

*“So that was the Lighthouse, was it?
No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing.”*
(Woolf, 2000, p. 202)

Front-page picture of the lighthouse at Byron Bay by Judith Tepper.

*The Significance of Things and Objects in
Virginia Woolf's
To the Lighthouse*

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Abstract

This thesis will provide a discussion of the significance of things and objects in Woolf's 1927 novel, *To the Lighthouse*. It presents an investigation of what significance the objects and things play in relation to the protagonists of the story. Further, I will also be analysing how things can provide a type of structure in the lives of the characters, and additionally in the novel itself. The relationship between characters and things in *To the Lighthouse* is in accordance with the relationship all of us have with things in our own lives. Things are constantly surrounding us. In short they connect us and remind us of the external world. The relationship between things and characters is perhaps of particular prominence in *To the Lighthouse* due to Virginia Woolf's writing style. Woolf was an artist of the stream of consciousness technique, and she utilised it in a manner that had never been carried out before. In *To the Lighthouse* there is no clear narrator, implying that Woolf grants us a representation of multiple consciousnesses through the stream of consciousness technique. Readers of Woolf are granted front row seats from which to observe the characters' thoughts, perceptions and impressions as they arise and develop. Characteristics of Woolf's writing style, and the fact that she was a realist and a modernist, have directed my approaches of investigation.

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As the process of working on my master's thesis has come to an end, so has my time as a student at NTNU in Trondheim. The final process of my studies has been both demanding and rewarding, and I have learnt a lot from this challenge. Working with Woolf and her beautiful novel has truly enriched me. I will take the knowledge that I have gained from this experience into my profession. Presumably, I will take it with me into other aspects of life as well. The novel is a true masterpiece. I am very glad I did not reach my level of patience instantly after discovering early on that it is a quite challenging piece of literature.

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1. Introduction

'Yes, of course, if it's fine tomorrow,' said Mrs. Ramsay. ...

To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy, as if it were settled the expedition were bound to take place, and the wonder to which he had looked forward, for years and years it seemed, was, after a night's darkness and a day's sail, within touch. ... James Ramsay, sitting on the floor cutting out pictures from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores, endowed the pictures of a refrigerator as his mother spoke with heavenly bliss. It was fringed with joy. The wheelbarrow, the lawnmower, the sound of poplar trees, leaves whitening before rain, rooks cawing, brooms knocking, dresses rustling – all these were so coloured and distinguished in his mind that he had already his private code, his secret language, though he appeared the image of stark and uncompromising severity, with his high forehead and his fierce blue eyes, impeccably candid and pure, frowning slightly at the sight of human frailty, so that his mother, watching him guide his scissors neatly round the refrigerator, imagined him all red and ermine on the Bench or directing a stern and momentous enterprise in some crisis of public affairs.

'But', said his father, stopping in front of the drawing-room window, 'it won't be fine'.

Had there been an axe handy, a poker, or any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it. ...

'But, it may be fine – I expect it will be fine,' said Mrs. Ramsay making some little twist of the reddish-brown stocking she was knitting, impatiently. (Woolf, 2000, pp. 7-8)

From the opening pages where we get acquainted with little James and his ardent wish to go see the lighthouse, to the final pages where he finally accompanies his father and sibling Cam to go and see it up close, *To the Lighthouse* is rich in the representation of objects and things. These have different significance when it comes to adding effects to the story of the Ramsay family, their summer guests and their house near the coast.

Many of us do not see much significance in the everyday objects that occur in our lives. With Virginia Woolf's artistic way of mastering the method of stream of consciousness, her readers are invited to do the opposite. One is drawn into the conscious minds of her characters, and one is thus given the ability to register the way objects appear in and also direct their stream of thoughts. Due to extended focus on the inner life of Woolf's characters, the objects, which are thought about, stand out as tokens of the existence of a world in contrast to this, namely the external world. Even though material objects are part of the external world, objects that are perceived make their entrance into the internal.

One of Woolf's main themes is life itself and how her characters perceive their existence. This conclusion seems hard to draw without investigating the interference of things and objects in the characters' lives. Woolf manages to prove that even things that appear to be small are powerful in influencing the lives of her characters.

1.1. The Significant Object

Personally, things and objects have always intrigued me. We let things surround us unconsciously throughout the day. In a way they provide structure in our lives through the habitual routines we attach to them. We use things to facilitate or accessorise our day-to-day routines, without further attention. The significance of the isolated object is usually not something people reflect upon. Bill Brown reminds us that people tend not to start thinking about a thing and the role it plays, until they lose it or it breaks (2004, p. 4).

"Take care of your things" is probably an utterance familiar to many of us. Further, most of us have experienced the frustration of losing one or several of our things. When we lose an item, we are perhaps prevented from getting into our house, changing channel on the TV or combing our hair. Losing a favourite necklace may never stop troubling us. Suddenly, we are very conscious about the thing we once had, what it enabled us to do, and how much it meant to us. We realise how dependent we are on things.

It is clear that we do not often think about things and objects that are not serving us a purpose one way or another. Thinking about an object in isolation from a human perceiver, without an ulterior motive or a specific interest in the item, is quite abstract for us. Does the item even exist when the relationship to a human perceiver and observer is absent? This is a question Woolf was interested in (de Gay, 2006, p. 111). The external world is difficult to explore in isolation from perceivers, and thus, in isolation from the internal world.

Objects rust and decay in the absence of humans. This is something many of us have been reminded of when we return to our cabin in the summer after a long and rough winter. In

a way items are in danger of disappearing into the hands of time when people are not there to maintain and preserve them. The conclusion that can be drawn is that objects are reliant on the maintenance and preservation of humans in order not to fade and decay.

During these times of rapid expansion in technological innovations, things and merchandises, we are perhaps even more unconscious of the significance of different things in the world than ever before. The world has become a highly material one, and being part of the modern society demands that we own more and more things. Things are no longer tools for survival, and they no longer simply exist to satisfy our basic needs. In my thesis one aspect I wish to examine is whether Woolf seemed concerned about the rapid development of things and objects following the industrial revolution. I wish to comment upon whether she appeared to value handmade objects above the new machine-produced objects.

In terms of style Woolf was innovative. Woolf's manner of writing evolved in the époque of modernism, which causes my interest in objects and things to take the stylistics of this period into consideration. Woolf was concerned with depicting reality and therefore attempted to capture, and offer her readers with, her characters' immediate thoughts and perceptions of things.

What Lily Briscoe in the novel wishes to record in her painting is "that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything" (Woolf, 2000, p. 209). She was, like Woolf, concerned with the importance of initial thoughts of moments and things, before we have been able to reconstruct them in our heads, or through communication with others. Woolf attempted to capture the moment before it passed.

To the Lighthouse is not a story that has been constructed in a person's, or in a narrator's head. Rather, it represents a collection of stream of thoughts and perceptions from multiple characters. Readers of Woolf get the sense that they are granted complete access to all the characters' inner thoughts. In addition to the usage of the stream of consciousness technique, Woolf alternates her mode of narration through her use of the free indirect discourse. This aspect makes the reader aware that subjectivity is always at work in literature, as it is in real life (INMWL, n.p).¹

The objects are brought into the text as they float into the consciousness of the characters. They link internal life with the external. Through the objects the shift from one character's mindset to another's is facilitated. In this sense, the objects serve as a way of

¹ Abbreviated title of source: Introduction, Norton Masterpieces of World Literature. Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)

structuring the novel, and as a way of linking the internal mindset of the characters with one another. From the material object one can gain access to the impressions of all the characters that are in an encounter with it. Mrs. Ramsay's knitting introduces us to her thoughts concerning the lighthouse keeper's son who she is knitting the stockings for. Lily Briscoe discovers maternal qualities of Mrs. Ramsay through her observation of Mrs. Ramsay's knitting. Readers are granted to take part in a leap from Mrs. Ramsay's mindset to Lily's through the knitting.

Within the world of objects and things that I will be exploring are also larger commodities and the Ramsay house. The objects and things that occur and capture my interest in the narrative need not be physical encounters between characters and these items, however. They can also be some form of representation of objects and things. These refer to the material aspect of objects and things, but occur within the imaginative world of the characters. Concerning the difference between the two terms, this will be discussed in section 2.2 of my thesis. So far, I have made no distinction between objects and things.

1.2. Thesis Focus: The Subject-Object Relation

In my thesis I wish to investigate the relationship I have already touched upon in the previous paragraphs, namely the one between subjects and objects, and more specifically the relationship between the characters of *To the Lighthouse* and objects. The passing of time and the presence of space are also important to account for in this matter. Without the supervision and maintenance of humans, things will decay and reach the state of being out of order after a certain amount of time. Humans have the power to preserve objects. However, objects can also in different ways preserve people after their time is due. Shakespeare found a way to immortalise himself through his poetry, as did Leonardo da Vinci through his paintings.

In *To the Lighthouse* the characters are also preoccupied with the issue of preservation through things, and more specifically through art. For Mr. Ramsay the hope of maintaining his character through his philosophical books is evident. Lily Briscoe struggles to be a good enough artist by preserving the character, and the moment of truly envisioning who Mrs. Ramsay was, in her painting.

The items in the novel are of different importance to the characters. In order to understand the relationship between the objects and the characters it is necessary to investigate them separately. Woolf and other writers took interest in the life of things separate from human interference. Karl Marx famously remarked “[i]f commodities could speak, they would say this: our use-value may interest men, but it does not belong to us as objects” (as

cited in Derrida, 1994, p. 197). In *To the Lighthouse* Virginia Woolf sheds light on things that appear separated from the function they serve a human actor.

The relationship between objects and characters or the absence of such a relationship is of main interest in my thesis. As things to various degrees structure our daily lives, things structure the way of life for the characters in *To the Lighthouse* as well. All humans seek structure, and Jakob Lothe reminds us that we tend to view our lives as more or less framed and structured narratives (Lothe, 2003, p. 13). The way things and objects in *To the Lighthouse* function as structural devices can seemingly reveal aspects of the relationship between objects and subjects as well. Therefore the structural feature will also be focused upon in my thesis.

Some objects in *To the Lighthouse* are given more profound and noticeable attention than others. These objects are as the title and subtitles indicate, the lighthouse and the window. In later sections I will discuss, amongst other objects, the importance of the window and the lighthouse both as structural devices, but also as objects that have certain significance to the characters. One will also come to find that they, like the novel at large, are connected to the life of Virginia Woolf and her childhood.

By using Bill Brown and his *Thing Theory* to help decipher what an object's natural relation to a subject is, his discussion of the definition of things and objects, along with Woolf's own comments regarding her authorship, I will try to reach a conclusion about the significance of certain objects in *To the Lighthouse*. Morten Nøjgaard offers an explanation of how objects are not only used in the narration as indications of specific phenomena. They can also be viewed as structural elements in the narrative if they keep reappearing (Nøjgaard, 1975, p. 106). This viewpoint serves as one point of departure for me in investigating the objects that occur in the narration.

The first chapter of my thesis consists of a short theoretical background concerning Woolf's modernist authorship, and an introduction to the terms "things" and "objects". Following this chapter I have divided the thesis into two main chapters concerning the aspects of significance of the objects. These include how objects are used as structural components in presenting space for the characters' thoughts to unfold, but also as signals of where the story is headed. I wish to distinguish how objects directly and or indirectly reveal characteristics in the protagonists. Finally, the objects can serve as revelations of personal beliefs that can be further discussed as issues of relevance during the period of modernism. I will summarise my main points in a concluding chapter.

2. Theoretical Approach

Mikhail Bakhtin argued that the novel is always in correspondence with the social and cultural context of the writer. He shed light on the importance of the discourse of novels, and stated that the discourse consisted of borrowed language made up of several voices. Bakhtin's definition of the term polyphony fits well with Woolf's inclusion of several perspectives and voices through the characters. Bakhtin further specified that the discourse of novels has the shape of the socially engaged space it is created in (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 269). Bakhtin's view of the novel leads me to confront the ideologies that existed when *To the Lighthouse* was written in order to understand it better.

Foremost, this chapter presents an introduction to Woolf's notions of displaying realistic characters. As one will come to find, this revelation guides me towards discovering the significance of objects in relation to the characters in *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf was unique in her depiction of characters. The high interest in inner life and catching immediate states of perceptions through the stream of consciousness technique was Woolf's way of creating characters that were true and believable. It is also mainly through the stream of consciousness technique that things and objects in the novel make their appearance.

In addition this chapter makes an introduction to Bill Brown's *Thing Theory*. A definition of what things and objects apply to is essential as I will soon be devoted to discussing their significance in the novel.

2.1. Woolf's Literary Context and the Importance of Character

20th century Modernism brought new impulses in literature. Sudden and unexpected breaks with the existing conventions were introduced. Experimentation and individualism became virtues in contrast to the traditions of the romantic and Victorian era of the 19th century (Rahn, 2011, n.p).

Modernism can arguably be said to have grown out of cultural shocks. The biggest shock accumulated in World War one. People had a hard time making sense of the world after the mass destructions following the war. Consequently, the society and the civilization were in change during this period (Rahn, 2011, n.p).

Woolf was conscious of different changes that were arising in the society of the 20th century. An important change that caught her particular attention was a shift in characters around 1910. She found evidence of this in the distinction between the romantic Victorian

cook and the modern Georgian one. The Georgian cook was borrowing newspapers from her employer, asking advice about her clothing, and was a much more visible figure in the household than the one of the previous age. If human relations had changed, this meant that religion, conduct, politics and literature had changed as well, according to Woolf (1924, p. 5). This enforced her opinion of the necessity to formally change the conventions of the novel. When James Joyce said that all a novel needed to be was interesting, Woolf disagreed and argued that new specific methods for writing literature, and then foremost novels, had to be developed.

The discovery of changes in both society and character were important components in the development of modern literature. Further, novelists of modern times, as well as those of the time being, are often firstly occupied with the creation of their characters. This is seemingly natural, as more than anything readers, and people in general, are judges of character. We do not come across very well with people who are mysterious to us. We use our instincts to judge characters in all our relations. Novelists take the task a step further. According to Woolf they feel that there is something permanently interesting in character in itself (1924, p. 5).

Evidently, creating realistic characters and exploring the concept of character was important to Woolf. Before the actual writing of the book she revealed that her ideas revolved around “all character – *not* a view of the world” (as cited in Lee, 1996, p. 475). Here, she also introduces her interest in multiple perspectives in order to more accurately recount realism.

Woolf distanced herself from a number of her contemporary and earlier authors in her unveiling of character. In particular she disagreed with the so-called Edwardians: Mr. Bennett, Mr. Wells and Mr. Galsworthy. Woolf chose to call them materialists (Woolf, 1921, n.p). Foremost, she distanced herself from Mr. Arnold Bennett. She not only reacted to how the Edwardians presented their protagonists, but further she showed reluctance to how these authors appeared to make “the trivial and the transitory seem true and enduring” (Woolf, 1921, n.p). In summary this implied that they were describing, “the fabric of things” (Woolf, 1924, p. 18). According to Woolf they did not succeed in doing what she was preoccupied with, namely, “[getting] behind the cotton wool”. Woolf thought that a hidden pattern could be found behind it. This pattern was something all human beings were connected to. She viewed the whole world as a work of art, and all beings as parts of this masterpiece (Woolf, 1978, p. 72).

Woolf was a firm believer of the fluctuating subjective thought. She refrained from objectively describing characters and things. As she saw it, the Edwardians presented “a false

contemporary pretense of scientific objectivity” (INMWL, n.p). This implies that their descriptions were done standing outside the scene itself. Further, they would not face the fact that there are no neutral observers. Woolf felt that their achievement was merely to produce a chronological accumulation of details (ibid).

A novelist needed to be interested in the characters, the things and the book itself, was Woolf’s argument (Woolf, 1924, p. 12). This is highly visible in *To the Lighthouse* where Woolf sheds light on the characters’ stream of incoherent thoughts and their subjective perceptions of different things and objects. The Edwardians, as mentioned above, described the fabric of things. They offered the reader a house and a view. They then expected the reader to work out that there was a character living in this house, and further to distinguish whom this character was (Woolf, 1924, p. 18). The intimacy that Woolf offers us by relating all the characters’ thoughts and emotions as they arise is not offered. Her focus shifted away from the object under observation, to the way the observer subjectively perceives the object (INMWL, n.p). All humans have their own subjective nature with which they view the world. Woolf attempted to depict this aspect in her characters.

Further, Woolf stated that the author’s job was to display the true character, not take long breaks from the character’s inner thoughts in order to have room for a description of the scenery. She asserted that a depiction of the surroundings would be a digression causing the reader to lose track of the character altogether (Woolf, 1924, p. 24). Woolf’s manner of modernist writing can be distinguished in the first section of *To the Lighthouse* where the focus is always on character and how a character perceives different encounters. She never leaves the characters’ viewpoints. Thus she does not spend time objectively displaying the surroundings of the Ramsay house for example. In fact, the appearance of the Ramsay house is not related at all. Perhaps this fact reveals that the house is very familiar to the characters. Thinking about the appearance of it would then be unnatural for them.

In *Misperceiving Virginia Woolf* James Harker discusses the fact that Woolf was frustrated by the earlier restrictions of representation. These types of representations involved that, “a certain superfluous detail, a water bottle or the layout of a house [was] supposed to conjure a particular kind of person” (2011, p. 3). She discarded the idea that what seems big in life matters more than what appears small. Life consists of sometimes seemingly incoherent and inconsistent thoughts and impressions. This might serve as an explanation to Woolf’s rich inclusion of things and objects in *To the Lighthouse*. The objects in the novel, and the subjective thoughts that arise in the encounter with these, enforce the realistic impressions of the characters. Everyday objects are essential in all people’s lives from beginning to end in

the sense that they prompt subjective thoughts and feelings. Further, this proves that things, and also the small things, have a lot of significance and importance.

James Harker defines a typical characteristic in the characters of Woolf to include that they are constantly looking and thinking as they direct their way in life (Harker, 2011, p. 2). Further, in the same way as the inner life of every human being is filled with emotion, sensation and thought, so is the inner life of Woolf's characters. These sensations can surface due to an encounter with even the smallest and most customary of material artefacts (ibid). Again one is reminded of the importance of objects in peoples' lives, and how they prompt thoughts and feelings.

For Virginia Woolf modern literature was an art deriving from the nature of the faculties of perception. Harker states that one of the most intriguing and prevalent features in Woolf's characters is that they often misjudge their perceptions. Woolf is committed to everyday things and how we can have trouble recognizing them for what they are (Harker, 2011, p. 2). Her fiction shows a rhetorical reliance on misperception or limitations in the perceptual faculties. Harker declares that perceptual failure can be a resource for the modernist author (ibid). The type of perceptual failure that occurs in the works of Woolf derives from the common origin and confusion when connecting and disconnecting the internal and external world. Characters get lost in their own thoughts stemming from their perceptions. Due to her demanding stylistics, this is also a risk for readers of Woolf.

In *Misperceiving Virginia Woolf* Harker states, "[t]he blindness that the misperception can undergo stems from the name of an inattention, but not inattention to something visible" (2011, p. 2). This inattention likely derives from the inconsistent thoughts a visible object can induce. These thoughts need not be structured, or even concerned with the object at all, and they vary from person to person. Therefore it is possible to shape a misperception (Harker, 2011, p. 12).

All human brains are subjected to the type of misperception described in the former paragraph. There are so many impressions and thoughts throughout the day. Our focus shifts abruptly. Our attention is constantly positioned to interruption by new factors of stimulation. These consist of encounters with objects and other people for example. Harker summarises with the fact that all people are therefore inclined with an imperfection of knowledge (2011, p. 5).

Further, we account for missing data by our earlier perceptions, and fail to see small changes. Woolf is exploring this mechanism and ties it to our bodily senses. Vision is utterly important to Woolf and her characters, and she is constantly relating vision to our other senses.

Knowledge of the world does not simply derive from what is visible by plain eyesight though. Seeing is a passive activity. Harker elaborates that intellectuals gain knowledge by the way in which they use their vision to select, focus and compile information about the external world (2011, p. 7). This is further based on how we choose to connect what we see to our inner world. Woolf had a unique way of describing this process in her characters. She is known for her distinctive way of relating how humans think and feel.

Woolf's interest in capturing the inner life of her characters is definitely evident. Frederic Jameson argued that different varieties of inwardness were "the main influential formal impulses of modernity" (as cited in Harker, 2011, p. 1). Woolf was often known to be the most inward of them all. Harker declares that Woolf does not only privilege inner life over external reality but she also views the external life as arbitrary. He further foreshadows that Woolf views the external world as being a mere framing occurrence (ibid). On the other hand, Woolf's inclusion of objects shows that she was also interested in the outer world. Tolliver Brown points to how Woolf depicted a unifying pattern for the capricious divisions between subjects and objects (2009, p. 55). In *To the Lighthouse* she clearly explores the boundaries between inner and outer world. She inquires into objects and things as part of the external world, but she also illustrates how they become part of the characters' inner life. Woolf portrays how the boundaries between external- and internal world are merged.

2.2. Thing Theory

Before further attempting to distinguish the significance of the objects and things in relation to the characters in *To the Lighthouse*, it is necessary to define what an "object" and what a "thing" really is.

Both of these terms are ambiguous. They serve as massive generalities, but also as particularities in the lives of humans. A lot of us think about the material aspect of objects and things in order to define them. However, both words exceed their material and external significance. Bill Brown exemplifies this by saying that the meaning of "things" can sometimes surpass that of "objects", in that this word can be used to describe different phenomena, unnamable sensations for instance (Brown, 2001, p. 5). This is the case in this example: "there is a thing about him that I really like."

Further, one could say about a relationship between two people that: "They have many things in common". This does not mean that they have several of the same CD's, coffee cups, or that they share a car. These types of utterances consist of matters that are more or less unidentified facts. Neither do "objects" need to be related to material items, but can have a

grammatical meaning. Already it is evident that these terms have abstract qualities and that they are quite capacious.

“Thing” can also explain the concrete yet ambiguous within the everyday according to Brown. This is visible in this example, “put it by that red thing in the window.” There is physicality attached to the item in the window, but also ambiguity as it fails to get a proper definition. When saying, “I have a thing I need to go to tomorrow”, “thing” functions to overcome the loss of other words, or as a placeholder for describing an event that has yet to come. Moving on, it can describe an indeterminate characteristic, or be the answer to an irresolvable question as in this next utterance: “there is a thing about the poem that I will never understand” (Brown, 2001, p. 4).

In conclusion so far, “thing” can seem to be located somewhere between the nameable and the unnamable. Brown continues with, “[i]t can be thought of as the amorphousness out of which objects are materialised by the perceiving subject, the anterior physicality of the physical world emerging, or the after effect of the mutual composition of the subject and the object” (Brown, 2001, p. 5). Here he introduces how an “object” turns into a “thing”. He also sheds light on the fact that things and their physicality are largely dependent on the perceiving subject. Brown indicates that an object becomes a thing when it can no longer be taken for granted as part of the natural environment. More accurately, the “thingness” of objects becomes visible and knowable when the object world is somehow interrupted. If the glass of a window breaks for example, it asserts itself as a thing. As touched upon in the introduction we do not often pay attention to an object unless it breaks or we lose it. Brown distinguishes these alterations with the subject as what makes an object into a thing (2001, p. 4).

In terms of the physicality of things, they make their appearance with suddenness in our everyday lives. Brown reminds us that we are constantly “caught up in things” (Brown, 2001, p. 4). This may be illustrated through the encounter with a plastic toy lying on the floor causing you to trip and fall on your face, or when you cut your fingertip on a piece of paper.

As touched upon in the introduction, my main emphasis is on the material aspect of objects and things, or rather, on the material object as perceived by the characters. The way objects assert themselves as things is of interest in my thesis, but will not be consistently remarked as a distinction between the two, as is the case of Brown. I use the terms quite interchangeably, and relate to their common meaning foremost. I wish to detect the way in which objects do not only serve as generalities for humans, but how the individual character perceives them and further what this subjective significance reveals characteristically or thematically in terms of the social and cultural context of the novel.

3. Objects and Structure

3.1. The Structure of the Novel

In order to detect objects that provide structure in the narration of *To the Lighthouse* I will make an attempt to distinguish an overall structure of the novel itself. Further, the structure of the novel with its three sections display different perspectives of the subject-object relation. These distinctions emphasise the representation of multiple perspectives that Woolf was loyal to in her attempt at depicting reality.

The structure of *To the Lighthouse* was the first to make its appearance in Woolf's mind before she started writing. Clearly, structure in this novel is of importance. In her diary she wrote that she viewed it as "two blocks joined by a corridor" (as cited in Lee, 1996, p. 475). These two blocks resulted in the first and last section, *The Window* and *The Lighthouse*, whereas the joining corridor turned into the *Time Passes* section.

The first section of the novel, *The Window*, and the last section named after the title of the novel itself, *The Lighthouse*, are the longer ones. In the middle there is a shorter section, *Time Passes*. The *Time Passes* section not only stands out from the two other sections by virtue of it being shorter, but also, this section has a different structure. The longer sections revolve around the characters and their immediate perceptions, encounters with objects, relations with objects and with other characters, whereas the *Time Passes* section makes room for objects to appear on their own, simply in the presence of time. This section provides images of what happens when things are left unattended. The notions of external and internal space are brought to the reader's mind due to the formal distinctions between the different parts. The last part of the book, *The Lighthouse*, gives the novel a circular essence and includes the scene where Mr. Ramsay, James and Cam actually go to see the lighthouse.

The subtitles of the different sections also reveal structural differences. A distinction between them is already recognised in the table of contents. The first and last sections have titles that are objects, namely *the window* and *the lighthouse* (my emphasis). The window and the lighthouse have distinct structural qualities. The definite article reveals that a specific type of window and lighthouse are being referred to. However, objects and external life do not primarily occupy these sections, as the titles may suggest. On the other hand, as mentioned above, this is the main focus in the *Time Passes* section. The middle section does not refer to

any particular time. Time is hard to distinguish in clear terms. The title indicates continuous movement, which is the most recognizable feature in the phenomena of time.

The middle section has a time span of several years as opposed to the other two sections, which account for less than a day. This is in contrast to the fact that it is shorter than the other two sections. Again, an emphasis is placed on time's superiority and the sense of it simply flying by unnoticeably. The deaths of Mrs. Ramsay, Prue and Andrew are mentioned in parentheses in the *Time Passes* section. Another aspect of the brutal ways of time is here demonstrated. Time does not take any precautions. In the hands of the world and in the continuous passing movement of time, people are small.

The structure of the novel with its three sections resembles the way life passes by. In the beginning of life one is drawn to the actual moment, exploring everything one sees, and getting to know one's surroundings. New experiences are interpreted based on previous ones. In the passing of life one discovers how fast time flies by, and that moments, objects, and people, are in danger of not being preserved once time gains more and more power. In the end one perhaps feels the need to make sense of it all. In accordance with this the expedition to the lighthouse takes place, and at the same time there has been a shift in perspective. This shift is not only based on the distance to the lighthouse, but marks a shift in perspective to one's own life.

3.2. Objects as Structural Devices

This chapter focuses on things and objects that occur in the narrative in terms of providing structure. My focus is mainly on a type of "local" structure in my thesis, apart from the three prominent objects that I will account for in this section. "Local" in this sense implies the type of structure that is created due to the objects' role as space providers for the characters' thoughts.

According to the topic of my thesis, my main attention when reading *To the Lighthouse*, fell on the occurrence of things and objects. Morten Nøjgaard presents the existence of "keywords" as essential in order to distinguish certain words or topics that play extra significance in a narrative. The "keywords" are located in the narration as words that are subjected to repetition, as words that stand in contrast to one another, as words that have significant placement in the text, or as words that appear in remarkable combinations (Nøjgaard, 1979, p. 106). Many of the objects in *To the Lighthouse* correspond to the criteria attached to "keywords".

3.2.1. The Window

As proposed earlier on, the window has prominent importance in the novel. Already in the table of contents our attention is drawn to the window, as it is the title of the first section. The window is the first object that is mentioned within the narration. It appears as a recurring object throughout the section.

The window as an object is quite fascinating. It consists of a frame and a piece of glass. Bill Brown explains in his *Thing Theory* that what we do with objects is that we look through them. By looking through things we detect what they hold in store about history, culture, society, that is to say, “what they disclose about us” (Brown, 2001, p. 4). Looking through things involves interpreting them based on their relationship to us. The object or the thing itself is not given much consideration, but rather the focus is placed on its use-value and what purpose it serves a human actor. This is literally what happens in the encounter with a window. We look through it in order to gain information of what is either to be found inside or outside a building or a vehicle, depending on our own localization. The window connects what is inside with the outside.

Further, the window constructs important parts of the novel’s visual space. This is also what windows do in real life; they enable us to expand our sight to reach a wider range. The sense that several things are going on at the same time is enforced by the presence of the window. Through the window as a spatial element, the reader is granted access to three scenes at the same time. There is Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Tansley pacing up and down the terrace outside, Mrs. Ramsay and James sitting inside the house, and Lily Briscoe is also within eyesight of Mrs. Ramsay and James through the window.

Mr. Ramsay communicates with Mrs. Ramsay and James through the window. This provides information of the window being open. An open window adds interesting qualities to the window. It shows how an object can actually cease to be an object when it is used. The open window displays nothingness. There is no longer a frame of glass separating the outside from the inside. The separation of the outside from the inside has been erased. For Virginia Woolf modern literature was an art deriving from the nature of the faculties of perception. She was exploring the points of connection and disjunction between the inner and the outer world (Harker, 2011, p. 2). She wanted to explore the boundaries between inner and outer life, and she often found these borders to be penetrable. Symbolically an association can perhaps be drawn to Woolf’s attempts to break down the barriers between inner and outer world through the open window. The fact that Mrs. Ramsay keeps obsessing about “opening windows” might also be referring to the aspect of diminishing boundaries between inner and outer world.

The window's framing features still exist even though it is open. They can be applied to the structure of the novel. The window presents a frame for the story to unfold between. Woolf's stream of consciousness technique fits well with the structural provisions of the window. The visual scene is rich, and the distance created by the window gives the stream of thoughts of the characters the possibility to expand quite rapidly. The readers also get the sense of looking at the unfolding story through a window. A new pair of glasses is given to the readers, as one will always interpret a situation slightly different from others. A certain distance is also provided, as we literally do not take part in the action.

Through the window the character of Mr. Ramsay is as mentioned within eyesight. Mr. Ramsay's position on the terrace while he is thinking reveals a lot of aspects of his character. He is walking up and down which sends signals of his insecurity and instability. His stream of thoughts also reveals the uncertainties of his character. Mr. Ramsay always seeks Mrs. Ramsay's affirmations of his talent as a philosopher.

One might also think of the window as an object that enables Woolf to look back into her past and childhood, as this novel has been recognised as an autobiography by the author herself. "[T]o have father's character complete in it; & mother's; & St. Ives; & childhood ... " (Woolf, 1980, p.18). She is in distance to her past, but the memories are so vivid that she is able to visualise them as if she was looking through a window right there and then. By the distance presented by the window and the years that have passed, Woolf can view her past with a new pair of glasses.

Importantly, the window also offers a view for the characters and thereby also the readers to the most important object of *To the Lighthouse*, namely the lighthouse itself.

3.2.2. The Lighthouse

The constant presence of the lighthouse throughout the narration structures our emphasis to always be more or less occupied by the lighthouse. The lighthouse gives the narration both structural and symbolical clues as to where the story is heading.

Woolf herself claimed that the lighthouse was not an emphasised symbolic feature in the novel. "I meant *nothing* by the lighthouse. One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together" (as cited in Lee, 1992, p. 21). To my mind however, the lighthouse's symbolic reference cannot be ignored. The lighthouse guides ships, but it also guides the narration in *To the Lighthouse*. It guides the characters towards an understanding of their lives and in finding their way and purpose. The lighthouse is a point of stability in the

otherwise ever changing and unpredictable world of the novel. As Woolf intended, it holds the sections together.

Furthermore, the lighthouse sends out different types of beams that hit different parts of the surface. There are always additional aspects of meaning, and different viewpoints, in all the corners of the earth. The same way Woolf was delineating the subjective perceptions of her characters, the lighthouse stands out as another reference that sheds light on different angles and nuances of the surroundings, thereby adding additional networks of perspectives to the depiction of reality.

The conflict in the opening passage of the novel, on whether or not to go to the lighthouse the next day, reveals some of Woolf's views concerning gender differences. Woolf was devoted in discussing the way men seemed to be constrained by facts while women were driven by their more emotional and emphatic side (Harker, 2011, p. 12). Mr. Ramsay comments on the bad weather and states that they will not be able to make their way across the ocean to see the lighthouse the next day.

“It was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure of or convenience of any mortal being, least of all his own children, who, sprung from his loins, should be aware from childhood that life is difficult; facts uncompromising” (Woolf, 2000, p. 8).

Meanwhile, Mrs. Ramsay sees the same clouds but twists the truth in order to please James. “‘But it may be fine – I expect it will be fine,’ said Mrs. Ramsay, making some little twist of the reddish-brown stocking she was knitting, impatiently” (Woolf, 2000, p. 8). The same way she twists the stocking she is making, she twists the truth in order to spare James' feelings. This is a quality that Woolf felt was typical in women, foremost in the Victorian ideal, which many of the qualities in Mrs. Ramsay can be compared to.

The light beams of the lighthouse constantly interrupt the dark and abandoned Ramsay house in the *Time Passes* section.

“When darkness fell, the stroke of the lighthouse, which had laid itself with such authority upon the carpet in the darkness, tracing its pattern, came now in the softer light of spring mixed with moonlight gliding gently as if it laid its

caress and lingered stealthily and looked and came lovingly again” (Woolf, 2000, pp. 144-145).

Also, later in this section the reader is reminded of the lighthouse’s dominance in the story:

“The place was gone to rack and ruin. 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 shallow, the rat and the straw” (Woolf, 2000, p. 150).

The lighthouse provides stability and enables life to go on inside the Ramsay house. Woolf was eager in exploring light and the bodily senses, especially that of vision. The provision of light from the lighthouse beam enables the articles in the Ramsay house to be distinguished.

The beginning of the middle section starts with Mr. Bankes saying, “[w]ell, one must simply wait for the future to show It’s almost too dark to see, said Andrew coming up from the beach. One can hardly tell which is the sea and which is the land, said Prue” (Woolf, 2000, p. 137). Woolf’s exploration of the bodily senses is also evident here. Without light we cannot see, and without sight one does not know what exists before us any more, and we cannot tell things apart.

Arriving at the lighthouse in the end changes the perspective according to the clues we have been given from the beginning of the story. When Mr. Ramsay, Cam and James sit in the boat heading towards the island where the lighthouse stands, Mr. Ramsay looks back at their house. At the same time he looks back at the past and sees himself walking up and down the terrace. In the same way Woolf was finally able to process the past and the loss of her parents, as they have been recognised as Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Ramsay in the novel, Mr. Ramsay can digest his past in the distance presented by the ocean and in finally arriving at the lighthouse. Arriving at the lighthouse perhaps also represents a more intimate and honest meeting between husband and wife. He fulfils Mrs. Ramsay’s wish of taking their son to see the lighthouse, and acknowledges her wishes and independence. Also, as Mrs. Ramsay is constantly compared and even merged with the light of the lighthouse, this encounter between Mr. Ramsay and the lighthouse also signifies that Mr. Ramsay finally sees her as an independent being.

“See the little house”, he said pointing, wishing Cam to look. She raised herself reluctantly and looked. But which was it? She could no longer make out, there on the hillside which was their house” (Woolf, 2000, p. 180). Mr. Ramsay is able to locate their house in the

distance. However, when Cam tries to catch glimpse of it she fails. Mr. Ramsay is further annoyed by the fact that Cam fails to detect their house across the sea. The father of the family has reached another stadium of his life and is able to make some sort of sense of the past. Cam, on the other hand, has not reached this point in her life. She is not able to make sense of the past yet. Presumably she does not feel the need to either. Rather, she is drawn into the presence of the moment and feels the distance of the ocean also distances her from the island where their house is located.

The change in perspective emphasises what Woolf was loyal to displaying, the importance of additional networks of meaning, and the subjective account of reality. This is in accordance with some of the beliefs of her father, Leslie Stephen. He defended the freedom of the individual consciousness and questioned assumptions of the external reality. He proposed that every individual must seek, find and defend his or her own truth (de Gay, 2006, p. 122). In the final section when James finally sees the lighthouse up close Woolf sheds light on different perspectives and how they are all part of reality. James remembers his view of the lighthouse when he was a little boy as opposed to now.

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

James looked at the Lighthouse. He could see the tower, stark and straight; he could see that it was barred with black and white; he could see windows in it ... So that was the Lighthouse, was it?

No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing.” (Woolf, 2000, p. 202)

3.2.3. The Painting

In the first section Lily’s painting is first mentioned when Mrs. Ramsay remembers that she needs to sit still for Lily to paint her. The painting then keeps reappearing in the narration. It is the project of Lily Briscoe and it has many different aspects of significance in the novel. In this subsection I will present the ones that are of structural importance.

The painting in a way structures the novel thematically and draws our attention to art and different opinions of what art should be. Further, the demanding task of completing an artwork is demonstrated through Lily. Early on she envisions the image she wants to capture on her canvas, but when she takes the brush in hand everything suddenly changes. Woolf

displays how we are constantly subjected to new impressions and unable to stand still in a moment.

The painting also draws our attention to that of different modes of representation. Lily Briscoe constantly feels subjected to critique by Mr. Bankes. He awakens many doubts in her concerning her role as a female painter. It appears he has a different view of what constitutes art. In order to examine Lily's painting he puts on his glasses, which perhaps strengthens our sense of him viewing art differently. He sees art with another pair of glasses.

“What did she wish to indicate by the triangular purple shape, ‘just there?’ he asked.

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

But the picture was not of them. Or, not in his sense. There were other senses, too, in which one might reverence them. By a shadow here and a light there, for instance” (Woolf, 2000, pp. 58-59).

Woolf finds expression of her high interest in subjectivity through Lily. Lily has a different view on art than Mr. Bankes. He seems to be more interested in the type of art that represents reality, while Lily tries to capture and represent the essence of Mrs. Ramsay, and not her appearance. This way Woolf reminds the reader that subjectivity is always at work in art as in real life. Tolliver Brown argues that Woolf's interpretation of art through Lily's painting bears similarities with Einstein and his theory of relativity. The triangular shape that Lily adapts to the figures of mother and son are reminiscent of the triangle that Einstein's teacher formulated in order to facilitate the understanding of the complexities in relativity. Space was one of the lines in a right triangle, time another and the third, the hypotenuse, referred to space-time brought together (Tolliver Brown, 2009, p. 46). Tolliver Brown thus recognises Woolf as exploring scientific ideas.

More so, the painting also facilitates the reader to predict where the story is going. In the final section Lily finally manages to capture her vision of Mrs. Ramsay on the canvas. This aspect, in addition to the landing on the island of the lighthouse, changes the whole perspective of the novel. Lily has reached her goal at the same time as James, his father and sister, have reached the lighthouse. The restrictions implied by the window frame in the first section have been removed, and Lily can finally express her vision more freely. The death of Mrs. Ramsay, who, as mentioned, resembles the Victorian ideal, perhaps indicates the change

from the romantic era to the modern period, where other artistic values could surface. The physical absence of Mrs. Ramsay in the final section forces Lily to look for an alternate signifying system (Moise, 2011, p. 35). Mrs. Ramsay's beauty and sense of mystery complicates Lily's interpretation of her earlier in the novel. The essence of Mrs. Ramsay stays invisible until her death, which implies that Mrs. Ramsay is not subjected to small, constant changes, any longer. When Mr. Ramsay leaves for the lighthouse, Lily is finally able to get rid of the patriarchal constraints that used to be imposed on her, and she can complete her painting (de Gay, 2006, p. 123).

4. The Relationship Between Characters and Things

This chapter presents objects that are in relation to the characters. The same way as grammatical correspondence in sentences is dependent on the object phrase standing in relation to the noun phrase, this is also the case in *To the Lighthouse* and in real life. The most important aspect of narrative technique in *To the Lighthouse* is as indicated earlier, Woolf's stream of consciousness technique. Awareness of the notions of this technique provides guidance in terms of approaching the analysis. This technique visualises the relationship all humans have with things around us. They appear in our consciousness and direct our thoughts.

4.1. The Stream of Consciousness Technique

The philosopher-psychologists, William James and Henri Bergson, were essential in introducing the thought of consciousness as a stream that flows. Further, they proclaimed that the mind has its own time and space. These are not correspondent with the ones of the external world, but exist within the consciousness of the individual (as cited in Steinberg, 1979, p. 176). Lothe describes both time and space as basic in terms of fiction and to human beings. Finding a definition of them is hard, as they are fluctuating utterances (2003, p. 76).

In Bachelard's contribution to explaining these terms, he states that time and space need not be separated categories (Bachelard, 1994, p. 8). He defines space as something that creates identity. This aspect is further linked to when and under what circumstance we appeared in that space. Foremost, Bachelard engages in the house as a narrative space. All people are closely attached to their houses, especially as children. Further, he claims that the importance of our childhood home is often made clear to us in later years (Bachelard, 1994, p. 4). This is in accordance with the setting, the space, and the conditions for writing *To the Lighthouse*. It is an autobiographical novel depicting Woolf's own childhood spent with her family at their summerhouse at St. Ives.

Woolf was utterly dedicated to understanding the complexities of time and space. Through her usage of the stream of consciousness technique she reveals that she also viewed space and time as phenomena that were to be experienced within an individual's mind. Further, she explores the external qualities of time and space in the *Time Passes* section of *To the Lighthouse*. She uses objects in decay as indications of the passing of time. Woolf saw time as superior, impossible to slow down or stall. In terms of dealing with space, her world

of things and her characters' perceptions of things show that nothing simply has one point of connection (Tolliver Brown, 2009, p. 54).

Woolf's charge to the novelist is expressed through her utterance "[l]et 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 incidence scores upon the consciousness" (as cited in Steinberg, 1979, p. 25). This statement displays her interest in the pre-speech phase of impressions. More specifically, it shows her engagement in recounting realism. The technique of stream of consciousness allowed her to explore the pre-speech phase, along with time and space within her characters.

In terms of defining this technique in novels one can find a definition in *Stream of Consciousness Technique in the Modern Novel*. Here, the definition reads that it is a type of

[p]sychological novel which takes as its subject matter the uninterrupted, uneven, and endless flow of one or more of its characters. [C]onsciousness is meant to cover the total range of awareness and emotive- mental response of an individual, from the lowest pre-speech level to the highest fully articulated level of rational thought. The assumption is that in the mind of an individual at a given moment his stream of consciousness is a mixture of all the levels of awareness, an unending flow of sensations, thoughts, memories, associations, and reflections; if the exact content of the mind ("consciousness") is to be described at any moment, then these varied, disjointed, and illogical elements must find expression in a flow of words, images, and ideas similar to the unorganized flow of the mind. (Steinberg, 1979, p. 6)

4.1.1. Things in Terms of Connecting the Internal and the External World

The opening scene of *To the Lighthouse* where James and Mrs. Ramsay discuss going to the lighthouse the next day is constantly spread with exterior elements to the action itself. These correspond to the features mentioned in the former paragraph. Auerbach draws our attention to the fact that these elements do not disturb the action, but they fill up more space and time in narration than one initially would have pictured (1992, p.17). These non-disturbing but present elements are mainly those of inner processes. This is where Woolf's narrative technique is most visible. The inner processes are, as defined above, movements within the consciousness of individual personages, not necessarily even personages who are present in the main unfolding scene. Mrs. Ramsay's consciousness starts dwelling on other things while

she is sitting with her son James. Her mind is preoccupied with the stocking she is knitting and the mess around the house (Auerbach, 1992, p. 16-17).

‘I expect it will be fine’, said Mrs. Ramsay making some twist of the reddish-brown stocking she was knitting, impatiently. If she finished it tonight, if they did go to the lighthouse after all, it was to be given to the Lighthouse keeper for his little boy who was threatened with a tuberculous hip; together with a pile of old magazines, and some tobacco, indeed whatever she could find lying about, not really wanted, but only littering the room (Woolf, 2000, p. 8).

The objects that surface in the characters stream of thoughts are often subjected to the confirmation of their existence. In a way the contrast of an external world to the characters’ internal world, adds meaning for the character. According to Brown we place a lot of meaning in things due to their physicality (1999, n.p). Woolf makes a nice imagery of this aspect of the external reality, and how it seems to put us at ease with our own perceptions, through displaying the thoughts and imageries of Mr. Ramsay.

[A]s one raises one’s eyes from a page in an express train and sees a farm, a tree, a cluster of cottages as an illustration, a confirmation of something on the printed page to which one returns, fortified and satisfied him and consecrated his effort to arrive at a perfectly clear understanding of the problem which now engaged the energies of his splendid mind. (Woolf, 2000, p. 38)

It is hard to make sense of things simply in our own minds. The external world facilitates this process, and offers material, external items, that we can put memories and associations into. The external objects provide additional networks of meaning in order to get closer to the essence of truth and reality.

As mentioned, Toller Brown discusses how Woolf explored the penetrable boundaries between subjects and objects. Mrs. Ramsay is constantly subjected to comparison to light. At one point she feels connected to the lighthouse beam, and even feels that she becomes one with it.

[S]he looked out to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of three, which was her stroke, ... 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 ...

It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to things, 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 (Woolf, 2000, p. 70).

Woolf was also interested in the concept of group consciousness as remarked by Tolliver Brown (2009, p. 43). Through objects she feels she can unite the characters' consciousness. One of the most effective objects of unification is the dinner table. Here, the Ramsay family and their guests meet to enjoy a meal of boeuf en daube. Mrs. Ramsay strengthens the unification aspect in her almost obsessive need to entertain her guests although their stream of consciousness reveals that they are preoccupied by their own worries and affairs.

However, the dinner table does what a table usually does, namely gather people for a social meal. Woolf can explore and develop the stream of thoughts of all the characters simultaneously due to the presence of the dinner table. At some point she tries to connect the consciousness of different personas while they are present around the table. Another object located at the dinner table is drawn into this merging of different character's consciousness.

[I]n the middle a yellow and purple dish of fruit. What had she done with it, Mrs. Ramsay wondered, for Rose's arrangement of the grapes and pears ... [T]o her pleasure (for it brought them into sympathy momentarily) she saw that Augustus too feasted his eyes on the same plate of fruit ... That was his way of looking, different from hers. But looking together united them. (Woolf, 2000, pp. 105-106).

Lily's thoughts circle around the challenges she experiences with finishing her painting while she is sitting at the dinner table. As Lily's eye catches a glimpse of the saltcellar on the table, she thinks of moving the tree in her painting to the centre. She picks up the saltcellar and puts it down again on a flower in the tablecloth, "so as to remind herself to move the tree" (Woolf, 2000, p. 93). Lily constantly catches a glimpse of it again, and her idea of moving the tree resurfaces in her mind every time. The saltcellar as an object is not specifically referred to, rather, this object displays how Lily's line of thoughts surface and develop. She has attached an idea to the saltcellar. This is an individual occupational idea of hers that has no clear

attachment to the item itself. Woolf's stream of consciousness technique is visible here, as well as the fact that we put individual associations and reminders into things. These associations have the tendency of reappearing in the encounter with the object we first attached these ideas to. Harker's focus on inattention is also visible here. In the later encounters with the saltcellar, Lily seems to go back in time again and live through the idea she initially had. Even though time has passed, Lily does not see this difference in the saltcellar and her thoughts can resurface as if the moment comes back. The saltcellar also unexpectedly floats back into Lily's consciousness through the sense of vision.

4.2. Things that Reveal Characteristics

Many of the items that occur in *To the Lighthouse* have prominence as revealing characteristics. In this chapter I will comment on an excerpt of these.

One of the most visible changes in civilization during the 20th century was perhaps that women were starting to make themselves more and more visible outside of the domestic sphere. The phenomenon of "housewives" was challenged by the new group of educated intellectuals and aesthetically developed women who were ready to make their appearance. They wanted to prove that they were intellectual individuals who could contribute to society (Shaffer, 1993, p. 91).

Brian W. Shaffer introduces Woolf's ambivalent view on women as part of civilization. He comments upon the fact that most of Woolf's heroines struggle with the constraints imposed on them by the conventions of society. In *To the Lighthouse* he finds that the two opposing groups of women that Bell distinguished, are represented through the figures of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe (Shaffer, 1993, p. 91). Mrs. Ramsay is bound by the old conventions and functions as a figure from the group of "housewives", related to the Victorian heroine. The stocking and the act of knitting is primarily associated with the Victorian ideal of the previous age and with Woolf's own mother, who has been distinguished as inspirational to the whole character of Mrs. Ramsay. "[T]o have father's character done complete in it; & mother's" (DIII, 1980, p. 18)². There are many similarities between Mrs. Ramsay and the Victorian ideal of the domestic "housewife". Mrs. Ramsay's affective and maternal qualities are revealed through the reddish-brown stocking as well. This is an item she has planned to give to the lighthouse keeper's son whom she sympathises with.

² Abbreviated title of source: *The Diary of Virginia Woolf. Volume Three. 1925-1930*

As Mrs. Ramsay's counterpart stands Lily Briscoe, who attempts to make it as a female painter (Shaffer, 1993, p. 91). Lily never marries and chooses another path in life than most other women of the time. Mrs Ramsay is fixed on creating order and is bound by old morals. She constantly reflects upon the mess around the house, and also on who might be ideal for marriage among the single residents of the summerhouse. She feels that marriage is something that is essential in order to be complete and reach the state of being "in order" as a woman. Lily Briscoe, however, never marries.

The stocking also says something about Mrs. Ramsay's dominance and power in the novel. She seems to be twisting the stocking according to how she wishes to twist the future. Mrs. Ramsay is occupied with the thought of being kind to those around her. She wants to be remembered for her kindness. Her kindness is something she can knit into the stocking she is making for the poor lighthouse keeper's son. This aspect touches upon the aspect of preservation through things. She both connects and twists the environment around her by the help of her knitting. The stocking reaches a high level of personal significance due to it being handmade. Thereby it is very intimate for Mrs. Ramsay to be making it.

A nice contrast between the handmade everyday object and technological innovations is drawn in the opening pages of the novel. James is cutting out machineries from the Army and Navy Catalogue meanwhile Mrs. Ramsay is knitting. The machines are only representations of the real thing, but appear so vivid and fascinating in the little boy's mind. Gender and age differences can also be spotted here. With the new generation come new innovations. The male psyche perhaps also proves to be more intrigued by these types of discoveries and technological developments. By placing the scissors nicely and accurately around the edges of the machines, James creates solid images of these innovations and their shapes and edges in his mind. However, the innovations are impersonal objects. They have a certain distance both because of the fact that they are machine produced, but also because they are simply images in a catalogue. On the other hand, the stocking that Mrs. Ramsay is making is personal, and even in the making as the scene unfolds.

Another way in which Mrs. Ramsay proves her intellectual way of twisting aspects in order to please others is with the boar's skull on the wall.

What had possessed Edward to send them this horrid skull? She had been so foolish as to let them nail it up there. It was nailed fast, Mildred said, and Cam couldn't go to sleep with it in the room, and James screamed if she touched it.

...

‘Well then,’” said Mrs Ramsay, ‘we will cover it up’ ... she quickly took her own shawl off and wound it round the skull ... she came back to Cam ... said how lovely it looked now; how the fairies would love it; it was like a bird’s nest ...

Now, she whispered, crossing over to his bed, James must go to sleep too, for see, she said, the boar’s skull was still there ... He made sure that the skull was still there under the shawl. (Woolf, 2000, pp. 124- 125)

By putting the shawl over the skull Mrs. Ramsay pleases both Cam and James. Woolf also explores the aspect of vision here. As long as Cam cannot see the frightening skull, even though it is still there, she is not afraid. At the same time knowing that the skull is there even though he cannot see it, pleases James. He has a representation of the skull in his mind.

When Charles Tansley accompanies Mrs. Ramsay into town we get another aspect of Mrs. Ramsay’s character revealed through an object that she possesses. “As for her little bag, might he not carry that? No, no, she said, she always carried *that* herself. She did too. Yes, he felt that in her” (Woolf, 2000, p. 15). Mrs. Ramsay proves her independent and strong qualities through the signal that “she always carrie[s] [her bag] herself”. Perhaps it also implies that Mrs. Ramsay is a mysterious woman who likes to keep her things to herself. Lily later discovers Mrs. Ramsay’s mysterious ways, and this is part of the reason why she struggles to complete the image of her. Further, in terms of the bag, letting a man carry your purse makes you reliant on the man, and also in some sort of debt to him. On the way back Mrs. Ramsay however lets him take hold of her bag. Mr. Tansley’s character is poor and insecure, and perhaps the sympathetic side of Mrs. Ramsay finally lets him carry her bag in order for him to feel heroic and proud by the side of such an extraordinary, beautiful woman.

Mrs. Ramsay’s beauty is constantly being discussed in the first part of the novel. Lily Briscoe is struggling to get to the core of her beauty and further make a representation of Mrs. Ramsay in her painting. More so, Mrs. Ramsay’s beauty is being compared to objects in order to make sense of it. This corresponds with Brown and Tolliver Brown’s findings. We put a lot of meaning in things. By comparing human qualities to things we suddenly feel that it makes more sense to us. “[T]he torch of her beauty; she carried it erect into any room that she entered” (Woolf, 2000, p. 47). Mrs. Ramsay’s beauty being compared to a torch, and further one that she carries erect, makes one think of the type of beauty that lights up any room and which seems to be a type of guiding light. This is also revealing typical traits of Mrs. Ramsay. She is the unifying force in the narrative.

Mrs. Ramsay appears as a stable character for the people around her. Her sense of being content is displayed through the comparison she makes between herself and a sailor. She contemplates that “had the ship sunk he would have whirled round and round and found rest on the floor of the sea” (Woolf, 2000, p. 92). In the same passage Lily thinks of Mrs. Ramsay as a ship. This suggests both that it might be natural to compare Mrs. Ramsay to a ship, and also that there is a link in the internal mindsets of Lily and Mrs. Ramsay. Their thoughts revolve around the same thing.

The character’s footwear is often given attention. Our shoes are prominent and significant objects for us. They take us through the path of life symbolically and literally. A worn out pair of shoes proposes that the person wearing them has been places in his or her life. When a person enters a room out of sight from people who are already present, it is the sound of the shoes touching the ground that reveals the arrival of the person.

In *Exhibiting the Example: Virginia Woolf’s Shoes* John Nash proposes that Woolf seemed to have a thing for footwear. Many of her novels remark upon the footwear of her protagonists. *To the Lighthouse* is no exception (2013, p. 1).

“Her shoes were excellent he observed. They allowed the toes their natural expansion” (Woolf, 2000, p. 22). This is an observation made by Mr. Bankes as he is approaching Lily. Lily, as described earlier in this chapter, represents the new group of aesthetical and intellectual women. The observation of her shoes might be a token of Lily as a character of independence. They were “excellent” and “allowed the toes their natural expansion” (ibid), implying that Lily can go whichever road she chooses in her life and furthermore take up the space she needs. She can be herself.

The displaying of the character of Mr. Ramsay involves numerous encounters with his “excellent boots”. Brown states the fact that a “thing” can describe and identify something that goes beyond the physicality of the object. He sheds light on the way things can be said to describe the way in which objects can become values, fetishes, idols and totems (Brown, 2001, p. 5). “Mr. Ramsay would talk about his boots about the hour” (Woolf, 2000, p. 113). Obviously the boots have special importance for Mr. Ramsay and his character. This importance goes beyond the physicality of the boots. Mr. Ramsay is a man who seeks a lot of attention and confirmation. He wants to be seen and admired. The boots correspond to his character and vanity. In order to account for his own feelings Mr. Ramsay draws a comparison to a pair of boots, “[h]e felt rigid and barren, like a pair of boots that have been soaked and gone dry so that you can hardly force your feet into them” (Woolf, 2000, p. 98). Obviously boots are something Mr. Ramsay feels connected to, they make a lot of sense to

him and his own understanding of his character. The soaked boots impose constraints on Mr. Ramsay, constraints that he does not feel comfortable with. The image of the boots is formed within Mr. Ramsay's mind. This proves how we are able to visualise representations of things.

After the passing of Mrs. Ramsay when Mr. Ramsay has no female to affirm his strengths he turns to Lily for solitude. Lily does not know how to approach his needs, but instead she comments on his boots.

She could see them walking to his room on their own accord, expressive in his absence of pathos ...

'What beautiful boots!' she exclaimed. She was ashamed of herself. To praise his boots when he asked her to solace his soul ...

Ah, yes, he said, holding his foot up for her to look at, they were first-rate boots (Woolf, 2000, p. 167-168).

Mr. Ramsay is content with the affirmation of his boots instead of his personal traits. He feels that they truly represent him.

The relationship between objects and characters is definitely intimate. After Mrs. Ramsay has passed away, Mrs. McNab pictures Mrs. Ramsay before her based on her memories of Mrs. Ramsay's clothes. This proves how we attach memories and associations in things.

There was the old grey cloak she wore gardening. (Mrs. McNab fingered it). She could see her, as she came up the drive with the washing, stooping over her flowers (the garden was a pitiful sight now, all run to riot, and rabbits scuttling at you out of the beds)—she could see her with one of the children by her in that grey cloak (Woolf, 2000, p. 148).

The cloak as an object displays the character of Mrs. Ramsay. Our personal belongings are intimately associated with us, and the cloak seems to bear the presence of its former owner even after her passing. The grey cloak also reveals that Mrs. Ramsay was not a character that demanded much attention.

4.3. Things that Appear Alienated from the Subject-Object Relation

The significance of most things and objects is determined based on a general matter. This points to the way in which we use cultural and historical codes to decipher the significance of

things. A table, for example, has a common and general significance for most of us. This object has been used as a social gathering point for people to sit around (and place things upon) mainly in order to consume food, for centuries. This historical and cultural association determines how we view the table and its functions. Woolf, however, is questioning what a table is isolated from its usual habitat. She decides to attempt to step away from humans' preconceptions of it. She explores this aspect of the object through the scene where Lily asks for an explanation of the meaning of Mr. Ramsay's philosophical ideas concerning "[s]ubject and object and the nature of reality, ... (Woolf, 2000, p. 28) ." "Think of a kitchen table then, ... , when you're not there" (ibid), she is told by Andrew. Lily then sees before her a kitchen table lodging in a pear tree. This image is found absurd and bizarre to the reader. The table is no longer found in its usual surroundings and the human percipient fails to make sense of it. Woolf explored the philosophical concepts of her father, Leslie Stephen through Mr. Ramsay.

Brown draws our attention to the fact that we do not pay attention to the object itself or the "thingness" of the object unless it stops working for us (Brown, 2001, p. 5). The inability to utilise an object the way we are used to is what makes us more attentive in the encounter with it. This is in accordance with the table in the tree. All of a sudden we are questioning the table as an isolated object. We visualise its shape more vividly, and we reflect upon its meaning aside from the occupations we have always attached to it. This happens although the image of the table in the tree appears very bizarre.

We mainly understand things by putting our focus on use-value and what purpose the things serve a human actor. Furthermore, we take their purpose for granted based on former experience, and we use them quite unconsciously. In *The Social Life of Things*, Arjun Appadurai, also declares that from a theoretical point of view, "human actors encode things with significance" (Appadurai, 1988, p. 5). This utterance stresses Brown's point. The outcome of the interaction between a subject and an object, for the subject, is always the main criterion in terms of deciding the object's significance. From a methodological perspective following the things themselves in motion determines the human and social context (ibid). Things can reveal a lot about human development.

All the while it is evident that things are accounted for based on a high degree of how they stand in relation to humans. Alone, without a perceiving subject, things do not seemingly serve much purpose. Woolf is devoted to exploring the theme of absence in the *Time Passes* section. By exploring the alienated subject-object relation Woolf draws our attention to the human senses. When things are left alone or in the dark, do they still exist? Without the presence of human beings applying the bodily senses of vision and touch to objects, what are

they? de Gay underlines that Woolf also questions the self in the *Time Passes* section, and how the self is simply a collection of perceptions (2006, p. 112). “[T]here was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say, ‘This is he’ or ‘This is she’ (Woolf, 2000, p. 137).

The *Time Passes* section is almost free from character dominance. The introduction to the section doubts the survival of things when darkness and absence make its prominence.

Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds, came into bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin, there a bowl of red and yellow dahlias, there the sharp edges and firm bulk of a chest of drawers. (Woolf, 2000, p. 137)

Woolf plays with the aspect of time in this section. Night falls upon the Ramsay house and we both feel that simply one night passes, but in reality we discover that several years have passed during the few pages of this section.

Almost one might imagine them, as they entered the drawing-room questioning and wondering, toying with the flap of hanging wall-paper, asking, would it hang much longer, when would it fall?” ...

The bare legs of tables, saucepans and china already furred, tarnished, cracked. What people had shed and left—a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some faded skirts and coats in wardrobes—those alone kept the human shape and in the emptiness indicated how once they were filled and animated; how once hands were busy with hooks and buttons ... (Woolf, 2000, p. 138-141)

Woolf seems to draw the conclusion that even though the Ramsay family and their summer guests are not present in the house, there are presences there to perceive it. Many of the objects are given human capacities involving thought and feeling, and we get the sense that the objects and the house have a life of their own. de Gay suggests that the presences in the house show Woolf’s belief in an inner soul that can survive on its own in the nature of reality (2006, p. 112).

Mrs. McNab enters the house towards the end of the *Time Passes* section. She has the ability to perceive it. The articles inside the house are able to exist because they live within the memories of the characters. The image of the house becomes a representation in the

characters' memories. Mrs. McNab's visual memories of the past are powerful. It is at this stage that the family re-enters the narrative. She sees the past as not simply something that used to exist, but something that still exists, simply in another place (de Gay, 2006, pp.119-120).

[Minta] cried out that she had lost her grandmother's brooch – her grandmother's brooch, the sole ornament she possessed. ... It was her grandmother's brooch, she would rather have lost anything but that, and yet Nancy felt, though it might be true that she minded losing her brooch, she wasn't crying only for that. She was crying for something else. ... But she did not know what for. (Woolf, 2000, p. 84-85)

The personal significance and the sentimental value of the brooch for Minta Doyle are here evident. The fact that it is an heirloom that she has got from her grandmother manifests this aspect. This sense of loss also reveals how things and their significance are not recognised before we are alienated from them. Furthermore, Minta expresses that she did not simply cry because of the loss of the material thing. She feels like she has lost something else as well. Perhaps this feeling of loss derives from the sense of losing a type of connection with her deceased grandmother. Her grandmother might have been an inspiration and a figure of admiration for Minta. She retrieved this essence of her grandmother from the brooch. Again, the relationship between objects and people is stressed. She associates her grandmother with the brooch, and more so, she can associate herself with her grandmother through the brooch. The brooch here functions like a bridge of bringing Minta and her grandmother in connection with one another. This example also demonstrates how much meaning and significance we can attach to things. More so, this meaning is made clear when the item is lost. The subject-object relation has been disturbed and the role of the item and the "thingness" makes its appearance like Brown suggests.

5. Conclusion

“I think, therefore I am”, René Descartes famously remarked. Through Woolf’s depiction of reality involving multiple thoughts that occur in the consciousness of her characters, this aspect of reality is firmly stated in *To the Lighthouse* as well. We are reminded that reality is a subjective feeling, and we all have to find our own truth.

This truth appears to visualise itself through our encounters with our surroundings, and as I stated early in the introduction, we are subjected to constant coexistence with the objects around us. The internal and external worlds are connected to one another through the subject and object relation. This is how the internal and external worlds are brought together. Time and movement give life to the relation between the internal and the external worlds. Our surroundings change as time passes and we move in space. Accordingly, our impressions and the thoughts produced by our encounters develop and alter.

Woolf depicts initial and original impressions of things and objects. She exemplifies how objects serve as reminders of memories, associations and other senses of meaning that need not be in evident relation to the object at all, but formed within the subjective self.

One aspect of how the objects make their appearance in *To the Lighthouse* is in the mindset of the characters as representations of the past, present or future. These objects appear in movements within the characters’ consciousness. Often the objects are simply thought about and not present within the surroundings of the characters. Some objects are also encountered and perceived by the characters, but rarely do objects occur as descriptions of the scenery. Neither, are the visual appearances of objects remarked upon. The objects are more or less always placed as framing the narrative, hence adding structure, saying something about characteristics, or presenting space for the subjective thoughts of the characters to be unfolded. Due to the use of the stream of consciousness technique, and the absence of a clear narrator, the objects in *To the Lighthouse* have a distinct place as indicators of characteristics that a fixed narrator would otherwise reveal.

Woolf exploits the multiple networks of meaning presented in objects. Not only do they function as spatial parts and demonstrate how the human brain works, they also initiate discussions about many phenomena, civilization and art in the time of Woolf’s literacy.

Woolf shows how objects that are perceived, become part of the inner world of the characters. Their external qualities are taken into and interpreted within the inner world. The existence of the objects as simply external elements is an aspect she explores in the *Time*

Passes section. There seems to be a response to the existence of things in isolation from human actors. We determine the significance of things, but they also determine or initiate our line of thoughts and our perception of reality. Although we as humans cannot fully experience the isolated external world, the objects of the Ramsay house have a life of their own in the absence of the former residents. The house is brought more and more back to life by the presence of the neighbour Mrs. McNab. She has memories of how the objects were once in contact with the people who used to live there. The objects seem to survive due to the memories that were once formed between themselves and people. Also, traces of the selves that once inhabited the Ramsay house can be discovered in the *Time Passes* section.

Woolf's interest in multiple perspectives of reality expands into her engagement in different modes of representation. Aspects of life, objects, and people, can be represented in different ways. Woolf concludes with the fact that one can never reach authoritative knowledge of any aspect in life, as pointed out by Harker (2011, p. 5). Through Lily and her painting we are reminded that we can never gain full knowledge of the character of Mrs. Ramsay as readers of the novel. Nor can Lily, or any of the other characters. Woolf exploits the theme of art and indirectly the potentials of visual signification. By doing this she is demonstrating how the "conventional narrative voice, and, at the same time language, as is merely symbols, prove to be insufficient to get access to the characters and to express reality" (Moise, 2011, p. 46). Different representations and subjective accounts however, lead us in the right direction. As Lily's discussion with Mr. Bankes concerning art exemplifies, art can display different types of representation. New modes of representation through art were being brought to the foreground during the period of modernism.

The existential thoughts that occupied Woolf were also haunting many of her protagonists. Mr. Ramsay often refers to Shakespeare and other grand names. He wonders whether life and the world would have been the same without Shakespeare. Furthermore, he wonders whether anyone will read his philosophical books. "(and she knew that Mr Ramsay was beginning) to be uneasy; to want somebody to say, Oh, but your work will last, Mr Ramsay," (Woolf, 2000, p. 117). Mr. Ramsay understands that through his books he can be read and preserved in generations to come. Lily also sees this aspect in art. This is revealed when she finishes her painting. She fears that it is not good enough to be preserved. Most artists are victims of this type of fear. "Yet it would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be rolled up and flung under a sofa" (Woolf, 2000, p. 195). Lily discovers that a representation of her talent can be preserved in her work of art.

Time's brutal ways took Mrs. Ramsay's life, as briefly mentioned in parentheses in the *Time Passes* section. Nonetheless, she lives on. Brian W. Shaffer points out that Mrs. Ramsay stands out as the chief civilizing force before and after her death (1993, p. 91). As Mrs. Ramsay can be subjected to comparison with the Victorian ideal, this suggests that the characteristics of the Victorian female are to be valued in the future as well. Mrs. Ramsay is preserved through the memories the other characters have of her. However, in the long run, these memories will fade away. Mrs. Ramsay lives on through Lily's painting of her. Furthermore, she is preserved in the material permanence of the lighthouse beam. Duration has thus revived and triumphed over time and death (Guiget, 1965, p. 253).

It is evident that through *To the Lighthouse* Woolf was investigating her own past in the attempt to make sense of it, and further understand her own existence at the time being. As she expressed herself through writing, she processed the loss of her parents. She also felt a type of recovery in doing this (de Gay, 2006, p. 96). Woolf collected her memories in the novel and made them attainable for readers. Every time the novel is read, a slightly different subjective impression of it will be formed. New interpretations add multiple perspectives of meaning to the story. However, one can never gain full insight into Woolf's own intentions when writing it. The novel is a representation of Virginia Woolf's childhood and her memories from St. Ives. Woolf manages to preserve herself and her past through the novel. The ability of preservation that art possesses is again demonstrated here. As pointed out by de Gay, Woolf does this both literally and biologically (2006, p. 129). All writing deals with absence and loss as language is made up of symbols for things that are absent. Woolf's talent as a writer is preserved on the written pages between the covers of the book.

Fully understanding your own purpose and existence is perhaps quite impossible. All we can do is simply, "wait for the future to show" (Woolf, 2000, p. 137), as uttered by Mr. Bankes in the novel. Lily asks herself, "Was there no safety? No learning by heart of the ways of the world?" (Woolf, 2000, p. 195). I think the answers to her questions are no. Reality remains somewhat that of a question mark. What is evident, however, is that through things and objects, and the sense of meaning we attach to them, comfort can be found. Things and objects make us aware of the coexistence between an inner and an outer world. They create a sense of order within us through this awareness. The universe is made up by elements of contrast, and order is found through the law and structured coexistence of these. We find a large amount of meaning in the things and objects around us. If we feel lost, they can provide a type of guidance. This type of guidance is similar to the one that can be provided by a lighthouse at the sea.

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