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# “Let Us Record the Atoms as They Fall Upon the Mind” The Use of Objects and Animals to Convey Consciousness in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* and William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*

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“Let Us Record the Atoms as They Fall Upon the Mind”  
The Use of Objects and Animals to Convey Consciousness in Virginia Woolf’s  
*To the Lighthouse* and William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*

Geneviève Emily Rogers

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the  
Prerequisite for Honors  
in English

April 2016

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## Acknowledgements

A very special thank you to my honors advisors Timothy Peltason and Octavio González, whose guidance on this project has taught me much about being an effective reader and writer.

Thank you also to Lisa Rodensky, my initial thesis advisor, whose course on Virginia Woolf led me to first notice the special role objects play in *To the Lighthouse* and whose mentorship greatly influenced my approach to writing English research papers.

Thank you to Kathleen Brogan and Yu Jin Ko for agreeing to review my thesis and partake in my oral exam.

Thank you also to Catherine Masson for her continual encouragement and for agreeing to be the honors visitor for my oral exam.

## **The Pollen of Ideas**

It is difficult to draw a circle around the modernist literary movement and say “here it is” or “this is what it was.” Each work of art in the movement made its own attempt to be different and to escape exact definition. If there is a single unifying aspect of literary modernism, it may simply be the dissatisfaction with the fiction that had come before and a conscious effort to capture more fully the experience of living. The attempt to imitate ‘reality’ reexamines the meaning of the word itself. In his essay “The Art of Fiction” (1884) Henry James writes, “It goes without saying that you will not write a good novel unless you possess the sense of reality; but it will be difficult to give you a recipe for calling that sense into being. Humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad form” (387). Ford Madox Ford echoes James’ idea in his essay “On Impressionism” (1913), writing that “one is an Impressionist because one tries to produce an illusion of reality” (43). When it comes to what he means by an “illusion of reality,” Ford’s definition is as broad as James’, and he describes it as “the sort of odd vibration that scenes in real life really have” (42). At the core of these essays, both authors express the desire to connect with the reader in a way that truthfully and holistically conveys a lived experience.

James and Ford were hardly alone. Virginia Woolf writes in her 1925 essay “Modern Fiction” that the distinguishing factor in the work of her contemporaries is the “attempt to come closer to life, and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them, even if to do so they must discard most of the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelist” (161). Woolf, like James and Ford, champions the idea of moving away from literary tradition to capture life’s experiences through the mind’s eye. Whereas these authors speak to the effect of their work on their contemporary readers, William Faulkner highlights the desire that these portrayals of reality remain convincing to any reader in any time period. In a 1956

interview with the *Paris Review*, he claims that “the aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again.” The desire to capture reality was ubiquitous among modernist authors, who presented their unique experiences in notably different ways, creating a revolutionary literary movement as diverse as it was colorful.

In Woolf’s attempt to capture the vibrant experience of living, she creates a careful balance of internal and external narration, putting on display the complex internal lives that can exist in even the most commonplace of settings on the most typical of days. Two of Woolf’s early short stories, “Solid Objects” (1920) and “The Mark on the Wall” (1921), capture this balance particularly well. Characters in these stories find mental relief by using otherwise trivial material objects as focal points for their thoughts and reflections. The practice of using small external objects to explore larger internal struggles comes into its fullest and most complex form in Woolf’s novel, *To the Lighthouse* (1927). With many exceptions, Victorian authors tend to use physical objects in their narratives as part of lengthy descriptions that can serve to set up tone, social class, or the personality of characters. Objects in Victorian novels seem to *remain* in the external sphere, whereas objects in Woolf’s works often *enter into* the minds of her characters. In “Modern Fiction,” Woolf expresses the desire to “convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit [of life], whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible” (161). Woolf wraps objects, normally what would be “the alien and external,” into the spirit of life by using them as bridges between the complex inner life and the quotidian outer life. The function the object serves in a character’s consciousness, then, is ultimately more important than the function it serves in the outside world.

In Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying* (1930), he strives to bring the minds of fifteen characters to life on the page. Several of these characters form complex relationships with the animals they encounter, fixating on the animals in moments of intense emotional pain. Faulkner bestows the animals with an almost mystical quality and they play an integral role in how characters make sense of their emotions. In examining these character-animal interactions with Woolf's use of objects in mind, the reader can see that the animals also serve as bridges between the complex internal world of mind and the simpler aspects of the seemingly mundane external world. In order to come closer to capturing the essence of reality, or the "unknown and uncircumscribed spirit" of life ("Modern Fiction" 161), Woolf and Faulkner create meaningful encounters between characters and everyday *things* in their lives as a way of connecting the sublime and the mundane. What these *things* are (be they animals or objects) is ultimately less important than what they reveal about the inner workings of the minds of the characters who come across them.

Despite the similarity in how they use external objects to draw out their characters' perceptions of the world around them, Woolf and Faulkner seem, at first, to have little else in common. Woolf wrote among many budding modernist authors in the bourgeois Bloomsbury coterie. Her novels concern themselves with characters also in the British upper-middle class. Faulkner, on the other hand, was far away from the Bloomsbury or Paris literary scenes, writing mainly in rural Mississippi and creating an array of lower-class to middle-class and ruined upper-class characters who live in the fictitious rural Mississippi's Yoknapatawpha County.

These differences of milieu as well as traditional views of influence (it is unlikely that Woolf and Faulkner directly influenced or even read each other's works)<sup>1</sup> have seemingly kept

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<sup>1</sup> There is no indication that Faulkner ever came into contact with Woolf's works, although he was not very open about his literary influences. Woolf had several of Faulkner's books in her

critics from analyzing the texts of Woolf and Faulkner in direct comparison to each other. Most critical work that discuss both Woolf and Faulkner examines them as two separate pieces of a much larger study of modernist themes. One such example is Richard Pearce's study of how different narrative patterns in the works of Woolf, Faulkner, and James Joyce are, when put together, emblematic of the entire modernist movement. A few conspicuous exceptions that zero in on solely the work of Woolf and Faulkner are Loreta Ulvydienė's examination of the construction of time across *As I Lay Dying* and *To the Lighthouse* and Toni Morrison's master's thesis on themes of alienation in the works of Woolf and Faulkner.

That Woolf and Faulkner wrote in different spaces and did not directly influence each other does not necessarily argue against comparisons like that of Ulvydienė and Morrison, especially when one considers how Woolf and Faulkner fit into the complex literary web presented by recent literary critic Pascale Casanova. Casanova presents a "world republic of letters" (4) that formed in the modernist era, in which literary capital flowed back and forth from cultural peripheries to metropolitan centers such as Paris, New York, and London. With major innovations in travel and communication leading to a sudden increase of interconnectedness in the nineteenth century, there came a similar increase in the ability for global literary connection. As literature became more widely read and more authors vied for top spots in publishing, translation, and reviews, a sense of competition and a need to write within the avant-garde style emerged. This is not to say that all modernist writers wrote identically or were copying each other, but they were all reading each other with a critical eye and experimenting with their own works. In short, they were seeking legitimacy through the status of "prestige," that is acceptance

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personal library collection; however, this is an untrustworthy metric, since many of the authors Woolf regarded most highly are missing from her personal collection. Woolf wrote several literary reviews and often referred to works she was reading in her personal letters, conspicuously never mentioning Faulkner.



in a “restricted and cultivated public” (Casanova 15). Each author had a personal network of literary connections. What formed was a complex mesh of literary influence. Clive Bell, who was involved with a Parisian group of writers including Joyce, Ford, and Marcel Proust, was also part of the Bloomsbury Group in England, which contained avant-garde modernist writers and artists including Woolf, E.M. Forster, Roger Fry, Vanessa Bell, and Leonard Woolf (McNeillie 1). The movement of Clive Bell between the Bloomsbury coterie and the Parisian milieu is a strong example of how Casanova’s world literary system worked.

A significant result of this literary interconnectedness was the ability for remote authors to participate actively with their contemporaries in the modernist movement. Woolf and Faulkner were never directly involved in the Parisian salons,<sup>2</sup> yet both emerged as canonical modernist authors, their fame in many cases eclipsing that of artists who *were* in Paris at this time. Understanding how Woolf and Faulkner fit into this modernist network of influence helps explain their influence on other modernists and opens analyses of their works to the possibility of comparing them to each other. As Casanova points out, “literary work can be deciphered only on the basis of the whole of the composition, for its rediscovered coherence stands revealed only in relation to the entire literary universe of which it is a part” (3). There was an emerging style that transgressed national boundaries and Woolf and Faulkner were linked through it. Faulkner, at least, was somewhat aware of this phenomenon and spoke to it in several interviews. When asked about Joyce’s influence on his work, Faulkner said, “Sometimes I think there must be a sort of pollen of ideas floating in the air, which fertilizes similarly minds here and there which have not had direct contact” (qtd. in Hamblin and Peek 209). He spoke to the power of influence

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<sup>2</sup> Woolf traveled to France at least sixteen times in her life, but the closest she came to a salon was a party with her siblings, Clive Bell, and his friend Gerald Kelly. Faulkner visited Paris most notably in 1925, but he did not attend any salons either, preferring to travel on his own and speak to art students and everyday Parisians.

another time when a student at the University of Virginia asked him about the parallels in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and his own *As I Lay Dying*:

No, a writer don't have to consciously parallel because he robs and steals from everything he ever wrote or read or saw. I was simply writing a *tour de force* and every writer does, I took whatever I needed wherever I could find it, without any compunction and with no sense of violating any ethics or hurting anyone's feelings because any writer feels that anyone after him is perfectly welcome to take any trick he has learned or any plot he has used. (qtd. in Gwynn and Blotner 115)

Both Faulkner and Woolf were partaking in the modernist movement and both became recognized for their work within their lifetimes. In short, they were trying to become known and both succeeded. In this process, they adapted to what was highly regarded at the time, input from their peers, and what they were reading themselves.

Woolf, living in Europe, had easy access to this emerging modernist culture. The Bloomsbury group, formed around 1906, was not self-consciously an organization or a movement, but rather a group of friends tied together by marriage and other personal relationships (McNeillie 3). They proved to be Woolf's great connection to the modernist literary movement. Throughout her most formative writing years, she spent extensive time with these writers and artists sharing ideas on writing and politics and generally influencing each other's works. These people remained her close friends throughout her life. While Woolf did not have a formal education, she was not writing in isolation. She was in constant conversation with her contemporaries and their input played a great role in her development as a writer.

Faulkner, on the other hand, did not have the same luxury of geographical proximity. He did not have Woolf's circle of authors and, unlike the expatriate Americans, he did not move

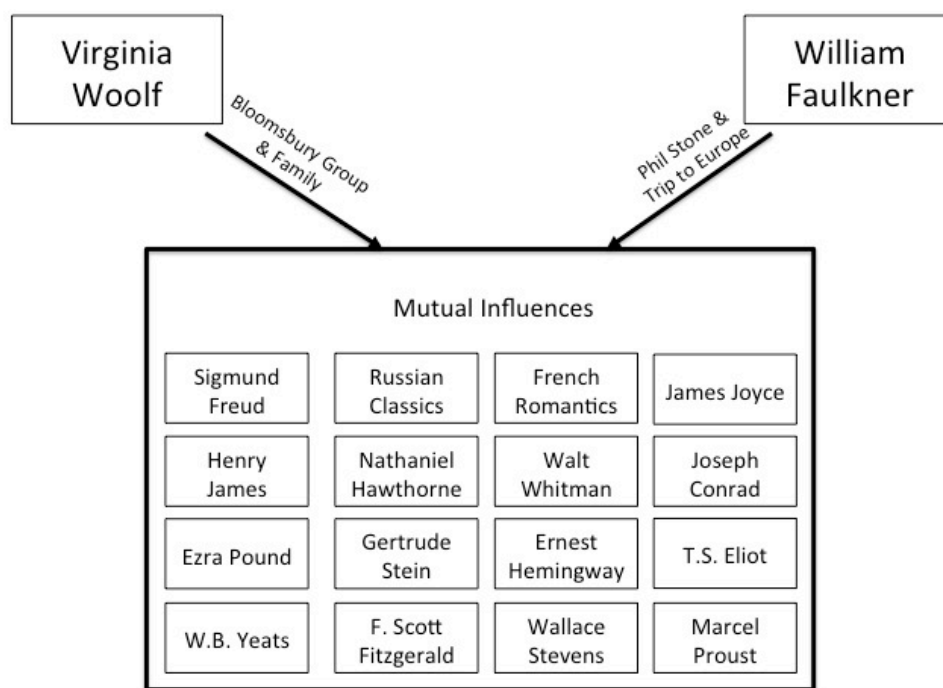
permanently to Paris. Faulkner, however, did not write in isolation and there were two key elements in his life that tied him to the modernist movement and explain his participation in it. First was his friend Phil Stone, also living in Oxford, Mississippi, who was four years Faulkner's senior. With a formal education from Yale, Stone became a mentor to Faulkner in many ways. Stone turned Faulkner towards nineteenth century poets, then towards the Symbolists, and, most importantly, towards the modernist movement including Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and Joyce (Minter 27). Stone encouraged Faulkner's talent, advocated for his work, and eventually became his literary agent.

The second element that tied Faulkner to the modernist movement was a trip that Faulkner took to Europe where he spent a considerable amount of time in Paris. Although Stone sent Faulkner with letters to Joyce, Eliot, and Pound, Faulkner neither used these letters nor met with any of these authors. Instead, he visited historical and literary landmarks, practiced his French, spoke to art students, and wrote (Minter 55). Generally, Faulkner's work from that time is not highly regarded and is certainly not viewed as his best work. His real strength emerged when he returned home and applied all he had learned to his "own little postage stamp of native soil [that] was worth writing about" (Faulkner qtd. in Bleikasten 88) His trip to Paris is indicative of the exposure Faulkner had to the greater modernist movement as well as his curiosity in exploring his place in it.

When examining the nodes of the networks of Woolf and Faulkner, it is possible to begin to see great overlap between the two authors. Both writers were influenced by contemporaries such as Joyce, James, and Eliot as well as earlier authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Sigmund Freud, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, among others. Hawthorne is a particularly compelling example of an author who influenced both Woolf and Faulkner greatly. Woolf grew up reading

Hawthorne and even wrote in her diary about the kinship she felt with him: “ever since I was a little creature, [I scribbled] a story in the manner of Hawthorne on the green plush sofa in the drawing room at St. Ives while the grown-ups dined” (Woolf qtd. in Gordon). Faulkner was likewise influenced by Hawthorne, with clear parallels appearing in his works. One recent critic, Richard Brodhead, goes so far as to call Faulkner “the greatest modern exploiter of Hawthorne’s reconstructed legacy” (Brodhead qtd. in Wolter 31). The influence was not missed by Faulkner’s contemporaries as was evidenced when a University of Virginia student pressed Faulkner on the similarity of his work to Hawthorne’s.

By examining the influences on Woolf and Faulkner, we can see how these two authors fit into Casanova’s “world literary system”:



Mutual influences in the above figure consist of authors both Woolf and Faulkner read in earnest. Seeing how connected Woolf and Faulkner were to their influences allows us to better understand how entrenched they were in the modernist movement. In laying out all of their connecting nodes, their mutual influences, and the people who served as pathways for Woolf and

Faulkner to interact with the modernist movement (Bloomsbury for Woolf and Stone for Faulkner), it becomes clearer how it might be that similarities in style and theme appear in their works.

### **Biographical Similarities**

However different Mississippi might be from London, there were a few notable similarities in the family lives of Woolf and Faulkner that are helpful to take note of when considering similar themes in their works. The similarities that emerge in the lives of Woolf and Faulkner certainly do not isolate their experiences. There are many novels about family tensions, especially where fathers are concerned; however, there is something particular in the way that Woolf and Faulkner treat families in *To the Lighthouse* and *As I Lay Dying*. The novels have parallel family structures and both examine how the familial fabric frays at the loss of the mother, centered on a pivotal journey. When considering the emotional reactions of the characters in the novel, it is helpful to have the biographical context that links Woolf and Faulkner together.

Faulkner was born to a prominent family in the Deep South, and spent the majority of his life living in Oxford, Mississippi. Faulkner was an avid reader throughout childhood and was a quiet boy who often listened to the stories told by the people in his community. Later, a friend would describe him as someone who had heard every side of every story and retained all of it (Minter 12-13). His desire to work through many different perspectives is reflected in his literary works; in *The Sound and The Fury* Faulkner retells the same story through the eyes of four very different members of the household. This desire can also be seen in *As I Lay Dying*, in which fifteen characters trade off telling bits of the same story; each one seeing pieces of the same

events from a different perspective. Faulkner was deeply imaginative, known for constantly making up elaborate stories and lying. A cousin of his recalled later that “It got so when Billy told you something ... you never knew if it was the truth or just something he’d made up” (qtd. in Minter 12). His cousin’s account speaks to Faulkner’s reputation as a raconteur, something that would later feed into his literary drive.

Woolf was likewise born to a prominent family and had an equally imaginative childhood. Although Woolf did not receive a formal education, she read incessantly throughout her childhood. She and her sister also played by writing fake newspaper articles chronicling the goings-on in their home. Although Woolf was not described as a liar by her peers, she was known for her exaggeration and fabrication when telling stories as well as for asking many questions. Woolf’s niece recounted a story of Woolf speaking to a friend at a tea party during which Woolf “simply fired out questions at her” before going on to describe an elaborate dress that someone else had described simply as “just plain black, high necked in the front with no back to it, but oyster-colored sleeves” (qtd. in Lee 6-7). Woolf’s reputation as an unreliable witness among her friends was reflected in her letters and diary (Lee 7), but it is this ability to spin stories that, as with Faulkner, fed into her literary skill.

Generally, Woolf sensed that she was on the outskirts of social engagements. Her marginalized position within her world was not altogether negative, and Woolf explores the various benefits to be had when outsider women come together in the third section of *Three Guineas* (1938), where she contemplates a desire to create a “secret Society of Outsiders,” made up of “daughters of educated men” (166-167). Morrison found this reflected in *Mrs. Dalloway*, arguing that Woolf viewed isolation as inevitable but advantageous in a world of despair and disorganization (2).

Both writers had troubled and complicated relationships within their families, especially in relation to their fathers. Faulkner's father, Murry Falkner,<sup>3</sup> was not affectionate, drank heavily, and was occasionally violent (Minter 5-6). After being denied the opportunity to take over his father's railroad company, Murry moved from job to job and was generally viewed as a failed descendent of impressive (almost mythological in their success) ancestors (Minter 8). Faulkner was somewhat ashamed of his father's mediocrity and while they were amicable, they weren't close. Murry never read Faulkner's popular works and generally saw him as more of his wife's child than his own.

Woolf likewise had a troubled and complicated relationship with her father, moving between being very close at a young age (she told a story to him every night and was remembered by her mother to twirl her hair in imitation of her father as she read) and resentful throughout her teen years when tensions within the family ran high after her mother's death. Her father, also a writer, was seen by his daughter to be caring and thoughtful at some times and overbearing and egotistical at others (Gordon).

## **Conclusion**

*To the Lighthouse* is separated into three sections, with perspectives flowing freely from one character to another and told in the third person. It begins with a day in the life of the Ramsays, a family on summer holiday with friends in a rickety house in Scotland overlooking the sea with the lighthouse in the distance. While the first section spans only one day, the second section spans a full ten years, including the death of Mrs. Ramsay and two of her children. The

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<sup>3</sup> Faulkner changed the spelling of his last name to include the "u" when he joined the Royal Air Force in Canada during World War I.

third section, like the first, only captures one day, in which part of the family finally returns to the vacation home and goes on the long awaited trip out to the lighthouse.

*As I Lay Dying* tells the story of the Bundrens, a poor family living in Mississippi, as they endeavor to bring their mother's corpse several towns over to be buried with her ancestors. The novel spans nine days, with first-person perspectives from each member of the family as well as from others in their community across fifty-nine sections. The family's journey becomes long and arduous as they face obstacles such as a flooded bridge, a fire, and a broken leg.

In these works, Woolf and Faulkner both explore the minds of their characters, how the members of the family relate to one another, and how those in their community perceive them. Albeit set in very different worlds, both novels struggle with the inherent psychological isolation of humans and explore sibling-to-sibling, sibling-to-parent, and family-to-outsider relationships, featuring voices from parallel societal structures and include perspectives from a mother, a father, sisters, brothers, and non-family members in the immediate community.

Most interesting for my study is how these novels exhibit the way in which Woolf and Faulkner use objects and animals to explore the minds and relationships of their characters. Woolf critic Benjamin Carson captures the interdependent nature of the sublime and the mundane for meaning in modernist works: "Meaning, for modernists, is found in the search. It is found in the quest to re-fashion a whole out of an impossible number of 'scraps and fragments' (Woolf, TTL 90). It is found in the precarious balance between the fleeting and the eternal" (28). Woolf and Faulkner use fleeting parts of everyday life to ground the eternal thought and emotion felt by all people. Both animals and objects serve as central *things* that, even if they are unimportant on their own, are given deep meaning by characters. Characters form relationships with objects and animals through complex and intricate narratives. Through this process, Woolf



and Faulkner link the sublime to the mundane and come closer to capturing the full vibrant experience of living.

## Woolf's Objects

In her essay “Modern Fiction” (1921), Virginia Woolf explains at length the responsibility of novelists to capture the experience of living as authentically and as fully as possible. Her take on realism, however, is not to hold a mirror to the physical world around her. “Life,” she claims, “is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.” The task of the author, then, is to “convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible” (“Modern Fiction” 161). The problem she finds with the writers who have come before, whom she terms the “materialists” (“Modern Fiction” 158), is that they rely too heavily on describing the material world, and do not ultimately capture the full experience of living. Woolf is concerned with interior life, or consciousness, more than she is with the details of external life. In other words, she describes the work of authors as needing to “reveal the flickering of that innermost flame which flashes its message through the brain” (161). The flame she describes, however deeply internal and invisible, emerges out of the experiences of everyday existence. In her works, then, Woolf strives to bridge the sublime and the mundane by creating complex relationships between the consciousness of her characters and the objects they encounter in their day-to-day lives. Unlike the “materialists” who preceded her, Woolf focuses on objects sparingly and uses them almost exclusively to convey some inner thought of a character.

Woolf begins her exploration into the relationships people form with objects in her early short stories. “The Mark on the Wall” (1917) and “Solid Objects” (1920) concern themselves entirely with relationships the protagonists form with various objects they encounter. Woolf explores how these items work to sort out mental chaos or trauma in their lives. In these stories,

the way characters fixate on seemingly unimportant objects seems unhealthy, bordering on neurotic. Through the unreasonable fascination, however, Woolf reveals a deeper understanding of the psyche of the characters.

“Solid Objects” details the journey of the protagonist, John, from a promising politician to a hermit consumed with a need to hunt for and collect small objects. The objects he collects, such as a lump of glass, a shard of china, and a chunk of iron, would generally be considered trash both by the reader and by John’s colleagues and friends. As John becomes addicted to the search for objects and slowly loses his career and personal connections, the story begins to reveal the negative consequences of his obsession. In one possible reading, the story becomes a commentary on the risks of artistic vision. Woolf leaves it deliberately ambiguous whether John had any genuine interest in politics, and explains at length the kind of tortured relief he finds when observing his objects. As Woolf critic Douglas Mao notes, “if the aesthetic holds many pains here, Woolf takes care to show that the practical holds few pleasures” (26). Mao also points out that John’s rejection of adult responsibility in order “to embrace the magic of the small” mirrors the rebellion of the Bloomsbury group against the writing style of their literary parentage (28). John chooses to dedicate himself to something of a bohemian lifestyle, eschewing conventional values of money and power to pursue his real passion even if it is not understood by his peers. It would be a mistake to try and identify the value or significance of the objects in the text by conventional standards. The genuine subject of the text is neither John nor the objects he possesses (or rather that possess him), but the *relationship* formed between the two.

While the narrative never condones or glorifies John’s obsession, it does take pains to make the reader understand the psychic relief John finds through his objects. To better

understand John's tortured obsession as well as Woolf's attempt to generalize John's experience, it is necessary to examine the moment Woolf describes the connection:

Looked at again and again half consciously by a mind thinking of something else, any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain when we least expect it. ("Solid Objects" 82)

When John looks at an object while thinking of something else, his thoughts fill and transform that object into an "ideal" shape. The term "ideal" is important, because it indicates that the mixing of thought and object has improved both. The *object* has become ideal and *thought*, in achieving the transformation, has also improved. This positive sensation is what draws John back to his objects again and again until he is concerned with little else. Although the impression the object leaves on the mind is "ideal," the word "haunts" reintroduces the nefarious undertones of this obsession. The choice to focus on the object may not be purposeful or desirable, but inevitable and scary. Woolf draws the reader into the experience by employing impersonal terms such as "a mind," "any object," and "the brain." What is more, the third person narration speaks directly to the reader and the word "we" encompasses John, the narrator, and the reader. The experience that alienates John and ultimately ruins his life can suddenly be generalized to include anyone. John may seem like an extreme case, but Woolf uses him to show what may appear more subtly in the lives of many people.

While the narration generalizes John's experience to include the reader, no one in his immediate world is able to understand. Other characters who view John's objects are either "unfavourably impressed" ("Solid Objects" 84) or do not notice them. The objects are not important by conventional standards, rather, they are important because John has built a

relationship with them. That they are otherwise meaningless items only makes it easier for John to fill them with importance. Further, because there is no conventional importance associated with the objects, the story must endeavor to make the reader understand why John has chosen them. If the objects carried universal value, the process of making the reader understand their unique importance to John would be distorted or even unnecessary. John's objects are like a blank page onto which he and the reader can project unique meaning.

These objects not only provide a kind of receptacle for John's thoughts, but serve as a pathway for the reader into John's mind. His overactive imagination uses his objects to escape from his own lonely world into fantastical stories and poetic visions. By focusing his inner thoughts on the small objects he discovers, John is able to find clarity and peace, even if the outside world fails to understand. Ultimately the relationship between protagonist and object reveals something larger: society sees John as a failure, but John himself has found great fulfillment in his searches. It is impossible, however, to ignore the slow decay of John's life as he succumbs further and further to his hunt for special objects. It is this decay that allows for "Solid Objects" to also be read as a trauma narrative, in which the fantastical stories John constructs around his objects serve as a form of escapism, even of repression. In his imaginative musings, John is entering into a fantastical world that brings him away from a harsher reality. For example, a lump of glass becomes a "gem" which might have belonged to a sunken Elizabethan treasure chest or "a dark Princess trailing her finger in the water as she sat in the stern of the boat and listened to the slaves singing as they rowed her across the Bay" ("Solid Objects" 80-81). A lump of iron, which resembles the lump of glass in shape, is much heavier and John finds it "evidently alien to the earth." He wonders if it comes from "one of the dead stars" or is "the cinder of a moon" ("Solid Objects" 84). John views his small pieces of trash as beautiful

treasures from faraway places or a different time. Even the broken piece of china, which does not transport him to an imaginary world, takes on an unexpected beauty that preoccupies his mind. Its many colors give it a “richness and lustre of the most attractive kind” (“Solid Objects” 83) which contrasts with his drab and disordered apartment. Woolf shows the reader that John is escaping his world through his objects and gestures toward the idea that John relates to these broken objects because he imagines himself as an important soul cast away for being in the wrong world at the wrong time.

When considering John’s reaction to trauma, it is helpful to turn to Woolf’s most famous traumatized character, Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Four years after his service in the First World War, Septimus suffers a delayed breakdown reacting to the trauma he experienced fighting in the war. Throughout Septimus’ internal reflections, the reader becomes aware that he feels a deep sense of guilt but is unable to identify his crime. In Woolf critic Karen DeMeester’s analysis of trauma in Septimus’ narrative, she writes, “Trauma inevitably damages the victim’s faith in the assumptions he has held in the past about himself and the world and leaves him struggling to find new, more reliable ideologies to give order and meaning to his post-traumatic life” (650). Septimus lives in a society that no longer wants to talk about the horrors of the war. One doctor fails or refuses to see Septimus as seriously suffering claiming he “had nothing whatever seriously the matter with him but was a little out of sorts” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 21). Another doctor recognizes the severity of Septimus’ depression, but his only solution is to send him away to a home outside of London where they can “teach” him “to rest” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 95). Without help, Septimus cannot find meaning in the world around him: “It is possible, Septimus thought, looking at England from the train window... it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 86). No longer repressing his crisis and

unable to find meaning in his suffering, Septimus tragically commits suicide. In contrast to Septimus, John is still repressing his trauma. Rather than commit suicide, John devotes himself to finding meaning, order, and imaginative escape through the small objects he collects. There is no mention of or even allusion to a previous traumatic event in John's life. Speculation on his trauma comes solely from his escapist and obsessive behavior in the story. In leaving the origin of John's neurosis open, Woolf allows for readers to project their own experiences onto the text. Whereas readers may be able to distance themselves from Septimus' war-trauma narrative, John's story could apply to anyone.

Woolf takes up another protagonist-object relationship in "The Mark on the Wall." "The Mark on the Wall" is presented as a single journal entry reflecting on the first of many times the unnamed narrator observes a small black mark on the wall of her living room. The story, as she tells it, is that rather than get up and see what the mark was, she sat and reflected on what it might be. As in "Solid Objects" neither the narrator nor the object is the true subject of the story. In this case, the narrator's introspection is the crux of the story, so that the eventual identification of the mark (a snail) is largely unimportant.

In "The Mark on the Wall," the mark serves as an anchor for the narrator's wandering thoughts. Moving from the haphazard transient nature of life to the nature of knowledge, the narrator's swirling thoughts always return to the mark on the wall, either as evidence for her current argument or as an instigation of the next. With every return to the object, the narrator becomes grounded, before going off into another tangential train of thought. Unlike John, the narrator in "The Mark on the Wall" is very aware of the effect objects have on her, and openly ponders it:

Indeed, now that I have fixed my eyes upon it, I feel that I have grasped a plank in the sea; I feel a satisfying sense of reality... Here is something definite, something real.

Thus, waking from a midnight dream of horror, one hastily turns on the light and lies quiescent, worshipping the chest of drawers, worshipping solidity, worshipping reality, worshipping the impersonal world which is proof of some existence other than ours.

(“The Mark on the Wall” 44-45)

Here, solid objects, starting with the mark, transform into the concept of reality itself. The mark is a “plank in the sea” that she can grasp onto when lost in the chaos of her mind. The same security applies to the chest of drawers when she wakes up from a bad dream. The impersonal and solid nature of these objects reminds the narrator that simpler things exist outside of the complexity in her mind. The comfort the narrator takes in identifying these objects as solid and reassuring proof of a stable reality after waking from a nightmare is possibly another instance of post-traumatic relief found through objects. As in John’s case, there is no explicit origin for the trauma in “The Mark on the Wall,” however, the narrator’s companion exclaims near the end of the story, “Curse this war; God damn this war! ... All the same, I don’t see why we should have a snail on our wall” (“The Mark on the Wall” 46). Despite the speaker’s disdain for the snail on the wall, he makes no effort to remove it. Woolf critic Marc Cyr examines the tale at length to show that the mark on the wall is likely present at the time the narrator sits down to write in her journal many months later, indicating that neither the narrator nor her companion ever removes it. Fatigued from a war he is unable to do anything about, the narrator’s companion makes no effort to remove even the small controllable nuisance. By placing complaints about the war immediately before complaints about a snail that is never removed, Woolf may be commenting on the trauma and fatigue suffered universally throughout England during the First World War.



The narrator, on the other hand, seems fond of the mark, and as John used his objects to escape his reality, the narrator uses the mark to escape her world as well.

As in “Solid Objects,” the form of the mark on the wall is ultimately unimportant and Woolf stresses that the relationship examined does not only exist between this one narrator and this one object. As Cyr puts it, “Woolf is proposing that objective reality is less important than the world of perceptions internal to each individual” (197). This potentially universal experience, more than the specific mark, is the subject of the narrator’s journal entry. The narrator explains in the opening paragraphs: “How readily our thoughts swarm upon a new object, lifting it a little way, as ants carry a blade of straw so feverishly, and then leave it” (“The Mark on the Wall” 37). Woolf’s use of “our” here works similarly to her use of “we” in “Solid Objects.” While the narrator’s fixation on objects may be neurotic, she, at least, seems to believe that her experience is more universal. At the same time, the narrator acknowledges the triviality of this action and by equating humans thinking about objects to tiny insects moving a blade of grass, she diminishes the importance of these feelings, reducing them to little thoughts moving busily and almost mechanically in a person’s mind. In this metaphor, the narrator also seems to imply that people naturally leave an object behind once they’ve contemplated it. Ironically, this does not appear to be true in her own case, as she does not “leave” the mark on the wall and feels compelled to write about it months after first noticing it. The narrator’s life doesn’t fall apart around her while she obsesses over the mark, but her inability to “leave” the mark introduces the same unease as John’s inability to leave his objects. While the narrator of “The Mark on the Wall” and John both seem to find great pleasure in reflecting on their objects, their level of obsession seems to be something of a warning. The consequences of this unheeded warning are revealed in Septimus’ character. Septimus’ trauma is probably more severe than those of the characters in the short

stories and he successfully represses it for four years. Ultimately, however, since he is unable to find an outlet for his suffering he falls into a crisis and kills himself.

Beyond revealing the risks of repressed trauma, the relationships characters build with objects in “The Mark on the Wall” and “Solid Objects” are examples of an approach Woolf outlined in “Modern Fiction” for capturing more accurately the disjointed nature of thought:

Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small.

(“Modern Fiction” 161)

For Woolf, the ideal method of writing is one that captures the chaos of the mind. She is not as interested in the physical world as she is in the *interpretation* of that physical world. That being said, she understands and seeks to represent how profound thoughts emerge from and intermingle with day to day life. In “The Mark on the Wall,” for example, Woolf traces the path of the narrator’s thoughts and uses objects to anchor these thoughts to everyday life. In doing so, Woolf traces the pattern of thought, records the “pattern” of these atoms, all while using small seemingly innocuous objects. She proves that the most profound thoughts and concepts can be found in what “is commonly thought small.” This occurs in “Solid Objects” as well. John’s thoughts are not clearly traced, but by working to make the reader understand John’s obsession, the reader is brought closer to John’s consciousness. Seeing how John fills small objects, otherwise regarded as trash, with immense importance traces these atoms in another way. Each object is otherwise meaningless, but by tracing the importance placed upon it, Woolf effectively traces and conveys the workings of the minds of her characters.

## *To the Lighthouse*

Woolf's use of objects as tethers between the inner lives of her characters and the reader appears throughout her novel *To the Lighthouse*. Unlike in her short fiction, however, the objects in this novel are not articles of trash and do not anchor the characters' inner world to the outer world in quite the same way. While characters often look to objects for clarity and comfort in *To the Lighthouse*, the relationships they form with and through these objects are pushed to further complexity.

The attention given to the kitchen table at the vacation home in *To the Lighthouse* is not nearly as intense as the attention given to the objects encountered in Woolf's short stories; however, the table cannot be ignored, because of what it reveals in the minds of Mrs. Ramsay, Andrew Ramsay, and Lily Briscoe. To begin with, the table puts on display the powerful orchestrating role Mrs. Ramsay plays in the domestic sphere. The table is the center of the domestic *space* and seems to give special power to Mrs. Ramsay, who is the center of domestic *life*. Mrs. Ramsay is the organizer of her family; throughout the text she is seen trying to control the interpersonal relationships of those in the house, especially when it comes to marriage. When Mrs. Ramsay (the most unifying character in the domestic space) sits at the head of the table (the most unifying object in the domestic space), the unifying force becomes two-fold and Mrs. Ramsay is able to see the very thoughts and emotions of the people she has brought together:

It could not last, she knew, but at the moment her eyes were so clear that they seemed to go round the table unveiling each of these people, and their thoughts and their feelings, without effort like a light stealing under water so that its ripples and the reeds in it and the

minnows balancing themselves, and the sudden silent trout are all lit up hanging,  
trembling. (*TTL* 106)

This passage focuses on Mrs. Ramsay's gaze. Her eyes become "clear" and she is gifted with sight into the minds of the people around her. Somewhat like the beam of the lighthouse or the narrative voice in the book, Mrs. Ramsay's gaze passes effortlessly over every character to show "their thoughts and their feelings." Mrs. Ramsay's special ability to "unveil" those around the table helps explain the level of trust, admiration, and love they feel towards her.

Although Mrs. Ramsay's sight at the table is unique to her, the table also becomes important in understanding how Andrew and Lily see and interact with each other. Andrew uses the table when trying to explain his father's work to Lily. When Lily doesn't understand "subject and object and the nature of reality" Andrew facetiously clarifies by adding, "think of the kitchen table then... when you're not there" (*TTL* 23). At the surface level, and at the level which Lily interprets it, Andrew's comment uses the table as a tool to explain Mr. Ramsay's philosophy. In this way, the table serves as a link between their two understandings. The explanation, however, is minimal, confusing, and ultimately ineffectual such that Lily is no better able to understand Mr. Ramsay's theory than before. Without Lily realizing it, the table is being used as a weapon against her. Andrew assumes that masculine philosophy is out of her realm of comprehension and therefore does not even attempt a valid explanation. Instead, Andrew simplifies a theory that Mr. Ramsay has spent most of his life studying into a few pacifying phrases. While the table serves as a symbol of female power for Mrs. Ramsay, it is also a symbol of masculine philosophy and women's presumed inability to understand it. It is also worth noting Andrew's word choice, because "subject and object and the nature of reality," is exactly what the narrator in "The Mark on the Wall" ponders in her journal entry. In the passage analyzed earlier, the

narrator reflects on the relationship between herself (the subject), the objects in her room, and how these objects ground her sense of reality. What is more, it is ultimately Woolf, a woman, who is creating Andrew's understanding of philosophy. Woolf's clear understanding of the masculine philosophy ironizes Andrew's assumption that Lily would not be able to understand it.

However important the table may be when Mrs. Ramsay, Lily, or James is present, it carries no inherent meaning on its own. The table appears in the kaleidoscopic middle passage of the novel, "Time Passes," with no one present (much as Andrew asks Lily to imagine it) and its insignificance in this scene is highlighted in the language. The table is listed among many household items in the empty house without special attention drawn to any of them. Further, the table is only mentioned in relation to the blancheted apples sitting on top of it (*TTL* 126). As in her short works, Woolf is again only interested in the way her characters interpret or interact with the object, and the table carries no importance or power on its own.

Lily Briscoe's paintings provide a particularly compelling example of the complex forms the human-object relationship takes in *To the Lighthouse*. While she recognizes that her paintings will be "rolled up and stuffed under a sofa" (158) and that others do not connect to her work as she does, Lily continues to paint. By painting all her life, even if she never garners a true audience, Lily succeeds in a personal rebellion against male expectation as she defies Charles Tansley's insistence that "women can't paint, women can't write" (*TTL* 86).

Many critics, such as Henry Harrington and Sharon Proudfit, have centered their study of *To the Lighthouse* around Lily's paintings, arguing that these paintings can elucidate the reader's understanding of meaning and interpersonal relationships in the novel. I will focus here on Lily's own interaction with her paintings and how her creative process helps elucidate her character for the reader.

It is hard to compare the paintings to the kitchen table, the snail, or the lump of glass, because their form is so vastly different. The two main distinguishing features of her paintings are that they are *created*, not found, by Lily and that they are conventionally considered a work of art in which the viewers expect to find meaning, be it the artist's or their own. Lily must create her object whereas John, the narrator of "The Mark on the Wall," Mrs. Ramsay, and Andrew find meaning or power through an existing object that they encounter. It is in the process of creation, not in observing it later, that Lily finds meaning, clarity, and contentment. When Lily attempts to paint Mrs. Ramsay and James sitting in the yard (the first time the painting appears in the text), Woolf lays out the approach Lily takes to painting:

She took up once more her old painting position with the dim eyes and the absent-minded manner, subduing all her impressions as a woman to something much more general; becoming once more under the power of that vision which she had seen clearly once and must now grope for among hedges and houses and mothers and children- her picture.

(*TTL* 53)

On the surface, Lily is painting everyday objects, such as a hedge, a house, a mother, and a child. Lily follows the argument Woolf makes in "Modern Fiction" by not capturing these objects with visual accuracy, but by trying to achieve something transcendent in her representation of them. Rather than hold a mirror up to the objects in front of her, Lily recreates them on her canvas in an abstract way that more accurately communicates her "vision." Woolf purposefully leaves the exact nature of Lily's vision vague, but since Lily accesses it by dimming her eyes and expanding her mind, the reader gets the sense that it is a visual representation of a powerful emotion. Lily, like Woolf, uses the external only as a means of communicating the internal. In other words, Lily uses her painting to "record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in

which they fall” (“Modern Fiction” 161). In Lily’s recreation of the objects in front of her, patterns of the human-object relationships from Woolf’s shorter works appear. Much as the narrator of “The Mark on the Wall” feels that the mark is a plank at sea that she can mentally grasp onto to calm herself, the objects in the painting give Lily “something definite, something real” (“The Mark on the Wall” 44) to grasp. In “Solid Objects,” John’s objects reform themselves in his mind, and similarly when Lily paints something from the impersonal world around her, it “loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape” (“Solid Objects” 104). Lily’s thoughts mix with the objects in front of her, allowing her to repaint both the objects and her emotions in an “ideal” shape. What is more, the painting is itself an object embedded with smaller symbolic objects.

By observing the painting process, the reader better understands Lily as a character. For example, there is much to be learned when examining Lily’s explanation that her abstract painting represents Mrs. Ramsay and James:

There were other senses too in which one might reverence [Mrs. Ramsay and James]. By a shadow here and a light there, for instance. Her tribute took that form if, as she vaguely supposed, a picture must be a tribute. A mother and child might be reduced to a shadow without irreverence. A light here required a shadow there. (*TTL* 52- 53)

Lily gives the reader several clues to her character when considering her painting: that the painting is a tribute, that Lily believes that a picture must be a tribute, that she is concerned with mother-child relationships, and that she believes the relationship between Mrs. Ramsay and James has darkness which contrasts with some other lightness. Lily’s supposition that all pictures must be tributes tells the reader that she is not creating art for art’s sake. Her paintings are an attempt to capture and give tribute to something in her life. The choice to use Mrs. Ramsay as the

object of her tribute shows the reader the importance of Mrs. Ramsay in Lily's life. There is an obsessive quality in Lily's relationship with Mrs. Ramsay and the painting implies that Lily's fixation is based in part on Mrs. Ramsay's role as a mother and on the darkness Lily identifies in her.

Unlike the kitchen table or the objects from Woolf's short fiction, a painting is conventionally understood to be an aesthetic object. The lump of glass and the mark on the wall are quickly dismissed by everyone save their respective protagonists. Any viewer of Lily's painting, however, expects it to communicate some emotion or experience. This expectation is why Lily does everything she can to keep prying eyes away from her canvas. Mr. Bankes is the only person she allows to look at her work, and it is therefore significant that the communication between painter and viewer is unsuccessful in his case, as he can neither identify the objects in the painting nor see Lily's artistic "vision":

Taking out a pen-knife, Mr. Bankes tapped the canvas with the bone handle. What did she wish to indicate by the triangular purple shape, "just there"? he asked.

It was Mrs. Ramsay reading to James, she said. She knew his objection – that no one could tell it for a human shape. (*TTL* 52)

As she creates each stroke and fills it with meaning, Lily limits the interpretations of outsiders. Lily sees darkness in Mrs. Ramsay and, as a result, has chosen to paint her as a dark purple triangle to balance out the lightness in the other corner of the painting. Mr. Bankes, however, only sees the geometric shape and cannot comprehend why Lily would reduce Mrs. Ramsey and James to a "purple shadow." Despite the fact that outsiders look to find meaning in the painting, the significance of the object, as with the mark on the wall or John's objects, is only understood by one character.



While Lily's creative process gives her clarity and invites the reader to follow along, it excludes those around her who are not privy to her thoughts. This is not to say, however, that her creative work has failed. Throughout the novel, the reader watches as Lily paints two separate paintings. Lily works on her first painting throughout the first section of the novel, "The Window." Fittingly, Lily's painting is something of a window into her inner world and into the relationships she observes around her. While she has an idea of where she wants to go with her painting, she never has the opportunity to finish it. Lily is largely absent in "Time Passes," but takes up her brush again to start a new painting in the last section of the novel, "The Lighthouse." Lily finishes this painting in tandem with Woolf finishing her novel, and it is in examining the final paragraph of the novel that the reader sees that Lily's painting is anything but a failure:

Quickly, as if she were recalled by something over there, she turned to her canvas. There it was--her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (*TTL* 208-209)

Lily is unconcerned with what will become of her painting once it is finished. That it will be hung where no one can see it or destroyed doesn't matter, because it is the process of creation that is important to her. The possessive language of "*I have had my vision*," shows the reader that Lily's vision is a private one. Her verb choice "had" is also significant. She is not proud to have

*communicated* or *captured* her vision, because her triumph is in the experience. In other words, the painting's "attempt at something" (TTL 208) reveals "the flickering of that innermost flame which flashes its message through the brain" ("Modern Fiction" 161). The private vision is fulfilling for Lily, just as the private experiences of the protagonists of "The Mark on the Wall" and "Solid Objects" were fulfilling for them. Their experiences do not need to be shared. The painting and novel work hand in hand with each other. The line down the center of Lily's painting is commonly understood to be the lighthouse, but it also mirrors the structure of the novel, with "Time Passes," the complex second section of the novel, simultaneously dividing the book in half and tying the whole novel together. Lily's vision is private, and although *To the Lighthouse* is public, Woolf gestures toward the idea that the important part of her own work, the "vision," was the process of its creation, and has already been completed before the reader has even opened the book.

## **The Lighthouse**

The most prominent object in the novel is, of course, the lighthouse. Beyond appearing in the title and always being capitalized throughout the text, the lighthouse's true significance lies in the relationships almost every character in the novel forms with it. For example, Lily Briscoe is finally able to finish her painting after staring out at the lighthouse. These closing lines to the novel show the dissolving quality of the lighthouse, as it fades into the haze. As with many of Woolf's other objects, the lighthouse "mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form" ("Solid Objects" 82). Lily physically feels the effort of looking at the lighthouse, contemplating Mr. Ramsay's arrival, and reflecting on all of the other issues she has been meditating on in the pages before. As the object dissolves, so too do her thoughts. Her

thoughts, now much looser, are easier to poke, pry into, and reform. This culminates in the physical action of recreating the lighthouse as a line that unifies her painting and achieves her inner “vision” (*TTL* 209).

Much earlier in the novel, Mrs. Ramsay thinks of the lighthouse in a way that is reminiscent of characters in Woolf’s earlier works. As Mrs. Ramsay reflects on the lighthouse, the reader understands that this is a diversion that brings her peace:

She looked out to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of three, which was her stroke, for watching them in this mood always at this hour one could not help attaching oneself to one thing especially of the things one saw; and this thing, the long steady stroke, was her stroke (*TTL* 63).

Here, the text begins to delve into the complicated relationship between Mrs. Ramsay and the lighthouse. To begin with, the lighthouse seems to belong to Mrs. Ramsay. She thinks of the third stroke as her stroke, and since she is “always” looking at this hour, it is clear that she seeks out this comfort often. It is important to note that both the lighthouse and Mrs. Ramsay have an orchestrating power. Mrs. Ramsay brings her family and friends together at her carefully orchestrated dinner, and is continually attracting people to her with her “beauty and splendor” (*TTL* 28). She compels Lily to get along with Charles Tansley and encourages the marriage of Paul and Minta. Reflecting her steady and grounding familial role, Mrs. Ramsay attaches herself to the stroke that she finds to be long and steady. As the lighthouse stands as a warning, directing nearby ships away from the rocky shore, Mrs. Ramsay beckons people to her, inviting them to come to the summer house.

What is more, Woolf’s descriptions of Mrs. Ramsay looking at the lighthouse are unexpectedly intense and erotic. Matt Franks, makes the compelling argument that certain

passages with Mrs. Ramsay and the lighthouse portray autoeroticism. When Mrs. Ramsay looks out to the lighthouse, an overtly phallic symbol, she uses its presence to please herself: “She looked up over her knitting and met the third stroke and it seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes, searching as she alone could search into her mind and her heart... she praised herself in praising the light... she was beautiful like that light” (*TTL* 63). Mrs. Ramsay identifies strongly with the object, so that it is “so much her, yet so little her” (*TTL* 65). By mixing herself with the lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay is able to “praise” herself through “praising” the light, identifying her own beauty through identifying the beauty of the light. This mixing of her identity with that of the lighthouse, which the reader sees a few pages later is capable of bringing her to a climactic state (*TTL* 65). Franks argues, “Mrs. Ramsay meets herself as her own sexual partner, takes up the phallus apart from any male presence, and uses its power for herself” (Franks).

Mrs. Ramsay’s use of the phallic symbol to please herself further complicates the reader’s understanding of Mrs. Ramsay’s relationship with her husband. Although there are instances in the text when Mrs. Ramsay appears to love her husband, his constant need for sympathy exhausts her. Throughout “The Window” James notices that his father’s constant desire for sympathy saps his mother’s energy, making her wither like a flower (*TTL* 38). Lily Briscoe goes so far as to identify Mrs. Ramsay giving into Mr. Ramsay’s constant need for sympathy as the cause of Mrs. Ramsay’s death. When warding off Mr. Ramsay’s silent demands for sympathy herself, Lily claims “Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died” (*TTL* 194). Mrs. Ramsay’s insistence that “an unmarried woman has missed the best of life” (*TTL* 49) and her continuous encouragement of other characters to get married, are indications of overcompensation emerging from her own frustrations in her marriage. Mrs. Ramsay attempts to

validate her own marriage by insisting that marriage is the only conceivable route to happiness. In actuality, Mrs. Ramsay desires to be alone: “Always, Mrs. Ramsay felt, one helped oneself out of solitude reluctantly by laying hold of some little odd or end, some sound, some sight. She listened, but it was all very still; cricket was over; the children were in their baths; there was only the sound of the sea” (*TTL* 64). Here, Mrs. Ramsay mirrors the narrator in “The Mark on the Wall.” As the narrator in “The Mark on the Wall” mentally grasps onto physical objects to calm her turbulent mind, Mrs. Ramsay lays hold to “some little odd or end” to bring herself out of mental solitude. The use of the word “always” implies that her longing to remain apart is something that she feels continually. When Mrs. Ramsay does bring herself out of mental solitude, she finds that she is physically alone and that the isolation need not, then, be broken. As she imagines her family secure and away from her, Mrs. Ramsay listens to the sea. As she listens, her attention is brought to the beam of the lighthouse. In this return to the lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay is brought to a virtually orgasmic state:

Watching [the lighthouse] with fascination, hypnotized, as if it were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight... the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough! (*TTL* 65)

The light of the lighthouse caresses Mrs. Ramsay until she is brought to ecstasy. The “waves of pure delight” are so intense that the narrative voice is punctuated by her exclamations. Again, Mrs. Ramsay is using and subverting the phallic symbol of the lighthouse to please herself. More than this, however, the reader sees that it was her joy in solitude that prompted Mrs. Ramsay to look out to the lighthouse and take this pleasure. Mrs. Ramsay’s autoerotic solitude is ironic, because she is the centralizing force in the novel. It may be this internal contradiction that causes

Mrs. Ramsay to proclaim “the inadequacy of human relationships” (*TTL* 40) and that causes her deep sadness and the “darkness” that Lily portrays in her painting.

Mr. Ramsay is somewhat aware of Mrs. Ramsay’s desire to be alone. As Mrs. Ramsay contemplates the lighthouse in this passage, Mr. Ramsay passes her and his consciousness interrupts the narrative: “He could do nothing to help her. He must stand by and watch her. Indeed, the infernal truth was, he made things worse for her. He was irritable – he was touchy. He had lost his temper over the Lighthouse” (*TTL* 64). Mr. Ramsay knows that his presence does not help Mrs. Ramsay and that she might be happier without him. If the lighthouse at this moment is the instrument of Mrs. Ramsay’s autoeroticism, then the reader can see that Mr. Ramsay loses his temper over Mrs. Ramsay’s desire to be alone, a situation in which there is no space for him.

As with the painting, the form of the lighthouse is crucial to the relationships characters form with it. The painting is a work of art that provides a space for creation and carries a lot of expectation. Its form is crucial for Lily Briscoe’s unique relationship to it. Similarly, the lighthouse’s form is significant. The lighthouse’s purpose is to guide ships at night and in poor weather. Metaphorically, the lighthouse serves a similar purpose in the lives of the characters, standing as a fixed point that guides their chaotic minds. Harrington describes the lighthouse as, “a constantly moving still point at the center of the lives of all the characters” (370). Reflecting the stream of consciousness narrative approach of the novel, the lighthouse’s beam highlights each character and object that it passes one by one. More than this, the beam is given an active role even when characters are not present. In “Time Passes,” the beam of the lighthouse continues to gaze into the empty house: “Only the Lighthouse beam entered the rooms for a moment, sent its sudden stare over bed and wall in the darkness of winter, looked with

equanimity at the thistle and the swallow, the rat and the straw” (*TTL* 138). The other objects remain still, but the lighthouse’s beam is personified. It enters rooms and looks at everything with a “sudden” stare. The active language gives the lighthouse a more dynamic role and an inherent energy, even when humans are not present. What is more, the lighthouse refuses to pass judgment on or interfere with what it is looking at. Instead, it looks with “equanimity” and passes over all of the objects of the room regardless of how unimportant they seem; it makes no distinction between a bed and a rat. Although the reader expects the lighthouse to send a warning that pushes people away, this lighthouse ironically seems to welcome people in, beckoning to them.

In a 1927 letter to Roger Fry, Woolf wrote, “I meant *nothing* by The Lighthouse” (qtd. in Rubenstein 38; emphasis Woolf’s). Given the prominence of the lighthouse, Woolf’s dismissal of it is unexpected. She goes on to explain, “One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together. I saw that all sorts of feelings would accrue to this, but I refused to think them out, and trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotions” (qtd. in Rubenstein 38-39). Even with its lack of meaning, the lighthouse holds the entire design of the novel together, just as the line holds the design of Lily’s painting together. In fact, it is its nothingness that allows the reader to connect deeply with it. The lighthouse is not meant to be understood in the same way by all of its viewers, be it a character or a reader. Rather, the lighthouse is a constant presence onto which each individual can project their own significance.

Many critics have discussed the lighthouse’s presence in the novel, especially when taking into account Woolf’s comments in her letter to Fry. Roberta Rubenstein argues that when Woolf wrote that she meant *nothing* by the lighthouse, she was referring to the *something* that

*nothingness* embodies in much of her work. At the time Woolf was writing *To the Lighthouse*, she wrote in her diary about the phrase “Where there is nothing” (qtd. in Rubenstein 38). The phrase became her expression for the complete emotional void she could not otherwise articulate (Rubenstein 38). Rubenstein argues that, “negative diction functions as the verbal equivalent of what visual artists term ‘negative space’: the areas that surround the subject matter and therefore define it” (39). Woolf’s goal when using language connoting negative space, nothingness, or negation was to create an empty space around each character that helps define them more clearly. This theory especially makes sense when reexamining Woolf’s words to Roger Fry and viewing “*nothing*” to be an instance of “Where there is nothing.” This void of meaning allows for a space for readers to interpret the lighthouse on their own. If Woolf had written the novel with a clear interpretation of the lighthouse in mind, it would have seeped through the writing and limited the various reactions readers could have to it.

Taking this line of thinking further, the emptiness of meaning also allows for each character in the novel to make the lighthouse “the deposit for their own emotions” (qtd. in Rubenstein 39). Indeed, each character in the novel reflects on the lighthouse differently, and the lack of clear symbolic meaning in the lighthouse allows each of the characters to organize their thoughts around it in a unique way. Rubenstein’s insight can be applied to Woolf’s short stories as well. The lump of glass and the mark on the wall in “Solid Objects” and “The Mark on the Wall” are also void of clear meaning. In these stories as well as in *To the Lighthouse*, the characters are able to connect with the objects because they are able to deposit their emotions into them completely. The unique symbolic weight of the lighthouse to each character is an important tool in making sense of their frenzied minds. Woolf’s focus on objects in these three works fits the mission outlined in “Modern Fiction,” to focus on the realm of the mind more than



simply to imitate the physical worlds. In other words, she is concerned with the relationships formed with the objects, rather than on the objects themselves.

For example, Mr. Ramsay's particular relationship with the lighthouse shows an emotional progression in his character. The lighthouse's influence on Mr. Ramsay is less direct; it is not when he is looking at the lighthouse, but when he is journeying towards it that he experiences a few moments of clarity. In the last section of the novel, Mr. Ramsay sails to the lighthouse with James and Cam, and during the journey he manages to connect with both of his children, from whom he has been emotionally estranged. Mr. Ramsay is constantly in pursuit of the letter "R" in his imagined alphabet of genius, and in his journey to the lighthouse Mr. Ramsay is finally able to move from "Q" to "R." The result, however, is not the intellectual genius he may have imagined, but the ability to empathize with his children. The changes in his behavior are subtle, but they indicate that he is more in tune with the feelings of his two children. In turn, he is better able to provide for them emotionally. For example, Mr. Ramsay looks at Cam and recognizes that he upset her when he scolded her for not knowing how to locate the cardinal directions. Recognizing that he made her upset, he makes an effort to subdue his typical behavior in order to make her happy:

I will make her smile at me, he thought. She looks frightened. She was so silent. He clutched his fingers, and determined that his voice and his face and all the quick expressive gestures which had been at his command making people pity him and praise him all these years should subdue themselves. He would make her smile at him. (*TTL* 167).

Mr. Ramsay is taking note of his daughter's expressions and realizes that she is quiet and frightened. He decides to make a genuine effort to make her happy, whereas in the past, he has

only ever *asked* for pity and understanding from the women around him. Later, Macalister's son, who is helping steer the ship to the lighthouse, points out the location where a ship sank. The children are afraid that their father will burst out in passion when he sees the location, an outburst which they "could not endure" (*TTL* 206). Instead Mr. Ramsay only says "'Ah' as if he thought to himself, But why make a fuss about that?" (*TTL* 206) Although the narration is not in Mr. Ramsay's consciousness at that moment, the children's reactions shows the reader that Mr. Ramsay's attempt to please them is working. He is trying to subdue his usual outbursts, because he has become aware of how they make his children feel.

James Ramsay's relationship with the lighthouse runs the course of the book, and he is, in fact, the only character that provides an explicit description of the building:

The Lighthouse was then a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye, that opened suddenly, and softly in the evening. Now –

James looked at the Lighthouse. He could see the white-washed rocks; the tower, stark and straight; he could see that it was barred with black and white; he could see windows in it; he could even see washing spread on the rocks to dry. So that was the Lighthouse was it? (*TTL* 186).

James' description is split into two separate visions of the lighthouse. In the first description, the lighthouse is presented poetically as a creature casting its gaze over all of the characters. In the more poetic vision, James imagines the lighthouse's stroke in the evening, calling back to the earlier description of Mrs. Ramsay reflecting on the lighthouse's beam in the evening. James' second description is a much harsher view of the lighthouse, which is more in line with his father's personality. He sees it as "stark and straight... barred with black and white." This is the lighthouse in front of him, not the one he has imagined since he longed to visit it as a child.

Woolf critic Elizabeth Abel treats the same passage, and argues that the “stark and solitary paternal reality replaces fantasmic union with the mother” (49). According to Abel’s analysis, in the final voyage to the lighthouse, James switches his alliance from his mother to his father. Throughout the novel, James generally loathes his father and adores his mother, creating a narrative with aspects of Freud’s Oedipus complex theory. When Mr. Ramsay interrupts Mrs. Ramsay playing with James in the opening pages of the novel, James’ reaction is violent: “Had there been an axe handy, a poker, or any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father’s breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it” (*TTL* 4). Throughout the final trip to the lighthouse, James reflects on his hatred for his father. He begins to sympathize with his father, finally realizing that “they alone knew each other” (*TTL* 185). The change in their relationship is in part due to Mr. Ramsay becoming more in tune with his children’s emotions, but ultimately James changes as well. Abel believes that in reconciling with his father, “Woolf uses the Oedipal narrative to subvert the affirmations that surround James’s development, to puncture the illusion that he can both be his father’s heir and retain his mother’s heritage” (52). While I agree that James shows an emotional shift toward his father, I think this reading ignores the balance James ultimately finds between his two visions of the lighthouse. After seeing the lighthouse up close and realizing its bare reality, James concedes that his previous poetic vision of the lighthouse is still valid: “No the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other Lighthouse was true too” (*TTL* 186). In the final journey to the lighthouse James is able to reconcile his love for his doting mother and his love for his father, whom he previously hated for taking his mother’s attention away. James realizes that his two visions of the lighthouse, like the love for his parents, are not incongruous.

James' two visions of the lighthouse also represent the idealized and the mimetic views of an object. There is the physical lighthouse in front of him as well as the idealized image infused with emotion that he has created of the lighthouse in his mind. This double regard of an object is what Woolf seems to strive for in her works. Woolf presents an unexpected idealized image of an object in the mind of a character. She creates an interaction between a character and an object that is not what the reader would assume to be how the character would approach the object. In *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner takes up a similar challenge. The relationships between animals and characters stick out to the reader, because they are not expected. The difference between what is expected and what is presented creates space for interpretation and captures a vibrating and full image of consciousness.

## Faulkner's Animals

Virginia Woolf poetically outlines her theory of what modern fiction should strive to accomplish in her essay "Modern Fiction." William Faulkner was less inclined than Woolf to write publicly about his technique as an author or the state of modern fiction, although he adapts a narrative style in his novels that seems to embrace the same goal expressed in Woolf's essay: to explore more fully the inner life of the character. Faulkner offers a brief glimpse into his thoughts on the purpose of being an author in a brief address he gave to the University of Virginia, "A Word to Young Writers":

That is the young writer's dilemma as I see it. Not just his, but all our problems [sic], is to save mankind from being desouled as the stallion or boar or bull is gelded; to save the individual from anonymity before it is too late and humanity has vanished from the animal called man. And who better to save man's humanity than the writer, the poet, the artist, since who should fear the loss of it more since the humanity of man is the artist's life's blood. (qtd. in Gwyn and Blotner 245)

Like Woolf, Faulkner desires to capture the "humanity" of the human, the full experience of consciousness. Faulkner joins Woolf, and many other authors, in the attempt to "reveal the flickering of that innermost flame which flashes its message through the brain" ("Modern Fiction" 161). It is interesting that Faulkner incorporates animals in his reflection, because in bringing the internal minds of his characters to life on the pages of his novel *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner seems to use animals in a similar way that Woolf uses objects in her short stories and *To the Lighthouse*. Dialogue in *As I Lay Dying* is sparse and unpoetic, and in order to convey the depth of pain felt by his characters as well as their inner thoughts and complex relationships, Faulkner relies, in part, on several animals in the text that the characters encounter.

*As I Lay Dying* tells the story of the Bundrens, a poor farming family living in rural Mississippi. When the novel begins, Addie, the mother, is lying on her death bed and her family prepares for her death. The most macabre example of their preparations is the oldest son, Cash, building Addie's coffin just outside of her window so that she can monitor his progress. Darl is the second oldest son, is the most frequent narrator, and has many moments of clairvoyance. Jewel is the third oldest son, born out of a secret love affair between Addie and the local minister, Whitfield. Among her children, Addie shows a clear preference for Jewel. Dewey Dell is the only daughter and is secretly pregnant with the baby of a local boy, Labe. Vardaman is the youngest son and can be read as being anywhere from seven to fifteen years old. Addie's dying request of her lethargic and dispassionate husband, Anse, is to be buried with her extended family in Jefferson, a town ten miles away. Her family takes on what turns out to be a nearly impossible task that takes over ten days. Along the way the family receives help from various neighbors, most notably from Tull and Gillespie, and despite intense flooding, feuding, losing a team of animals, and a barn fire, the family eventually reaches Jefferson, but not without serious loss and sacrifice.

When describing the process of writing *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner said, "I simply imagined a group of people and subjected them to the simple universal natural catastrophes, which are flood and fire, with a simple natural motive to give direction to their progress" (qtd. in *Paris Review*). The novel is, of course, much more complex than Faulkner makes it out to be in his interview. The narrative is broken into fifty-nine sections each narrated by one of fifteen characters as they navigate their grief, relationships, and journey to Jefferson. The internal narrative voice is often higher than the dialogue or vocabulary accessible to the characters and there are times when the consciousness of one character dips into that of another. The result is a

narrative that flows from the mind of one character to another, but in a way that is more structured yet less consistent than the stream-of-consciousness that appears in *To the Lighthouse*. Most of the sections are narrated by Bundren family members, but neighbors and others in the community occasionally narrate as well.

Almost every reader of *As I Lay Dying* will remember Vardaman's infamous section which contains only the sentence "My mother is a fish" (*AILD* 84). While the passage is baffling on its own, in the context of Vardaman's other grief-monologues, the reader can see that the fish is central to his understanding of his mother's death. Early in the novel, while the family waits for Addie to die, Vardaman goes out and catches a large fish in the nearby stream. Proud of his accomplishment, he brings it home for the family to eat. His relationship with the dead animal is complex and the passages regarding the fish are jumbled and confusing. The isolation of the sentence "My mother is a fish" highlights the importance of the animal in understanding how Vardaman copes with the death of his mother, and indeed the fish becomes a central node in most of Vardaman's grief stricken thoughts.

Vardaman, who is quite young, connects with the fish when processing his grief because he associates it with adulthood. Tull, a neighbor, notes, "That boy comes up the hill. He is carrying a fish nigh long as he is. He slings it to the ground and grunts 'Hah' and spits over his shoulder like a man... Vardaman cusses it. He cusses it like a grown man" (*AILD* 30-31). By catching the fish and bringing it home to be eaten, Vardaman has accomplished an adult task and when he spits and swears, he emulates the adult men in his life. Vardaman is, of course, still only a child, but after Addie's death he must grapple with adult concepts of death and grief.

Vardaman chooses the fish as an object to organize his unraveling thoughts in part because he associates the fish with becoming an adult.

In Vardaman's subsequent sections, he is overcome with grief and confusion and in an attempt to find logic in a situation where there is inherently no logic, he grounds his thoughts in the fish. Immediately after Addie dies, Vardaman falls into a grief induced panic. His movements can be somewhat hard to follow, as Faulkner concentrates primarily on Vardaman's internal monologue, but the reader can make out that Vardaman runs down to the barn, sets a team of animals loose, and runs to Tull's house. In these Vardaman sections, he focuses on a death he understands easily, the death of an animal, to try to understand one he cannot otherwise comprehend, the death not only of a human, but of his mother:

It was not her because it was laying right yonder in the dirt. And now it's all chopped up. I chopped it up. It's laying in the kitchen in the bleeding pan, waiting to be cooked and et. Then it wasn't and she was, and now it is and she wasn't. And tomorrow it will be cooked and et and she will be him and pa and Cash and Dewey Dell and there wont be anything in the box and so she can breathe. It was laying right yonder on the ground. I can get Vernon. He was there and he sees it, and with both of us it will be and then it will not be. (*AILD* 66-67)

It is hard to make sense of this passage in large part because it expresses Vardaman's struggle to make sense of his own surroundings and confusing emotions. The fragmented disordered language is an attempt to give the reader an impression of the chaos in Vardaman's mind. Vardaman ultimately fails to find reasoning or logic through the fish, but Faulkner succeeds in anchoring Vardaman's complex emotions to a common object. The reader can begin to make out Vardaman's equation that "it," the fish, is dead just as "she," his mother, is dead. Although



Vardaman declares “My mother is a fish,” it is clear in this passage, which speaks to how the mother and fish are and are not alike, that the equation is not exact. The passage invites the reader to explore what is meant by “is.” The death of the fish has transformed it from a being to an object. Although there is certainly confusion between the two deaths, Vardaman is partially able to distinguish between them by referring to the fish as “it” and his mother as “she” and “her.” Vardaman’s confusion between objects and beings is also subtly alluded to in the term “bleeding pan,” what he calls the pan where Dewey Dell has put the fish. The childish term sounds as if the pan itself is bleeding. This unintentional personification heightens the sense in the passage that there is a confusion between subjects and objects in Vardaman’s mind, which comes up again in later interactions between Vardaman and Addie’s coffin. Vardaman’s constant return to the fish and his repetition that his mother and the fish are the same, shows his obsession. The dead animal becomes hypnotic to Vardaman and serves as a central object around which his emotions and understandings can swirl (like how the ants described in Woolf’s “The Mark on the Wall” swirl around a blade of grass).

Vardaman’s first passages after his mother’s death are nearly unintelligible; however, Vardaman is later able to use the fish to form more coherent thoughts as he begins to make sense of the death:

*But Jewel’s mother is a horse. My mother is a fish. Darl says that when we come to the water again I might see her and Dewey Dell said, She’s in the box; how could she have got out? She got out through the holes I bored, into the water I said, and when we come to the water again I am going to see her. My mother is not in the box. My mother does not smell like that. My mother is a fish (AILD 196)*

Not without its difficulties and obscurities, this later passage remains more coherent than the earlier passage. However strange the logic may be, there is certainly logic present. Vardaman understands that his mother was placed in the coffin and believes that when the “box” fell into the water, his mother was somehow able to escape through the holes he bored into it. The equation of his mother to a fish further supports his belief that she escaped into the water.

Vardaman’s assertion that his mother “*does not smell like that*” is telling to the reader, because it provides insight into why he is focusing his thoughts and emotions on the fish. He cannot bear to imagine that his mother is the same as the smelly corpse, so he disassociates her from the corpse by transposing her onto the fish, a much more familiar concept which he associates with adulthood and whose death he is able to fully comprehend. Vardaman again calls up his imperfect equation between his mother and his fish. This time he adds the equation of “Jewel’s mother” and his horse. Vardaman is referring to the horse Jewel bought for himself and with whom Jewel has formed a deep bond. The two equations and the distinction between his mother and Jewel’s mother show that Vardaman is somewhat aware that Jewel uses his horse to cope with the death of Addie much in the same way Vardaman uses the fish to cope. Further, the juxtaposition of his mother first with a horse and then with a fish, gives all three a mystical quality. The presence and interaction of humans, animals, and water in this passage connect the human life to its origins in nature, perhaps helping Vardaman make sense of the death as an inherent element of nature.

Christopher White provides a useful study of animal imagery and symbolism in *As I Lay Dying*, calling the novel a “zoosemiotic tour de force” (81). White argues that, “like Addie, the figure of the animal (the fish) may be said to haunt the text as an Other whose signs and signals

defy simple consumption” (84).<sup>4</sup> Where White distinguishes animal figures and Addie into separate haunting “Others,” I would argue that they are the same. Animal figures haunt the children precisely because of the role the animals play in how the children process grief. The animal-centered mental gymnastics the children go through in order to comprehend Addie’s death foreground animal imagery, animal encounters, and pain as all part of the same bundle.

The fish is by far the most prominent animal in Vardaman’s thoughts, but there is also a passage in which he shares a special relationship with Jewel’s horse. Just after learning of his mother’s death, Vardaman falls into a sort of crazed grief-induced panic during which he sets Peabody’s, the doctor who has come to check on Addie, team free and runs over a mile to Tull’s house as he tries to process what has happened. Before Vardaman reaches a place mentally where he is able to think straight enough set the team free or go to Tull’s house, he runs to the barn where he cries so hard he begins to vomit. It is in the barn that he encounters Jewel’s horse:

Then I can breathe again, in the warm smelling. I enter the stall, trying to touch him, and then I can cry then I vomit the crying. As soon as he gets through kicking I can and then I can cry, the crying can... The life in him runs under the skin, under my hand, running through the splotches, smelling up into my nose where the sickness is beginning to cry, vomiting the crying, and then I can breathe, vomiting it. It makes a lot of noise. I can smell the life running up from under my hands, up my arms, and then I can leave the stall. (*AILD* 54)

Digging through Vardaman’s frantic narration, the reader sees that he is crying himself sick, but he is able to breathe again when he is surrounded by the horse’s warm presence and smell. By touching and petting the horse, he calms down some and is able to leave the stall. White

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<sup>4</sup> White uses the term “consumption” in reference to Vardaman’s claim that his mother and his fish are cooked and eaten (*AILD* 66-67).

describes the encounter as an “affective recharge, a magnetic transference of ‘life’ from the horse to the child” (91). When touching the horse, Vardaman does not describe the horse’s fur or its pulse, but rather focuses on its “life” that runs under its skin and “splotches.” This “life” does not stay within the horse, but runs under Vardaman’s hands and up his arms, pacifying him. There is no mention of anything Vardaman sees in this passage and his experience here is limited to feeling, smelling, and breathing. Limiting the senses renders the scene somehow more intimate, and in conjunction with the “life” that passes from the horse into Vardaman, there is a transcendent relationship between the boy and the horse. The horse’s presence alone seems to be enough to calm Vardaman. Vardaman does not use the horse as an object to center his thoughts, as he does with the fish; rather, simply being in the presence of the horse calms him down.

Vardaman has an intimate and soothing encounter with Jewel’s horse in the barn, but it is Jewel who has the most significant connection with the animal, although this relationship can be complex and difficult to follow. Throughout the text, Faulkner continually includes indications of the special connection between the horse and Jewel. For example, Anse explains to Peabody that when the horse is loose, “can’t nobody else [but Jewel] ketch hit” (*AILD* 42). Jewel’s horse also helps him cope with Addie’s death. When the reader first sees Jewel riding and putting away his horse, Jewel is far enough away from the house that “he cannot even hear Cash sawing” (*AILD* 13). The start of the next section presents Jewel upon his return, upset that Cash is “hammering and sawing on that goddamn box” (*AILD* 14) right under Addie’s window. The reprieve from this sound is an indication of how being with his horse brings Jewel a temporary escape from the thought of his mother’s imminent death. Darl, who understands this connection

more than any other sibling, at one point describes Jewel as as “lean as a race horse” (*AILD* 218). Jewel’s horse is not bred for racing, but it is telling that Darl sees him in the same category as his beloved animal. Faulkner demonstrates Jewel’s devotion to the horse by depicting the intense work of clearing forty acres of their neighbor’s land at night that it took for Jewel to buy the horse. By working to buy a horse without his father’s help or permission, Jewel also strives for adulthood and independence. Ultimately, through Jewel’s relationship with the horse, Faulkner underlines tensions in some of Jewel’s familial relationships as well as Jewel’s complex feelings toward independence and grief.

Jewel’s relationship with the horse has a mystical quality to it. In one of the opening scenes of the text, Darl describes a mystical encounter in which Jewel works to tame the unruly horse. When describing the horse, Darl refers to “a glittering maze of hooves,” an “illusion of wings,” and the horse’s coat “bunching, tongues swirling like so many flames” (*AILD* 12). In a lull in the violent interaction, Jewel and the horse become part of one being: “Jewel walks steadily toward him, his hands at his sides. Save for Jewel’s legs they are like two figures carved for a tableau savage in the sun” (*AILD* 12). In Jewel’s steady stride, the reader recognizes his fearlessness and determination. Together, Jewel and his horse become part of an epic image. The mystical quality of Jewel’s relationship with the horse is also foregrounded when Dewey Dell describes Jewel sitting on the horse, late in the novel. Her section closes with:

Jewel sits on his horse like they were both made out of wood, looking straight ahead.

I believe in God, God. God, I believe in God (*AILD* 122).

This description, like Darl’s earlier description, shows Jewel and the horse becoming one. Dewey Dell recognizes something fantastical about the relationship between Jewel and his horse. They become one entity, simplified from complex volatile organisms to a solid wooden statue.

Moreover, they are made out of wood, like Addie's coffin. Darl can see the unity between Jewel and his horse, and in this vision, Dewey Dell can as well; however, she does not possess Darl's clairvoyant qualities and is not able to understand the depth of the bond between Jewel and the horse. Unable to understand, Dewey Dell turns to God. The significance of what she sees prompts her to assert her belief in God and repeat it over and over.

Jewel's relationship with the horse underlines his complicated relationship with his mother. The horse is emblematic of Jewel's hard won independence, but when Jewel returns home with his new horse, Addie falls into hysterics:

'Jewel,' ma said, looking at him. 'I'll give – I'll give – give – ' Then she began to cry.

She cried hard, not hiding her face, standing there in her faded wrapper, looking at him and him on the horse, looking down at her, his face growing cold and a little sick looking, until he looked away quick (*AILD* 135)

Addie is looking up at her son and stammers as she tries to think of something else she can give him. In the previous weeks when Jewel "took a spell of sleeping" (as a result of working all night to chop wood), Addie took care of him and employed the help of Dewey Dell to do some of his work so that Anse would not find out and punish him. The security of her motherly role is suddenly turned on its head when Jewel returns with his self-earned horse, a stark emblem of his adult independence. As she grasps that her child is now grown up, she breaks down crying.

There is nothing more she, as a mother, can give him. Jewel's physical placement high above his mother on the horse so that he is looking down at her furthers the image of Jewel as an adult no longer needing the care of his mother and he is now somewhat out of her reach. Addie's pain at losing her son to adulthood is underlined a few pages later when Darl describes Addie sitting by Jewel sleeping. The image echoes Addie sitting by Jewel when he slept as a boy, but is subverted

by the addition of her crying quietly. Addie's dismay at his return with his horse leaves Jewel with his "face growing cold and a little sick looking" until he feels so badly that he must look away.

In examining Jewel's deep connection with his horse, the reader can see that the relationship ultimately captures the tension Jewel feels between freedom and loss. James Potts views the mystical encounter Darl describes between Jewel and his horse, as Jewel attempting to capture the "embodiment of his elusive dreams" (70). Looking at the passage with an eye on the work done by twentieth century psychiatrist Carl Jung on the symbolism of horses in dreams, Potts argues, "the mother's body, death, Jewel's desire for adulthood—and hence escape from his parents—and most importantly, the realm of sacredness all merge in language about Jewel's horse" (70). The horse serves as a living receptacle for the juxtaposition of Jewel's desire for independence and grief. Originally, the horse was Jewel's hard-won chance at independence. Rather than leave his family on his own, however, Jewel suffers the forcible loss of a parent. The question of loss versus independence comes up when Anse agrees to sell the horse in exchange for a team of animals to continue their journey after an attempt to cross a flooded river kills most of their original team. In this moment, Jewel again faces a mixture of grief and independence. He rides away with the horse and the family believes they will not see him again. Instead of disappearing, however, Jewel drops the horse off at the farm to whom they are selling it, and returns to the family by foot. He gives up his independence in order to secure that his mother is buried where she wants to be buried. In this action, the horse serves as a symbol of Jewel's commitment to his mother.

Addie's sorrowful reaction to Jewel's horse complicates Jewel's relationship with Darl after Addie dies. In the novel, Darl is given the ability to see and understand things that he

should not be able to see and understand, such as when he narrates Addie's dying moments even though he is not there to witness them. When Darl sees Addie sitting and crying by a sleeping Jewel on the day Jewel brings the horse home, he comes to one of his psychic realizations: "And then I knew that I knew. I knew that as plain on that day as I knew about Dewey Dell on that day" (*AILD* 136). Darl does not explicitly tell the reader what he now knows, or what he "knew about Dewey Dell on that day." The reader can assume, however, that Darl is referring to the way he knows that Dewey Dell is pregnant with Lame's child. As Dewey Dell describes it, "It was then, and then I saw Darl and he knew" (*AILD* 27). There is no reason Darl should know that Dewey Dell is pregnant, but just by looking at her, he is able to connect and understand what happened. The reader also knows that Jewel is Addie's only child born out of a loving relationship, her affair with Whitfield. It can be assumed, then, that this is the new secret Darl is referring to when he sees Addie crying over Jewel. He has always known that Jewel is the favored child, but the extremity of Addie's reaction to the horse finally indicates to Darl that this favoritism stems from something significant, and, just as he needed no explicit information from Dewey Dell to know about her affair, Darl needs no explicit information to know about Addie's affair. Darl is the only one who knows of Addie's affair and out of resentment for being loved less than Jewel, he drops hints about Jewel's parentage in order to introduce doubt into Jewel's mind.

As the novel progresses, the horse becomes central to the tension between Darl and Jewel. Jewel does not associate Addie with his horse as explicitly as Vardaman associates her with the fish, but Darl creates and insists upon the idea that the horse and Addie are closely related. Darl's insistence can be seen in the following conversation between Darl (the narrator) and Jewel:



“It’s not your horse that’s dead Jewel,” I say. He sits erect on the seat... looking long across the valley to where the barn leans against the bluff, shaping the invisible horse...

“But it’s not your horse that’s dead.”

“Goddamn you,” he says. “Goddamn you.”

I cannot love my mother because I have no mother. Jewel’s mother is a horse. (*AILD* 94-95)

Here, we see an earlier echo of Vardaman’s equation, “Jewel’s mother is a horse” (*AILD* 196). A sense of longing is established as Jewel looks out and tries to imagine his horse within the barn. Jewel tries to imagine something he cannot see and although Jewel is thinking of his horse, Darl understands that the longing is actually for Addie. The horse is a sign of Jewel’s independence, and remains a point of tension between him and his father throughout their journey to Jefferson. When Jewel earned the horse he was making an overt indication of his growing up, likely not realizing the impact it would have on his mother. Darl can pick up on Jewel’s special relationship with the horse, and Jewel’s association of guilt with the horse when it comes to his mother. Jewel cares deeply for his horse, and Darl taunts him by reminding him that he should care more deeply for his mother. By reminding Jewel that it is his mother, and not his horse, that is dead, he is implying that Jewel should not be staring at the barn and thinking about the horse, but focusing on grieving for his mother. Here, as well as throughout the rest of the novel, Darl continues to equate “Jewel’s mother,” not his mother, to a horse. Darl and Jewel have the same mother, although Addie’s stark preference for Jewel makes Darl feel estranged to the point that Darl dissociates from Addie and claims, “I have no mother.”

Similar to Vardaman and Jewel, Dewey Dell connects deeply with the cow in the barn as she processes her grief. Shortly after Vardaman breaks down and finds comfort with the horse, Dewey Dell goes out to the barn to milk the cow. She has a similar experience to Vardaman's experience with the horse when she pets the cow in the barn. Whereas Jewel's main preoccupation before the death of his mother was longing for independence, Dewey Dell's main preoccupation is her secret pregnancy. Just as Jewel's search for independence mixes with and complicates his grief for Addie, Dewey Dell's longing for Lafe and confusion about her pregnancy complicate her own grieving process. For example, parts of Dewey Dell's interaction with the cow are notably sexual: "She nuzzles at me, snuffing, blowing her breath in a sweet, hot blast, through my dress, against my hot nakedness, moaning" (*AILD* 61). The cow moans and her hot, sweet breath blows on Dewey Dell's "hot nakedness." The cow longs only to be milked, but the corporal and sexual language mixes the cow's longing with Dewey Dell's own longing for Lafe: "Lafe. Lafe. 'Lafe' Lafe. Lafe. I feel the darkness rushing past my breast, past the cow; I begin to rush upon the darkness but the cow stops me and the darkness rushes on upon the sweet blast of her moaning breath, filled with wood and with silence" (*AILD* 62). Dewey Dell repeats Lafe's name, saying it once out loud in spite of her fear that someone in her family will discover her pregnancy. The "darkness" Dewey Dell feels is a compilation of the darkness of losing her mother, being without Lafe, and facing pregnancy. Darkness and emptiness appear again when Dewey Dell says, "the cow in silhouette against the door nuzzles at the silhouette of the bucket, moaning" (*AILD* 61). Rather than seeing the cow itself, Dewey Dell sees its dark outline against an otherwise empty doorway. Further, the cow is moaning into the bucket's dark, empty silhouette. That Dewey Dell describes and sees objects by their silhouettes speaks to the darkness that surrounds her. She also describes "the slope" outside the barn door that is "pale with lesser

dark and with empty seeing” (*AILD* 61). Again, rather than see the object itself, Dewey Dell sees it only in relation to its degree of darkness. The entire action of seeing has become “empty.” As Dewey Dell gets lost in this darkness, however, the cow’s “moaning breath” serves as a kind of shield to stop her. The cow is an anchor for Dewey Dell and keeps her from getting lost in the darkness and emptiness. Lafe, darkness, and emptiness become completely intertwined with the cow in this passage, allowing for Faulkner to show how these contradicting emotions are juxtaposed in Dewey Dell’s mind.

Along with darkness, emptiness, and longing, the repetition of the word “dead” throughout Dewey Dell’s encounter with the cow further underlines that she is coping with grief. “The dead air shapes the dead earth in the dead darkness, further away than seeing shapes the dead earth. It lies dead and warm upon me, touching me naked through my clothes.” (*AILD* 63-64). Here, the reader sees Dewey Dell facing the death of her mother through the repetition of “dead” things. This is contrasted with her nakedness, linked to her longing for Lafe. Dewey Dell struggles to make sense of her emotions, and her thoughts break down in the style of, but to a lesser degree than, those of Vardaman’s: “I said You dont know what worry is. I dont know what it is. I dont know what it is. I dont know whether I am worrying or not. Whether I can or not. I dont know whether I can cry or not. I dont know whether I have tried to or not” (*AILD* 59). Her thoughts become repetitive, confusing, and punctuation is missing. Whereas the horse serves as a vehicle of cohesion for the thoughts of Vardaman, it seems that the cow has triggered a sort of dissolving in Dewey Dell’s mind. Faced with her confusion, she turns again briefly to God, claiming, “I said You dont know what worry is” (*AILD* 64). Despite the unraveling language of the text, Dewey Dell terminates her passage with a clear, poetic statement: “I feel like a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth” (*AILD* 64). She is the wet seed, fertile and pregnant. The death,

change, and men who do not understand her plight are the “hot blind earth” she has found herself surrounded by. Her interaction with the cow has allowed her a moment to fall into the confusion of emotions in her mind and emerge with surprisingly succinct and elevated observation of her situation.

Cows and milk are strongly linked to motherhood and fertility, and the choice of the cow as the source for Dewey Dell’s comfort is symbolically important as she processes her grief and pregnancy. Dewey Dell must come to terms simultaneously with the death of her mother and the potential of her own motherhood: “What you got in you aint nothing to what I got in me, even if you are a woman too” (*AILD* 63). Faced with her loneliness, Dewey Dell both realizes how having a child would better and worsen that isolation: “If I could just feel it, it would be different, because I would not be alone. But if I were not alone, everybody would know it” (*AILD* 58-59). If Dewey Dell could feel the presence of the baby inside of her, she would feel less alone. At the same time, the pregnancy would ostracize her from her family and community. Dewey Dell has trouble imagining her pregnancy as more than just a “tub of guts” (*AILD* 58). and this adds to her intense fear of her pregnancy. What is more, immediately after her mother dies, Dewey Dell is expected to perform motherly roles. The family comes down from Addie’s deathbed to eat, but Dewey Dell hasn’t prepared any food. Peabody complains and Anse criticizes that she “ought to took time” (*AILD* 60) to cook the fish. It is perhaps because of the motherly pressure she faces that Dewey Dell needs separation from her family in order to grieve.

It is also worth noting the brief encounter Dewey Dell has with Jewel’s horse in the barn. Between lines regarding her encounter with the cow, Dewey Dell notes:

The barn is dark. When I pass, he kicks the wall a single blow. I go on. The broken plank is like a pale plank standing on end. Then I can see the slope, feel the air moving on my

face again, slow, pale with lesser dark and with empty seeing, the pine clumps blotched up the tilted slope, secret and waiting. (*AILD* 61)

The reader can assume that “he” is the horse, as the cow is a female and the horse was previously referred to this way by Vardaman in the preceding section. Whereas the horse was immobile (or at least his actions were not noticed by Vardaman), the horse here makes a single clear movement at Dewey Dell’s presence. Although she does not touch the horse, she feels a kind of physical relief like Vardaman did. She can see something outside of the darkness in the barn (although it is “empty seeing”) and she feels air move on her face again. The crux of the encounter, however, remains with the cow.

The fish, the horse, and the cow all play central roles in the grieving processes of Vardaman, Jewel, and Dewey Dell. As with the objects in Virginia Woolf’s works, these animals do not seem to play an active role as their mere presence allows for characters to dissolve and reform their tumultuous thoughts and emotions. There is a special and almost supernatural quality to the animals that causes these characters to pour their feelings about the death of their mother into them. A key to better understanding these transcendent encounters is looking at the concept of animal magnetism, mentioned by Cash as he builds his mother’s coffin. Each of the children copes with the loss of Addie in a different way, and Cash does so by putting intense effort into building the coffin. Amidst sections of chaotic emotional introspection by Cash’s siblings is a strange section in which Cash simply lists thirteen reasons for building Addie’s coffin on a bevel. The reasons appear odd at first, but are part of a complex logic that can provide clues to reading the rest of the novel. The eighth reason is “Animal Magnetism” (*AILD* 83). The reason for listing animal magnetism might simply be to suggest the easy and satisfying way two beveled planks fit into one another, like a magnet. The capitalization of the words might

also suggest that Cash is referring directly to the theory of animal magnetism that was fairly well known in Mississippi in the early twentieth century. Rosemary Franklin offers an astute analysis of Cash's list and provides a helpful background to Faulkner's understanding of animal magnetism as a theory. According to Franklin, animal magnetism is the theory that there is an invisible natural force exerted by animals that flows from one to the other, can have healing qualities, and can hypnotize. Animal magnetism was well known to Mississippians before Faulkner's novel, and was closely linked to phrenology, a "primitive kind of psychology" (Franklin 25). Faulkner, and therefore Cash, likely didn't have an academic knowledge of these theories, but knew their practical applications (Franklin 24-26). It is hard to know exactly why Cash is referring to animal magnetism in this list, but Franklin conjectures that it is based on phrenology pamphlets he had come into contact with that informed his understanding of gravitational stresses that will affect his carpentry (Franklin 26-30). Going beyond Franklin's understanding, it is possible that Faulkner uses this opportunity to introduce animal magnetism in the text as a way of calling attention to the almost magical quality of the relationships characters have with animals throughout the text. What is more, Cash, like Darl, does not have a direct enlightening encounter with an animal; however, Faulkner does not completely leave Cash and Darl out of the human-animal relationships in the novel. Cash introduces the idea of animal magnetism that can inform the reader's understanding the mystical quality that surrounds the animals in the novel. Similarly, Darl's observations of Jewel's encounters with the horse are what inform the reader's understanding of Jewel's relationship with the horse.

## **The Coffin**

Not quite an animal itself, the coffin is a charged object in the novel that seems to vibrate with its own kind of life. Addie's coffin is by far the most powerful example of the Bundren children connecting with an object in such a way as to elucidate their feelings toward the death of their mother for themselves and for the reader. The presence of the coffin seems to permeate the novel affecting characters both directly and indirectly.

Before the coffin is even completed, it stands as a haunting image, infiltrating the thoughts of the characters and marking the steady movement of time towards Addie's death. Just below Addie's window, Cash saws, smooths, and nails the boards together as she peers out from time to time to check on his progress. The first section of the novel closes with Darl walking into the house "followed by the / Chuck. Chuck. Chuck. of the adze<sup>5</sup>" (*AILD* 5). When Jewel is in earshot of Cash's sawing the sound consumes his thoughts. Jewel hears the saw as counting the time by until his mother's death: "that goddamn adze going One lick less. One lick less. One lick" (*AILD* 15). Dewey Dell describes the same sound as being "like a dog outside the house, going back and forth around the house to whatever door you come to, waiting to come in" (*AILD* 59). In both descriptions, Cash's sawing plagues their minds as a persistent reminder that Addie is dying.

Cash's sawing haunts the opening sections, but once he is done building the coffin, just about in tandem with Addie's passing, it takes on an almost sentient existence of its own. Faulkner allows Darl, who is not physically present, to narrate the moment the coffin is completed. In his moment of clairvoyance, Darl describes how the completed coffin suddenly develops a sense of life:

It is not yet day when Cash drives the last nail and stands stiffly up and looks down at the finished coffin, the others watching him... Then the four of them – Cash and pa and

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<sup>5</sup> Similar to an ax, an adze is a curved-blade tool for shaping wood.

Vernon and Peabody – raise the coffin to their shoulders and turn toward the house. It is light, yet they move slowly; empty, yet they carry it carefully; lifeless, yet they move with hushed precautionary words to one another, speaking of it as though, complete, it now slumbered lightly alive, waiting to come awake. On the dark floor their feet clump awkwardly, as though for a long time they have not walked on floors (*AILD* 79-80)

Although the coffin is “lifeless” and “empty,” the characters also feel that it is somehow alive. Now that it is completed, it sleeps “lightly alive, waiting to come awake.” The coffin ironically seems to go through its own birth at this moment, however a quiet birth this may be. The coffin has a peculiar effect on the men who are present, rendering them suddenly awkward, cautious, and clumsy. The men speak in hushed voices and move with excessive care, and yet stumble as if they have forgotten how to walk. This effect appears to be universal, affecting family members and non-family members alike. There is no activity in the coffin, but its very presence carries a profound weight that affects everyone around it. Because the coffin’s role as Addie’s burial receptacle is inherently part of the effect it has on others, this effect is present even when she is not.

Once Addie’s corpse is in the coffin, both seem to be reanimated. After placing Addie’s body in the coffin (backwards so as not to wrinkle her dress), the family awkwardly carries the unwieldy coffin out of the house to the wagon:

[Jewel] heaves, lifting one whole side so suddenly that we all spring into the lift to catch and balance it before he hurls it completely over. For an instant it resists, as though volitional, as though within it her pole-thin body clings furiously, even though dead, to a sort of modesty, as she would have tried to conceal a soiled garment that she could not prevent her body soiling. Then it breaks free, rising suddenly as though the emaciation of



her body had added buoyancy to the planks or as though, seeing that the garment was about to be torn from her, she rushes suddenly after it. (*AILD* 98)

It is difficult to make out the action of this moment, but it seems that Jewel has lifted the coffin so suddenly that it risks toppling over and that Darl, who steps in to keep it from falling all of the way over, imagines the tilted weight he feels as being Addie's physical resistance in one direction and pressing forward in the other direction. The image is full of activity as Addie "clings furiously," her body's buoyancy making the coffin rise "suddenly," and Addie rushing after a torn garment. The distinction between Addie and the coffin is muddled. The "emaciation of her body" is what gives the planks buoyancy and Addie's action is the coffin's action. Faulkner blends the character's perceptions of Addie and the coffin throughout the novel, and characters struggle to differentiate between the two.

Of all the characters in the novel, Vardaman seems to have the most trouble differentiating between the coffin and his mother. This confusion plays into his confusion about his fish, further coloring in the reader's perception of Vardaman's grief. Vardaman, not yet accepting that Addie is dead and believing that he can help her breathe, opens the room's window (despite the driving rain outside) and bores holes into the top of the coffin, accidentally boring holes into Addie's corpse's face. When the coffin later falls into the river, it is through these holes that Vardaman imagines that his mother, confused in his mind with the fish, swims out and escaped. Vardaman's young mind struggles to come to terms with the fact that his mother is physically inside of the coffin he sees, and with Addie's dead body hidden within the coffin, Vardaman sometimes imagines that she is still alive. Late in the novel, Darl brings Vardaman to "listen" (*AILD* 212) to the gurgling sounds Addie's body makes as her body decomposes in the coffin. Vardaman asks Darl "What is she saying?" and "Who is she talking

to?” (*AILD* 214). He also imagines that Addie is staring at him through the side of the coffin. Much of Vardaman’s grieving process is put in relation to his fish, but the coffin also shows his inability to understand the realities of his mother’s death.

Cash, who does not have a moment of profound connection with an animal in the novel, connects deeply with the coffin. Tull notes early in the novel that it will take longer to build the coffin on a bevel, but Cash ignores his comment and continues “with the tedious and minute care of a jeweler” (*AILD* 79). Just after the coffin is completed, Cash’s voice enters the novel and he lists out the thirteen reasons to build it on a bevel. When Vardaman encounters his fish, his thoughts are fragmented and the fish plays a key role in the way he attempts to make sense of his emotions and experiences. After the coffin is ‘born,’ Cash’s thoughts fragment as well. Unlike the thoughts of Vardaman, however, Cash’s thoughts at first seem to break down logically, separating into thirteen bullet points explaining a decision he made while building the coffin. At the same time, the reasons he provides fluctuate between logical, “1. There is more surface for the nails to grip,” and perplexing, “6. Except” (*AILD* 82-83). Throughout the rest of the novel, Cash’s sections remain short, fragmented, and entirely obsessed with taking care of the coffin. Cash, like all of his siblings, is reeling after the death of his mother and he copes by putting himself to work on the coffin. It is not until the coffin is buried that Cash is able to formulate coherent thoughts, and he suddenly becomes the rational and dispassionate voice relaying the final events of the novel. In this way, it is not until his work of building and burying the coffin is completed that Cash is able to organize his thoughts and express himself coherently. Jewel gives up his horse so that the family can continue their journey to Jefferson. The sacrifice speaks to Jewel’s love for his mother, and in the same way Cash’s labor over the coffin becomes its own grotesque tribute to his mother.

Faulkner uses Cash's absolute devotion to building the coffin for Addie in order to underline Jewel's resentment toward Cash. Jewel narrates only about two paragraphs in the novel, and the short section is completely filled with Jewel's fixation on Cash building the coffin. At first, Jewel's anger seems to be because he imagines that Cash is upsetting Addie by building the coffin in front of her: "It's because he stays out there, right under the window, hammering and sawing on that goddamn box. Where she's got to see him" (*AILD* 14). Quickly, however, resentment toward Cash's attempt to please their mother seeps into the narrative: "where she can see him saying See. See what a good one I am making for you" (*AILD* 14). This sentence is followed by Jewel's memory of Cash bringing in a bread pan full of dung when Addie expressed the desire to plant flowers with fertilizer. Jewel is not only upset that his mother is dying and that Cash's constant sawing is reminding him of time passing toward her death. The anger seems to be also rooted in the fact that Cash is able to do something for Addie in her final moments, and Jewel cannot. The novel makes it clear that Jewel is Addie's favorite child, because he is born out of the love affair between her and Whitfield. Jewel, used to being her favorite, resents that Cash has his mother's attention. Jewel's jealousy is made more clear when he goes on to say, "If it had just been me when Cash fell off that church and if it had just been me when pa laid sick with that load of wood fell on him" (*AILD* 15). Jewel's memories are vague, but the reader can infer that Jewel is referring to moments when Cash and his father were sick and were therefore at the center of his mother's attention. Jewel goes on to imagine himself and his mother "on a high hill" rolling and throwing rocks down "the hill at their faces and teeth" (*AILD* 15). Jewel resents that Cash has Addie's attention and thinks that Cash is making all this noise to draw attention to the good work he is doing for her.

Darl and Jewel's sibling rivalry also plays out in their relationship to the coffin; Darl attempts to destroy the coffin as Jewel attempts to save it. The competitive dynamic between the brothers first emerges when Darl narrates how he, Jewel, and Cash try to carry the coffin out of the house. Jewel grows impatient and frustrated, taking over and essentially carrying the coffin himself:

"Wait, Jewel," I say. But he will not wait, he is almost running now and Cash is left behind. It seems to me that the end which I now carry alone has no weight, as though it coasts like a rushing straw upon the furious tide of Jewel's despair. I am not even touching it when, turning, he lets it overshoot him, swinging, and stops it and sloughs it onto the wagon bed in the same motion and looks back at me, his face suffused with fury and despair.

"Goddamn you. Goddamn you." (*AILD* 99)

Cash is not able to keep up with his brothers as they surge ahead. This reflects how, whatever resentment Jewel may feel for Cash, Cash does not engage in a rivalry against either Jewel or Darl. As Cash is left behind, the moment centers on the relationship between Darl and Jewel. Jewel's power to carry the coffin comes from "the furious tide" of his despair. In this moment, Darl realizes the link between Jewel's deep grief and his desire to take care of the coffin. It is unclear who is saying "Goddamn you," but it echoes language that Jewel uses in other parts of the novel. Reading the final line as in Jewel's voice, the reader can see that Jewel feels enraged in part because Darl did not let go of the coffin like Cash. Darl feels as if the coffin is weightless and tells the reader that at the end he is not even touching the coffin anymore; however, it seems that Darl does not completely let Jewel carry the coffin himself. If Darl had completely let go

and fallen behind, Jewel could have carried the coffin to the wagon by himself, an impressive feat that would have proved his devotion to his mother, at least in his mind.

The brotherly conflict between Darl and Jewel comes to a climax when Darl burns down Gillespie's barn (in which the coffin is being kept) and Jewel singlehandedly carries the coffin out of the flaming building. When Darl and Vardaman listen to the sound of Addie's decomposing body, he explains to Vardaman that, "she wants Him to hide her from the sight of man... so she can lay down her life" (*AILD* 215). Faulkner does not provide a clear motive for Darl's desire to destroy the coffin, but the reader can suspect that it is a mix of simultaneously wanting to put his mother to rest (rather than wheel her body for ten days in order to bury it in a specific location) and wanting to spite Jewel. In the earlier passage, Darl senses that Jewel feels great despair at his mother's death, and wants to protect the coffin. Darl, who resents that Addie favored Jewel (she "always whipped him and petted him more... That's why she named him Jewel" (*AILD* 18)), also seeks a kind of revenge on Jewel. Darl's resentment of Jewel is also seen in how Darl always questions Jewel about his parentage, dropping hints that Jewel was born of adultery. Out of a mix of these two motives, Darl sets fire to Gillespie's barn to destroy the coffin inside of it.

Although the novel does not end after the barn burns down, the moment serves as a climactic end note to the family's journey, with only some falling action coming after. Darl narrates the episode. He does not include the moment he actually sets the barn on fire, concentrating instead on Jewel's heroic action. After helping Darl rescue the livestock from the burning barn, Jewel returns for the coffin:

We watch through the dissolving proscenium of the doorway as Jewel runs crouching to the far end of the coffin and stoops to it. For an instant he looks up and out at us through

the rain of burning hay like a portière of flaming beads, and I can see his mouth shape as calls my name... he is no longer looking at us. We see his shoulders strain as he upends the coffin and slides it single-handed from the saw-horses. It looms unbelievably tall, hiding him: I would not have believed that Addie Bundren would have needed that much room to lie comfortable in; for another instant it stands upright when the sparks rain on it scattering bursts as though they engendered other sparks from the contact. Then it topples forward, gaining momentum, revealing Jewel and the sparks raining on him too in engendering gusts, so that he appears to be enclosed in a thin nimbus of fire. Without stopping it overends and rears again, pauses then crashes slowly forward and through the curtain. This time Jewel is riding upon it, clinging to it, until it crashes down and flings him forward and clear and Mack leaps forward into a thin smell of scorching meat and slaps at the widening crimson-edged holes that bloom like flowers in his undershirt.

(*AILD* 221- 222)

The barn becomes a theater in flames, with a “dissolving proscenium” and a “portière of flaming beads.” Darl is not seriously concerned with Jewel’s safety, seeing the moment as something of a show. The epic and almost mystical moment also highlights the virtual life of the coffin.

Although Jewel moves it at first, the coffin quickly takes on a movement of its own, so that in the end Jewel is riding on top of it until he is thrown off. Jewel has little dialogue in the novel and even less narration. His characterization comes primarily through his actions, and through his struggle to save the coffin, Faulkner shows Jewel’s devotion to Addie and desire to prove himself to her.

It is fitting that the epic scene is centered around the coffin and Addie. Addie is essentially the title character, and despite having only one section of narration in the novel (after

she has died), her lingering influence over the other characters is what drives their decisions and action. Although Addie and the coffin have little agency in the novel, they seem to hold power over the characters in their presence. The men carrying it into the house stumble awkwardly along, treating it with immense care. Vardaman struggles to differentiate between the coffin and Addie's corpse, often imagining that both are alive. Cash feels an all consuming devotion to building and delivering the coffin to Jefferson, which mirrors the devotion he feels for his mother. In Jewel's one section, he is consumed with resentment toward Cash building the coffin where everyone can see, revealing the resentment and jealousy he feels toward his brother. Finally, Darl and Jewel's attempts to destroy and save the coffin, respectively, are juxtaposed in order to reveal the sibling rivalry between them, and the two different ways of showing devotion for their mother.

The many nuanced faces of grief that emerge when characters encounter the fish, the horse, the cow, and the coffin in the novel, seem to be what connect their presence in the novel more than anything else. The way each animal encounter achieves this is different. Vardaman seemed to process his grief by anchoring his thoughts on the fish, whereas Jewel's complex relationships with his mother and brother are brought forward by the independence Jewel's horse seems to stand as a symbol for. The cow Dewey Dell encounters seems to serve primarily as a catalyst, prompting her to give into her intense emotions of grief and desire. The coffin is so closely intertwined with Addie that its very presence exerts power of the characters. By setting up encounters that reveal complexities in the minds of his characters, Faulkner, like Woolf, uses small pieces of the external world to communicate the inner world of his characters.

## Conclusion

My goal in studying Woolf's and Faulkner's uses of objects and animals was to come to deeper understanding of how these authors vividly capture the complex minds of their characters. Concentrating on the parts of their novels where internal and external worlds meet revealed a great deal about what the two authors are trying to convey in their texts and through their characters. I expected, or perhaps wanted, something of an algorithm to emerge from this study. I was looking for a clear pattern of when, how, and why these authors integrated objects into their narratives. What I found, however, was that each character interacted with each object or animal in a different way. The protagonists in Woolf's short stories, for example, anchor their chaotic minds to the objects they come across. The same cannot be said of the way characters encounter objects in *To the Lighthouse*. When Lily works on her painting or Mrs. Ramsay looks out to the lighthouse, their thoughts, emotions, and anxieties seem to work themselves out *through* the objects. In *As I Lay Dying*, Vardaman's fish is somewhat akin to the objects in "The Mark on the Wall" or "Solid Objects." As Vardaman works through his own trauma, his chaotic thoughts anchor themselves on the fish. This is different from how Jewel interacts with his horse. Faulkner does not present Jewel's own thoughts about his horse, but Darl's descriptions reveal a great deal about Jewel's emotions, pain, and relationships. Dewey Dell's experience with the cow again works in quite a different way. When Dewey Dell is with the cow, she does not necessarily reflect *through* the cow, and she does not anchor her thoughts onto the animal either; rather, she is *prompted* to feel and reflect. The way characters interact with the lighthouse and the coffin in these novels, is again different from the other objects and animals. Like Mrs. Ramsay, the lighthouse stands as an organizing force for the characters, and like Mrs. Ramsay's memory, it continues to stand and influence the characters long after Mrs. Ramsay herself is



dead. The presence of the coffin is inherently intertwined with the memory of Addie, influencing characters throughout the novel and revealing complex familial relationships. Both the lighthouse and the coffin seem to haunt all of the characters in their respective texts, playing a large role in how the characters process and work through their feelings of grief.

I continue to be particularly interested in the examination of where internal and external worlds connect in modernist fiction, and particularly in works that employ stream of consciousness. If I had more time, I would have liked to expand this study to include more works by Woolf and Faulkner, and in particular *Mrs. Dalloway* (Woolf 1925), *The Waves* (Woolf 1931), and *The Sound and the Fury* (Faulkner 1929). As my work progressed, I found myself drawn toward the study of how the intermingling of external objects with internal consciousness is employed in trauma narratives. I discuss this briefly in regards to “The Mark on the Wall” and “Solid Objects,” but would like to explore the subject in other modernist works as well.

What I appreciated most from my study of Woolf and Faulkner was the opportunity to study a few of their works in great depth. In my broad survey of the many kinds of criticism that has been done on their works, I realized that my examination of objects and animals is not the only way to read *As I Lay Dying* and *To the Lighthouse* together. Their parallel social structures and core drama create a rich field of areas to explore. Before focusing my study on objects and animals, I considered studying the representation of gender across the two novels as well. It would seem, in a first reading, that Woolf creates stronger female characters and that Faulkner creates stronger male characters; however, I think a close analysis of parallel characters across the novels would reveal that this is not necessarily true. I began a brief study of the treatment of gender in these novels through a Digital Humanities scope for a class fall semester, and if this were a project with infinite time, I would have liked to push forward with this analysis.

In his essay “The Art of Fiction,” Henry James wrote that “art lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt, upon the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints” (376). Reading Woolf and Faulkner together has proved James’ words true to me. I have greatly appreciated this opportunity to study Woolf and Faulkner in relation to each other, and have gained a much deeper appreciation of modernist literature.

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