remain a component of narrative portrayal of character, but must somehow be brought into reconciliation with one another. A balance between the individuality of the character and the character's function as a narrative tool must be achieved to maintain the believability of the character and create a cohesive narrative.



The Divide of Narrative and Character Conflicts: Disruptions to the flow of life

Woolf's artistic vision seeks to encompass the shifts in human relations and the change in human character to produce a novel that recaptures the essence of life in the literature of the historical moment. In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" she mentions the change in human character that occurred "on or about December, 1910" that requires a concurrent shift in the literature emerging at the time because "for us at this present moment the form of fiction most in vogue more often misses than secures the thing we seek" (194, MF 287). Social shifts jointly causes shifts in the individual experience of life and the narrative that seeks to portray this life. The conflicts emerging in Woolf's narrative emerge from the experience of the ordinary mind on an ordinary in the midst of social changes and uncertainty meaning that for the portrayal of "real, true, and convincing" characters the portrayed characters must mutually experience the conflicts of Woolf's narrative that have risen from the social moment of her writing in which her characters also reside (MBMB 193). The contradictions that the narrative must bring into cohesion, that of past and present, inner and outer, the divide between people, and the universal and individual, stem from Woolf's perception of the condition of the modern mind/character. In *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, the internal experienced conflict of the characters mismatches the internal conflict of the narrative, erecting a divide in the flow of life between character, narrative, and reader. The internal uncertainties of the characters emerge disjointed from the narrative and the metasociety portrayed in the novels.

The internal struggles of characters in *Jacob's Room* emerge disjointed from the social shifts and uncertainties that resonate on the life of the ordinary mind on an ordinary day and on the constructed society in the novel. The one conflict the characters and narratives jointly share is the divide between people. *Jacob's Room* insists throughout that people are unknowable,

continual expressing doubt of the ability to know anyone or to know anything from his rooms, the things he does, him from the point of view of other characters. An elderly lady riding in a train car with Jacob, looks at him and feels the divide between them; she thinks:

Nobody sees any one as he is, let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite a strange young man in a railway carriage. They see a whole- they see all sorts of things- they see themselves...Mrs. Norman now read three pages of one of Mr. Norris's novel...One must do the best one can with her report. Anyhow, this was Jacob Flanders, aged nineteen. It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said. 22

The narrative echoes these words, unconnected to a specific character's internal thoughts: "But how far was he a mere bumpkin? How far was Jacob Flanders at the age of twenty-six a stupid fellow? It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done" (123). The divide between people that the characters experience in the narrative and the divide between the narrative and the character is a conflict that transcends character and narrative internal; in this alignment of uncertainty, the narrative's portrayal of character encompasses the sense of life. But, the divide between people is the only directly experienced conflict that the characters have in common with the narrative.

Jacob operates seemingly ignorant of the historical moment, its changes, and the contradictions it scores upon the mind of the modern human character. As the narrative does not delve into his mind, it is difficult to say what internal conflicts he feels, but judging by his external actions and speech, he has little connection to the changes and uncertainty of the time. He has a prompt disregard for modern literature, honoring the

classics of society's literature, thought, and education as the supreme model. Jacob writes an essay in which "modern life was repudiated;" it is rejected by the leading literary magazines of the time but still "the lid shut upon the truth" as it stowed them away (54). He spends his day privy to the cloistered and traditional world of Cambridge, the church, and the British Library, and seems on the whole, totally without care. He has no thought for women and their growing liberty; he insists that Fanny Elmer, a somewhat modern woman, gives up the modern book and revert back to the classic bildungsroman *Tom Jones* if she "must read novels" (97).

In some places, the uncertainty of the narrative and of the writer is superimposed onto Jacob's action, though this meeting merely furthers the divide between narrative and character as the characters become a tool for expressing artistic struggle. In one scene, Jacob is hunting moths in the night, an image that reoccurs throughout Woolf's essays as semblance of the chase of the essence of life force.

Mrs. Dalloway brings the narrative internal conflict into a closer alliance with the internal conflict of the characters and with the society in which they operate. Many of the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* operate disconnected and unaware of the social atmosphere for the thematic exploration of society through the contrasts between them. The narrative portrays the characters of Peter, Hugh, and the doctors as locked in a pre-war society of imperialism, proportion, and royal frump, their faith in the conventions of society unshaken. Septimus appears locked in the transition stage directly after the war of extreme uncertainty and chaos; his inability to reintegrate into society overwhelms the narrative portrayal of his character. Elizabeth is compartmentalized in the future; she already embodies in her identity the social changes and accepts as certain she will embark on a career outside the domestic. But Clarissa deeply feels the

contradictions also rippling through the narrative, bringing to unsteady cohesion the divide between narrative and character.

Clarissa is not limited to thematic tool meant to contrast with another character to reveal something about the contradictions in society; but instead is allowed to feel directly the contradictions and uncertainties of life in the modern age as a life experience; she is conscious of these contradictions and she explores and feels them and makes sense of them in her head. Clarissa recognizes the disruption of the war in social continuity from past to present: on her morning walk, Clarissa pauses to look in the “window of a glove shop where, before the War, you could buy almost perfect gloves” which used to be the sign of a lady; yet with the stop in production, the young generation, her daughter, “cared not a straw for” them (11). Yet she still rejoices in the resumption of daily activity that transcends the war :

In people’s eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June. 4

For her internal experience of time, the past and the present intertwine, present stimuli triggering past memories that blend with her experience of the present. When walking through St. James’s Park, Clarissa remembers walking with Peter on mornings similar to this one. As her memory continues, her sense of life shifts, and the past and the present merge together: “some sights bringing [Peter] back to her calmly...[he] came back in the middle of St. James’s Park on a fine morning” and as she walks she imagines what Peter would say and what he would see (7). Her

connection to Peter is not ordered by time “for they might be parted for hundreds of years” and still he walks through the park with her and still she imagines when they meet again they will continue as if not time had kept them apart (7). But when they do meet, she communicates awkwardly but still feels the same toward him as she always has; but she must merge the passing of time and the changes that has wrought on them both into her conception of their past relationship.

She struggles to order her fleeting and evasive internal feelings, thoughts, and desires into communicable and accessible sentiments. Clarissa feels a great divide between people that she gives structure to in her mind through the visualization of how “here was one room, there another” (125). In the afternoon, Clarissa lies down to rest for an hour and is mystified but a sudden feeling that she communicates to herself in a metaphor:

But — but — why did she suddenly feel, for no reason that she could discover, desperately unhappy? As a person who has dropped some grain of pearl or diamond into the grass and parts the tall blades very carefully, this way and that, and searches here and there vainly, and at last spies it there at the roots, so she went through one thing and another. 118

She runs through several possible sources before discovering it is because both Richard and Peter “criticized her very unfairly, laughed at her very unjustly, for her parties. That was it! That was it!” (118). In Richard and Peter’s laughing at her party, they slot her off into the compartment of ‘hostess’ amongst thousands of other women making connections for her husband. Clarissa also feels at times the pressure of the universal weighing on her individuality: when walking to buy the flowers, Clarissa’s sense of herself is stripped and all that is left is “only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even

Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (10). She must then decide how to defend herself from the force of a universal social role and to answer their question of “what’s the sense of your parties?” (118). She does it as an offering to life, but she wants to go “deeper beneath what people said (and these judgments, how superficial, how fragmentary they are) in her own mind now, what did it mean to her, this thing she called life” (119). Her parties, she finds, are “to combine, to create,” to bring together “So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair” (119). And though Peter or Richard would not be able to understand this if she communicated it to them in words, they feel through at her party her creation of unity and togetherness; she communicates to them through the act of creation her internal feelings.

Because Woolf’s developed her artistic vision to return a sense of life to literature amongst social shifts and a change in human character in her historical moment, she must let the characters feel and experience these same uncertainties rippling through society. A joint source of narrative and character conflict strengthens the connection between narrative and character and allows for the flow of the life spirit.



Historical Continuity: The Flow of Time in Woolf's Narrative

In Woolf's essays and novels, she expresses a deep sense of historical and literary continuity, but she also recognizes the jarring need to reconcile past conventions with the radically different, modern present: how can an inherited literary style developed by past generations "whose fights [are] done" reflect adequately the chaotic and uncertain experience of modern life flooded with the mass death of a generation in a world war, major advancements in technology that allow for a partial mastering of nature, and the beginning of the eradication of gender and class lines? (MF 284). This uncertainty echoes in narrative style, flow, and themes. In *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway* the clash between the past and the present is violent yet unavoidable. She begins the essay "Modern Fiction" searching for an analogy that accurately describes the movement of the literary canon from the past to the present. The first comparison she proposes is that of a mechanical process, where better writing emerges in a linear flow from the refinement of tools and a perfecting of method as historical time passes. She dismisses this with the reasoning that "it is doubtful over the course of the centuries, though we have learnt much about making machines, we have learnt anything about making literature" (MF 284). She describes the relation between the literary past and present and the shift between them more accurately to her taste with the idea of a landscape upon which writers move as warriors, "a little in this direction, now in that, but with a circular tendency should the whole course of the track be viewed from a sufficiently lofty pinnacle" (MF 284). While "down in the plain little is visible" of the present and future, but the past may be looked at, envied, scorned, or learned from.

She recognizes that contemporary writers do look to their predecessors for guidance in their writing: "men and women who began writing novels in 1910 had this great difficulty to face- that there was no English novelists living from whom they could learn their business"

(MBMB 201). And while she asserts that there was no predecessor from modern novelist could develop from, she still looks to the past for lessons at least in what not to do. In “Modern Fiction” and “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” Woolf places in stark contrast a literary past with the literary present, yet emphasizes a continuity of the past and the present. One thing connecting literature through time is character; though the treatment of character may differ it remains the chief concern whatever the age: “and in all these novels all these great novelists have brought us to see whatever they wish us to see through some character. Otherwise, they would not be novelists; but poets, historians, or pamphleteers” (MBMB 200). In “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Mrs. Brown is presented as a concept of character; in this characterization she remains the same throughout time: “There she sits in the corner of the carriage, which is travelling, not from Richmond to Waterloo, but from one age of English literature to the next, for Mrs. Brown is eternal, Mrs. Brown is human nature, Mrs. Brown changes only on the surface” (MBMB 205).

She speaks mainly of a most immediate literary past, earlier generations of writers being far enough distanced to be admired for what they did well in their age. In “Modern Fiction,” she writes “But any deductions that we may draw from the comparison of two fictions so immeasurable far apart are futile save indeed as they flood us with a view of the infinite possibilities of the art and remind us there is no limit to the horizon” (291). She speaks mainly, then, of the older generation recently deceased or still writing, emphasizing that their literary tools and conventions no longer answer the needs of the present: “they have developed a technique of novel-writing which suits their purpose; they have made tools and established conventions which do their business. But those tools are not our tools, and that business is not our business. For us those conventions are ruin, those tools are death” (MBMB 205). The conflict between past and present (in terms of literary and social conventions) scores itself upon

the narrative's treatment of character in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, and remains present though reconciled in *To the Lighthouse*.

In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf takes into her hands the tools of her most immediate predecessors and uses them in ways unintended; but so much of the novel is spent unpinning literary tradition that characters fall through. The narrative of *Jacob's Room* gyrates around the central character Jacob, using throughout objects to reflect and symbolism elements of his internal character. Woolf takes the materialism that she accused the Edwardians of to the extreme: Jacob's character does not only operate in a material world but is embodied by a material world, fragmented into pieces of his shoes, his books, his rooms, his essays, his appearance, his letters.

Woolf also receives the framework of the bildungsroman as a 'tool' for constructing her narrative, but then completely undermines the certainty and validity of such literary (and the connected social) ideals. The story, like a bildungsroman, follows Jacob from childhood into adulthood following him from Scarborough to Cambridge, to London, to Italy. But, though he leaves home and has the experiences meant to shape boys into men and thus ensure the sovereignty and continuity of society, he does exhibit a profound visible change in morals or understanding but continues on, praising the ancient classics and resided in the stronghold of the British Library, scorning the emergence of modernity, not marrying and not becoming particularly successful professionally. When he grows to be a man, the women in his life, far from rejoicing over it, feel a sense of gloom:

That he had grown to be a man was a fact that Florinda knew, as she knew everything, by instinct.

And Betty Flanders even now suspected it, as she read his litter posted at Milan, "Telling me," she complained to Mrs. Jarvis, "really nothing that I want to know;" but she brooded over it.

Fanny Elmer felt it to desperation. For he would take his stick and his hat and would walk to the window, and look perfectly absentminded and very stern too, she thought.

"I am going," he would say, "to cadge a meal off Bonamy."

"Anyhow, I can drown myself in the Thames," Fanny cried." 111

He dies, and the continuity of society and the dependability of its institutions are undermined.

The novel follows Jacob in fragments from his childhood to his death, the span of a (short) lifetime, suggesting a discontinuation between past and present.

The narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway*, follows the rhythm of a day, one dictated naturally by the pattern of the sun and also one acknowledged throughout time. The end is left open to the passing of another day and the coming of the future, which regardless of the changes, will be arrived at by a passing of days. However, the life experience of characters flows with a discord between past and present; a character's memories and moments of the past from childhood and before the war mingle with and shape the experience of the present, but the character in the present is disjointed from his or herself of the past, conveying a sense of a discontinuity between life and literature between the past and the present linked partly to the interruption of the war. However, the narrative does recognize the continuance of the past in the present, but not one conveyed in the narratives construction of Clarissa, Septimus, or Peter.

The narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* personifies London as a woman, both living a modern life and an ancient life. At night London becomes

"like a woman who had slipped off her print dress and white apron to array herself in blue and pearls, the days changed, put off stuff, took gauze, changed to evening...I resign, the evening seemed to say, as it paled and faded above the

battlements and prominences, molded, pointed, of hotel, flat, and block of shops, I
 fade, shade was beginning, I disappear, but London would have none of it, and
 rushed her bayonets into the sky, pinioned her, constrained her to partnership in
 her revelry.” 161

London as a modern woman enjoying the night life triumphs over the traditional ordering of day
 and night, sleep and activity that nature imposes. However, though London has escaped
 traditional orders, her identity remains heavily invested in the past:

“through all ages- when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the
 age of tusk and mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise, the battered woman-
 for she work a skirt- with her right hand exposed, her left clutching at her side,
 stood signing of love- love which has lasted a million years, she sang, love which
 prevails, and millions of years ago, her lover, who had been dead these centuries,
 had walked, she crooned, with her in May; but in the course of ages, long as
 summer days, and flaming, she remembered, with nothing but red asters, he had
 gone; death’s enormous sickle had swept those tremendous hills.” 81

The intersection of a historical and cultural past and present skews the concept of time so that
 the current and the ancient simultaneously constitute the perceived reality of the present moment.
 Though modernism rejects conventions of Victorian society, all points of the past are
 indistinguishable and inseparable from the present; a concept that the narrative in does not quite
 invest in the characters. The narrative constructs a marked divide between the past and the
 present of the characters.

The present character of Clarissa Dalloway experiences life through a mixing of memories and relationships of the past with present interactions and external stimuli; but the person who experienced the past has become a memory as well, uncertain as all other memories. Her identity of the past has been lost in her present condition:

“But often now the body she wore, this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing- nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible, unseen; unknown; there being no more having children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs.

Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway.” 10

When she sees Peter again, he thinks she is changed, and even though memories of him constantly color her present, the two are unable to communicate.

Septimus experiences a complete change in character after the war. Septimus “went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walling in a square,” he went to save a certain kind of England which when he returns he does not care for (84). He returns shell-shocked, a modern artist, uncertain of what his life was or who he was before the war. All of his present thoughts and feelings have been colored by the war with no connection to what he once was. In his mind, the war even is disconnected from his present self, he sometimes forgets about it: “The War?...Had he served with distinction? He really forgot” (94).

A balance must emerge between the past, the disruption of the War, and the present: between the literary and social conventions of the past and the changes of the present both

structurally and thematically for the portrayal of characters animated with the life spirit of the time period.



“I have had my vision:” The Lighthouse as the Central Line

As the narrative of Woolf’s artistic development continues onto *To the Lighthouse* the contradictions of narrative portrayal of character explored separately thus far (that of history and present, granite and rainbow, movement and pause, universality and the individual, and the divide between the internal of narrative and character) merge together into an organic unity in *To the Lighthouse* ordered by the presence of the lighthouse. When asked by Roger Fry about the symbolic significance of the lighthouse, Woolf replied “I meant *nothing* by The Lighthouse. One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together” (Letters 385). The lighthouse weaves together a series of dualities in narrative construction and character internal: it operates with concrete and metaphysical significance to the narrative and the characters as they struggle to bring into resolution the uncertainties and contradictions of social change; ultimately the lighthouse coordinates the restoration of order for the characters and a moment of completion for Woolf’s artistic vision in the meshing of narrative and character internals through a dynamic symbol allows the life spirit to animate the characters and the narrative.

The narrative makes use of external objects to symbolize internal motion and life and to further bridge the gap between narrative and character by offering an object held in the readers mind in relation to both; offering a rhythm and freedom to the internal linked to something presented in the narrative, but held in the reader’s mind as outside the narrative; something like the kitchen table used to explain Mr. Ramsay philosophical work:

Whenever she “thought of his work” she always saw clearly before her a large kitchen table. It was Andrew’s doing. She asked him what his father’s books were about. “Subject and object and the nature of reality,” Andrew had said. And when she said Heavens, she had no notion what that meant. “Think of a kitchen table then,” he told her, “when you’re not there.” 23

Through symbolic imagery and objects, the reader can imagine concrete and physical objects as operating with metaphorical significance. These objects ordering the narrative and providing a bridge into the characters’ internals are the lighthouse and Lily Briscoe’s painting.

The lighthouse remains present throughout the novel, the pattern of its pulse “coming regularly across the waves first two quick strokes and then one long steady stroke” providing a framework for the novel’s flow and structure of three sections (62). The narrative, like the pulsing of the lighthouse beam, flashes from person to person and lights up their experience of life in that moment, a pattern in the narrative’s internal closely related to the way Mrs. Ramsay says one comes to know another person. Mrs. Ramsay reflects that “beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by” and as she thinks the lighthouse beam flashes through the window with which Mrs. Ramsay associates herself: “she looked out to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three” (62, 63). Unlike *Jacob’s Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway* in which the flow of the narrative imitated the ordinary mind on an ordinary day, jumping from impression to impression, the flow of the narrative in *To the Lighthouse* is ordered by a concrete and imaginable object in which Mrs. Ramsay invests herself. The flow of the narrative is directly associated with life specific to the characters of the novel through Mrs. Ramsay.

Though the narrative flows based on a stationary object, a lighthouse is the dark foundation upon which a beam of light turns; therein not only associating the flow of the narrative with life specific to the characters but a broader life upon which the present, individual, and the transitory is lit by the light of the historical and the permanent.

The lighthouse overarching presence in novel connects with immediacy the conflict experienced by characters arising from the social changes that have also created uncertainties in Woolf's narrative, lining up narrative and character internals again in the source of conflicts they must work through. The novel opens with the question of going to the lighthouse; in "The Window" it is at once a concern of commonality amongst the characters and a division. The lighthouse is elevated in everyone's mind as an excitement, the removed destination of a journey that may or may not take place. The ongoing discussion of whether the weather will allow the trip to the lighthouse causes tension in the household of the Ramsay family and their guests. The tension over the lighthouse mirrors the ripples of uncertainty in the conventional beginning to stir in the minds of the characters.

The novel in the first section, "The Window," presents a private sector of Victorian society that though operating smoothly, the characters have begun to feel the ripples of questioning and uncertainty in the conventions of this society corresponding with the ripples of discontent and separation that occurs over the possible but unlikely journey to the lighthouse. Mrs. Ramsay operates as a Victorian matriarchal figure who creates a sense of unity amongst the other characters; but this is a role she must actively seek to fill, that she slips into and out of, an act that "sometimes slips into mimicry" as argued in Crater's essay "Lily Briscoe's Vision: The Articulation of Silence" (127). When Mrs. Ramsay sits alone and sheds the persona she assumes to bring off a successful dinner party or to give her husband what he need, she feels herself "to

be silent; to be alone. 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 (62). She must arouse herself for the sake of unity and continuity of a society with a way of life she feels neither connected to nor happy about:

Only she thought life — and a little strip of time presented itself to her eyes — her fifty years. There it was before her — life. Life, she thought — but she did not finish her thought. She took a look at life, for she had a clear sense of it there, something real, something private, which she shared neither with her children nor with her husband. A sort of transaction went on between them, in which she was on one side, and life was on another, and she was always trying to get the better of it, as it was of her; and sometimes they parleyed (when she sat alone); there were, she remembered, great reconciliation scenes; but for the most part, oddly enough, she must admit that she felt this thing that she called life terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you if you gave it a chance. 59

For the continuation of life in this society, she urges marriages for “people must marry; people must have children” but she wishes to protect her children from the destructive nature of this society upon the individual’s happiness; she wishes to enact a breach in continuity by preserving her two youngest children in their childhood, asking “why must they grow up and lose it all?” in the suffering of “love and ambition and being desperately alone in dreary places” (60). The lighthouse enters again her thoughts, as she thinks about the bitter disappointment James will suffer by not going to the lighthouse, “how he will remember that all his life” (62). For James, the cancelled voyage to the lighthouse becomes one of life’s first disappointing blows delivered by Mr. Ramsay, a patriarchal figure who behaves with Victorian conventions.

Despite Mrs. Ramsay's active involvement in perpetuating unity and social continuity through marriage and womanhood, she still ultimately asks herself "But what have I done with my life" (82). Mrs. Ramsay questions the continuation of society's conventions, alternately succumbs to and resists the force of the universal pushing her to act in a gender role necessary for the continuity and unity of a society, and feels the separation from the internal and the external; within her, the mark of Victorian convention and womanhood, there is a breaking down of these conventions. With her death, Mrs. Ramsay is not able to achieve a resolution between these contradictions, but Lily Briscoe and Mr. Ramsay, who experience similar uncertainties amidst the social shifts, achieve moments of order that rely upon the lighthouse.

In "Time Passes," all the social certainties of the first section crumble leaving chaos, as Mrs. Ramsay the unifying figure dies, Prue dies in childbirth and Andrew Ramsay in the war, preventing the marriage of a generation and the birth of the next generation. "Time Passes" intensifies the questions and contradictions experienced by the characters in "The Window" so that in "The Lighthouse" section it becomes imperative to find some ordering of the mind.

This section passes as a dual narrative of Lily painting on the lawn and Mr. Ramsay in the boat to the lighthouse; both feel the incongeniality of past and present, the conflict between the internal and external, the imposition of the universal on their individuality, and in the translation of this into a narrative dealing with the same struggles there emerges a sense of harmonized movement of the narrative and character's life.

Mr. Ramsay, though the embodiment of Victorian patriarchal conventions, feels sharply the uncertainties of his social moment. Mr. Ramsay has a traditionally linear way of thinking about mental development as a process of making it through the alphabet. Yet this traditional

order does not ensure certainty for him. He worries intensely about his external and lasting worth, that the emerging society will deem him irrelevant and not read him: “Charles Tansley had been saying that people don’t read Scott any more. Then her husband thought, “That’s what they will say about me;” so he went and got one of those books. And if he came to the conclusions “That’s true” what Charles Tansley said, he would accept it about Scott. But not about himself. He was always uneasy about himself” (118). Mr. Ramsay depended greatly upon Mrs. Ramsay to soothe away his unease through her creation of family unity; when she dies, he must face alone his uncertainties. In the final section, Mr. Ramsay, James, and Cam’s journey to the lighthouse reinstates the family unity: Mr. Ramsay’s children as the voyage continues feel a growing connection and admiration of him; his arrival at the lighthouse signals the end of a journey that began ten years ago which is in itself a completion of a narrative of living; this completion of his join coincides with Lily’s completion of her vision, allowing as the essay “The Central Line down the Middle of *To the Lighthouse*” a dual possibilities of resolutions to modern uncertainties: one that draws upon conventions of the past centered on family, and the other an centered on art, an expansion of gender roles. As the essay “The Central Line down the Middle of “*To the Lighthouse*”” argues, joint ending of the fulfillment of Lily and Mr. Ramsay’s visions allows for the development of individualized reordering of the social chaos in which one invested in the continuation of conventions in society is just as valid as one breaking from the conventions of society.

Lily Briscoe, a painter, experiences uncertainties in her place in this social setting of “The Window”, a conflict that reverberates in her struggle with painting. Lily’s painting, for her, operates as an external manifestation of an internal vision, a projection of the transient and ethereal onto a concrete and lasting object. For the narrative, it operates as a symbolic organic

object held in the reader's mind (a painting, though it can be composed in words, automatically aligns itself with a visualization of colors and shapes in the mind) that is both the creation of and mirror of Lily's internal mind. In the course of the painting, Lily faces struggles that match up with the narrative struggles (both in her artistic questioning and her personal uncertainty stemming from her experience of life), strengthening the connection between narrative and life of character. Her internal uncertainty mix with her artistic struggles so that the resolution of both must be reached jointly. Lily's painting is a "question [of] how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left;" she paints with "the unity of the whole" in mind (53). Lily discusses her painting with William Bankes in terms of balance: balancing of bright and dark, light and shadow: "if there, in that corner, it was bright, here, in this she felt the need of darkness...a light here required a shadow there" (52). Lily struggles with the transition from internal vision to external medium: "it was in that moment's flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set on her" (23).

Her personal uncertainties stemming from stemming from the society in which she operates, must be brought to a balance as well for the completion of her painting. Mrs. Ramsay tells her "an unmarried woman has missed the best of life" and Lily suspects that this may be true being in love with Mrs. Ramsay, or rather "in love with this all', waving her hand at the hedge, at the house, at the children," in love with the unity Mrs. Ramsay creates as a traditional matron (49, 23). Lily wants that, but then she also has her painting which is incompatible with the fulfillment of the traditional gender role Mrs. Ramsay insists she continues through marriage. Lily oscillates between believing what Mrs. Ramsay represents and between clinging to her painting as the essence of her life. Charles Tansley adds another layer of doubt for Lily: "women can't paint, women can't write" (48). Though painting gives meaning to her internal life, Lily

struggles to invest significance in the painting outside of herself. Mr. Tansley's words continually break into her thoughts; she thinks "it was bad, it was bad, it was infinitely bad!" Lily doubts the validity of herself as an artist and of her desire to paint if she usurps the order and unity invested in gender roles to paint something disordered, insignificant, and transient (48). The force of these contradictory feelings pulls her in many directions, an inner disharmony that projects itself visually onto her painting. When Mr. Ramsay approaches her on the lawn in the last section and appeals to Lily's womanhood for sympathy, Lily is unable to give him what he needs, for which she bitterly criticizes herself.

In "The Lighthouse" section, Lily begins her second painting; it holds the same elements of scene and she feels the same internal uncertainty with the need for resolution intensified after the war. The lawn where she sits becomes "the world; they were up here together, on this exalted station" (179). As Lily sits there, she transcends physical distances, time, and the walls that form barriers between people: Mr Carmichael "seemed to hear her thoughts;" Mrs. Ramsay returns in her beauty to go "off to town, to the poor," to sit on the beach, to laugh, to bring life together (179, 18). A thread connects Lily to those on the boat; she knows when they have landed: "He had landed. It is finished" (191). In the process of painting, barriers of time, space, and people fall away, leaving an interconnected world in which the opposites of past and present, internal and external, here and there fall into order. As Mr. Ramsay lands at the lighthouse, she "was relieved. Whatever she had wanted to give him, when he left her that morning, she had given him at last" (208). In this state, in the openness and harmony of her mind in this moment, "with a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre" achieving the balance she had been seeking for ten years in a moment of vision from the

superimposing of the lighthouse upon her painting: “Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision” (209).

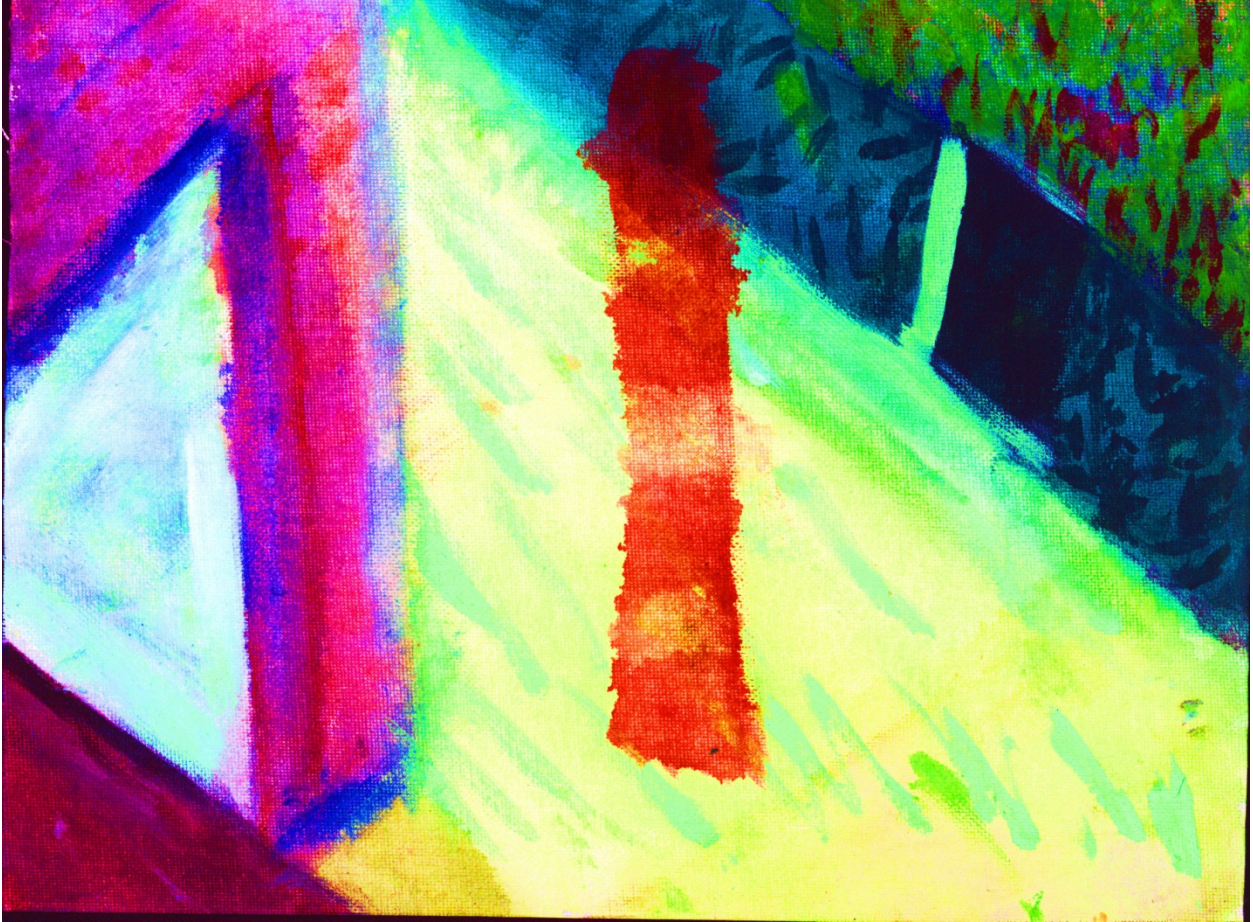
Lily Briscoe’s artistic struggle coincides with Woolf’s; just as Lily Briscoe’s painting, the elements and conception of her writing were present from the beginning of her vision. The sense of Woolf’s artistic development between *Jacob’s Room* and *To the Lighthouse* emerges like Lily’s artistic development between the first and second painting: her conception of design and of scene does not change, but it is the reordering and balance Woolf achieves between narrative contradictions embedded in her vision of character. *To the Lighthouse* achieves an organic unity in which a balance emerges between the contradictions through the intertwining of the narrative contradictions with the characters’ internal experience, the narrative structure. Like with Lily’s painting, the lighthouse provides the structure of her vision.

To the Lighthouse encompasses a moment of completion for the artistic vision that Woolf introduced in “Modern Fiction” for the construction of character through the narrative portrayal of how a character experiences life. As this essay has explored, this artistic vision has narrative contradictions embedded in it that must be sorted out for the realization of the vision: *To the Lighthouse* achieves this balance that allows for the completion of the vision through the creation of an organic whole that match up narrative and character internals through their shared rhythm of life, experienced conflicts, and achieved resolutions linked structurally together by the presence of the symbolic object the lighthouse. Through the matching of character and narrative internal, narrative contradictions are resolved: history and the past mix together and both are allowed to coexist (which is mirrored in the narrative technique of an experimental novel of manners set in the domestic sphere where the section of war is the most experimental). The narrative bridges together granite and rainbow by offering symbolic dynamic objects for the

reader to imagine as they grapple with vague concepts; these objects are elastic enough to move with the fluxing of the character's mind. The characters feel the force of the universal: the novel also sometimes develops a character into a role for thematic exploration; yet that is complicated as the characters individuality makes it sometimes difficult for them to fit into that role. Take for example, Mrs. Ramsay who is the Victorian 'angel of the household' figure who contrasts with Lily Briscoe and whose death signifies the unsustainability of past conventions. However, she consciously acts to fit that role, when she is alone she is a dark shape and she doubts all that she thematically embodies. The closeness of the narrative and character internals of *To the Lighthouse* creates a flow of life between character, narrative, and reader, bringing Woolf's artistic vision to cohesion.



Lily Briscoe's Completed Painting



[Click painting to return to the title page.](#)

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