Method in To the Lighthouse: Diffusion and Synthesis.

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Method in To the Lighthouse: Diffusion and Synthesis

by

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May 4, 1976
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Abstract

The narrative in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* reflects and intensifies her thematic concern in the novel. Her perception of reality, which involves the inevitable intermingling of the psychological and the external worlds, is illustrated by the diffusion and synthesis of her prose style. The individual's recognition of the complexity of his universe allows him to extend his vision beyond his subjective and objective worlds.

The flow of impressions through the human psyche, which simultaneously diffuses conscious and unconscious perceptions and sensory responses, provides the basic structure of *To the Lighthouse*. The continuous stream of thoughts constituting the individual's internal world progresses according to an inherent logic based upon unconscious associations and directs the movement of the narrative. The psyche's diffusion of sensory stimuli precedes the mind's categorization of sensory responses. Woolf incorporates this diffusion and the subsequent synthesis of both thoughts and senses into the framework of her fiction in order to illustrate the
mental process of perception and conceptualization.

The internal psychological world of *To the Lighthouse* is created by the diffusion of the conscious and unconscious, which produces a state of mind that is in turn diffused with the external world. Unconscious thoughts and repressed emotions encroach on the conscious reality of the character, who inadvertently confuses them with his present experience. When the character confronts his external world, this psychological world merges with the environment to create his unique subjective reality.

Given the thematic structure of *To the Lighthouse*, the diffusions of perspective and time are inevitable. Woolf deliberately merges the consciousnesses of her narrator and characters in order to create one moment of subjective experience comprehended by a single conscious mind. Memory fuses with perceptions of the present to create a psychological time in which the past is actually transformed into the present. The resulting confusion of time and point-of-view emphasizes the ambiguous quality of the novel.

Finally, the subjective vision achieved in *To the Lighthouse* is intensified by the narrative's framework of interrelated poetic devices. The symbolic vehicle, one symbol consisting of many related symbols and images,
is diffused throughout the novel in both form and meaning. The novel's two controlling symbols, the sea and the Lighthouse, are separately diffused and related to each other in order to reflect the complexity of reality.

Virginia Woolf's use of diffusion and synthesis echoes her conception of reality. The inevitable confrontation of the individual's subjective consciousness and his objective world produces his unique perception of reality, a vision reflected in the narrative structure of *To the Lighthouse*.
Introduction

Virginia Woolf conceives of the novel as an organic form in which the elements of style reflect and intensify her perception of reality. The flow of impressions through the human mind is illustrated by Woolf's stream of images, interrelated through the inherent logic of association of thought and emotion. She contends that reality is subjective and unique to each individual:

The mind receives a myriad of impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old. . . . Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist 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?1

The psyche is the focal point of the individual's experience, of the analysis and interpretation of that experience, and of the resulting readjustment of the subjec-
tive consciousness. The mind "does not and cannot mime the world and can be neither a mirror image nor a facsimile of it."\(^2\) Perceptions of the external world are diffused internally, inextricably mixed with the already existing inner reality, and synthesized into a coherent whole. This renewed vision exhibits the qualities of both past and present reality and is modified by another new experience the instant following its solidification: "As long as one is open to new experience, one's knowledge and one's world in consciousness are always being transformed in structure and in meaning."\(^3\) This resulting ever-changing "luminous halo" or multi-consciousness that circumscribes the individual is continually subject to the flux of thought succeeded by the temporary stasis of the moment of vision, which in turn must submit to the flow of life's experiences.

Virginia Woolf's balance of sensibility and reason in her prose mirrors the thematic content of To the Lighthouse. The novel deals with the necessity of maintaining an equilibrium between an emotional involvement in the flow of life and a detached, intellectual analysis of one's situation. This balance or stasis makes possible a new, heightened, subjective consciousness or personal vision that transcends both the purely
subjective and objective worlds. Woolf infuses her art with emotion, which has the capacity for truth lacking in the intellect. Conceptualization, a conscious process that organizes and relegates experience to mechanical patterns suited to its own function, is a step removed from the more instinctive emotional response. The artist's emotion is communicated to the reader by means of a "connection of emotions rather than events. These emotions express the artist's feeling and intuition." The "emotional harmonies" resulting from this method are, as Woolf suggests, part of an unconscious universal code or symbolic pattern inherent in the reader's mind and provide the vehicle by which the artist and reader commune on a non-verbal level:

Nature, in her most irrational mood, has traced in invisible ink on the walls of the mind a premonition which . . . great artists confirm; a sketch which only needs to be held to the fire of genius to become visible.

The reader's response to his own unconscious knowledge mirrored by the words of the artist is necessarily emotional rather than intellectual, because the source of this buried truth exists below the consciousness, the portion of the psyche making verbalization possible. Virginia Woolf contends that art must illustrate a direct relationship between language and feeling if it
is to evoke an emotional response:

All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions.\(^8\)

Woolf tempers her intuitive truth with intellect, which selects and orders emotion in order to construct a coherent whole reflecting her transcendent vision. She attempts to "preserve the illusion of direct contact with human beings in the process of immediate and random experience, while in fact so selecting that experience that it will form an ordered whole."\(^9\) The synthesis achieved in the "ordered whole" parallels the artistic vision attained by the perfect balance of the subjective and objective realms in \textit{To the Lighthouse}.

In her novel, Virginia Woolf's thematic concern is with the perception of a total reality. The complexity of reality can be comprehended only when the individual dissociates himself from the flux of present experience and acknowledges his surrounding world. The human mind reduces external reality to its essential meaning and relates that essence to his own subjective world. In this relationship, the subjective world is objectified and the objective world is personified as the two realities merge. This identification or diffusion of the two
worlds culminates in a moment of synthesis or vision that transcends both the subjective and objective. Even though it is produced by the reconciliation of two abstractions, this transcendent third reality is nevertheless unique and subjective, because it is a product of the individual mind. In Woolf's novel, this momentary vision or instant of perception is externalized in Lily Briscoe's art.

The individual's subjective reality is necessarily illusory, because it is isolated from its surrounding factual world. The Ramsays' drawing room window symbolically frames this reality and delineates Mrs. Ramsay's perspective. The glass separates her consciousness from her surrounding world, but its transparency allows her to extend her vision beyond her mind to her external environment. The human psyche's inability to accurately perceive its objective world causes the individual to modify his reality according to his individual needs. The resulting fiction shields him from his unsympathetic environment, personalizes his world, and provides an order by which he can define his existence. Mrs. Ramsay's fiction, for instance, supplies the comforting falseness or veneer of civilization that permits her to unite her family and guests.

Virginia Woolf creates a tension between the in-
individual's subjective fiction and his external universe of empirical data. Mr. Ramsay, in his allegiance to the factual, objective world, is associated with "'a kitchen table . . . when you're not there'" (38). The "uncompromisingly plain" (232) table isolated in its austerity is a metaphor for the objective universe existing apart from the human world and unperceived by the subjective consciousness.

The two realities are diffused in the subjective mind when it perceives the world and synthesized when the psyche penetrates and reconciles the subjective and objective realms. The resulting synthesis creates a visionary third reality, which is externalized in Lily Briscoe's art. Lily's completed painting symbolizes the perfect balance of two visions of reality in the novel's third section "The Lighthouse." Here, past subjective experience is more objectively interpreted, because it is removed from the subject by a distance of time.

Lily's vision mirrored by her painting is only momentarily fixed. The completion of the painting coincides with the landing of the Lighthouse party, an act in which the idea of motion is explicit. The narrator concludes the account of Mr. Ramsay's voyage by noting that he "sprang, lightly like a young man . . . onto
the rock" (308). The last sentence of Woolf's novel indicates a temporary stasis and belongs to Lily's consciousness: "I have had my vision" (310).

Woolf significantly employs the past perfect tense in order to indicate that this moment of synthesis must necessarily follow perception, the instant in which the individual's internal and external worlds were diffused. The use of the word "vision" suggests an intangible mental image, which, by its definition as a product of the imagination, must give way to the continuous flow of the psyche. The novel concludes with Lily's artistic vision as opposed to the landing of the Lighthouse party, because art, which is dissociated from the flux of life, can objectively assimilate life's experiences through abstraction and universalize their meanings.

Woolf's artistic method based upon diffusion and synthesis thus reflects her thematic concern for the reconciliation of the two worlds that will yield a transcendent vision. To the Lighthouse, her artistic achievement, can be compared to Lily's painting but can also represent one moment in the life of the psyche which is arrested in time and held up for analysis and contemplation by the artist.
Notes


3 Love, p. 3.


5 Johnstone, p. 90.

6 Johnstone, p. 90.

7 Johnstone, p. 90.


Chapter 1

Diffusion of the Narrative Structure

Virginia Woolf's artistic method in To the Light-house is one of psychological diffusion or multiconsciousness, a perpetual state of mind in which many different impressions are registered simultaneously in the memory, creating a complex network of interrelated facts. In her essay "A Mark on the Wall," Woolf expounds the obligation of literature to achieve closer contact with the subjective vision by depicting the complex psychic reality:

And the novelists of the future will realize more and more the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories, taking a knowledge of it for granted.¹

Using these basic impressions as a source or starting point, consciousness progresses from one thought fragment to another by means of its inherent logic of unconscious association. Virginia Woolf describes the process of thought as slipping "easily from one thing to
another, without any sense of hostility or obstacle. I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts."2 The underlying unconscious organization of the psyche structured by instinct and feeling triggers the reader's emotional response rather than his thought. The narrative flow based on the connected emotions resembles the stream of consciousness, a psychological rather than literary term referring to a mode of mental process.3 Scholes and Kellogg define stream of consciousness employed in literature as an "attempt to reproduce mental-verbal process—words deployed in patterns referrable not to verbal artistry but to actual thought, focusing not on the audience but on the character. The stream of consciousness insists on psychologically oriented patterns."4 In defense of her method of depicting reality as a psychological state, Virginia Woolf explains her interpretation of stream of consciousness:

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.5

Although Woolf insists that fundamental psychic processes structure subjective reality and should therefore create the world of the novel, she nevertheless
unifies her novel by means of an evocative, allusive language and a highly conscious pattern of organization. The creation of art requires a greater degree of intellectual organization than speech, a mode of communication necessarily more conscious than the continuous mental stream of impressions. Virginia Woolf's art is the product of the refinement and ordering of the psychic experiences comprising her characters' daily lives. Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* meditates on the impossibility of directly transforming the basic stream of consciousness into written form. She reflects that "to follow her thought was like following a voice which speaks too quickly to be taken down by one's pencil" (40). In order to create a unified work, Woolf selects the material of her art and chooses the poetic devices that most appropriately measure the linear movement of her narrative as well as convey thematic content. The dual nature of the symbol must incorporate its tangible reality, which aids the narrative flow, and its essence, which enhances meaning. The symbol can be extended even further to compound the narrative and its implications with authorial comment.

The highly conscious narrative of *To the Lighthouse* simultaneously illustrates the movement of inner reality, based upon the flow of consciousness and the
unconscious associations of images which aid its linear progression, and the novel's thematic content, deliberately structured by means of a complex system of indirectly related images. This method of narration is exemplified in the fourth chapter of "The Window." Woolf creates an unconscious association of images in order to aid her narrative process, to transfer the focal point of consciousness from one mind to another, and to suggest an added dimension to the novel's thematic structure. After having accidently interrupted Mr. Ramsay during one of his private moments, Lily and William Bankes resolve to stroll in order to avoid an embarrassing confrontation. The focal point of consciousness moves from Bankes' to Lily's mind by means of either the intermediary voice of the narrator or the united voices of their combined consciousnesses. Mr. Ramsay shouting "'Some one had blundered!'" (31) intrudes on William's thoughts and conveniently provides the necessity for comment by the narrator, allowing the natural movement to Lily's consciousness to take place. The narrator objectively comments or allows Lily and William together to observe that "Mr. Ramsay glared at them. . . . Together they had seen a thing they had not meant to see. They had encroached upon a privacy" (31). This passage naturally progresses to
one of the minds involved in this observation by means of the words "Lily thought" (31). Lily then contemplates her painting illustrating the "bright violet" (31) jacmanna and "the wall staring white" (31). The "staring" quality of the white paint can be directly associated with the glaring Mr. Ramsay and the Lighthouse itself, later described as "glaring white and black" (301). At this point, Lily sees the white and violet as irreconcilable opposites, her conscious representation of her unconscious feeling regarding the opposing viewpoints of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and their different realities. These conflicting forces will ultimately be resolved in her painting, in which she achieves a momentary balance between opposites and which becomes the artistic representation of the Lighthouse, the physical embodiment of the entire color spectrum. Lily unconsciously associates her frustration in her failure to capture her thought at the instant of conception in color and line with the waning power of the sun as autumn progresses. She despairs when her mental vision fades before she can accurately give it form in paint:
She could see it all so clearly, so commandingly, when she looked: it was when she took her brush in hand that the whole thing changed. It was in that moment's flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set on her who often brought her to the verge of tears and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child (32).

The ensuing mental darkness deprived of the light of reason is indirectly associated with the sunlight diminishing as the winter months approach. Lily unconsciously associates her frustrated feelings in her groping for vision in darkness with her next conscious observation: "'It suddenly gets cold. The sun seems to give less heat'" (33). In a moment of lucid perception, Lily Briscoe reduces Mr. Ramsay to his essence embodied in the image of a kitchen table. Her thoughts regarding his contribution to the intellectual world indirectly trigger her involuntary reaction to Mr. Bankes pausing near the pear tree, the focus of her vision of the kitchen table:

Suddenly, as if the movement of his hands had released it, the load of her accumulated impressions of him tilted up, and down poured in a ponderous avalanche all she felt about him. That was one sensation. Then up rose in a fume the essence of his being. That was another. She felt herself transfixed by the intensity of her perception; it was his severity; his goodness (39).
Lily's deliberately intellectualized conception of Mr. Ramsay evokes her unconscious reaction to Mr. Bankes. Woolf employs this same method of narration dictated by the association of unconscious impressions and conscious thought in the ninth chapter of "The Window." External events and poetic images combine to illustrate the movement from the contemplation of life to that of art, paralleling the novel's movement from the involvement in the flux of life to the creation of the artistic vision of reality. Lily observes William Bankes' "rapture" (74) in his worship of Mrs. Ramsay sitting at the drawing room window and reading a fairy-tale to her son. Lily unconsciously relates the ineffable significance of his experience to her own similar communion with Mrs. Ramsay, because both are characterized by silence. Mr. Bankes' "silent stare" (74) and non-verbal communication with Mrs. Ramsay have "the same effect as the solution of a scientific problem" and manage to subdue "the reign of chaos" (74). Lily remembers sitting on the floor and hugging Mrs. Ramsay's knees in an attempt to extract an intangible truth or ineffable knowledge from her. By means of this intimacy, Lily had hoped to uncover the secret or essence of truth, which can be felt but not verbalized. Mrs. Ramsay's mind and heart harbor "tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which
if one could spell them out, would teach one every-
thing, but they would never be offered openly, never
made public" (79). Lily wanted "not inscriptions on
tablets, nothing that could be written in any language
known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge"
(79). Lily's non-verbal communion with Mrs. Ramsay
parallels William Bankes' silent rapture in her wor-
ship. Lily's thoughts lead her consciousness to musings
about bees, which are "drawn by some sweetness or sharp-
ness in the air intangible to touch or taste" (80), to
the hive, their home and source of life. Lily inadver-
tently associates this structure of the hive, the
structure symbolic of the center of human activity, with
Mrs. Ramsay, who "wore, to Lily's eyes, an august shape;
the shape of a dome" (80), and who is the source of
creativity and life in her own sphere. Lily unconsciously
reduces the hive and Mrs. Ramsay to their essences,
the basic geometric shape of a dome, and allies them on
a common plane of existence with regard to both symbol
and meaning. They both represent a life-source and
therefore assume the same shape. The unifying image of
mother and child in life is transferred to the world of
art by means of the dome image. The dome was used as
an organizing and unifying device in painting and archi-
tecture during the Roman period and the high Renaissance.
Frederick Hartt suggests that its structure, resembling the open vault of the sky, is "traditionally held to be symbolic of Heaven" and connotes the power of God, who creates and sustains the mortal world. Mrs. Ramsay, who assumes its shape, is the creator and unifying force of her own subjective world and orders life for both herself and those around her. The attention of both Lily and William is diverted from the living world of Mrs. Ramsay and James to the consciously created sphere of art, Lily's painting, which represents a subjective vision of life framed by the window. Lily informs William that Mrs. Ramsay and James are represented in the painting but that the picture is "not of them" (81). The complex association of images and occurrences makes possible the movement from life to art in the narrative, a progression that parallels the thematic content of Woolf's novel as well as her own subjective process of transforming her personal reality into an artistic vision.

In "Time Passes," the narrative movement enhances the plot and thematic structure. Poetic devices associated with objective, indifferent reality are absorbed in parenthetical statements concerning the subjective world of the individual. Spring, "like a virgin fierce in her chastity, scornful in her purity" (198), divorces
herself completely from the human world and remains "entirely careless of what was done or thought by the beholders" (198). Although the seasons belong to the sphere of Nature apart from the human realm, Woolf personifies Spring and grants her the qualities of a young girl in order to aid the narrative flow in its movement toward a statement about Prue. Here, subjective reality, the human world of the members of the Ramsay household relegated to parenthetical statements, is subordinated to the domain of external reality. Information regarding Prue's death is preceded by a passage intimating Spring's sympathetic response to the human world bound by the limits of its mortality and compelled to acknowledge the reality of death: "Moreover, softened and acquiescent, the spring with her bees humming and gnats dancing threw her cloak about her, veiled her eyes, averted her head, and among passing shadows and flights of small rain seemed to have taken upon her a knowledge of the sorrows of mankind" (199). The implied correlation between natural and human cycles suggested by the association of Prue's marriage to Spring-time is reinforced by the parenthetical statement of Andrew Ramsay's death. The narrative progresses from the depiction of the gradual decay of the home, plagued by natural, external forces of disintegration which
eventually loosen Mrs. Ramsay's shawl covering the animal skull, to the illustration of destructive forces conceived and consciously operated by the mind of man. The "ominous sounds like the measured blows of hammers dulled on felt, with their repeated shocks still further loosened the shawl and cracked the tea-cups" and (200) parallel man-made destructive forces of war. By means of a parenthetical statement following this passage, Woolf informs the reader that Andrew died in France during the war.

The psyche's process of diffusion is associated with the image of a mist, which would obscure and confuse definitions of components of the external world in Chapter 9 of "Time Passes." The human psychological condition continually alternates between diffusion, in which new experiences are registered and categorized, and momentary synthesis, in which new experience is combined with already existing memory or old experience in order to achieve a state of reconciliation between antithetical ideas. This intermittently occurring synthesis or subjective vision is absorbed by the artistic vision of Lily Briscoe, who will ultimately give expression to the essence of a reality underlying the factual world. The passage dealing with this psychic haze, which obscures Woolf's conception of the true reality,
is appropriately succeeded by a parenthetical statement about Lily Briscoe, who has just arrived at the renovated Ramsay summer home and who will eventually reveal the essence of life now shrouded by mist. Virginia Woolf constructs her narrative on the basis of an indirect association between the objective and subjective worlds, which complement rather than directly parallel each other.

The image of the mist is further developed in Chapter 10 of "Time Passes." The "vapour" (214) of the sea transmitting its reality to Lily while she sleeps parallels Woolf's method of conveying the significance of her novel. Like Lily who understands the essence of reality in her unconscious state, the reader comprehends the nature of Woolf's reality conveyed by means of a complex structure of related images, which aid the movement of the narrative through the unconscious association of thoughts of the narrator, the characters, and the reader.
Notes


4 Scholes and Kellogg, p. 185.


7 Doner, 5.


Chapter 2

Diffusion of the Senses

In *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf employs sensory diffusion or synesthesia to create an instant of unconscious perception. Individual sensory responses are neither differentiated nor schematized, because the conscious mind has not yet interpreted the new sensory stimuli according to already existing references. The fluid literary style developed from mythopoetic thought appropriately conveys this diffusion and is necessarily less systematic than a style evolved through empirical theoretical thought. Sensory stimuli are diffused by the psyche, creating a complex network of interrelated sensuous and emotional responses on the part of the perceiver. At the moment the subject registers this information, sights, sounds, and odors are indistinguishable on the unconscious level of perception. This ambiguity and confusion ultimately give way to the conscious mind's inevitable process of organization and categorization of experience. The resulting synthesis clarifies the subject's vision and enables him to comprehend his world.
Virginia Woolf deliberately diffuses sight and sound at the conclusion of the ninth chapter of "Time Passes." The potpourri of sounds emanating from the desolate Ramsay home are given substance by means of the image of a mist. The haze, which seemingly shrouds the land and obscures vision, parallels the reverberations of dissonant sounds making impossible the resolution of clear, perfect, harmonized chords:

There rose that half-heard melody, that intermittent music which the ear half catches but lets fall; a bark, a bleat; irregular, intermittent, yet somehow related; the hum of an insect, the tremor of cut grass, dissevered yet somehow belonging; the jar of a dor beetle, the squeak of a wheel, loud, low, but mysteriously related; which the ear strains to bring together and is always on the verge of harmonising, but they are never quite heard, never fully harmonised, and at last, in the evening, one after another the sounds die out, and the harmony falters, and silence falls (212).

The indistinct reverberations of sounds and experiences represent the psyche's many levels of consciousness, which cannot be clearly delineated. The imprecise tones, however, are all "somehow related" and find their common basis of association in the unconscious, which blurs their distinctions. The reverberations also allude to the complexity of every external object perceived by the subjective mind and the subsequent impossibility of
categorizing or defining it absolutely.

The intangibility of either the imaginary mist or the actual sound can be used to metaphorically describe the symbolic structure of Woolf's novel. The diffusion of symbols facilitates their indirect rather than direct interrelation. This ambiguity of style is the means by which significance is communicated to the reader on the emotional rather than intellectual level. Like reverberations of sound, partially heard and partially imagined existing somewhere between the realms of reality and illusion, meaning is also suspended between the senses. Truth about reality is not verbally articulated but is instead conveyed by means of indirect relationships.

The ambivalence enveloping the world of To the Lighthouse reflects Woolf's vision of reality, a synthesis of the individual consciousness and the external universe, existing mentally in the ambiguous realm between illusion and fact.

An example of sensory diffusion involving hearing and touch occurs in Chapter 10 of "Time Passes." Lily Briscoe, listening to the music of the sea and feeling the gentle winds blowing through her open window, sinks into unconsciousness. The "messages of peace breathed from the sea to the shore" (213) suggest the pressure of light currents of air, which perform the function of
emissaries from the inanimate to the human world. The sea's breath, which can be heard as well as felt, is directly related to "the voice of beauty ... murmuring" (213) to Lily while she sleeps. Woolf employs synesthesia, an unconscious association of the senses, in order to underline the effect of her narrative method. This passage communicates its meaning to the reader indirectly, just as Lily inadvertently receives the message of the sea during unconsciousness.
Notes

Chapter 3

Diffusion of the Conscious and Unconscious

The center of the psychological world of Woolf's fiction is the interaction of conscious and unconscious experience. In To the Lighthouse, the human psyche diffuses its many levels of conscious and unconscious thought, allowing emotions, instinctual responses, and repressed memories to encroach on the individual's conscious reality. Past experience, despite its seeming insignificance, is nevertheless interpreted by the subjective mind and registered in its conscious or unconscious memory. The individual unknowingly employs this unconscious knowledge derived from either personal experience or a common universal consciousness in all his subsequent thoughts and actions. This diffusion of the two portions of the psyche rendering impossible the distinction between conscious perception and unconsciously absorbed knowledge creates the internal psychological world of To the Lighthouse.

Conscious and unconscious realities provide each
other with a counterpoint of thoughts and impressions. The two parts of the mind periodically exchange places yielding to each other the focal point of consciousness. Reading the fairy tale "The Fisherman and his Wife" to her son James, Mrs. Ramsay occupies one level of her conscious mind but becomes engrossed in the flux of different thoughts on another:

Mrs. Ramsay wondered, reading and thinking, quite easily, both at the same time; for the story of the Fisherman and his Wife was like the bass gently accompanying a tune, which now and then ran up unexpectedly into the melody (87).

Her ruminations regarding the possible engagement of Minta Doyle and Paul Rayley add another dimension to the counterpoint already created by the parallel of the Ramsays' marriage to that of the fisherman and his wife. Like the fictional wife, Mrs. Ramsay encourages her husband and children to mentally create and actually believe in an imaginary world removed from harsh reality. The narrator notes that Mrs. Ramsay "fishes" memories of the Doyle family out of her mind. The verb "fish" employed in the conscious narrative of the persona provides another association with the tale. Woolf diffuses the perspectives of the narrator and character as well as the conscious and unconscious regions of the psyche by granting the persona access to Mrs. Ramsay's
experience of reading a tale about a fisherman. The intermingling of the subjective world of Mrs. Ramsay and that of the persona calls into question the authority of the narrator. Instead of remaining totally objective, the narrator is also the victim of the subjective vision limiting the knowledge of the character.

In Woolf's novel, objective reality used as metaphor belongs simultaneously to both the physical and symbolic worlds. Characters may be only unconsciously aware of the connection between their emotions and external events. Strolling along the beach with Paul, Andrew, and Nancy, Minta loses a family heirloom, her grandmother's brooch. The jewel assumes an importance exceeding that of its physical reality and becomes representative of Minta's lost innocence. The knowledge of approaching death, symbolized by the incoming tide that will hide the jewel, accompanied the world's parents' awareness of sexuality and their subsequent expulsion from Eden. Paradise, an illusory world manufactured by man to explain his Fall into sin and his consequential mortality, represents the ideal for which man strives but which he knows he will never attain in reality. The illusion of purity constitutes the appealing fiction that shields the truer, baser, animal nature of man. The reality of death will ultimately conquer the
illusion of physical life. Man's mind manufactures a false order to combat the threatening chaos symbolized by the formlessness of the sea which invades the peaceful land. Minta's despair at having carelessly dropped the brooch is the superficial cause for her tears. She is not consciously aware that she is actually lamenting a more universal tragedy, the replacement of the illusion of innocence and order by the harshness of reality:

It was her grandmother's brooch; she would rather have lost anything but that, and yet Nancy felt, it might be true that she minded losing her brooch, but she wasn't crying only for that. She was crying for something else. We might all sit down and cry, she felt. But she did not know what for (117).

Nancy's observation that all mankind is inclined to cry for something indefinite lends universality to Minta's unconscious awareness of a larger tragedy surrounding her own limited experience. The conscious world is influenced and directed by unconscious knowledge derived from either personal past experience or a universal consciousness inherited by every psyche.

The human mind is incapable of resolving the ambiguity created by the diffusion of the conscious and unconscious. The state of diffusion is immediately subject to the continuing flux of the psyche and of the external world, leaving the individual unable to separate
and crystalize each of his many levels of experience.\textsuperscript{2} The degree to which the outer world is both an echo or extension of the inner reality remains unknown to the individual.

Attempting to achieve her artistic vision which would constitute a balance between subjective reality and objective fact, Lily Briscoe remains frustrated in her efforts to translate her mental image into line and color. She consciously determines that she cries longing for Mrs. Ramsay, who was able to order chaos and whose presence would have given form to Lily's art. However, Lily is only unconsciously aware of the reason for her tears. Her anxiety is actually prompted by the inability of her own imagination to transform the apparent formlessness and destructiveness of objective facts into art or vision.

This process of diffusion of the conscious and unconscious is continued in "The Lighthouse," in which the unconscious is extended to and finds expression in conscious thought and action. The uncommunicative attitudes of Mr. Ramsay and his children erupt in familial discord evidenced by their slamming of doors. This outward act of slamming doors suggests the psychological act of dividing the world of the self from objective fact. Anger, which as an emotion is subjective, blinds
them to objective reason and compels Mr. Ramsay, Cam, and James to indulge their passions. Their egocentricity confines them to the limitations of their own subjective worlds, unable to transform their perceptions into vision. Their voluntary self-imprisonment in their personal realities is symbolized outwardly by their slamming the doors of their minds on a greater awareness of their universe. The physical reality of the doors is associated with Lily's consciousness and is transcribed into metaphor in order to underline its symbolic significance. Lily connects the continual movement of the "doors in one's mind that went banging and swinging to and fro" (218) to her own state of mental suspension. She remains temporarily fixed in her present limited perception, unable to extend her vision and understand her world.

Lily Briscoe's conscious and unconscious thoughts are diffused with and released in her conscious actions. She associates her conception of Charles Tansley, who is "lean and red and raucous" (292), with red ants, unimaginative creatures of habit who perform a particular, specialized function. In a parenthetical statement subordinate to her principal, conscious flow of thought about Tansley, Lily observes that "there were ants crawling about among the plantains which she disturbed with
her brush—red, energetic, shiny ants, rather like Charles Tansley" (293). Like the industrious insects, Charles Tansley is active rather than contemplative and is most preoccupied with exerting his will in his external environment. Lily admits that her perception of Mr. Tansley is colored by her own peculiar subjective reality, which is inaccurate in terms of the objective world:

Her own idea of him was grotesque, Lily knew well, stirring the plantains with her brush. Half one's notions of other people were, after all, grotesque. They served private purposes of one's own (293).

Altered by Lily's unique consciousness, Mr. Tansley becomes an extension of her mind limited to its own subjective interpretation. Serving Lily's particular psychological need, Tansley becomes a projection of some portion of her internal world. Lily suffers from the same subjectivity for which she condemns egotists like Charles Tansley, who are incapable of achieving insight beyond the narrow world circumscribed by their own visions. Tansley's image is the vehicle by which Lily mentally vents her frustration: "He did for her instead of a whipping-boy. She found herself flagellating his lean flanks when she was out of temper" (293). The narrator indirectly associates Tansley with the ants by inferring
Lily's unconscious association of her thought of abusing him with her willful act of torturing the red ants:

She raised a little mountain for the ants to climb over. She reduced them to a frenzy of indecision by this interference in their cosmogony. Some ran this way, others that (294).

By the process of substitution, both Charles Tansley and the colony of red ants are symbols of Lily's own inadvertently acknowledged inadequacies. Her unconscious frustration resulting from her ignorance of a reality beyond her own restricted psychological world seeks expression in external symbols. This anxiety rises to the conscious level of her mind as she relishes in the imaginary torment of Tansley, who suffers by her own hand for indulging in egoism, an error for which she also condemns herself. Lily indirectly admonishes herself by mentally punishing Tansley for refusing to acknowledge a world that exceeds the bounds of his subjectivity. Her mental release of frustration is extended to the universe beyond her mind and takes form in her deliberate torture of the ants, the insects with whom she indirectly identifies both Tansley and herself. Employing this method of psychological substitution, Lily confuses her conscious and unconscious motives and goals as her internal world is mirrored in and extended into her environment.
The diffusion of the mind's many levels of conscious and unconscious thought permits repressed desires and memories to influence conscious reality. External action and conceptual thought become projections and extensions of the individual's unconscious mind, making their differentiation from unacknowledged instincts impossible.
Notes


2 Vogler, p. 29.
Chapter 4

Diffusion of Self and World

Woolf portrays the confrontation between the human consciousness and external reality, which inevitably results in the diffusion of subject and object. In To the Lighthouse, the outer world remains undifferentiated from the self when this interaction occurs. At the moment of perception, the internal and external worlds are fused and the psyche is projected onto the object perceived. The environment assumes greater significance as well as human characteristics. In her Cambridge lecture, Virginia Woolf discusses the fluidity of the soul, which colors other persons and objects with its own qualities:

Whoever you are, you are the vessel of this perplexed liquid, this cloudy, yeasty precious stuff, the soul. . . . The soul is not restrained by barriers. It overflows, it floods, it mingles with the souls of others.

The human consciousness, which can react to its surroundings only in terms of its own psychic experience, subjectively interprets its world and molds its environment to at least faintly resemble the self. The narrator of To the Lighthouse personifies inanimate objects in order to illustrate the interaction between the psyche...
Woolf's method of diffusion of self and world emphasizes her thematic structure by discovering reality to be an intermingling of the unique world of the individual and given objective universe perpetually interacting with the human mind.

Mrs. Ramsay balances her involvement in the continuous flow of subjective experience with her objective assessment of her world. Her inner self, "having shed its attachments" (95) by reducing itself to its essence of being, is projected on to and merged with the external world. Mrs. Ramsay unconsciously identifies herself with the light of the Lighthouse, because the self and the object possess a common ground for communication and underlying essence that structures both their individual realities: "Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at--that light, for example" (97). The subjective consciousness reconciles itself to its surroundings by bestowing life on the inanimate world, an act providing an outlet for human energy and creating a significant relationship between the individual and his surroundings. Man intuitively recognizes the importance of explaining his existence in a world that is apparently indifferent to his needs:

41
It was odd, she [Mrs. Ramsay] thought, how if one was alone, one leant to inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself (97).

Mrs. Ramsay, who objectifies her being by projecting her thoughts and emotions onto the guiding light, can witness her own life from a different perspective. She unconsciously endows the Lighthouse beam with human characteristics, because the mind can extend only its familiar and necessarily human internal world to its surrounding universe. The personification of the beam underlines the connection between the inner and outer worlds, which facilitates their inevitable exchange of stimuli:

She looked at the steady light . . . watching it with fascination, hypnotised, as if it were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain (99).

Although Mrs. Ramsay objectifies her private world in the form of the light and attempts to see her reality objectively, she is nevertheless limited in her understanding to her necessarily narrow, subjective vision.

The diffusion of self and world creates an ambiguous universe in which the subjective human consciousness merges with its surroundings. Warner contends that in
Woolf's novel the psyche is projected onto a landscape and mirrored in external objects:

In "Time Passes" . . . outer reality is used . . . to represent psychological states of mind. The house becomes the symbol of a mind that exists in a state of autistic withdrawal.

By means of this striking and bold symbolism, Mrs. Woolf can explore all the complexities and nuances of the relationship between ordinary involvement in and abstraction from the world of space and time.

The controlling image of the mirror in Part II of To the Lighthouse allows Nature to reflect the reality of the mind, a process which turns the psyche in upon itself. "A pool of water," isolated from the flow of life, is used as a simile for an eternal essence which endures despite time's efforts to destroy:

So loveliness reigned and stillness, and together made the shape of loveliness itself, a form from which life had parted; solitary like a pool at evening, far distant, seen from a train window, vanishing so quickly that the pool, pale in the evening, is scarcely robbed of its solitude, though once seen. Loveliness and stillness clasped hands in the bedroom, and among the shrouded jugs and sheeted chairs even the prying of the wind, and the soft nose of the clammy sea airs, rubbing, sniffing, iterating, and reiterating their questions--"Will you fade?"
Will you perish?" scarcely disturbed the peace, the indifference, the air of pure integrity, as if the question they asked scarcely needed that they should answer: we remain (195).

Life is distilled to its essential quality and divorced from its changing and deteriorating physical aspect. The pool of water embodies and reflects this eternal element, which remains permanent regardless of the passage of time symbolized here by the receding train. The essence, however, can be appreciated only when it is objectified by means of a symbol, alienated from the flux of life and perceived in retrospect from a distance created by time. Woolf personifies air and water and the abstractions "loveliness" and "stillness" in order to objectify the self and to emphasize the diffusion occurring between the human and the inanimate. "The prying of the wind" and "the soft nose of the clammy sea airs" destroy the outer shell of physical existence but cannot threaten the existence of a spiritual essence underlying creation and serving to perpetuate life. This intangible life force conveys its determination to remain by means of its silence, the only appropriate mode for the communication of the ineffable. The "swaying mantle of silence... wove into itself the falling cries of birds, ships hooting,
the drone and hum of the fields, a dog's bark, a man's shout, and folded them round the house in silence" (195). This "mantle of silence" is representative of the objective world embracing the subjective. A symbol of the mind, it absorbs individual realities and surrounds the house with its own reflection. The internal and external worlds have been diffused in order to create a mirror image of the self, which in turn insures the mind's servility to the limitations of its own subjective world.

The world of the self simultaneously mirrors and is reflected by its external universe:

There came to the wakeful, the hopeful... imaginations of the strangest kind... of stars flashing in their hearts, of cliff, sea, cloud, and sky brought purposely together to assemble outwardly the scattered parts of the vision within (198).

The self, indistinguishable from its environment, harbors the imprint of the world in its soul, while the subjective mind itself is projected onto an external landscape. The image of a pool of water, used as a simile to reflect life's essence, is extended to the realm of metaphor, where it is transformed into the mind of man:
In those mirrors, the minds of men, in those pools of uneasy water, in which clouds for ever turn, dreams persisted, and it was impossible to resist the strange intimation which every gull, flower, tree, man and woman, and the white earth itself seemed to declare (but if questioned at once to withdraw) that good triumphs, happiness prevails, order rules (198).

The dreams persisting in man's soul and echoed by the world's animate and inanimate forces embody the essence of life, which earlier had only been reflected by the pool of water. The human psyche is metaphorically transformed into a pool in order to effect the diffusion of self and world.

The pool of water, a metaphor for the mind of man, further evolves into its abstraction. The pool actually becomes a mirror, the structure that embodies its own symbolic import. As Warner suggests, the human mind, perceiving nothing beyond its own image in external reality, encloses itself within the confines of its limited vision, effecting its own deterioration and its absurd isolation from its world:

So, Mrs. Woolf suggests, the human mind can find order and coherence in a retreat into itself. But associated with this retreat is the inevitable deterioration of a mind that no longer orients realistically to time and space. 6

This total diffusion of self and world impedes the
acquisition of vision, which would afford the mind an understanding beyond the surface of external reality and the natural limitations of the subjective consciousness:

That dream, of sharing, completing, of finding in solitude on the beach an answer, was then but a reflection in a mirror, and the mirror itself was but the surface glassiness which forms in quiescence when the nobler powers sleep beneath (202)?

The mirror's surface reflection of either the human soul or objective reality does not indicate the reality of the third dimension of human knowledge. This new insight permits man to relinquish his bonds to his limiting senses and to discover a transcendent reality beyond his immediate experience:

To pace the beach was impossible; contemplation was unendurable; the mirror was broken (202).

The destruction of the mirror symbolizes the eruption of human consciousness, which, in an instant of momentary vision, transcends its limited subjective world to comprehend permanent truths underlying objective reality.

The diffusion of self and world is a psychic state that alternates with clarity of perception. This psychological ambiguity occurs at the instant of perception, but the confusion is dispelled by synthesis or comprehension, which enables the mind to interpret and systematize experience.
Notes


3 Love, p. 19.


5 Warner, 383.

6 Warner, 379.
Chapter 5

Diffusion of Perspective

The ambiguity inherent in the narrative structure of To the Lighthouse is created by Woolf's diffusion of perspective. Characters' consciousnesses are deliberately confused with one another and with the narrator's perspective in order to establish a limited, subjective vision of reality. Woolf's seemingly omniscient persona, who assumes the stance of the apparently objective observer of the Ramsays' world, is in reality the victim of the restricting subjective viewpoints that control the characters. Like modern fiction narrators, who, according to Scholes and Kellogg, function to de-emphasize objective facts, Woolf's narrator serves to accentuate the fictional truth of the individual imagination.¹ This restriction of the narrator's vision distinguishes the ultimate understanding of the reader from that of the fictional persona. The resulting irony created by the juxtaposition of the two viewpoints discourages the reader from accepting the narrator's perspective. The reader is thus compelled to participate in the act of artistic creation by developing his own
peculiar vision that allows him to comprehend the artist's world.\(^2\)

Although Woolf's narrator depicts and comments on the novel's world from an apparently disinterested stance, he does not claim omniscience. His subjectivity is evidenced by the diffusion of his perspective with that of the other characters. Woolf's intentional confusion of the narrator's and character's visions illustrates the persona's slavery to the same limiting viewpoint that circumscribes the character's reality. This narrative technique allows the author, while pretending to reveal all available information, to permit the reader only selected insights. This dual purpose of the narrative in modern fiction disallows the possibility of objectivity on the part of either the narrator or the author, who have access to a very limited store of knowledge and remain subject to their restricting individual worlds.\(^3\)

The reader, who is denied a total understanding and consequently the option to judge objectively, must accumulate knowledge of the world of the novel by means of the characters' reflections and the narrator's comments. Like the human psyche, the personality is continually modified by changing perceptions of the world. Bennett suggests that the reader's knowledge of a fic-
tional personality matures as the character's multitude of impressions perpetually shifts in focus and as he is mirrored in and interpreted by the consciousnesses of others:

Instead of defining an identity or epitomizing it in a particular incident, she invites us to discover it by living in the minds of her characters, or in the minds of others with whom they come into contact.

The reader also enriches his comprehension through the observations of the narrator, who functions as a "mysterious third party." Auerbach contends that the persona actually becomes an invisible character perceiving and interpreting in the same manner in which the characters themselves would seek insight:

The tone indicates that the author looks at Mrs. Ramsay not with knowing but with doubting and questioning eyes—even as some character in the novel would see her in the situation in which she is described, would hear her speak the words given.

According to Leaska, Woolf's persona exhibits the limitations of subjectivity that the traditionally omniscient narrator lacks:
When the novelist maintains the third-person angle throughout, as does Virginia Woolf, in both Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, one might legitimately ask how precisely this differs from an omniscient-author-point-of-view novel. The difference, though often not susceptible to detection, is chiefly this: While in the omniscient-author-point-of-view novel, the author looks into the minds of his characters and relates to the reader what is going on there, the information is presented as he sees and interprets it rather than as his people see it. Moreover, in the traditional omniscient novel, the information is narrated as though it had already occurred. In the multiple-point-of-view novel . . . the mental contents—the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the persona—are rendered as they seem and feel to him. In addition, the mental states are presented scenically as if the settings or situations which evoked these states were happening now before the reader, at the time of the reading. . . . All the fictional data—are communicated through the consciousness of someone present.7

Capable of registering only subjective impressions rather than proven facts regarding the novel's world, the reader is ultimately limited in his understanding as a result of his own inadequacies. Woolf's diffusion of perspective in To the Lighthouse is inevitable in terms of the thematic structure of the novel, which acknowledges the subjective vision as the only possible means by which the psyche can interpret its surrounding world.
Virginia Woolf blurs distinctions separating the viewpoints of the characters and narrator by obscuring the subtle transitions between their consciousnesses and employing the same or related images in their thought patterns. Woolf allows one individual's stream of impressions to flow into that of another character or the persona, causing the diffusion of the external, physical framework of the narrative. Leaska maintains that Woolf merges the consciousnesses of her narrator and characters by neglecting to distinguish among their styles of verbalization. The diffusion of images shared by two characters or by a character and the narrator creates one underlying consciousness encompassing the novel's many separate individual realities. To the Lighthouse, in which perspectives and time are diffused, can be interpreted as one moment of subjective experience comprehended by a single conscious mind.

In To the Lighthouse, Woolf illustrates the diffusion of perspective as Lily Briscoe's and Mrs. Ramsay's consciousnesses merge by means of the image of a house, a symbol of the human psyche. Mrs. Ramsay's insistence that the doors of her home should be closed and the windows should remain open indicates her persistence in preserving the sanctity and individuality of the self while maintaining contact with the external world. Her life
had illustrated the perfect balance between her inner, self-conscious experience and her recognition and acceptance of her environment. The resulting harmony is achieved by means of her unique perspective, which is objectified in the symbol of the window. Lily Briscoe uses this same image to define her own conception of the self. She transforms her memory of Mrs. Ramsay into the image of a house, whose "keyholes" might permit a spirit's entrance:

One wanted most some secret sense, fine as air, with which to steal through keyholes and surround her [Mrs. Ramsay] where she sat knitting, talking, sitting silent in the window alone; which took to itself and treasured up like the air which held the smoke of the steamer, her thoughts, her imaginations, her desires (294).

Lily interprets the drawing room window to be the external projection of Mrs. Ramsay's "thoughts," "impressions," and "desires." The house is the metaphor in which Lily's and Mrs. Ramsay's conscious minds unite in order to illustrate their common ambition to objectify their visions. Mrs. Ramsay's achievement of unity and balance in life is ultimately externalized by means of Lily's art.

Woolf further employs her method of narrative diffusion by uniting the consciousness of the narrator with
the individual psyche. Mr. Ramsay's and the persona's conscious minds merge in the image of the alphabet, the metaphor for all human knowledge. The narrator associates the piano keyboard, comprised of separate notes, or the alphabet, divided into individual letters, with all possible human thought. Mr. Ramsay's brilliant, analytical mind is capable of comprehending letters A-Q separately, but his lack of intuition and creative genius prevents him from understanding the meaning of the whole. The alphabet is first used only by the narrator as a simile for all knowledge but is gradually transformed into a reality more definite than that of a figure of speech in Mr. Ramsay's mind:

For if thought is like the keyboard of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q. He reached Q. Very few people in the whole of England ever reach Q. . . . But after Q? What comes next (53)?

Woolf transfers the idea of the alphabet from the narrator's consciousness to Mr. Ramsay's psyche, effecting an inexplicable communion between the minds of narrator and character, but the precise moment of this communication is indeterminable. This results in the diffusion of their conscious minds through which the narrator's
psychic reality actually becomes the subjective world of Mr. Ramsay. Their mutual sharing of the same point of view emphasizes the human limitations imposed by inadequate vision. Both Mr. Ramsay and the persona remain subject to their individual subjective realities.

Woolf accomplishes the same type of identification between Lily Briscoe's mind and the narrator's consciousness by means of the image of the kitchen table. In Chapter 4 of "The Window," Lily recalls Andrew's use of this image to explain his father's works, his books dealing with "'subject and object and the nature of reality'" (38). The unornamented, white kitchen table, isolated from all observers, suggests Mr. Ramsay's conception of the objective world that exists apart from and indifferent to human life. He denies the validity of his wife's deliberately created fiction, an imaginary, subjective world that shields the individual from a reality alien to his inherent delicate, human sensibility. In the novel's final section, the image of the table is transformed into a more concrete reality by means of Lily's and the narrator's perceptions. The diffusion of their conscious minds denies the possibility of distinguishing their thoughts from one another. Either Lily or the persona perceives:
The kitchen table was something visionary, austere; something bare, hard, not ornamental. There was no colour to it; it was all edges and angles; it was uncompromisingly plain. But Mr. Ramsay kept always his eyes fixed upon it, never allowed himself to be distracted or deluded, until his face became worn too and ascetic and partook of this unornamented beauty which so deeply impressed her (232).

The table, which functioned earlier as a simile for Mr. Ramsay's work, is now endowed with a more definite, possibly physical reality of which Mr. Ramsay himself is aware and with which he identifies. This passage, if narrated by the persona, factually conveys to the reader Mr. Ramsay's preoccupation with the image that mirrors his reality. If, however, the narrative is derived from Lily's consciousness, the information regarding Mr. Ramsay is not unbiased but colored by Lily's own peculiar interpretation of her host's supposed obsession. The deliberate confusion of the two consciousnesses compels the reader to acknowledge the unreliability of the facts offered and his own limited comprehension resulting from the inadequate information. The narrator shares the character's necessarily limited power of perception, which inevitably creates a restricted, subjective consciousness.

The diffusion of perspective in To the Lighthouse
is an organic derivative of Woolf's thematic concern. The fusion of the consciousnesses of the persona and the characters precludes the narrator's total, objective understanding of the world of the novel and limits him to the subjective vision restricting the characters. The reader, who is denied the information that would have been available through an omniscient vision, is also limited to his own inadequate comprehension. He is refused the opportunity to judge the characters and circumstances objectively. The novel itself can be interpreted to be one subjective moment shared by the narrator, the characters, and the reader, whose conscious minds are diffused to construct one all-encompassing perspective.
Notes


2Scholes and Kellogg, p. 260.

3Scholes and Kellogg, p. 270.


6Auerbach, p. 45.


8Leaska, p. 47.

9Leaska, p. 50.
In *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf illustrates the subjective mind's power to create its own eternal present by fusing its unique conscious and unconscious conceptions of time. The individual's interpretation of the passage of time does not necessarily correspond to its actual linear movement. The mind consciously absorbs and retains only certain ideas and memories, even though the individual's every unconscious thought is retained in his memory.

Bergson maintains that the human psyche compresses or expands periods of time according to its particular capacity and needs. The coexistence of the past and present within the individual psyche produces the simultaneity of events, the sense that the past actually becomes rather than is recreated in the present. Church suggests that Woolf employs this psychological identification of the past and present in order to establish a closeness of events that may actually be separated by years in terms of clock time. Auerbach
contends that the human consciousness is more adept than is language in covering a distance created by time. In order to illustrate this peculiar quality, Virginia Woolf incorporates into the fabric of her external plot events that are very close in linear time. The contrast between the rapid flow of thought and the slow movement of actual events emphasizes the psyche's inevitable distortion of time. Auerbach establishes the connection between multi-consciousness and the psyche's perception of time in Woolf's novel. The present triggers an association of thoughts and memories that intertwine to envelop the subject in an eternal present:

The important point is that an insignificant exterior occurrence releases ideas and chains of ideas which cut loose from the present of the exterior occurrence and range freely through the depths of time. . . . The ideas arising in consciousness are not tied to the present of the exterior occurrence which releases them. . . . The stress is placed entirely on what the occasion releases, things which are not seen directly but by reflection, which are not tied directly to the present of the framing occurrence which releases them.

The subjective mind, whose flow is perpetuated by an unconscious association of thoughts and impressions relating to both the past and the present, diffuses time through the creation of an eternal present.

This diffusion of time provides both the external,
superficial framework and the underlying, thematic structure of *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf creates ambiguity in the time scheme of the novel, which encompasses ten years of linear time but only one day of actual subjective experience. According to J.K. Johnstone, the afternoon and early evening of one physical day comprise the novel's first section. Similarly, one night passes in "Time Passes," and the morning begins in the final section. Woolf achieves structural unity in "Time Passes" by dispensing with conventional scenes and synthesizing the characters' experience with natural cycles. The characters' lives are placed in their proper perspective in relation to the objective world, and subjective experience is relegated to parenthetical statements. The eternal moment, in which the past and present are diffused, is created in the novel's third section by means of the fusion of the events in "The Window" with their corresponding situations in "The Lighthouse." Schaefer suggests that the mental and physical experience of the first section is enriched and intensified by its complementary memory in the last section of *To the Lighthouse*.
They blend into a single occurrence: the words and their remembrance, the emotion and its memory become one. The human action in shrinking temporally does not suffer any diminution in significance. Instead the moment and its significance by being thus telescoped take on the rounded completeness of a work of art.  

Johnstone notes that this interdependence of the first and third sections creates the unity vital to Woolf's structure. The novel as a whole constitutes one eternal moment, one instant of subjectivity in which experience is diffused and synthesized. The resulting vitality of the apparently forgotten past is evidenced by the characters themselves, who, as Church maintains, are affected by their conscious and unconscious memories of the past as well as by their living experiences in the present.

Mrs. Ramsay, who had created order and harmony in her home in "The Window," is given new life by means of the subjective memory in "Time Passes" and "The Lighthouse." Her ability to achieve unity through vision creates an eternal moment which is enriched by its rebirth in the conscious minds of others. As she cleans and restores the Ramsay summer home, Mrs. McNab recalls the living Mrs. Ramsay involved in her daily routine:
She [Mrs. McNab] could see her [Mrs. Ramsay] now, stooping over her flowers; and faint and flickering, like a yellow beam or the circle at the end of a telescope, a lady in a grey cloak, stooping over her flowers, went wandering over the bedroom wall, up the dressing-table, across the wash-stand, as Mrs. McNab hobbled and ambled, dusting, straightening (205).

Mrs. McNab unconsciously associates Mrs. Ramsay with a flickering light, a gleam that recalls the candles flickering on her dinner table, and with "a yellow beam" reminiscent of the ray of light emanating from the lighthouse tower. Both the candles' gleam and the lighthouse's beam symbolize the light of consciousness, the mind's penetrating vision capable of establishing an equilibrium between its inner and outer worlds. Mrs. Ramsay, who was capable of achieving this vision and creating her own reality by means of her imagination, is represented by this light. The telescope is emblematic of Mrs. McNab's subjective perspective consciously and momentarily focused on her memory of Mrs. Ramsay, the circle at the end of the instrument. A device for viewing distant objects, the telescope is an appropriate symbol for the line of subjective vision penetrating into the distant past retrieving forgotten experiences and granting them vitality and greater significance in the present. Like a distant scene, a past situation
gains clarity and unity as the time interval between the perceiver and the subject increases. Although the mind is subjective in its selection of conscious memory, its capacity for objectivity increases with its separation from the flux of subjective experience and consequential opportunity to interpret that same experience from a disinterested viewpoint. Mrs. McNab's recollection of her former employer's talent to achieve harmony encourages her and aids her in the task of cleaning and ordering the estate. Woolf achieves an organic connection between the past and the present through the deliberately created ambiguity afflicting the housekeeper's consciousness. Mrs. McNab, who is in reality remembering the past, sees Mrs. Ramsay "now" performing her daily rituals. Woolf uses the present tense to emphasize the surviving vitality and pervasiveness of Mrs. Ramsay's spirit. However, the narrator also describes her as engaged in impossible activities such as "wandering over the bedroom wall." This undercuts the evocation of the past and suggests the illusory quality of Mrs. McNab's perception, the unreality of the past in the present.

Mrs. McNab's ability to regenerate the past in terms of the present is reinforced by means of her memory of Mr. Ramsay. Woolf repeats her image of a
the telescope in order to refocus the past in relation to the present. Mrs. McNab brings Mr. Ramsay to life by symbolically adjusting the telescope to her eye, recreating the perspective with which she views the distant past:

The telescope fitted itself to Mrs. McNab's eyes, and in a ring of light she saw the old gentleman, lean as a rake, wagging his head, as she came up with the washing, talking to himself, she supposed, on the lawn. He never noticed her. Some said he was dead; some said she was dead. Which was it (210)?

Woolf again integrates the past and the present by recalling past reality in terms of current events. Mrs. McNab's adjustment of the telescope to her line of sight appears to be a physical action but is in reality a symbolic act suggesting the mental process of conscious memory. Virginia Woolf further intensifies the ambivalence created by this diffusion of time by indicating the housekeeper's ignorance of the Ramsays' present situation. Mrs. McNab, who admits that she does not know whether or not Mr. Ramsay is still living, cannot be actually watching him.

Mrs. McNab, representative of the unconscious mind that harbors the potential to achieve a vision beyond both the immediate subjective experience and the factual, objective world, indirectly recognizes the necessity of
both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's realities in a transcendent vision. The principles of both the husband and wife are revived through her subjective memory intensifying the memory of their past lives. Mrs. McNab is unable to consciously perceive the connection between the two individuals, who embody necessarily complementary views of reality. Lily Briscoe's vision will ultimately interpret and clarify their interrelation in terms of conscious art.

The past and present merge in James' consciousness, which diffuses his childhood memories of his parents with his existing relationship to them. He unconsciously substitutes his sister's reality for his mother's memory. James associates Cam, who has inherited the feminine capacity for compassion, with Mrs. Ramsay, who continually supplied her husband with sympathy and strength. Cam's reconciliation to her father infuriates James, just as his mother's submission to Mr. Ramsay's rational judgment had angered him. The past and present merge in James' mind as he unconsciously vents his frustration, which appears to be associated with his sister but which actually results from his mother's demonstration of love for her husband:

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She'll give way, James thought, as he watched a look come upon her face, a look he remembered. They look down he thought, at their knitting or something. Then suddenly they look up. There was a flash of blue, he remembered, and then somebody sitting with him laughed, surrendered, and he was very angry. It must have been his mother, he thought, sitting on a low chair, with his father standing over her (251).

Woolf depicts James' psychological diffusion of time by alternating past and present verb tenses. His current feelings about Cam's relationship with Mr. Ramsay and his memory of his mother's surrender to her husband alternately claim James' attention. James fuses his past and his current experiences in an eternal present time. This diffusion is immediately followed by his deliberate delineation and analysis of the past. The narrator claims "he remembered" (251) that his anger is in reality connected with his mother.

James consciously associates his current impulse to hurt his father with his previous desire to kill him. Observing Mr. Ramsay reading, James unconsciously reduces his father to his conception of his essential, dominating qualities. Mr. Ramsay's harshness and commanding presence are objectified in the form of an illusionary "black-winged harpy" (273) in James' eyes. The harpy's beak recalls the narrator's earlier description
of Mr. Ramsay as a "beak of brass." James associates his memory of his father, tickling his leg with a twig, with the harpy, who threatens to strike his leg with its beak. James will ultimately recognize the complexity of his reality and acknowledge the importance of both his parents' perspectives in determining the nature of reality.

Woolf again achieves unity of past and present in Cam, who perpetuates her dead mother's spirit. Both Mrs. Ramsay and her daughter are associated with the image of a fountain, the symbol of unconscious creative energy and transformation. Mrs. Ramsay symbolically releases the creative power necessary for her husband's survival:

Mrs. Ramsay . . . seemed . . . to pour into the air a rain of energy, a column of spray, looking at the same time animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating . . . and into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself (58).

Mrs. Ramsay's "illuminating" energy is apparently emitted in the form of light, an image that reinforces her association with the lighthouse. Her creative force transmits to her husband the love and sympathy he needs. Capable of regenerating her mother's capacity for compassion, Cam is also associated with the
image of a fountain. Cam, who had vowed to resist her father's tyranny, reconsiders her attitude toward Mr. Ramsay. Her revaluation of his admirable qualities and subsequent reconciliation with him occur at sea, a traditional symbol of transformation. The movement of her hand through the water produces the spray of a fountain, which is symbolic of her link with her mother:

She was thinking: . . . how her father's anger about the points of the compass, James's obstinancy about the compact, and her own anguish, all had slipped, all had passed, all had steamed away. What then came next? Where were they going? From her hand, ice cold, held deep in the sea, there spurted up a fountain of joy at the change . . . this sudden and unthinking fountain of joy fell here and there on the dark, the slumbrous shapes in her mind; shapes of a world not realised but turning in their darkness, catching here and there, a spark of light; Greece, Rome, Constantinople (280).

Like Mrs. Ramsay's "column of spray," Cam's fountain evokes a transition, a change from her past anger toward Mr. Ramsay to an attitude she has not yet defined. Like Mrs. Ramsay's illuminating energy, Cam's fountain is associated with the light of consciousness that creates civilization, the illusion of order shielding human nature from the reality of chaos. Virginia Woolf regenerates the spirit of Mrs. Ramsay in her daughter and fuses the past and the present to create an eternal
present by means of an image.

Mr. Ramsay's landing at the lighthouse, the edifice emblematic of both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, renews his relationship with his wife and rejuvenates his past, creating a timeless moment. His spiritual reconciliation with Mrs. Ramsay indicates his acceptance of her reality, an illusion manufactured by her subjective consciousness to protect herself from the harsh reality of life. Separated from his wife by a distance of time, Mr. Ramsay is able to appreciate her viewpoint, which he had ridiculed while she lived. His acknowledgement of the intuitive, imaginative quality inherent in life allows him to see and understand a reality beyond the surface of the objective world. Their symbolic reunion at once recalls the previous harmony of the Ramsays' married life and indicates the development of Mr. Ramsay's newly acquired vision. Woolf accentuates the presence of the past in his lighthouse landing by describing him as a man who seems to be much younger than his years. Mr. Ramsay "rose and stood in the bow of the boat, very straight and tall . . . as if he were leaping into space, and they [Cam and James] both rose to follow him as he sprang, lightly like a young man, holding his parcel, onto the rock" (308). Mr. Ramsay's landing also recalls the day on which he helped Mrs.
Ramsay to step from a boat. The memory of this incident occurs in both Mrs. Ramsay's and Lily's consciousnesses in Part I and Part III respectively. Although the reader questions the reliability of Lily's memory, the narrator nevertheless implies that Mr. Ramsay requested Mrs. Ramsay's hand in marriage on the day of their boat ride. Because the two events are similar, the couple's first pledge to unite in marriage is indirectly associated with their reconciliation. This eternal moment created by Mr. Ramsay's new insight simultaneously commemorates their past felicity and indicates their renewed spiritual union.

The past and present are diffused in an eternal moment when Lily Briscoe completes her painting. She is able to externalize her vision in her art only when ten years separate her from her subject. The distance created by time, making possible her objective perception of past events, enables Lily to more fully comprehend a previous situation. Like the vanishing point of a painting, the point on the horizon line to which all the compositional diagonal lines converge, the subject of Lily's art achieves a clearer focus as its distance from the artist's eye increases. Structurally, a greater area between the horizon line and the painting's surface allows the artist to encompass more detail in his work.
and to create a more comprehensive, coherent, and unified whole. Similarly, an increasing psychological distance between Lily and her actual experience affords her the opportunity to appraise her subject objectively, unhampered by the more subjective viewpoint that controlled her understanding during her involvement in the situation. Lily's unquestionable need for distance both psychologically and temporally makes the thematic and physical structure of Woolf's novel inevitable. A distance of time must separate the subjective world of the characters in "The Window" and their ultimate achievement of vision in "The Lighthouse."

Virginia Woolf creates an eternal present in Lily Briscoe's consciousness by rejuvenating her apparently forgotten experiences through her memory. The past, closely interwoven into the fabric of the present, actually becomes the present time from which it is inseparable. Lily's previous experiences controlling her art center primarily around her relationship with Mrs. Ramsay, whose achievement of vision in the subjective sphere of life parallels and makes possible the externalization of a particular vision in the objective realm of art. Sitting in the Ramsays' dining room, Lily consciously recalls her unresolved problem of the organization of her painting and unconsciously acknowledges Mrs.
Ramsay's influence over her art. The "grey-green light" (220) on the opposite wall indicates the spiritual presence of Mrs. Ramsay, who was always symbolically associated with light and clad in a grey dress and green shawl. Seated in the same chair that she occupied ten years earlier at the dinner party, Lily finds herself engrossed in answering the same question that occupied her mind then. Using the tablecloth pattern and salt cellar as elements of her painting, Lily had attempted to solve the problem of her art's structural unity. That "moment of revelation" (220) comes to life ten years later, when she redirects her attention to the identical dilemma.

Time is diffused by the pervasive spirit of Mrs. Ramsay, which joins the past and the present through memory. While standing at her easle, Lily's conscious mind spans ten years of her life and meditates on her past relationship with Mrs. Ramsay. Her mind is held in suspension as she relinquishes conscious contact with her present situation and indulges in reverie. Lily unconsciously integrates her past and present, standing "with all her faculties in a trance, frozen over superficially but moving underneath with extreme speed" (298). The thoughts "moving underneath" characterize the stir of apparently forgotten memories but also refer
to the functioning of her unconscious mind harboring impressions not yet elevated to the level of conscious perception that would clarify her vision. Lily's reminiscing causes her to accurately or inaccurately perceive a figure seated at the drawing room window casting "an odd-shaped triangular shadow over the step" (299). The references to the drawing room window, the symbol of Mrs. Ramsay's subjective vision of reality, and to the triangular shape, the essence to which Lily had reduced the mother and son, indicate the power of the past in determining the present. Woolf deliberately insinuates the unreliability of Lily's or the narrator's consciousness perceiving this shadow on the step. Lily's imagination triggers her memory of the past and creates a moment that embraces all of time.

Virginia Woolf implies the existence of an eternal, collective unconscious that fuses the past, present, and future in symbols. Contemplating the Rayleys' unsuccessful marriage and her own unmarried state, Lily associates a redish, burning glow with Paul Rayley: "Suddenly . . . a redish light seemed to burn in her mind, covering Paul Rayley, issuing from him. It rose like a fire sent up in token of some celebration by savages on a distant beach" (261). Here Lily unknowingly connects her present thoughts of him with her unconscious
memory of his burning red cheeks during Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party (154). His glow, which was then associated with his newly discovered love for Minta, now manifests itself in Lily's mind in the image of a fire on a beach that spreads to the sea:

She [Lily] heard the roar and the crackle. The whole sea for miles round ran red and gold. Some winey smell mixed with it and intoxicated her, for she felt again her own headlong desire to throw herself off the cliff and be drowned looking for a pearl brooch on a beach (261).

The "winey smell" and the idea of drowning can be associated with the gods of the unconscious, Bacchus and Neptune, who seemed to preside over Mrs. Ramsay's dinner in the person of Augustus Carmichael. Woolf deliberately suggests Lily's access to a universal consciousness through the use of archetypal symbols such as the "cliff," that divides conscious reason from the realm of the unconscious. The precipice had been used previously as a symbol in Lily's dream the preceding evening to denote the transition from unconsciousness to consciousness. By the process of substitution, Lily indirectly connects her fear of the fire, which would devour the Ramsays' home, with her unconscious dread of the sea, Woolf's symbol for the chaos that destroys the illusion of life's order:
And the roar and crackle repelled
her with fear and disgust, as if
while she saw its splendour and power
she saw too how it fed on the trea-
sure of the house, greedily, dis-
gustingly, and she loathed it (261).

Nancy's past association of the loss of Minta's brooch
and innocence with man's sacrifice of Paradise and im-
mortality is regenerated in Lily's mind. Her present
consciousness connects the sea's or fire's merciless
destruction of the land with reality's repeated efforts
to overcome and obliterate Mrs. Ramsay's illusion, sym-
bolized by the order and harmony ruling her home. Woolf
creates an eternal time and transports the dead past to
the living present by means of the diffusion of the
eternal, collective unconscious with past, present, and
future individual psychic realities.

Virginia Woolf creates an eternity of time by com-
memorating Mrs. Ramsay's achievement of order and unity
at her dinner party through the completion of Lily's
painting. Mrs. Ramsay's subjective vision in life
influences and makes possible the externalization of
that transcendent vision in art. Augustus Carmichael,
representative of a primal god of chaotic unconscious
powers not yet translated into conceptual thought, sym-
bolically unites these two visions by virtue of his pre-
sence at both events. The dish of fruit artfully
arranged and placed at the center of the Ramsays' dinner
table seemed to be "a trophy fetched from the bottom of the sea, of Neptune’s banquet, of the bunch that hangs with wine leaves over the shoulder of Bacchus" (146). Mr. Carmichael is indirectly associated with the presiding deities, Neptune and Bacchus, at the conclusion of the dinner. He stood holding his table napkin "so that it looked like a long white robe" (167) and chanted in a ritualistic fashion. Augustus Carmichael’s god-like presence at the novel’s conclusion links the past attainment of harmony and unity in life with the present achievement of coherence in art. Carmichael is again associated with a pagan god that rises from the sea or from the depths of the unconscious in order in decree some future inevitable destiny:

Then, surging up, puffing slightly, old Mr. Carmichael stood beside her [Lily], looking like an old pagan god, shaggy, with weeds in his hair and the trident (it was only a French novel) in his hand. He stood by her on the edge of the lawn, swaying a little in his bulk and said, shading his eyes with his hand. "They will have landed." . . . He stood there as if he were spreading his hands over all the weakness and suffering of mankind; she thought he was surveying, tolerantly and compassionately, their final destiny. Now he was crowned the occasion, she thought, when his hand slowly fell, as if she had seen him let fall from his great height a wreath of violets and asphodels which, fluttering slowly, lay at length upon the earth (309).
An eternal time is created by Lily's subjective consciousness, which mentally transforms Carmichael's book into a trident, the staff of Neptune. Lily imagines that he drops asphodels, an act which classifies him as a pagan deity in her mind. Woolf relates the past to the present by achieving an indirect association between the dinner party and the scene of the painting through Carmichael. She instills the present with a sense of the future through Carmichael's use of the future perfect tense as he declares that the lighthouse party "will have landed." The past and future fuse to enrich and intensify the significance of the present and to create an eternal moment that embraces all of time.

Lily's consciousness diffuses time as she relives a moment of the past spent with Mrs. Ramsay and Charles Tansley on the beach. Her memory is fused with her present, making their distinction impossible. This deliberate ambiguity illustrates the individual mind's conception of time to be static rather than progressing. The psyche does not perceive the moment to be a succession of divisions, but a fusion of past, present, and future events. Lily Briscoe is conscious of the duality of time operating in her current experience of painting:
She seemed to be sitting beside Mrs. Ramsay on the beach. . . . And Lily, painting steadily, felt as if a door had opened, and one went in and stood gazing silently about in a high cathedral-like place, very dark, very solemn. Shouts came from a world far away. Streamers vanished in stalks of smoke on the horizon. Charles threw stones and sent them skipping.

Mrs. Ramsay sat silent. She was glad, Lily thought, to rest in silence" (255).

Lily's stream of impressions flows through the door that connects perceptions of present reality to memories of the past. Woolf's use of this mental image simultaneously emphasizes the connection between and the mind's continuous, unconscious flow from present to past reality. The specific time to which the rest of the passage refers is purposely ambiguous. The time of Lily's burial of her past moment in the sand remains unclear. This deliberate diffusion of time produces an all-encompassing moment in which the fusion of past, present, and future creates one instant. The significant moment, preserved by the memory for future reference, will be modified by every event and expanded with each passing instant of linear time:
The moment at least seemed extraordinarily fertile. She rammed a little hole in the sand and covered it up, by way of burying in it the perfection of the moment. It was like a drop of silver in which one dipped and illumined the darkness of the past (256).

The memory of the moment will continually change with accumulated experience, offering a new perspective of both the past and present as the subjective consciousness grows.

The conscious mind expands and compresses actual linear time according to its own needs, creating its own peculiar reality of time. In To the Lighthouse, the individual's memory merges with his current impressions in order to produce an eternal moment that enriches both the present and the past.
Notes


2. Church, 22.

3. Church, 24.


5. Auerbach, p. 48.

6. Auerbach, p. 51.


10. Church, 19.
Chapter 7

Diffusion of the Symbolic Vehicle

In *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf diffuses the symbolic vehicle in order to construct a framework of images interrelated by means of indirect or unconscious associations. In Woolf's fiction, the symbolic vehicle is a tangible form used as a symbol and is comprised of many separate related symbols and images combining to create a particular pattern. Jean O. Love notes this pattern can be detected in the symbolic vehicle as a whole as well as in each of its parts diffused throughout the novel.¹ The dual nature of the symbol itself, which is both a particular concrete entity and a reference to an intangible reality, encompasses form and meaning. Love defines the symbol as "a reference to a certain content, and a content to which reference is made."² These objective and allusive qualities comprising the object that becomes symbolic are in turn diffused separately throughout the novel.

Individual images and symbols, which in turn contain their own overlapping subdivisions, thus refer
to similar content. In this manner, an underlying, complex network of interrelated poetic devices, which supports the thematic structure of the novel, is constructed. Referring to Kaplan and Werner, Love terms the complex nature of the symbolic vehicle "plurisignificant" and "multidimensional." In their study of symbol formation, Heinz Werner and Bernard Kaplan refer to the symbol's consequential growth to embody more than one idea or meaning "plurisignificance." Love refers to the symbol's expansion to encompass more than one dimension of actual experience in terms of its concrete reality as "multidimensionality." Images, symbols, and physical objects, which seem to be associated with only one symbolic vehicle, actually refer to every other symbolic vehicle in Woolf's novel. This perpetual cross-reference creates a complex network of allusions that lends unity to the novel's external and thematic structure.

To the Lighthouse is structured by images, symbols and metaphors and that structure is an inevitable growth of Woolf's thematic concern with the nature of the transcendent vision. This intangible third reality attained only when a balance between the subjective and objective worlds is reached externalizes the essential nature of all things. According to Webster's definition
as it is restated by Richter, the essence beneath the physical aspect is "a 'distillation,' or, in philosophical terms, a permanent substance underlying 'all outward manifestations.'"^5 The use of poetic devices which conjure up pictures rather than inspire conceptual thought is vital to the illustration of these essences or abstractions of life. These pictoral images, more primitive because they precede conscious observations, are closer to the unconscious mind and emotional responses. As a result, the abstraction is closer to reality, because it exists in its primitive state, undisturbed by conscious conception.

In the world of Woolf's novel, ideas are conceptualized into images in order to portray basic human experience. Emotion is detached from the characters and universalized by means of an image through which the reader can indirectly identify with and understand the character. Richter maintains that these images represent a lifetime of psychic states and not merely a specific state of mind in a given instance. The essence understood by both the writer and the reader is externalized in an image, creating a universe that permits the reader to experience a more direct contact with the artist's reality than would a world that is a photographic representation of appearances. Richter states
that the "external world of Virginia Woolf's novels becomes the medium through which we experience reality, rather than the reality itself." Woolf's intermediary world of abstraction, according to Sir Herbert Read, is comprised of many abstract shapes, each "drawn from the particular concrete object in front of the artist," which forms "an essence . . . nearer to the truth than any mechanical representation of its appearance."  

Virginia Woolf employs interrelated clusters of images, whose meanings and external forms are diffused throughout the novel in order to convey her sense of the essence of reality. She describes the structure of her art in *A Room of One's Own*:

> A book is not made of sentences laid end to end, but of sentences, built, if an image helps, into arcades or domes. 

Love suggests that these "clusters" associate ideas or objects but do not explicitly compare them. The juxtaposition that frequently occurs within a group of associated images is directly related to the thematic interest as well as the structural pattern of *To the Lighthouse*:

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The specific image and cluster to which it necessarily belongs . . . express the dialectical opposition of unity and dissolution in its several variations within the novel, which is both the theme and the determinant of the artistic pattern of To the Lighthouse.13

The concepts of "dissolution" or diffusion, and unity or synthesis are juxtaposed and associated in one symbol or image in order to illustrate the psyche's process of simultaneously perceiving and conceptualizing experience. In addition to paralleling thematic concerns, the juxtaposition of images compels the reader to respond spontaneously to the literature. Doner suggests that Woolf conveys essences in images by associating two dissimilar objects, and in the act of associating them, makes them appear to be similar, even though in reality they may be completely unrelated. In this way, the essence is conveyed through the resulting instantaneous impression on the part of the reader.14 Woolf creates intensity by compounding these juxtapositions with heightened language, catching the reader off guard and involving him in the world of her novel.15 The technique of Woolf's creation is an organic function of the creation itself and relates the external framework of interrelated poetic devices to the basic thematic focus of the novel.
The merging of individual poetic devices by means of their association in different clusters results in the diffusion of symbolic vehicles throughout Woolf's novel. Different vehicles can refer to similar content, just as one symbolic vehicle can allude to many different ideas and concrete realities. As a result, the symbolic vehicle and its constituent symbols can be diffused and differentiated at once. Their consequential relationships aren't based on "empirical-causal" facts but on recurring motifs. As Love suggests, the novel, structured by these indirect associations, resembles the sonata in form: "As in a sonata, the parts of the composition are derived and differentiated from a single whole and are necessarily related to that whole." Integral parts of the symbolic vehicle "are related structurally and functionally, for they are multiform expressions of the same content." This method makes inevitable the organic structure of the novel, whose diffusion creates a unified whole relating every motive to the focal point of the fiction. Woolf, whose style reflects this diffusion through motives, does not order paragraphs in relation to content or organize topics by paragraphing, because empirical cause and effect relationships are non-existent in mythopoetic thought. Instead,
Woolf's narrative finds its structural foundation in the association of images or motives, which necessarily involves a certain amount of repetition. Refrains, repetitions in the persona's narrative, seemingly redundant speeches, and echoing sounds imply the novel's cyclic movement. This echoing structure reflects the thematic concern for natural and human cycles in To the Lighthouse.²¹ The concept of regeneration, an inevitable product of the life cycle, is suggested by Woolf's use of the memory. Recurring thought, the basis of the human memory, creates the echoing structure of the narrative. The final section of To the Lighthouse is a symbolic reconstruction of the first by means of perspective and memory.²² The novel itself, which can be interpreted as one consciousness perceiving and synthesizing experience, is also the product of the memory of that instant of diffusion and synthesis.

Virginia Woolf transforms the sea into a symbolic vehicle that is diffused throughout To the Lighthouse by means of image and metaphor. The cluster of poetic devices associated with the central symbol of the sea permeates the novel through its relationships to parts of different symbolic vehicles. This diffusion of the symbolic vehicle in terms of both its physical form
and meaning allows the author to associate many different and even opposed ideas with the primary symbol and its components.

The perpetual movement of the sea parallels the flow of human experience and the psychological reality in To the Lighthouse. The rhythmical breaking of waves on the beach provides a "tattoo" (27) to Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts. Its incessant beating, which is more than just an accompaniment to her thoughts, can be compared to a continuo, an accompaniment containing only the basic rhythm pattern in a musical composition. The continuo functions as a foundation that unifies and orders the music's embellished melodies and harmonies, just as the unrelenting beat of the sea serves as a basic structure for human thought and experience. Mrs. Ramsay hears the sea repeating "I am guarding you—I am your support" (27). The psyche's ever-changing fluid nature is objectified in the formlessness of the ocean. The stream of thoughts and impressions finds expression in the flow of currents, which perpetually change course and break the surface of the sea. Lily Briscoe recognizes the mind's inherent similarity to this flow. The movement of the water becomes the means by which human thoughts are symbolically given form: "It was as if the water floated off and set sailing
thoughts which had grown stagnant on dry land" (33).
The sea's flow is also representative of the flux apparent in the objective universe, the world surrounding the individual's internal reality. Lily refers to Mrs. Ramsay's grief as a "flow" from which she strives to alienate herself:

All Lily wished was that this enormous flood of grief, this insatiable hunger for sympathy, this demand that she surrender herself up to him entirely . . . should leave her, should be diverted (she kept looking at the house, hoping for an interruption) before it swept her down in its flow (226).

However, Lily will eventually acknowledge this flow of the external world as a necessary component of her art. She will balance the flux of the objective world with the flow of her individual internal world. Her fusion of these two perspectives will ultimately yield the transcendent vision that creates her art.

Although the sea's perpetual movement constitutes the pulse of life, its incessant beating against the shore reveals its potential for destruction. The deliberate juxtaposition of ideas associated with the symbol of the sea, which at once sustains life and erodes the beach of the island, illustrates the complex nature of Woolf's reality. The sea's movement, the underlying beat of life, represents the essential force of
life but also measures its decay:

The monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again . . . "I am guarding you—I am your support," but at other times suddenly and unexpectedly, especially when her mind raised itself slightly from the task actually in hand . . . like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow (27).

When isolated from life's harmonies, the sea's beating or continuo is heard as a series of deathnotes reminding Mrs. Ramsay that her life span is continually decreasing. The island, like human life, will be eventually overcome by the destructive force. "Ephemeral as a rainbow," life is merely an illusion hiding the truer reality of death, the only certainty in human existence. Mr. Ramsay's reality stripped of life's fantasies is the reality of this remorseless beating revealed without its protective shield of illusions:
It was his fate, his peculiarity, whether he wished it or not, to come out thus on a spit of land which the sea is slowly eating away, and there to stand, like a desolate sea-bird alone. It was his power, his gift, suddenly to shed all superfluities... and so to stand on this little ledge facing the dark of human ignorance, how we know nothing and the sea eats away the ground we stand on (68).

His courageous rejection of the comforting fantasies, which exaggerate man's significance and place him at the center of the universe, allows him to recognize the human world's hopeless situation and its inevitable destruction at the hands of a greater cosmic force. Mr. Ramsay's persistence in quoting from Cowper's "Castaway," "'We perished... each alone'" (247), indicates his association of the sea with death.

In her use of the symbolic vehicle the sea, Virginia Woolf allows one of its isolated aspects, its movement, to embody a juxtaposition of ideas. The sound of the waves' drumming suggests both the essential force of life and the promise of approaching death, just as the sea as a whole suggests both ideas. Thus, the irony inherent in the physical reality of life is manifested by not only the symbolic vehicle but also by each of its individual component parts.

In addition to symbolizing two opposing views of life, the sea also represents a state of transition
between a limited perception of reality and a more mature, transcendent vision. The bay separates the self-contained world of the island, the Ramsays' home in which individuals are limited to their personal, petty concerns, from the Lighthouse, which is emblematic of the external universe. The bay must be crossed in order to achieve a reconciliation or balance between the internal, selfish world and the objective universe. The resulting harmony is externalized by the Lighthouse itself, which symbolically synthesizes the two apparently diverse viewpoints in order to provide a vision of reality that transcends either the subjective or objective worlds. Mr. Ramsay, Cam, and James physically cross the bay to achieve a reconciliation among themselves and to extend their views of reality. In Chapter 1 of "The Window," the narrator alludes to the Ramsays' future voyage, which will afford them greater insight. Individuals are perceived as "barks" that "founder in the darkness" (11). At this point in the narrative, the persona includes a parenthetical statement about Mr. Ramsay: "Here, Mr. Ramsay would straighten his back and narrow his little blue eyes upon the horizon" (11). He may be gazing at the distant Lighthouse which he will ultimately understand. As a result
of his voyage, Mr. Ramsay is reunited to his dead wife's spirit and attains the insight that allows him to incorporate her view of reality into his own in order to produce a more mature vision. Although neither Mrs. Ramsay nor Lily physically travels across the bay, each nevertheless achieves a symbolic union with the Lighthouse. Involved in a mystical transaction between her subjective and objective worlds, Mrs. Ramsay is able to symbolically transport her essential nature to the Lighthouse across the water. This exchange between subject and object is completed when Mrs. Ramsay's eyes glow with the reflection of the Lighthouse beam. Lily Briscoe is also able to symbolically traverse the bay by means of her artistic vision. She seems to know the exact moment the Ramsays' boat lands at the Lighthouse island through intuition. The sea is the medium through which she symbolically achieves the shift in consciousness that allows her to incorporate Mr. Ramsay's reality into her vision and transcend her limited, subjective perspective.

Woolf again diffuses the symbol of the sea in the dinner party scene. The clusters of images surrounding this symbol are simultaneously differentiated in their individual meanings and diffused by means of their relationship to the central symbolic vehicle. The sea's
significance does not remain constant but instead changes according to the allusions created by different combinations of associated images. The tempestuous sea of life containing the dissociated, conflicting viewpoints of those seated around the dining room table is ultimately tamed and ordered by Mrs. Ramsay, who unites her family and friends in a common purpose and creates a moment of stasis eternalized by the memory. Mrs. Ramsay contemplates her broken ties with the Mannings from whom she has been separated by random circumstance. Mr. Bankes remarks that "'People soon drift apart'" (133). This use of the verb "drift" recalls the narrator's metaphor for human lives, "barks" thwarted by chance. Mrs. Ramsay, who is compared to a sailor, attempts to control this drifting of human ships and to merge individual lives in one flow or current in order to create the illusion of order:

She began all this business, as a sailor not without weariness sees the wind fill his sail and yet hardly wants to be off again and thinks how, had the ship sunk, he would have swirled round and round and found rest on the floor of the sea (127).

This passage implies the juxtaposition of the ocean's surface, which represents the conscious life through which the individual attempts to institute a personal order, and the ocean's floor, which is emblematic of
unconsciousness, a state of chaos but which nevertheless embodies the essence or knowledge that makes possible a subjective order. By means of an image, Virginia Woolf develops this sense of boats or individuals drifting apart at the hands of a more powerful force. The individual must drown when he sacrifices his will to the absurd, merciless sea of life and refuses to try to subdue the threatening chaos.

Despite the awesome power of life's destructive forces, it is possible for man to create a subjective order that would lend meaning to his existence and allow him to cope with his world. Mrs. Ramsay attempts to check the pervasive chaos, which is unsympathetic to human problems, and to impose on life a self-created order, the product of her imagination. This order, which combats the potential for destruction, is achieved by means of successful human relationships. The superficial understanding and sympathy that can exist between two individuals can at least momentarily create an illusion of order, which will shield human nature from life's harshness. Mrs. Ramsay, who demonstrates this capacity for compassion, attempts to instill a sense of humanity in others in order to create unity and harmony at her dinner party. She non-verbally requests Lily to speak to Charles Tansley and defend the veneer
of convention and civilization that saves humanity from barbarism:

"I am drowning, my dear, in seas of fire. Unless you apply some balm to the anguish of this hour and say something nice to that young man there, life will run upon the rocks" (138).

Woolf further diffuses the symbol of the sea by allowing Tansley to develop this idea of drowning, as if there were some non-verbal communication connecting Mrs. Ramsay's mind to his consciousness. Lily complies with Mrs. Ramsay's silent request and speaks to Tansley, who relates his experience of learning to swim. When he was a baby, his father threw him out of a boat in order to teach him to survive in water. Tansley learned to swim in order to resist the sea's efforts to drown him. This incident is representative of the individual's initiation into life and his continual efforts to endure the toil and hardships confronting him.

The idea of swimming as a means of combatting and surviving in the sea of life is extended further to suggest the possibility of regeneration in mortal life. The discussion at the dinner table turns to the industry of fishing, which traditionally suggests a spiritual regeneration. The sea's transformation of physical death into spiritual rebirth becomes even more explicit
in the implied significance of the bowl of fruit artfully arranged and serving as a centerpiece for the Ramsays' dining room table. Mrs. Ramsay regards the dish as "a trophy fetched from the bottom of the sea, of Neptune's banquet, of the bunch that hangs with wine leaves over the shoulder of Bacchus" (146). The gift of Neptune or Bacchus, the gods of the disordered unconscious associated with the chaos of the sea, is given new life and raised to the level of consciousness. The conscious mind reorganizes unconscious knowledge to create a renewed, more coherent subjective vision. This moment of transcendent vision represented by the emergence of the fruit bowl will be perpetually regenerated by the human memory, which remains eternal as long as life continues.

The symbolic vehicle of the sea is further diffused in the image of a wave. Like the sea, which simultaneously embodies the forces of dissolution and order, the wave can have a definite shape or be completely formless, depending upon the viewpoint from which it is observed. The wave is emblematic of a human life comprised of independent thoughts and events which bear no relation to one another until they are ordered by the subjective consciousness. Lily, who will ultimately order the chaos of isolated experiences into a coherent whole,
instinctively recognizes this conflict:

And, what was even more exciting, she felt, too . . . how life, from being made up of little separate incidents which one lived one by one, became curled and whole like a wave which bore one up with it and threw one down with it, there, with a dash on the beach (73).

Experience gains clarity when the subject is removed from the event temporally and spacially. Lily Briscoe, who eventually tempers her subjective perception with objectivity, uses the image of a wave to define her difficulty in combining these two perspectives in her art:

All that in idea seemed simple became in practice immediately complex; as the waves shape themselves symmetrically from the cliff top, but to the swimmer among them are divided by steep gulfs, and foaming crests (235).

Separated from her emotional involvement with the Ramsays by ten years, Lily, unlike the "swimmer," gains clarity of vision by observing her past reality from a more objective stance. The wave, representing the duality inherent in the symbolism of the sea, had once been associated with the chaos of immediate experience but has now gained shape and unity as a vision of the past.

Woolf diffuses the symbolic vehicle the Lighthouse and its component symbols and associated images through-
out her fiction. Like the sea, the Lighthouse is a metaphor in which conflicting ideas relate to and balance each other in order to create a harmonized whole. The symbolic vehicles each represent the conscious mind's creation of a fiction or illusion of order, which tames and makes bearable a more severe reality. However, the Lighthouse and the sea simultaneously embody the underlying chaos of objective reality that continually threatens to destroy the illusion suggested by the same symbol. Virginia Woolf ultimately relates the seemingly conflicting ideas suggested by different parts of the symbolic vehicle and applies them to the whole as well as to its individual constituent images.

In *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf diffuses the entire symbolic structure of the Lighthouse in terms of its physical form and symbolic significance. The Lighthouse beam emanating from the perpetually revolving tower alternately sheds light and casts shadows, which is indicative of the dual nature of the entire symbolic vehicle. The rotating tower casts a beam of light, which, like the conscious mind, illuminates only its own isolated reality superimposed on the external world. However, the tower is also responsible for the interval of darkness succeeding each ray of light. This continuous, alternating pattern suggests the moment-
tary nature of the transcendent vision that immediately gives way to the unending flux of experience. This idea of dissolution, the only certainty provided by objective reality, connects the interval of darkness with the body of the Lighthouse, which is also associated with the harshness of the external world. Thus, Virginia Woolf simultaneously distinguishes the Lighthouse's rotating tower from its solid edifice in terms of form, but diffuses the symbolic meaning of the two parts of the Lighthouse by subjecting the tower's beam to the dichotomy that characterizes the entire symbolic structure.

The Lighthouse beam, representative of the individual subjective consciousness, is in turn diffused in many individual images of light, which illuminate only their own peculiar perspective by means of light and shadow. The apparent contradiction inherent in each light image in the novel results from light's potential to shed brilliance and to cast shadow. This duality relates the separate image to the symbol from which it was derived, the Lighthouse beam, and the symbolic vehicle to which it belongs, the Lighthouse. Images of light find expression in Mrs. Ramsay, who creates her own pleasing, personal fiction to dispel the absurdity of a chaotic universe. In Chapter 11 of "The Window," the
Lighthouse beam, which illumines a very specific reality, objectifies Mrs. Ramsay's subjective vision, which is restricted by her limited perspective. Mrs. Ramsay, who bears "the torch of her beauty" (64), sets her home "aglow" (59) with the light of creation and shelters and protects her family and friends.

The Lighthouse beam is symbolically diffused in the candles that light the Ramsays' dining room. Like the Lighthouse and its beam, the candles represent a comforting illusion perpetrated by Mrs. Ramsay's transcendent vision. However, they simultaneously suggest the forces of dissolution that threaten to overcome that same fiction. Mrs. Ramsay's guests are aware that they are participating in a ritual for the purpose of creating order in their lives and subduing the absurdity and meaninglessness that would produce despair. Like a subjective vision, the glow of the candles produces brilliance and shadow, illuminating a scene very different from a scene lighted by uniform light or perceived objectively. The unreality of the scene is evidenced by the "mask-like look of faces seen by candlelight" (147).

This illusion manufactured by the efforts and imagination of Mrs. Ramsay for the purpose of infusing life with meaning is related later to marriage, which unites
a man and a woman and provides a social order or institution by which the human race can be perpetuated. Walking back to the Ramsays' home after Minta accepts his proposal of marriage, Paul Rayley associates the lights of the distant town with civilization's accepted social institutions, which will govern his future:

And as they came out on the hill and saw the lights of the town beneath them, the lights coming out suddenly one by one seemed like things that were going to happen to him--his marriage, his children, his house (118).

Paul's glowing with "the heat of love" (154) and the "golden haze" (148) surrounding Minta following the couple's engagement are related to their faith in the illusion of perfect bliss promised by married life. Marriage, the basis of society's social order, allows a man and woman to legitimately produce offspring, an act that perpetually regenerates humanity. However, marriage also implies a loss of or death of the individual, who must merge his life and identity with that of another in order to reproduce. This duality inherent in marriage is made explicit by the ritual initiated by Mrs. Ramsay at her dinner party. The Boeuf en Daube is offered as a sacrifice to celebrate the momentous occasion:
Life and the prospect of regeneration are merely illusions that cover the harsher reality of death, the only certainty in man's existence. The lovers' "glittering" eyes, which seemingly reflect the candles on the table, indicate their participation in and self-sacrifice to this illusion that will grant order and purpose to their lives. Life, because it must end, bears "the seeds of death." Marriage, the means of perpetuating life, simultaneously offers itself as a feasible subjective order for the individual but also as a mockery of itself in the deceit it propagates.

Images of light are also associated with man's conscious creation of civilization, which provides the social order that shelters him from life's inherent chaos and barbarism. This illusion of unity and order is created by Mrs. Ramsay, who is associated with the ancient Greek culture by means of images of light. Her
first name is Ellen, which is a derivative of the Greek word Hellen meaning light. The connection between Ellen Ramsay and the Hellenic race is made explicit in Chapter 5 of "The Window," in which Mrs. Ramsay peruses her forgotten books and notices their dedications to her: "'The happier Helen of our days'" (43). Contemplating Mrs. Ramsay seated at the drawing room window, William Bankes associates Mrs. Ramsay with the art of ancient Greece, the birthplace of western civilization:

He saw her . . . very clearly Greek, straight, blue-eyed. . . . The Graces assembling seemed to have joined hands in meadows of asphodel to compose that face (47).

The narrator's statement that the Graces, the hand-maidens of the goddesses of classical mythology, "compose" her face indicates that Mrs. Ramsay is an artist's creation and the subject of a painting. Her dual nature as a mortal and an immortal work of art is re-emphasized by the narrator:

Knitting her reddish-brown hairy stocking, with her head outlined absurdly by the gilt frame, the green shawl which she had tossed over the edge of the frame, and the authenticated masterpiece by Michael Angelo, Mrs. Ramsay smoothed out what had been harsh in her manner a moment before, raised his head, and kissed her little boy on the forehead (48).

Mrs. Ramsay's mortal love and devotion to her family are
eternalized in art. Lily Briscoe's eventual understanding of this human involvement in life combined with her recognition of objective reality will enable her to illustrate her transcendent vision of reality in her painting of Mrs. Ramsay and her son.

Light loses its significance as an ordering power when it is dissociated from the subjective consciousness. In "Time Passes," the lights in the Ramsays' home are put out while the members of the household sleep. Lights are eliminated when the conscious mind yields to the unconscious. In response to Lily's inquiry as to whether or not a light should be left burning during the night, Prue replies "'not if every one's in'" (189). Only Mr. Carmichael's candle, the symbol of his consciousness, is left burning in the darkened home while he remains awake. The meaning of the Lighthouse beam is diffused in "Time Passes." In the absence of the human world, the beam no longer symbolizes the ordering power of the mind. Without the interpretation of the subjective consciousness, the Lighthouse light is random and inadvertently aids the forces of dissolution and chaos, which erode the once carefully preserved home:
So some random light directing them with its pale footfall upon stair and mat, from some uncovered star, or wandering ship, or the Lighthouse even, the little airs mounted the staircase and nosed round bedroom doors (191).

In "Time Passes," the Lighthouse beam is indifferent to the objective world, which provides no conscious reality to interpret it or reflect its light:

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 (207).

The "stare" of the beam indicates its indifference to its environment and its lack of interest in differentiating the components of its surrounding world. The beam of the Lighthouse is diffused in form through the symbol of Lily's canvas. Her blank canvas "with its uncompromising white stare" (234) recalls the "stare" of the ray emanating from its tower and illuminating everything with equal intensity. However, when Lily begins to paint, the canvas will reflect the total reality represented by the entire symbolic vehicle.

Like its light, the Lighthouse's body is also diffused in terms of significance. When observed by James during childhood from the opposite side of the bay, the Lighthouse, which was then associated with Mrs.
Ramsay's fiction, appeared to be "a silvery, misty-looking tower" (276). However, as James sails toward the Lighthouse with his father and sister, he appreciates the physical reality of the edifice: "He could see . . . the tower, stark and straight; he could see that it was barred with black and white" (276). James' recognition of the opposites that constitute the black and white Lighthouse body is associated with his newly acquired understanding of the dual nature of reality:

The other was also the Lighthouse.  
For nothing was simply one thing.  
The other Lighthouse was true too (277).

Every symbol or image associated with the Lighthouse embodies the duality represented by the entire symbolic vehicle. The balance symbolized by the Lighthouse, which is diffused in meaning and in form, finds expression in its beam and tower and all their individual ramifications throughout Woolf's novel.

The images and symbols related to the sea are also associated with those pertaining to the Lighthouse. This diffusion illustrates the physical and symbolic interrelation between the novel's two controlling symbolic vehicles. The Lighthouse, which is physically stable on an island amidst the fluidity of the sea, serves as a guide to wandering ships. This practical
function parallels the conscious mind's power to order the chaos of life and to momentarily stabilize the flux of experience symbolized by the sea. Mrs. Ramsay, Lily, Mr. Ramsay, Cam, and James must symbolically or physically cross the bay in order to acquire this power to achieve a total, comprehensive vision of reality.

Virginia Woolf diffuses images of light and water in order to construct a metaphor for the subjective mind, which will ultimately create its own transcendent vision of reality. Knitting in her husband's study, Mrs. Ramsay unconsciously transcends both her subjective and objective worlds and distills experience to its essential meaning. Woolf illustrates her psychological state through the use of light and water imagery:

And she waited a little, knitting, wondering, and slowly those words they had said at dinner, "the china rose is all abloom and buzzing with the honey bee," began washing from side to side of her mind rhythmically, and as they washed, words, like little shaded lights, one red, one blue, one yellow, lit up in the dark of her mind (178).

Thoughts "washing" through Mrs. Ramsay's consciousness indicate the flow of the psyche's unconscious thoughts and impressions, which occasionally rise to the conscious level of experience in the form of "words" or "little shaded lights." These isolated psychological illuminations indicate her moments of vision, which are
inevitably connected with her intuitive knowledge of the essence of her reality. This essence is indicated by the lights' colors, red, blue, and yellow, the three basic primary colors from which the entire color spectrum is derived. Mrs. Ramsay's capacity to reduce life to its essence or basic meaning symbolized by lights enables her to order her otherwise fluid and chaotic subjective world. Woolf also portrays Lily Briscoe's psychological reality by means of light and water images when she returns to the Ramsays' home after an absence of ten years:

Then, being tired, her mind still rising and falling with the sea, the taste and smell that places have after long absence possessing her, the candles wavering in her eyes, she had lost herself and gone under (222).

Representative of consciousness, the unsteady candle light in Lily's eyes is overcome by unconsciousness, a process indicated by the narrator's statement that she had "gone under."

The interrelation of images and symbols associated with the Lighthouse and the sea creates a moment of stability and eternity at Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party. The Ramsay family and guests are united through the efforts of Mrs. Ramsay in their common cause to subdue the threatening chaos of the objective world. Mrs.
Ramsay's subjective vision is symbolized by a light shining to create a peculiar perspective or distortion of reality. This light glowing under water indicates the stabilization of the objective world or the unconscious mind by means of a subjective vision:

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 it ripples and the reeds in it and the minnows balancing themselves, and the sudden silent trout are all lit up hanging, trembling (160).

This instant of psychological illumination creates a momentary suspension of the flux of life in which a chaotic world is molded by the psyche into a coherent vision:

The whole is held together; for whereas in active life she [Mrs. Ramsay] would be netting and separating one thing from another . . . she would be urging herself forward; now she said nothing. For the moment she hung suspended (160).

Woolf's association of the candle light and water images suspends reality and creates a moment of illusion in which the chaos of the external world is tamed by the imagination:
Now all the candles were lit up, and the faces on both sides of the table were brought nearer by the candle light, and composed, as they had not been in the twilight, into a party round a table, for the night was now shut off by panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished waterily (146).

The candles' glow and the windows' reflections distort the individual's view of the world beyond the Ramsays' dining room. The illusion of the mental communion of the people seated around the table results from their physical proximity intensified by the light. The seeming solidity of the room's interior contrasts with the apparent surrounding vagueness and fluidity of the outdoors reflected in the glass. However, the solidity of the room itself is illusory. The light perverts objective reality and creates the peculiar perspective with which the guests view their world. This sense of illusion is externalized by the bowl of fruit, "a trophy fetched from the bottom of the sea, of Neptune's banquet" (146). The candles, which shed their light on the supposed treasure of the sea, alter its appearance: "Thus brought up suddenly into the light it seemed possessed of great size and depth" (146). Light,
representative of Mrs. Ramsay's subjective vision, alters the nature of reality symbolized by the chaos of the sea. The vision resulting from this modification of objective reality momentarily transfixes life and creates an eternal moment of illusion, which subdues the chaos that perpetually threatens to undermine the individual's fiction.

Finally, the symbolic vehicles, the Lighthouse and the sea, are also associated in Lily's painting. The artistic vision, the externalization of a transcendent reality, depends upon the individual's reconciliation of his subjective and objective worlds. Lily's internal reality associated with light orders the chaotic meaninglessness of her surrounding world symbolized by the Lighthouse tower and the sea. The "uncompromising white stare" (234) of her blank canvas before it is transformed into the mirror of her mind recalls the "stare" of the Lighthouse in the novel's second section, in which no subject interpreted or reflected its light. Her brush, which "flickered brown over the white canvas" (235), recalls the inconsistent light of the candles that presided at Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party. The brush is the instrument employed by her consciousness to translate her vision into line and color. The rhythm established by the brush strokes and the pauses between them is
indirectly associated with the rhythmical breaking of
the waves and the regular alternation of light and dark-
ness produced by the rotating Lighthouse tower. Lily
acknowledges man's isolated instants of vision or
"illuminations" (240) which momentarily arrest the
flux of life and create order amidst chaos:

There were little daily miracles,
illuminations, matches struck un-
expectedly in the dark. . . . Mrs.
Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs.
Ramsay saying, "Life stand still
here"; Mrs. Ramsay making of the
moment something permanent (as in
another sphere Lily herself tried
to make of the moment something
permanent)—this was the nature of
a revelation. In the midst of
chaos there was shape; this eternal
passing and flowing . . . was
struck into stability (240).

Virginia Woolf denies the possibility of acquiring an
absolute knowledge or vision of reality. She uses the
image of "matches struck unexpectedly in the dark" to
acknowledge the momentary nature of vision, which must
yield to the continuing flux of experience.

The images and symbols associated with both the sea
and the Lighthouse are simultaneously diffused and dif-
ferentiated when Lily Briscoe completes her painting
and the Ramsays reach the Lighthouse. The unity created
by Mrs. Ramsay at her dinner party is commemorated at
the moment of Lily's artistic vision by Mr. Carmichael,
who witnessed both events. The bowl of fruit on the Ramsays' table is a treasure from the sea and reflects the light of the flickering candles. The emergence of "Neptune's trophy" is recalled by Mr. Carmichael, who, representing the ancient god of the sea, "surges up" (309) from his lawn chair when Lily completes her painting. This allusion to the sea is made as Lily draws her final line, an act that recalls her brush "flickering" over her canvas earlier. Virginia Woolf thus diffuses the basic symbolic vehicles providing the structural framework of her fiction in the final scene of the novel. Images and memories of images of water and light fuse to create the eternal moment in which the Lighthouse party lands and Lily achieves her artistic vision.

Virginia Woolf diffuses two interrelated symbolic vehicles in *To the Lighthouse*. The images and symbols associated with either the sea or the Lighthouse are in turn diffused and differentiated in terms of both meaning and form. Each part of the symbolic vehicle exists as a component of the whole, distinguished by its own specialized function in terms of physical form and symbolic significance. However, the same individual component simultaneously exists as a representation of the entire symbolic vehicle and embodies the total meaning of the entire structure. This complex
of interrelated poetic devices resembles the framework of the sonata, a musical form in which the motives and episodes, derivatives of one basic motive, exist independently of and in relation to the principal theme.
Notes


2Love, p. 28.

3Love, p. 28.

4Love, p. 28.


7Richter, p. 182.

8Richter, p. 184.

9Richter, p. 181.

10Richter, p. 187.


12Love, p. 27.


15Doner, 2.
16 Love, p. 28.
17 Love, p. 29.
20 Love, p. 26


22 McLaurin, p. 186.


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