

## Sybolism in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

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### Özet

Bu makele, Virginia Woolf'un *To the Lighthouse* romanındaki sembolizmi incelemektedir. Yazar, romanında farklı sembolleri gerçek anlamları dışında kullanarak dil, kimlik ve anlatım üslubuna yeni bir bakış açısı kazandırmaktadır. Semboller genellikle "ironic" ve "imali" (suggestive) dir. Bu yeni yaklaşım ile, geleneksel romanda kullanılan dil, kimlik ve anlatım tarzı "dar" (fixed) anlamını yitirerek çok anlamlılık kazanır. Bu da, yazara hem modern perspektive uygun olarak modernist romanda yeni teknikler geliştirmesine hemde hayatın ve gerçeğin tek düze olmadığını göstererek bakış açımızı genişletmesine yardımcı olur.

When at work on *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Virginia Woolf writes in her diary: "I am making more use of symbolism, I observe..." (1970: 60). In another diary entry, she accounts for what she means through her use of symbolism in the novel:

...symbols which I had prepared. I am sure that this is the right way of using them - not in set pieces, as I had tried at first coherently, but simply as images, never making them work out; only suggest. Thus, I hope to have kept the sound of the sea and birds, dawn and garden, subconsciously present, doing their work underground. (1982: 10-1)

This entry is of importance for two reasons in terms of the styles and methods which Woolf strives to bring to modernist fiction. In this paper, I will focus on two interacting views by examining Woolf's use of symbolism in *To the Lighthouse*. First, her use of

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symbols as suggestive and evocative clearly challenges the British tradition of novel writing. As a woman writer, Woolf sees novel writing in England as so fixed and so focused upon the conventions of her ancestral class - the class which had created it for different purposes, because it was a different time. As she views, the traditional genre had not adapted itself to the dramatic changes that her generation was experiencing in the early decades of the twentieth century. In her well-known essays "Modern fiction" (1919) and "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924), therefore, Woolf attacks the Edwardian writers, H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy. In her view, they seek everything in solid facts through an undue emphasis on objective reality and the material world. But Woolf believes that the "enormous labour of providing the solidity, the likeness to life" overshadows a more complex conception of life (1948: 188). "Is life like this" she asks. "Must novels be like this?" (1948: 189). In answer to these questions, Woolf gives a summary of her own views for modernist fiction:

Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being "like this". Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions - trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old...Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it.

It is, at any rate, in some such fashion as this that we seek to define the quality which distinguishes the work of several young writers, among whom James Joyce is the most notable, from that of their predecessors. (1948: 189-90)

What, in effect, Woolf defines here as "life" is "consciousness" - the "unknown and uncircumscribed" aliveness of "an ordinary mind". Her dissatisfaction with traditional novels is located primarily upon the conception of human identity and reality they construct. Woolf's continuous quest for an answer to the question 'what is life as consciousness?' propels most of her experimentation with the form of the novel.

Woolf thus feels necessary to discover and develop new forms and methods of writing so as to explore and convey the "within", the "uncircumscribed" nature of identity as "life"

and of reality in her works. For Woolf, as for other modernists writers, the meaning of life is not solid, but changeable, “something very erratic, very undependable” (1992: 143-4), in which writers try to express the meaning of their modern experiences. What constructs meaning in modernist fiction is a sense, derived from heightened aesthetic awareness, of the texture of life as consciousness. This awareness includes the experience of characters in the novel, of the readers as well as of the writer who creates an aesthetic work of art. Through her use of symbols not as fixed but as suggestive and evocative, therefore, Woolf rejects the “appalling narrative business of the realist: getting you from lunch to dinner: it is false, unreal, merely conventional” (1980: 209). The traditional stability of narrative disappears, giving way to a view of identity and reality as indeterminate and unfinished in accordance with varying and complex modern experience.

Secondly, I suggests that Woolf relies heavily on private symbolism to reveal the inner consciousness of her chief characters in *To the Lighthouse*. The symbols such as the sea and the Lighthouse, for example, convey the continuous rhythm of characters’ emotive life - the inner life of characters, taking a symbolic dimension within which the reader is immersed in the mind of the characters. David Daiches remarks that “throughout the book the characters are presented and re-presented until they are finally seen as symbolic. We are shown now their own minds, now their reactions on the minds of others, now the memory they leave when they are gone, now their relation to the landscape” (1970: 93-4). Characters, like poets, see these symbols not in the actual sense as in a typical realist novel but in a new way, associated with other ideas as something else in their vision. This view suggests clearly a view of the creative imagination that enables them to conceive a vision of reality behind appearances of symbols. When the boundary between the objective and subjective worlds shatters in a moment of perception, the thing which Woolf’s characters look at becomes another thing, which is more important than the thing itself. Thus, the images and symbols, which Woolf uses, not only suggest many ideas or meanings at the same time, but they also become means for her to reveal her modernist perception of reality and life in the novel. Lily Briscoe and the Ramsays always look for the meaning of life by identifying with these symbols in different ways. In the first part of the novel, “The Window”, for example, Mrs Ramsay tries to identify herself and endeavours to find meaning in life by associating herself with the light of the Lighthouse. In the third part of the novel, “The Lighthouse”, Lily Briscoe attempts to do the same task by painting a picture. Both of them examine carefully the essence of life and reality in an artistic way until they reach a final understanding in life. In *To the Lighthouse*, therefore, Woolf’s use of the sea and the lighthouse as external physical objects symbolically associates with the emotions and thoughts of her characters, in which the reader becomes able to learn their immediate responses and reactions against the situations they encounter. Apart from their actual meanings, these physical objects suggest another idea and meaning in Woolf’s novels. In the

novel, the world she puts before the reader is seen at once as more real and luminous, because Woolf merges successfully the world of facts and that of imagination by means of images and symbols.

*In To the Lighthouse*, therefore, it is impossible to separate Woolf's characters from external objects. They unite symbolically with each other. Their harmonious unification stands for and inspires each other in a way that it is difficult to speak of subject and object as divided opposites. This fusion serves us to perceive the feelings, memories and reactions of characters about life and reality. In this respect, the sea is a powerful symbol in *To the Lighthouse*, because the setting of the novel takes place on an island surrounded by the sea. The Ramsay family also has a house called 'the Lighthouse' on this island, and thus the sea can be seen and heard by the members of Ramsay family all day long, permeating their thoughts and reflections. In addition, the recurrent imagery of the sea and the light of the Lighthouse gives poetic force to the central themes of the novel by revealing the complex view of life and reality.

In fact, Woolf's use of the sea as symbol associates precisely with her childhood memories. Woolf's family used to have their summer holiday regularly on Cornwall just until her mother's death in 1895. Thus, her past memories clearly affect the way in which she writes her novels. While writing the novel, for example, Woolf notes in her diary: "I am making up *To the Lighthouse* - the sea is to be heard all through it" (1969: 80). Moreover, the first and "the important of all [her] memories", she writes in "A Sketch of the Past" is that of hearing the waves breaking, of the splash of water over the beach, of seeing the light of the Lighthouse at night evoked by "the pure ecstasy [she] can conceive" when she was in the nursery bed at St Ives (1976: 64-5). Woolf's next memory at St Ives is more "highly sensual" than the first one due to the sound and sight impression of external objects: the "smelling of so many smells at once", the different colours of apples, the "murmur of bees", "pink flowers" and "silver leaves" produce "such a complete rapture of pleasure that I stopped, smelt; looked" (1976: 66). John Lehmann approves of what she writes about her childhood memories: "the excitement among the children was immense, and the joys of boating, fishing, playing on the seashore, and watching the beams of the Godreuy Lighthouse at night, sank deep into their memories" (1975: 10). Woolf transmutes her childhood memories into symbols of her art in *To the Lighthouse*. Moreover, writing her memories not only liberates her from the routineness of everyday life, enabling her to discover her own reality itself, but it also endows her with a sense of continuity from the past to the future.

Similarly, the sea permeates thoughts, feelings and reflections of Woolf's characters in *To the Lighthouse*. In her visit to town with Charles Tansley, for example, the view of the bay fascinates Mrs Ramsay. When they come out on to the quay, the impressive view of the sea awakens her emotion and thought at once:

the whole bay spread before them and Mrs Ramsay could not help exclaiming, 'Oh, how beautiful!' For the great plateful of the blue water was before her; the hoary Lighthouse, distant, austere, in the midst; and on the right, as far as the eye could see, fading and falling, in soft low pleats, the green sand dunes with wild flowing grasses on them, which always seemed to be running away into some moon country, uninhabited of men. That was the view, she said, stopping, growing greyer-eyed, that her husband loved. (Woolf, 1972: 16)

Woolf gives a sort of the interaction between natural object and imaginative vision. Mrs Ramsay emotionally responds to the beauty and calmness of the bay as a 'plateful of the blue water' and the image of waves in 'pleats', yet the magnificent view of the sea leads her into a fantasy of the 'moon country'. Mrs Ramsay's fantasy produced by the blue water gives her a sense of peace and relief by soothing her feelings disturbed by the 'ugly academic jargon' of her husband at home. It also suggests a kind of triumphant and independent visionary identity for Mrs Ramsay when Woolf, like the Romantics, combines the objective world of things with the subjective world of mind. Moreover, in this symbolic language, Mrs Ramsay associates herself with the Lighthouse and her husband with the "sand dunes": "That was the country he liked best, over there; those sandhills dwindling away into darkness" (80). Naturally speaking, the sand dunes are wasted away either by the wind or by other natural forces, yet it symbolises the dark of human ignorance or lack of understanding and the barrenness which wears away the life of Mr Ramsay. Furthermore, Woolf might associate the dwindling sand dunes with a sense of terror, destruction, nothingness and spiritual darkness as qualities of patriarchy enshrined by Mr Ramsay. But Woolf associates Mrs Ramsay with the light which reaches from the Lighthouse. Here what is important in Woolf's use of the sea imagery is that it enables Mrs Ramsay to gain psychologically more freedom and become bolder in her mind within a fluid narrative, so that she imaginatively yearns for her own "moon country, uninhabited of men" full of peace, unity and imagination. Woolf feminises the country with female qualities Mrs Ramsay favours.

Like Mrs Ramsay and Charles Tansley, Lily Briscoe and William Bankes make their way to the bay and its surroundings. As the narrator informs us, "they came there regularly every evening drawn by some need" to find the same calmness and peace in the sea as Mrs Ramsay (24). The sea with its soothing and peaceful effects on thoughts and feeling become a source of mysticism and spirituality for them. Lily Briscoe and William Bankes feel not only 'a common hilarity, excited by the moving waves' but also a special kind of taste, privacy and vividness in the bay:

It was as if the water floated off and set sailing thoughts which had grown stagnant on dry land, and gave to their bodies even some sort of physical relief. First, the pulse of colour flooded the bay with blue, and the heart expanded with it and the body swam, only the next instant to be checked and chilled by the prickly blackness on the ruffled waves...so that one had to watch for it and it was a delight when it came, a fountain of white water; and then, while one waited for that, one watched, on the pale semicircular beach, wave after wave shedding again and again smoothly a film of mother-of-pearl.

(24)

Literally the water gives freshness and peace to thoughts, yet Woolf's unfixed narrative provides us with the multiplicity of meaning in which she represents the sea as mystical. This mystical impression can satisfy some need. What is actually meant in the quotation is that Woolf compares opposing qualities of life as light and dark, comfort and chaos which Mrs Ramsay detects in the sound of the waves. The visual perception of Lily Briscoe and William Bankes is continuously recreated through the changing scene of the bay with colour in the sunlight and the withdrawal of that colour with the sun to leave "the prickly blackness on the ruffled waves".

Similarly, towards the end of the part two "Time Passes" of *To the Lighthouse*, Lily Briscoe finds again delight, calmness and peace in the sea when she watches it through the window. After travelling a long way, she puts her head on the pillow, yet she imagines for a moment and feels "messages of peace breathed from the sea to the shore" (162). Woolf constructs a view of narrative view in which the identity of Lily Briscoe dissolves. When she unites her feeling and imagination with the sea as a whole, she loses her own self and becomes one body with it. In this respect, Lily Briscoe is a modernist character as expanded and dissolved out of fixity. Woolf achieves her modernist perception of identity without a authorial description as in the realist text by using symbolism.

Moreover, Woolf's use of the sea as symbol in *To the Lighthouse* provides characters with some kind of psychic awareness in life. William Bankes, for example, strives to understand the meaning of his friendship with Mr Ramsay by making some kind of assessment of him and his work. Mr Ramsay had been associated with the sand dunes, and thus William Bankes also looks at the sand dunes, thinking of his friend: "Looking at the far sand hills, William Bankes thought of Ramsay" (25). He recalls important moments of their meeting, yet he comes to notice that Mr Ramsay has changed a lot since then, and he feels that these changes have affected their friendship. Particularly after Mr Ramsay's marriage, "the pulp had gone out of their friendship" (25). William Bankes tries to understand his friendship with Mr Ramsay in terms of the sand dunes: "But in this colloquy with the sand

dunes he maintained that his affection for Ramsay had in no way diminished”, but Woolf suddenly endows him with a visual interpretation of their friendship: “But there, like the body of a young man laid up in peat for a century, with the red fresh on his lips, was his friendship, in its acuteness and reality laid up across the bay among the sandhills” (25).

The bay and its surrounding also provides Mr Ramsay with awareness of his ignorance in a different way as to his intellect and work. He is another of Woolf’s scholarly characters with “a splendid mind” (39). She represents him as “one of those men who do their best work before they are forty [with] a definite contribution to philosophy” (28). Mr Ramsay wants to dominate others through his male form of knowledge and power by insisting on “his own accuracy of judgement”. As the narrator tells us, he is “incapable of untruth; never tampered with fact; never altered a disagreeable world to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all of his own children” (6). Woolf illuminates the internalised version of the male form of knowledge through Mr Ramsay. She depicts satirically his knowledge as “lean as a knife, narrow as the blade of one...” (6). Lily Briscoe also likens his philosophical work to a “large kitchen table”, a “scrubbed kitchen table” (27-8). The kitchen table as bare, hard and fixed suggests a view of barren and dry academic work of Mr Ramsay deprived of “human emotions” and sympathy (38). He is an intellectual and well-educated, yet Woolf represents him as being limited, blind and narrow-minded towards others. Thus, Mr Ramsay’s “lack of consideration for the people’s feelings” leads him not only to see life hostile and unbearable but also to be “hypocrite”, “tyrannical” and “unjust” in life as Lily Briscoe observes him (38, 54-5): “he is petty, selfish, vain, egotistical; he is spoilt; he is a tyrant; he wears Mrs Ramsay to death...” (29-30). Woolf uses Mr Ramsay to represent her sense of the tyranny and egotism of modern masculine culture and allows her reader to appreciate the difficulties which this culture produces for people, particularly for women. Eventually, these perceptions of reality and life annihilate good relations both at home and in society, because Mr Ramsay always follows the truth with his own judgement, in which he lacks consideration for the feelings of others. He wants to be authoritative to his wife and children by controlling and suppressing them, but his attitude often brings about a kind of disagreement between father and mother, between parents and children by preventing perfectness and peace at home. James “hated him...for exactingness and egotism (for there he stood, commanding them to attend to him); but most of all he hated the twang and twitter of his father’s emotion which, vibrating round them, disturbed the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relation with his mother” (43). Hence James describes his father as “the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of the male, which smote mercilessly, again and again” (45). This kind of egotistical approach destroys the richness of happiness in the family and society. Woolf thus conveys her idea of how this kind of behaviour destroys the

perfect simplicity and good sense of relations in life. Mr Ramsay stands as a symbol of “the inadequacy of human relationships”, of sterile and destructive barrier to warm relationships: simply he is an example of “a horrible outrage of human decency” (38).

Unfortunately, this view of life does not lead Mr Ramsay to success in his scholarly investigations though he has a magnificent mind. He uses his linear logic in his study by thinking that an uncommon knowledge of genius will jump from A to Z; he sees the whole march of knowledge in one leap, so that Mr Ramsay has to take a difficult road, climbing from A to B, from B to C and so on. His ultimate desire is to reach his masculine destination in his knowledge, which is Z in his scholarly search. Yet he is unable to do so and divides his study into alphabetical order. This division suggests his fragmentary thought. Although he struggles to reach Z, Mr Ramsay has just reached Q: “After Q? What comes next? After Q there are a number of letters the last of which is scarcely visible to mortal eyes, but glimmers red in the distance. Z is only reached once by one man in a generation” (40). In my view, Woolf both mocks Mr Ramsay’s intelligence and uses the division of his study into alphabetical order as an image to show us the fragmentary and unstable state of his mind. She suggests that it is not possible to achieve such a linear logic, which causes Mr Ramsay to lose a grasp of his male form of knowledge as regular in life. This lack of an integrated view of life and reality frustrates him, and thus he, as the narrator tells us, becomes desolate and lonely: “the snow has begun to fall and the mountain-top is covered in mist...his eyes fixed on the storm, trying to the end to pierce the darkness, he would die standing. He would never reach R” (41). Mr Ramsay is unable to articulate himself through his male form of knowledge; he is “the leader of the doomed expedition” and loses his “fame” (42). The failure of Mr Ramsay is, in fact, closely linked to that of male culture as a fundamental paradox in the sense that this culture is so ambivalent even though it seems strong. Woolf thus regards the process of the formation of such culture as “the long wastes of the ages” (42).

After realizing the failure of his intellect, Mr Ramsay feels himself lonely, and thus he goes to the bay to relieve from his suffering. The vastness of the sea reminds him that there is still the broad expanse of human knowledge to be explored: “he reached the edge of the lawn and look out on the bay beneath” (51). He looks at the vastness of the bay and thinks of the same vastness in human knowledge. Later, he plunges into an active consciousness for a moment, which brings about a change in his perception. Mr Ramsay comes to notice the dark side of human understanding in relation to the vastness of the sea even though mankind has already made many advancements in different fields:

It was his fate, his peculiarity, whether he wished it or not, to come out thus on a spit of land which the sea is slowly eating away, and there to stand, like a desolate seabird, alone. It was his power, his



gift, suddenly to shed all superfluities, to shrink and diminish so that he looked barer and felt sparer, even physically, yet lost none of his intensity of mind, and so to stand on his little ledge facing the dark of human ignorance, how we know nothing and the sea eats away the ground we stand on- that was his fate, his gift. (51-2)

In her use of the sea which 'eats away the ground we stand on', Woolf not only suggests the futility of Mr Ramsay's knowledge, but she also mocks him and his intellect in another way by avoiding a direct comment. He is like "a desolate seabird, alone" in life. Woolf shows us that his gift and power do not provide him with fame, but desperately he accepts his failure, his narrowness and his blindness, which takes away many valuable things from him every day. As discussed above, he denies the reality of the world permeated by sympathy, peace and beauty, yet paradoxically his own vision creates a world of loneliness, destruction and isolation. Thus, he often requires his wife's sympathy, the comfort of her beauty and her assurance: "he wanted sympathy. He was a failure...It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life...He must have sympathy. He must be assured that he too lived in the heart of life" (44). It is Mrs Ramsay who gives sympathy, enables him to go in and out, enjoy himself. Having understood his failure and blindness, therefore, Mr Ramsay comes to believe that the ground on which he stands is not firm. It is gradually undermined by ignorance and indifference to life itself. There is a need within him, which his intellect is unable to fill up. Woolf symbolises his fate as the one at the edge of the sea, which is gradually being eaten away by the sea. In this psychic condition, therefore, he declares that he does not know anything about life. James Hafley describes his situation: "Mr Ramsay is afraid that he will be forgotten, that time will destroy his work; Mrs Ramsay, however...does not fear time; Lily finishes her painting" (1970: 137). Woolf emphasises that the intellect, like that of Mr Ramsay, prevents people from contributing to something useful in life.

Woolf also suggests the other aspect of the sea in terms of life and reality. At one time, it gives pleasure and peace by soothing the disturbed feelings, yet at other times, it ruins and destroys with a brutal power. The sound of the waves on the beach soothes Mrs Ramsay's thought and emotion when they make rhythmical movements, but she also notice the other quality of the sea:

...the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again as she sat with the children the words of the some old cradle song, murmured by nature, 'I am guarding you - I am your support', but at other times

suddenly and unexpectedly, especially when her mind raised itself slightly from task actually in hand, had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow - this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror. (19-20)

Woolf gives two opposing aspects of the sea at the same time. Mrs Ramsay sits by the window, and she is hypnotised by the rhythmic sound of the waves. It soothes her thought and emotion by entering her mind. The recurrent images and sound, which go deeper in her mind and imagination, give continuous comfort to her feelings and emotions when Mrs Ramsay detaches herself from the physical world in a moment of vision. The sound of the waves becomes 'some old cradle song'. As soon as she becomes aware of her actual self, however, Mrs Ramsay suddenly comes to realize at once the ghostly destructive and remorseless power of the sea. She no longer sees any kindly meaning in the sea. As Woolf represents the sea, nature does not always seem kind and friendly but sometimes harsh and destructive to humankind. The sea not only swallows up the island, but it also eats the ground we stand on as Gillian Beer remarks: "the sea, which encircles the land, can also bring enemies to its shores" (1992: 140). Although it soothes and consoles Mrs Ramsay at the beginning, the sound of the waves opens a noisy hole in her ears by shaking her with 'an impulse of terror'. What is more important in Woolf's representation of the sea is that she links the quick flow of waves or the sea to her modernist perception of life as fluid and temporary like "a rainbow". She does not see life as 'a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged' but as 'a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end'.

Apart from the sea, Woolf also uses the Lighthouse as a symbol to suggest some larger view of life and reality in *To the Lighthouse*. The Lighthouse is associated with many images of light and darkness in the novel. When the novel opens, Woolf links Mrs Ramsay to light at once. Mrs Ramsay tries to preserve James's joy by telling him that the journey to the Lighthouse will take place after a night of darkness. She fills her son with happiness and joy and always holds the possibility open to her son. Mrs Ramsay views life in terms of light which burns forever. But Woolf represents Mr Ramsay as identifying with darkness and sorrow in life. He struggles to extinguish the light and hopes by making life difficult and unbearable for others. For him, the life is 'that fable land where our brightest hopes are extinguished', and he thinks that the journey will be dangerous and dark one, in which "our frail barks founder in darkness" (6).

Woolf also associates Mr Ramsay's intellect symbolically with 'darkness'. In fact, darkness surrounds the whole atmosphere of his mind and vision. Hence he becomes not only indifferent and blind to others around him, but also unable to go further in his research: "A shutter, like the leathern eyelid of a lizard, flickered over the intensity of his gaze and obscured the letter R" (40). The inability to go further in his study frustrates Mr Ramsay, and in flash of light he comes to realize that he is "a failure" without never reaching R in his study (40-1). His failure derives from the fact that Mr Ramsay always seeks truth in "the dark of human ignorance", which gradually "eats away the ground" he stands on. In another words, he becomes aware of the truth of his own life and achievement by looking into "the darkness" (41). But Woolf also represents his possible success and achievement by the symbol of light: "His own little light would shine, not very brightly, for a year or two, and would then be merged in some bigger light, and that in a bigger still" (42). Mr Ramsay is ambivalent in his view of life and truth. Although he searches for his own truth in the darkness, he finds support in the light as well as in warmth of his wife's sympathy by which he wants to be "within the circle of life" (44-5).

Moreover, the imagery of light and darkness is linked to the success of Mrs Ramsay's dinner party. As soon as he enters the house when he returns from the beach with Minta, Paul Rayles notices especially the light. He exclaims "lights, lights, lights", repeating several times (91). The lights on the table bring symbolically the faces of the family members and guests together by removing the feeling of the conflict, darkness and separation: "'now all the candle were lit, and the faces on the both sides of the table were brought nearer by the candle light" (112). The unity, which has been caused by the lights, bring beauty, harmony and wholeness to the room. This beauty, harmony and order that Mrs Ramsay creates becomes successful in annihilating the feeling of discrepancy and darkness, which engulfs individuals remorselessly.

What is more, Woolf's use of the Lighthouse as symbol is closely related to her view of poetry, identity and narrative in *To the Lighthouse*. It is a poetic symbol with an uncircumscribed power of suggestion in connection with the imagery of the sea. Mrs Ramsay constantly attempts to create and keep the Lighthouse in her mind through the first part of the novel. When Mrs Ramsay finishes the story, "she looked across the bay, and there, sure enough, coming regularly across the waves first two quick strokes and then one long steady stroke, was the light of the Lighthouse. It had been lit" (72). Woolf interweaves closely the light of the Lighthouse and the sea imagery. The light, which moves up and down on the waves, goes deeply into the imagination of Mrs Ramsay. For a moment, she imagines as if they were going to the Lighthouse. She sinks deeper, and the light becomes luminous on the waves by intensifying her feeling. But what Woolf desires through her use

of the light of the lighthouse is to reveal her modernist perception of identity as fluid. She constructs a view of narrative which rejects fixity and solidity as in Edwardian fiction. Like Orlando, for example, Mrs Ramsay watches 'the stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three', and she sees that "this thing, the long steady stroke, was her stroke", so that she sits by the window until she becomes 'the thing she looked at - that light for example' (73). Once she identifies with the light, Mrs Ramsay experiences timeless solitude, in which she not only abstains from the entanglements of the actual world, but she also escapes from the burden of personality by expanding:

To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness...When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless...This core of darkness could go anywhere, for no one saw it...Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir; and there rose to her lips always some explanation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity...(73, emphasis added)

In Mrs Ramsay's experience, Woolf implies that when life sinks down in this manner, the range of our experience is limitless, because the mind is allowed to wander in freedom. Mrs Ramsay's response to the light of the Lighthouse is sensuous and imaginative. In a moment of vision, she goes beyond her actual existence. Her identity expands and dissolves completely when her mind imaginatively creates a 'being' within her 'being'. Similarly, after taking her son to bed, Mrs Ramsay stops knitting and looks in a moment of solitude at outside from the drawing-room window across the bay, and then she identifies herself with the light of the Lighthouse whose beauty fascinates her: "she looked at the steady light...which was so much her, yet so little her" (75). When she watches the light coming from the Lighthouse across the bay, her emotion reaches its peak with joy, so that the light of the Lighthouse with its power illuminates the darkness:

but for all that she thought, watching it with fascination, hypnotised, as if it were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight, she had known happiness, exquisite happiness, intense happiness, and it silvered the rough waves a little more brightly, as daylight faded, and the blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and then the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, it is enough! it is enough!. (75-6)

The beam of the lighthouse shows that Mrs Ramsay embraces the world outside imaginatively. The Lighthouse as a source of light enters her consciousness and makes her feel great joy and spiritual uplift. The repetition of images and symbols in different senses touches the psychological depths of Mrs Ramsay. Although she knows that no happiness lasts for ever, the hypnotic effect of the fading light and its reflected yellowness on the waves gives her an extraordinary ecstasy, joy and delight. Then she exclaims “it is enough! it is enough!”. Woolf’s use of language with various meanings not only breaks its fixity but also gives us a vivid impression and multiplicity about Mrs Ramsay’s feelings and identity. What is more important in her representation of Mrs Ramsay’s experience is that Woolf deals with her characterisation on both realist and visionary level in *To the Lighthouse*. The imagination frees Mrs Ramsay for a moment from the dark view of life and reality perpetuated by her husband, but it also brings the dissolution of her stable identity.

Finally, Woolf links the Lighthouse to memory. There is a close relationship between the creative imagination and the working of the memory, because strong emotion is stimulated by memories of the past. These memories exist and are sustained alive by the Lighthouse: an intense feeling about the Lighthouse remains fresh through time. The force of memory is often evident in Woolf when she recalls a number of “exceptional moments” from her childhood which “come to the surface unexpectedly” with renewed force (1976: 71). For these “exceptional moments”, she writes, “I felt that I had put away in my mind something that I should go back [to], to turn over and explore” (1976: 71). Meaning pours into each moment through what she calls her “tunnelling process” that ties it to the past when the strong emotion is stimulated by memories (Woolf, 1978: 272). The “scene-making” is central to her art of writing. In her diary, Woolf writes: “I keep thinking of different ways to manage my scene; conceiving endless possibilities; seeing life, as I walk about the streets, an immense opaque block of material to be conveyed by me into its equivalent of language” (1977: 214). Woolf’s “scene-making” both in the past and the present suggests a continuing existence of the self as two different beings at the same moment - the one in the past and the other in the present, suggesting a view of ‘two consciousness’ as in the memory of Wordsworth’s poet in *The Prelude* (1850). While contemplating his earlier days, the poet sees himself as “two consciousness, conscious of myself / And of some other being” - the person he is and the person he was (*The Prelude*, II, 32-3). This double awareness of memory creates emotion within the self and enlarges understanding and the sense of existence.

Similarly, in *To the Lighthouse*, memory becomes a great synthesiser of the mind and an instrument of transforming power in relation to the image of the Lighthouse. Woolf’s characters discover the continuity of their identities when the mind receives the picture of

the past and keeps it alive in the present. In the third part of the novel, particularly James and Lily Briscoe frequently recall the significant moments of their past lives when they are re-awakened by the familiar scenes that eradicate the distinction between the past and the present. During their journey to the Lighthouse, for example, James goes suddenly into his past memories about the Lighthouse once he fixes his eyes on it. He strives to form a unity in his mind, which had been forgotten for years. The Lighthouse in a fixed position becomes a symbol for this unity:

Everything became very close to one...Everything in the whole world seemed to stand still. The Lighthouse became immovable, and the line of the distant shore became fixed. The sun grew hotter and everybody seemed to come very close together and feels each other's presence, which had almost forgotten. (208)

As David Daiches argues, therefore, "the Lighthouse itself, standing lonely in the midst of the sea, is a symbol of the individual who is at once a unique being and part of the flux of history. To reach the Lighthouse is, in a sense, to make contact with a truth outside oneself" (1970: 95). As part of the flux of history, the Lighthouse itself allows James to remember his painful past experience caused by his father's egotism and opposition to the family's journey to it. He recalls Mr Ramsay saying, "It will rain...You won't be able to go to the Lighthouse". He also recalls his mother's description about the Lighthouse:

The Lighthouse was then a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye that opened suddenly and softly in the evening. Now - James looked at the Lighthouse. He could see the white-washed rocks; the tower, stark and straight; he could see that it was barred with black and white; he could see windows in it; he could even see washing spread on the rock to dry. So that was the Lighthouse. No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The was the Lighthouse too. (211)

This quotation suggests a number views as to Woolf's use of memory. First, she represents the complexity of the relationships between the past and the present. Indeed, recollections of the past are so frequent in the last part of *To the Lighthouse* that the action may be considered as taking place on two different levels: the past ten years ago and the present the Ramsay children are adults. In his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1978), William Wordsworth's statement about the nature of poetry makes clear the working of the memory and accounts for its importance: "the emotion contemplated till, by a species of re-action, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of the contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind" (1987: 740). In a similar way, Woolf's perception of memory as re-activating past

feelings is what enables her characters in *To the Lighthouse* to live in both the experience of the past and in the here and now as one continuous process. Secondly, these memories, Woolf shows, cause an internalised repression and psychological anger in the consciousnesses of the Ramsay children. For example, James recaptures the subjective feeling of his father's 'despotism' and 'tyranny' he experienced as a child at home when he wanted to go to the Lighthouse ten years ago and consequently how he had wanted to kill him with the "knife" and "axe" (209, 212). Thus, the Lighthouse reminds him of his painful experience, yet he transfers these painful memories to the whole of his past experience. Here Woolf unites thought and image, subject and object in that sensuous continuity of being. James remembers the time when his father refused his going to the Lighthouse. Then the Lighthouse as an object becomes part of his visionary recollections of the past experience. It also symbolises both Mr and Mrs Ramsay through the past experiences of James. When James fixes his eyes on the Lighthouse, he recalls both his mother's saying about the Lighthouse and his father's opposition to their journey to it. Not only had Mrs Ramsay promised to take him to the Lighthouse, but she had also described it to him ten years ago. Similarly, all his past memories, concerning his father's objection to their going to the Lighthouse, come back to James's mind: "it will rain...You won't be able to go to the Lighthouse". These two different experiences keep their freshness in his mind. Throughout *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs Ramsay occupies her place partly by her own being in the first part and partly in the memories of others. Daiches states that Mrs Ramsay's "personality dominates the book: she lives in section three in the memory of the others; her character has become part of history, including and determining the present" (1970: 100). Moreover, as to the union of James's memories with two views of the Lighthouse linked to his parents, Kaehele and German suggest that "James's ability to reconcile his two views of the Lighthouse reminds us, however, that it symbolises not only the individual traits of the Ramsays, but the harmonious union of their complementary qualities- courage with sympathy, intellect with intuition, endurance with fertility" (1970: 193). The double awareness of memory creates emotion within James and enlarges his understanding and the sense of his existence. By using his memory, therefore, Woolf reveals modernist perception of identity not as fixed and known but as a continuous discovery: "nothing was simply one thing".

In sum, by using different symbols in different way out their actual meanings, Woolf develops a new narrative technique in *To the Lighthouse*, a technique which she uses in her other novels. This narrative technique allows her avoid direct authorial intrusion, as in the traditional novel, by diverting the reader's attention into the consciousness or state of being of her fictional characters. As a modernist writer, Woolf does not give any theoretical argument in her own voice, does not sum up and explain; she prefers to remain impartial and

outside without justifying her own voice in *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf achieves her purpose in the novel by employing different symbols in multiple ways. In this multiplicity, she not only contributes to modernist fiction in accordance with modern experience when she subverts the fixity of language, narrative and identity, but she also helps us to enlarge our understanding of life and reality not as fixed but as shifting and continuous.

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