TO THE SELFHOUSE: THE CENTRIPETAL MOVEMENT OF SYMBOLS IN VIRGINIA WOOLF’S TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

Susan Poursanati, Allameh Tabatabai’ University, susan.poursanati@gmail.com

Yasaman Taheri, Tehran University, yasaman.taheri@ut.ac.ir

Abstract: Modernism is a literary movement which appeared around 1914. New technologies and the horrible effect of World War I, made many authors question the future of this modern machine (human being) who declined any kind of tradition for the sake of the new sentiment. Modernist fiction used two significant tools: one is the stream of consciousness to reveal the inner self of the characters, and the other one is employing the symbol to reflect hidden reality through the life of the characters. Virginia Woolf is considered as one of the most prominent modernist authors who employ the various modern techniques in her fictions such as To the Lighthouse. The aim of this article is followed in two different steps: first, the discussion of the roles of different symbols and signs through the whole work to reflect how these symbols function in the novel as a web of signs; and second, the exploration of the centripetal movement of various symbols and colors to show an unattainable concept of reality in modern life.

Keywords: Modern literature, Stream of consciousness, Symbolism, the notion of reality, centripetal movement, self.

Introduction
Symbolism is a technique that is utilized when a creator needs to make a specific state of mind or feeling in the literary works. Authors apply symbols to elucidate a notion or an idea to their readers to give their story depth and complexity: “Man, with his symbol-making propensity, unconsciously transforms objects or forms into symbols (thereby endowing them with great psychological importance) and expresses them in both his religion and his visual art”(Jung,229). Jung discussed the interplay of art, religion, and history in formation of symbols: “not in terms of its use of symbols, but in terms of its significance as a symbol itself—a symbolic expression of the psychological condition of the modern world” (229). Symbolism as an artistic and literary movement has its own style and methodology: “where the sense of Idea and even
primordial Idea remains unclear” (19). Virginia Woolf’s novel, “To the Lighthouse”, is a kind of modern autobiography which conceals the personal. This novel explores what it means to wish for the presence—a re-presentation that involves both presenting and representing—of the irretrievable by rigorously and attentively mapping how the longing friends and family feel for the dead, thereby opening an archive of both melancholia and healing (McIntyre 2013). If we look at the novel as a re-presentation and re-presence, it can function as an elegy to Mrs. Ramsey.

Moreover, there is a symbolic pattern in the novel including the sea, the lighthouse, Lily’s painting, lights and color, Ramsay’s house, the boar’s skull, the fruit basket, and the window are symbols by which Virginia Woolf conveys creativity, identity, relationship between men and women, womanhood and art which contribute to this pattern:

the ebb and flow of human relationships, expressed through the rhythm of merging and separation; fluctuations between light and darkness, figured not only in the alternating strokes and pauses of the lighthouse beam but in the natural world; the reconciliation of opposing forces and the possibility of renewal? indeed, the triumph of something over the forces of absence and loss that constitute nothingness. (Rubenstein, 43)

Various entities are related to the notion of the symbol itself; they function as the web of signs through the whole volume. In that sense all physical elements such as a window or the house, as well as the abstract elements such as the content of reality or identity are intensely jointed together as a chain to produce the ultimate meaning of these connections:

The history of symbolism shows that everything can assume symbolic significance: natural objects (like stones, plants, animals, men, mountains and valleys, sun and moon, wind, water, and fire), or man-made things (like houses, boats, or cars), or even abstract forms (like numbers, or the triangle, the square, and the circle). In fact, the whole cosmos is a potential symbol (Jung, 229).

This paper is interpreting various symbols which are employed by the author to reflect how the lighthouse as a stable symbol represents the lack of attainability. Each character retains their own version of reality; each of them wants to reach to their unattainable desires through a specific sign.

The Symbolic Patterns

The characters in “To the Lighthouse” are carefully arranged in their relation to each other, so that a definite symbolic pattern emerges. Mr.
Ramsay, the professor of philosophy, who made one original contribution to thought in his youth and has since been repeating and elaborating it without being able to see through to the ultimate implications of his system; his wife, who knows more of life in an unsystematic and intuitive way, who has no illusions yet presides over her family with a calm and competent efficiency; Lily Briscoe, who refuses to get married and tries to express her sense of reality in terms of color and form; Charles Tansley, the aggressive young philosopher with an inferiority complex; old Mr. Carmichael, who dozes unsocially in the sun and eventually turns out to be lyric poet, and Minta Doyle and Paul Rayley, the undistinguished couple whom Mrs. Ramsay gently urges into a not too successful marriage. In other words, each character has a very precise function in this carefully organized story.

The objects are functional as well. For instance, 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 a part of the flux of history: “For an object to inspire that disinterested intensity of contemplation which defines the object of art, it must make use of the emotional elements inherent in natural form, though in a manner altogether beyond what Nature herself provides. The emotional elements of form are listed by Fry as rhythm, mass, space, light and shade, color” (Koppen, 377). To reach the lighthouse is, in a sense, to make contact with a truth outside oneself, to surrender the uniqueness of one’s ego to an impersonal reality (Daiches 70). Mr. Ramsay, who is an egotist constantly seeking applause and encouragement from others, resents his young son’s enthusiasm for visiting the lighthouse, and only years later, when his wife has died and his own life is almost worn out, does he win this freedom from self.

When they arrive, they stop their personal grudges; for example, Mr. Ramsay ceases to pose with his book and breaks out with an exclamation of admiration for James’s steering; James and his sister, Cam, lose their resentment at their father’s way of bullying them into this expedition and cease hugging their grievances. Lily Briscoe and old Mr. Carmichael, who had not joined the expedition, suddenly develop a mood of tolerance and compassion for mankind, and Lily has the vision which enables her to complete her picture.

Undoubtedly, she utilizes multi-facet symbols and motifs to escape from the materialist styles of the previous authors and more specifically Woolf propagates a kind of inward movement. She uses the lighthouse as a major symbol in the novel to reflect that propaganda relied on simplicity, whereas creation of the story based on the centripetal movement is a mere art. Her complex and expressive writing style
eradicated the normal standard of the propagandist fictions of the World War I by radiating an inward movement into self-consciousness. “We civilizations now know that we are mortal’, echoing contemporary concerns about culture in the wake of the First World War, but also attributing the pre-war ‘disorder of our mental Europe’ to a typically modern ‘free co-existence in all cultivated minds of the most heterogeneous ideas’” (Ross and Lindgren 375). Virginia Woolf demonstrates the essential dimensions of the modern novel to come closer to the actual essence of self: “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” (qtd. in Rainy 899). To explore such private, and somehow unutterable reality and to escape customary representations she created a symbolic formula for her novels. In some of her essays, such as “The Art of Fiction,” she laments the lack of all theory of fiction:

For possibly, if fiction is, as we suggest, in difficulties, it may be because nobody grasps her firmly and defines hers severely. She has had no rules drawn up for her, very little thinking done on her behalf. And though rules may be wrong and must be broken, they have this advantage—they confer dignity and order upon their subject. (Woolf, 52)

In fact, scattered symbols throughout the novel are infinitesimal particles making its whole, therefore, the centripetal force in Woolf’s novel is a movement from the external level to the internal and private one. Various signposts were used to lighten flashes of significance as they related to the soul, such as lights and colors.

**Correlation of the colors and individuality**

In the novel, Woolf’s search for spiritual essence is expressed in light and color to locate characters on themselves. “Johannes Itten’s metaphysics of light and color illuminates the relation between creative source (Mrs. Ramsay/the lighthouse) and creative artist (Lily Briscoe/the painting) in Woolf’s novel. Itten further affirms that “the end and color and its release from imprisonment in the world of objects.” Woolf’s art does not reach so far toward abstraction, but she does imply that the “luminous halo” of consciousness should be conveyed through equivalents of “plastic form”, and notes that “fiction is given the capacity to deal with ‘psychological volumes’” (Stewart 498). There is a
color symbolism running right through the book. “When Lily Briscoe is wrestling unsuccessfully with her painting, in the first part of the book, she sees the colors as ‘bright violet and staring white’, but just as she achieves her final vision at the book’s conclusion, and is thus able to complete her picture, she notices that the lighthouse ‘had melted away into a blue haze’; and though she sees the canvas clearly for a second before drawing the final line, the implication remains that this blurring of colors is bound up with her vision” (Daiches 71).

Woolf adopts various colors to convey the transforming style of her narration, which depends on the human consciousness. “Her central concern was with the relationship between the way the mind experiences reality and the way the writer conveys that experience in narrative form” (Woolf, 63). As in ‘Modern Fiction’, Woolf figures out a narrow line between the hatred of traditional narration and the statement of anti-materialism, even spiritual values:

The proper stuff of fiction” does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss. And if we can imagine the art of fiction come alive and standing in our midst, she would undoubtedly bid us break her and bully her, as well as honor and love her, for so her youth is renewed and her sovereignty assured. (qtd. in Rainey 901)

Actually, she wants to disrupt the masculine point of view that is the perspective that focus on what exactly the signposts mean. She criticizes her contemporaries for their materialism by construction of multi-dimensional consciousness. Here is a way how she defines a modern novel:

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 other than custom would have us believe it. (qtd. in Rainey 899)

Mr. Ramsay, who visualizes the last, unattainable, step in his philosophy as glimmering red in the distance, is contrasted with the less egotistical Lily, who works with blues and greens, and with Mrs. Ramsay, who is indicated on Lily’s canvas as “a triangular purple shape”. Red and brown appear to be the colors of individuality and egotism, while blue and green are the colors of impersonality (Mclaurin 195). “Mr. Ramsay, until the very end of the book is presented as an egotist, and his color is
red or brown; Lily is the impersonal artist, and her color is blue (McLaurin 195) Mrs. Ramsay stands somewhere between, and her color is purple. The journey to the lighthouse is the journey from egotism to impersonality” (Daiches 72), from the pure self to the feeling of the lightness of the spirit:

Significantly, however, Woolf is consistent in distinguishing between the experiencing body and the body as what one says and does, the social body. It is the former which is foregrounded and interacts with the transcendent principle. This distinction between the surface, social self and a transcendent selfhood interacting with the experiencing body reappears in Mrs Ramsay’s conception of self in To the Lighthouse. (Koppen,380)

However, perhaps it can also serve as a metaphor for the human being described by Woolf. The lighthouse means something that can be perceived objectively from the individual; in the words of Ms. Ramsey, “our apparitions, the things you know us by”; but it also signals invisible, possibly tragic depths, for, as Mrs. Ramsay knew, “beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep” (Woolf 67).

Multifaceted demonstration of the sea

Woolf as a female author stands outside the stabilized method to reflect the newly erected structures that prepare the readers to realize the reality of the life through constructive and destructive power of the symbols such as the sea. Woolf reveals a particular division based on potential concept of art in modern era through the formulated framework: “Woolf’s meditations on art’s ability to express life, present in Lily’s painting (mother and child "reduced" to a purple shadow), but also in other analogies in the novel, are seen as incorporating Fry’s theory of an art which does not seek to imitate form, but to create form; not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life” (Koppen, 2). The sea plays an important role in the symbolic pattern of the novel. It is both destroyer and protector; it engulfs the individual elements and brings them together; it threatens the ordered world and creates harmony. To Mr. Ramsay the sea is the enemy, and he defies the flood from his spit of land. To Mrs. Ramsay, the sound of the waves can be like “a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beating the measure of life”, it can make her “think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea” and warn her that everything is ephemeral. But the waves falling on the beach also beat a “measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts” and repeat consolingly “I am guarding you-I am your support” (Woolf 30). Woolf builds on this dual function of the sea.
Woolf’s techniques of narration mislead the readers in order to escape from the fixed interpretation to create an opportunity for one’s mind to meander through the possibility of what might the meaning be. What is knowledge? What are our learned men save the descendants of witches and hermits who crouched in caves and in woods brewing herbs, interrogative shrew-mice and writing down the language of the stars? . . . Yes, one could imagine a very pleasant world. A quiet spacious world, with the flowers so red and blue in the open fields. A world without professors or specialists or housekeepers with the profiles of policemen. (qtd. in Hunter 67)

Indeed, the individual feels his nothingness in front of the sea, because it seems, as Lily says, “to outlast by a million years the gazer and to be communing already with a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest” (Woolf 37). To the assertive self, engulfment can mean nothing but annihilation: that is probably the reason why to Mr. Ramsay, the sea is nothing but the enemy (Simon 79). To those who try to merge, who dread separateness, it is a relief to be carried away by the flood. So, Mrs. Ramsay feels “outside that eddy” (Woolf, 130). When things remain separate. Yet to her also, order appears as a victory won over the waters. When the candles are lit, the party round the table is ‘composed’ and seems “to be order and dry land”; they all make a party on an island, having “their common cause against that fluidity out there” (152). So, when the link “that bound things together has been cut, they float up there, down there, off anyhow” (Chapter one of the third section); floating at random becomes an image of chaos, and the sea is once more a symbol of disintegration.

Yet, Lily and William Bankes stroll down every evening to the break in the hedge to look at the sea, as if “drawn by some need” (Woolf 13). The sea seems to release unknown powers in them, makes them expand beyond the limitations of self. So that in the third chapter, when Lily tries to grasp her vision, she turns again and again to the sea. It is as though contemplation of the sea and the bark sailing on it brought into proper perspective the relation of time and timelessness, of individual objects and the whole to which they belong. As Daiches has shown, blue is the color of the impersonal artist, and it is the sea that enables men to reach the impersonal vision. Cam looking at the island from the boat sees it becomes “steadily more distant and more peaceful” (Woolf 154), and her mind wanders in the underworld of waters “where in the green light a change came over one’s entire mind and one’s body shone half transparent, enveloped in a green cloak” (Woolf 281). Lily tries to get her canvas into perspective feels as “on a narrow plank, perfectly alone, over the sea” (Woolf 265). There she can satisfy her “need of distance
and blue” (Woolf 279), she can see things in their proper relations. Her vision is an insight into the nature of life and death, dissolution and permanence, individual being and the surrounding world. The main image in the novel must be ambivalent symbols, for Virginia Woolf, like Lily, must achieve “the razor edge of balance between two opposite forces” (Woolf 296) in the quest of an artist in search of self and impersonality.

When Lily first tries to express her vision of the Ramsay family and their world, and grasps the perfect integration of the scene, she feels “how life, from being made up of little separate incidents which one lived one by one, became curled and whole like a wave which bore one up with it and threw one down with it, there, on the dash on the beach” (Woolf 67). When ecstasy bursts in Mrs. Ramsay’s eyes at the stroke of the lighthouse, “waves of pure delight race over the floor of her mind” (Woolf 130). There are other similar examples in the text of the novel as when the sea associated to calmness and peace with one’s self: “The mind at peace rises and falls with the sea, and the rhythm of the waves makes it lose itself and go under” (Woolf 231). The sea is also, generally, the harbinger of peace: “The regular beat of the waves on the beach reassures and bring peace” (30). Another image of the sea in the novel links it to regularity: “Looking at the sea from a cliff top, one sees the waves shaping themselves symmetrically” (Woolf 244).

As a result, when Lily paints, she attains a dancing rhythmical movement, and “the lines on her canvas image the movement of the waves” (Woolf 244). They bring messages of peace to the shore and, when the party at last returns to the house, the waves break gently and “the sight of all the seas breaking in measure round the isles’ soothes the sleepers” (Woolf 220). In addition, when at last Mr. Ramsay and her children are freed from their resentment, the boat sails “buoyantly on long rocking waves [. . .] with an extraordinary lit and exhilaration” (Woolf 316-17) and they can hear the waves “rolling and gamboling and slapping the rocks as if they were wild creatures who were perfectly free and tossed and tumbled and sported like this forever” (Woolf 317). In sum, the sea simultaneously foreshadows and mirrors a certain state of the mind, mostly connected with peace and order, in the novel. The exhilaration of the waves has its counterpart in the lines running up and across in Lily’s picture, with its green and blues, and its attempt at something. In the sudden intensity of her vision, Lily draws her line and the form emerges. One would be very much surprised indeed if the relation of masses, lights and shadows in the picture did not portray the rising and falling of the waves, which echoes throughout the novel.
Centripetal force of the Lighthouse

The lighthouse is the central image as well as the strongest and most meaningful symbol of the novel. Firstly, this is indicated by the lighthouse’ being part of the title, immediately making it a focus of attention and secondly, by headlining the third part of the novel. “Lying across the bay and meaning something different and intimately personal to each other, the lighthouse is at once inaccessible, illuminating, and infinitely interpretable” (Carroll 114). The symbolic meanings of the lighthouse differ, change, and are even contrasted in different contexts and with regard to different characters in the novel. Due to these multiple and varying meanings, the lighthouse carries the narrative forward.

Woolf emphasizes the underlying outlines of the character’s mind as the destination from which the novel takes its title, the lighthouse suggests that the destinations that seem surest are most unobtainable. Just as Mr. Ramsay is certain of his wife’s love for him and aims to hear her speak words to that end in “The Window”, Mrs. Ramsay finds these words impossible to say. “These failed attempts to arrive at some sort of solid ground, like Lily’s first try at painting Mrs. Ramsay or Mr. Ramsay’s attempt to see Paul and Minta married, result only in more attempts, further excursions rather than rest” (Woolf 115). The lighthouse stands as a potent symbol of this lack of attainability. James arrives, only to realize that it is not at all the mist-shrouded destination of his childhood. Instead, he is made to reconcile two competing and contradictory images of the tower – how it appeared to him when he was a boy and how it appears to him now that he is a man. He decides that both of these images contribute to the essence of the lighthouse – that nothing is ever only one thing- a sentiment that echoes the novel’s determination to arrive at truth through varied and contradictory vantage points.

Woolf sets her iconic character Lily to reverberate unregistered currents of thought in order to interrupt the restrictive propaganda’s framework:

Meanwhile, the break with materialist conventions in narrative technique feeds back into an ideological opposition to materialism in its broader, socio-economic sense. By challenging the ‘custom’ of fiction, Woolf targets not just the established devices of writing, but the tendency of Bennett and his fellows to think about people in terms of class and money – ‘custom’ in its social and economic forms. (qtd .in Hunter 64)

She uses Lily’s painting represents a struggle against gender convection, represented by Charles Tansley’s statement that women
can’t paint or write. Lily’s desire to express Mrs. Ramsay’s essence as a wife and mother in the painting mimics the impulse among modern women to know and understand intimately the gendered experiences of the women who came before them:

Other approaches to the life-art relationship in Woolf’s writing may be understood as conscious correctives to the impersonalizing and disembodied tendencies of modernity. Usually with a basis in some variant of feminist/gender studies or phenomenology, such correctives take the form of a return to the body, aiming to situate the writing and written subjects in their world. (Koppen, 376)

Lily’s composition attempts to discover and comprehend Mrs. Ramsay’s beauty, just as Woolf’s construction of Mrs. Ramsay’s character reflect her attempts to access and portray her own mother. Lily is represented as an agent of the author not only to produce the proper stuff of the fiction, but also create a profound vision to the concept of the selfhood. Woolf describes: “the true self [is] neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves” (qtd.in Ross and Lindgren, 377). This would not be possible unless we stop looking outward and start to look inward, as it is emphasized by Woolf in her “Modern Fiction.” Expansive or fractured selves of this novel are a staple of European modernism: as English novelist Virginia Woolf sought to illustrate in her kaleidoscopic rendition of fluid subjectivities...and on a grand scale there is the portfolio of selves, or seventy-odd ‘heteronyms’ invented by Portuguese poet, writer, and translator Fernando Pessoa, whose unfinished, fragmentary lifetime project Livro do Desassossego (The Book of Disquiet, 1982) is the embodiment of the imaginative life as endless flânerie wan (dering). Pessoa’s labour on the fusion of art and life can be aligned with other such projects. (qtd. in Ross and Lindgren, 342)

Woolf reveals how characters connected with each other through an intense personal vision: “When Mrs. Ramsay views her own distant horizon, she often does not look at the material world outside of her but rather revels in prospects that she imagines inhabit her own interior, her body” (Luttrel, 73).This structure enforce readers to recognize the visionary ability of the Lily and Mrs. Ramsay: “Woolf endows Mrs. Ramsay and Lily with the same interest in discovering how to balance perception and expression between the proximate and the remote. Mrs. Ramsay and Lily are compelled to navigate the space between the near and the distant” (Luttrel, 70). The painting also represents dedication to feminine artistic vision, expressed through Lily’s anxiety over showing it
to William Bankes. In deciding that completing the painting regardless of what happens to it’s the most important thing, Lily makes the choice to establish her own artistic voice. “In this respect, her project mirrors Woolf’s writing, which synthesizes the perceptions of her many characters to come to a balanced and truthful portrait of the world” (Dick 53). In the end, she decides that her vision depends on balance and synthesis – how to bring together disparate things in harmony.

Creativity

For Virginia Woolf, symbols are acted as a massive frame that allow readers to experience the highest level of mental and spiritual exercises, which involves imagination and reasoning. Furthermore, by stating that: “symbols should suggest and evoke” (qtd.in Homans, 37), Woolf stresses the significance of reader’s imagination. The repeated images, symbols, and colors create an insight to the mind and soul. Not only the physical presence of the images become important, but also it instill in each character’s consciousness throughout the novel.

Many of the characters in “To the Lighthouse” are creative. Mr. Ramsay and Tansley are philosopher, Lily Briscoe is a painter, William Bankes is a scientist and Augustus Carmichael is a poet. Each of them produces works which survive – poems, books, paintings, scientific theories. Creativity imposes order on things, constructs things which resist the inevitable destructiveness of time. These high cultural forms of creative works are not the ones which are at the center of “To the Lighthouse”. There are other kinds of creative effort which run counter to the destruction of the passage of time. The nurturing of children is traditionally a woman’s role, and it involves all a woman’s creative skill and attention. Natural form and aesthetic form are part of interaction between life and art in this novel: “critical approaches to the life-art relationship in this novel tend to focus on perceived relations of equivalence between emotional experience and aesthetic (con) figuration, between life on the one hand, and shape, trope, structure on the other”(Koppen, 1). All the paradoxes of creation and time are at work in Mrs. Ramsay’s relation to her children. When someone destroys the beauty of Rose’s fruit bowl, Mrs. Ramsay immediately looks at her daughter Prue, for it is of her fragile, adolescent beauty and its vulnerability that she is reminded.

All creativity seems to aim at least in part to work against the destructiveness of natural, material processes, whether it is knitting a sock or raising a child. No amount of creative effort can guarantee success and survival. Domestic creativity, traditionally thought of as women’s work within the division of labor within the family, is often
concerned with spheres of creation in which the product has no more than a very temporary life before it is either consumed or damaged. (Mepham, 41)

“In *To the Lighthouse*” there are many examples of ‘women’s’ work creating vital and beautiful thing which do not last long. Mrs. McNab, with her friend Mrs. Bast and her son, rescue the house from falling into a complete decay by their creative work. Rose creates a beautiful arrangement of the fruit bowl and Mrs. Ramsay creates a dinner party” (Mepham, 41). These forms of creativity are taken more seriously, explored with more respect, than has usually been the case in the novel. The beautiful arrangement of the fruit bowl is destroyed even before the evening is over, the house begins to become dirty and damaged again the moment the work of repair and cleaning stops, and the mood of sociability and ease created at dinner begins to unravel as soon as people get up to leave. Each of these things is genuinely a work of beauty and pleasure produced by careful, focused and skillful effort and in this respect, there is a similarity between these kinds of creative work and that involved in the culturally more highly regarded forms such as scientific and artistic work.

Woolf denotes creativity as a means of anti-materialism to deconstruct the conventional patterns of meaning:

fiction must provide a means of transcending this superficial world-view; it must resist rather than collude with the dehumanizing processes of commoditization. As one recent critic puts it, she sees the role of fiction as ‘laying bare the counterfeit currency of capitalized culture’. Woolf first found a means of giving fictional expression to this cluster of broadly anti-materialist values. (qtd. in Hunter 65)

In her essay "Modern Fiction," Woolf famously criticizes writers whom she terms "materialists": "It is because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body that they have disappointed us,"(Woolf 2). Although Woolf claims to focus on spirit rather than body, the phenomenological interpretation of his works confuses the opposition between body and spirit; in her novels, the self-incarnation creates an impact on oneself, the other, and awareness of the world.

“Mrs. Ramsay with her rather morbid imagination is aware of the uneasy relation between creation and destruction. Her husband’s endless worry about survival and fame and his cheerfulness in the face of the indifference of nature, suggest that at some level, in spite of his apparent clarity of mind, he lives with the illusion that time can be defeated, that by an extra effort of his magnificent masculine will, he could produce work of such extraordinary quality that time would have to admit defeat” (Dick 57). It satisfies him that this has been achieved by
Sir Walter Scott and by Shakespeare. But Mrs. Ramsay, in her woman’s creation-destruction, has no such illusions:

And she peered into the dish, with it shiny walls and its confusion of savory brown and yellow meats, and its bay leaves and its wine, and thought, this will celebrate the occasion—a curious sense rising in her, at once freakish and tender, of celebrating a festival, as if two emotions were called up in her, one profound—for what could be more serious than the love of man for woman, what more commanding, more impressive, bearing in its bosom the seeds of death, at the same time these lovers, these people entering into illusion glittering eyed, must be danced round with mockery, decorated with garlands. (Woolf 93)

As she paints, Lily remembers Mrs. Ramsay and a particular scene does come to her mind with this kind of force, a scene which contains in a condensed and powerful way, a strong and characteristic memory of Mrs. Ramsay. It is a scene on the beach. Mrs. Ramsay is writing a letter, making remark about some objects floating on the water (which she cannot see clearly because of her short eyesight) and chatting with Charles Tansley. “Lily herself makes the connection between the power of particular scenes in the memory and her art when she thinks of ‘this scene on the beach [……] which survived, after all these years, complete [………]and it stayed in the mind almost like a work of art’” (Mepham 43). In this way, Lily plays a central role in intertwining different kinds of creativity represented in the novel.

**Voyage of discovery toward Ramsay’s’ House**

The Ramsay’s house is a stage where Woolf and her characters explain their beliefs and observations. During her dinner party, Mrs. Ramsay sees her house display her own inner notions of shabbiness and her inability to preserve beauty. “In the Time Passes section, war and destruction and the passages of time are reflected in the condition of the house rather that in the emotional development or observable aging of the characters” (Dick 62). The house stands in for the collective consciousness of those who stay in it. At times the characters long to escape it, while at other times, it serves as refuge. From the dinner party to the journey to the lighthouse, Woolf shows the house from every angle, and its structure and contents mirror the interior of the characters who inhabit it:

“In any case it is a mistake to stand outside examining "methods". Any method is right, every method is right, that expresses what we wish to express, if we are writers; that brings us closer to the novelist's intention if we are readers” (qtd.in Rainey899). Her method brings the readers closer to what we perceive as a life itself.
One of the most important psychological processes presented in “To the Lighthouse” is the development of identity or a sense of self which they represent it in relation to the house:

Virginia Woolf’s experimental novel relieves itself of the obligation to give a reflection of reality, focusing mainly on showing the reflection process itself, involving the reader in the stream of consciousness of a particular character. And so in Virginia Woolf’s prose, the narrative slides along the surface of reality, capturing all the smallest particles: the color of leaves on trees, fragments of random thoughts, the play of associations—and all this only in order to finally give the reader a moment to feel the full depth of this reality. (Fayzullaeva, 2)

In the novel both James Ramsay and Lily Briscoe develop to some degree in this direction. James, as a six-year-old boy in the first part, is very much attached to his mother, loving her protection and attention and enjoying the fairy stories she reads him. However, he is already different from his sister Cam and more like his father in that he likes to contemplate the undecorated or uncovered truth of the boar’s skull, which Cam prefers to be hidden by her mother’s shawl. In the third part of the novel, James has reached a crucial stage in his development. Mepham notes that he is old enough to take on more of the identity of an adult man, but his progress toward this is blocked by the fierce hatred of his father. He feels wretched because he is trapped or immobilized. “It is as if his father held him in a web, and as if the only possibility of progress was in metaphorically killing him, in rejecting him totally” (Mepham 29). He wants to be able to become more of a man, but not like his father. His hatred is so powerful that he is prevented from seeing his father clearly, all he can see is the black bird of prey with the metallic beak.

He gradually remembers his mother and the occasion on which she was hurt by his father’s aggressive intolerance. He was jealous of his father and afraid of him. His father is a sad old man, but he is also a man with many positive qualities which James can identify. “He has already internalized his father’s self-image as the heroic leader of a polar expedition; now James sees that in this image there are two sets of footprints, his own and his father’s” (Mepham 29). He shares his father’s severe sense of uncompromising realism, staring death and loneliness in the face unflinching. When his father praises him, he pretends, just like his father had been shown doing in the first part, to be indifferent to the praise as if it were not manly to care for such things:

The lighthouse itself confirms for him some obscure feeling about his own character because it is ‘a stark tower on a bare rock’, which provides him with a subtle and unconscious body image to match his
severity and strength and to which his father’s tall, lean and straight body significantly conforms. (Mepham 29)

This process of forming a stable identity and sense of self-worth is shown in “To the Lighthouse” to be particularly hard for a woman. The model of identity that is proposed for women, and which is perfectly exemplified in Mrs. Ramsay, is to be always willing to sacrifice their own self in the interests of others. Moreover, the psychological consequences of this model of womanhood can be disastrous, since the rule which says always take other people’s interests more seriously than your own may suggest that their lives are in fact worth more than your own. Lily is contrasted with Mrs. Ramsay on the one hand, and with Charley Tansley on the other. He is the very personification of self-assertiveness. As he walks with Mrs. Ramsay to the town, he talks endlessly and only about himself. Over dinner, he annoys Lily with the egotism of his self-centered conversation. “Lily herself is torn between different possibilities. She adores Mrs. Ramsay but wants to preserves herself from love and marriage” (Mepham 30).

The problem of identity is posed for Lily in the question of how it is possible to be a woman without being like Mrs. Ramsay. “In third part she has developed a much clearer sense of her priorities and seems confident that she has made the right decisions about her life” (Lawrence 427). Her incapacity for self-surrender makes her feel like a dried-up old maid, with nothing of value to offer. Thus, identity is an accomplishment, something that people achieve against serious obstacles and only after a great deal of emotional effort and learning. “Mr. Ramsay who tends to dramatize himself in stereotype images of male heroes which have little relation to reality, has self-doubt, thinking that he has been a failure” (Lawrence 428). His life has been built around accommodation of family life into his life as an intellectual. But the family consumes his time and gives rise to endless problems about money.

Mrs. Ramsay’s sense of self-worth is vulnerable to the silent gaze of Augustus Carmichael, not because he actually says anything, but because he represents the permanent possibility that our lives and personalities may be looked at from a different perspective from that which gives us our self-confidence. “Mrs. Ramsay takes Carmichael’s gaze to be a penetrating one which seeks out her hidden selfishness beneath the surface performance of her self-sacrificing services to others” (Mepham 30). There is no interpretation of a life which is immune to this kind of challenge, which could be certain that there is no hidden meaning which, suddenly appearing on the surface, would fragment the delicate tissue of identity. This is because the construction
of self is always an unfinished business. This novel takes the question of self to be permanently open:

Admitting the vagueness which afflicts all criticism of novels, let us hazard the opinion that for us at this moment the form of fiction most in vogue more often misses than secures the thing we seek. Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide. Nevertheless, we go on perseveringly, conscientiously, constructing our two and thirty chapters after a design which more and more ceases to resemble the vision in our minds. So much of the enormous labor of proving the solidity, the likeness to life, of the story is not merely labor thrown away but labor misplaced to the extent of obscuring and blotting out the light of the conception. (Woolf 3)

It suggests that even the most accomplished selves, those for whom there seems to be no more room left for doubts as to who they are or in what their worth resides, are built on insecure foundations.

The Boar’s Skull

After the dinner party, Mrs. Ramsay retires upstairs to find the children wide-awake, bothered by the boar’s skull that hangs on the nursery wall. The presence of the skull acts as a disturbing reminder that death is always at hand, even during life’s most blissful moments. When people die in “To the Lighthouse”, it is always a brutal intrusion of nonsense into the lives of the living. They die because the framework of human time, the way that people have of making sense of their past in order to create for themselves a future, collides with some alien, non-human time framework. This occurs through illness (Mrs. Ramsay and Prue) or accident (the shipwreck fishermen). Even the war, in which Andrew Ramsay is killed, which is a social and not a natural event, is presented in the novel as a distant, unintelligible destructive force.

In “To the Lighthouse” there is not any religious or social vision which could make sense of death, which could give to people’s dying an uplifting or consoling interpretation and which could ease the grief of the survivors (Mepham 31). Traditional representations of grief have concentrated on the shattering intensity of the emotion. “To the Lighthouse” paints a much more complicated and subtle picture. Virginia Woolf, of course, does not represent these processes using the language of psychology. “The power of her depiction of these inner experiences derives largely from her brilliance with metaphor - the rope which immobilizes James, the mutilated mackerel and so on” (Mepham 31). She aims to capture their quality as subjective experiences by finding
images with which to express them. “She chooses the device of showing the characters all on one day many years after Mrs. Ramsay’s death, as if she were less interested in the immediate shock of someone’s death than in the longer-term effects of the loss” (Mepham 32). It is as if it were only after a very long time that the characters are finally ready to let Mrs. Ramsay go.

On this day, each of them performs a private ceremony of farewell which allows Mrs. Ramsay to fade away. For Mr. Ramsay, of course, the ceremony is the trip to the lighthouse, and he conducts it very much as a ceremony, with readings and intonations of verse and ritual gestures. At the end he looks back at the island, silently staring “at the frail blue shape which seemed like the vapor of something that had burned itself away” (Woolf 174), as at the remaining mist of incense at the end of a service, or of course at the vanishing ghost of his wife with whom he has finally settled his accounts so that he can now leap as if released or rejuvenated onto the rock (Mepham 32). Lily believes that everything depends on distance. In order to be able to say farewell to the dead, one must first get them into perspective. If one remains too close to them, then everything becomes confused, mixed up together. This problem of gaining sufficient distance from someone, in order to be able to perceive them clearly, is particularly severe for a child in relation to its parents. James tends to attribute all sorts of magic power to both his father, whom he sees as a monstrous bird, and to his mother, whom he associates with the magical yellow eye of the lighthouse. Lily has the same problem with Mrs. Ramsay, who is a mother figure for her. Mrs. Ramsay is perceived as an angel, by many of those around her.

But Lily goes further than this for she thinks that Mrs. Ramsay has some secret knowledge hidden in her heart, “like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out would teach one everything” (Woolf, 42). Both James and Lily have to learn to see Mrs. Ramsay as a woman, with all the limitations and contradictions and negative aspects that this implies before they can really accept that her death is a fact and not some hostile withdrawal” (Mepham 31). The simple passage of time undoes the authority of the dead and unmasks them as limited, mistaken, flawed human beings after all. Moreover, social conventions change so that those which the dead personified when they were alive become old-fashioned or even perceived as positively oppressive and dehumanizing. Conventional women’s roles changed a great deal between Mrs. Ramsay’s and Lily’s generations so that it is almost impossible not to see Mrs. Ramsay as hopelessly trapped in degrading and oppressive roles and relationships.
As Lily paints her picture, her memories of Mrs. Ramsay undergo a simplification and clarification, as though she were editing them in order to arrive at images which contained clearly a sense of her, whether sitting on the beach or sitting, knitting at the window. At the end of her day of mourning, Lily also enacts in her mind a ceremony of farewell. What is more striking about Lily’s case is that she experiences the sudden upsurges of grief as shocking and surprising. Lily calls an emotion of the body “dammed up volcano” (Mepham 33), and it is a very physical feeling which is especially painful, she feels, because there are no words in which it can be expressed so that we are left confused and feeling out of control marvelous image, like being thrown wounded and bleeding into the sea.

The Fruit Basket
Rose arranges a fruit basket for her mother’s dinner party that serves to draw the partygoers out of their private suffering and untie them. Woolf states that: “one has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together” (Reese 133). Although Augustus Carmichael and Mrs. Ramsay appreciate the arrangement differently – she rips a bloom from it, she refuses to disturb it – the pair is brought harmoniously together. The basket testifies both to the “frozen” quality of beauty that Lily describes, and to beauty’s seductive and soothing quality.

Self-reflexivity of the Window
The window in part one is, naturally, the literal one at which Mrs. Ramsay sits with her small son James, the two of them forming the subject of a painting being executed by Lily Briscoe below on the lawn. The title, has a much wider application. Each of the characters has his window opening on the world, and much of the first section of the novel differentiates the frames of references of Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay, Lily Briscoe, the children, Charles Tansley, etc. “In addition to giving the view each one has from his window, Virginia Woolf, adding her own voice to the voice of the characters, bit by bit completes a view ‘in’ as well as ‘out’, in other words, a view of the viewer framed by window” (Schaefer 72). Watching Mr. Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay strolling together in the garden, Lily finds that they seem to exist on another level. Very often in the novel, they signify the general ideas of masculinity and femininity.

The polarity of males and females in the novel entwine with metaphor of the soul in which their native purity fallen into materialistic world. Therefore, narrative strategies of the author disrupt the normalized boundaries by relying on the centripetal force of the symbol:
History, as coterminal with the history of Europe, is a paradigmatic example of the centripetal tendency which we associate with Eurocentric, metropolitan modernism. ‘Everything has come to Europe, and everything has come out of it’ (Ross and Lindgren, 375). Eurocentrism reflected itself in the works of Virginia Woolf as a tool to underline the notions of individuality, soul, and progress.

“We do not come to write better; all that we can be said to do is to keep moving, now a little in this direction, now in that, but with a circular tendency should the whole course of the track be viewed from a sufficiently lofty pinnacle. It needs scarcely be said that we make no claim to stand, even momentarily, upon that vantage ground” (Woolf 1).

Woolf sets a novel as a firm framework for construction of the soul: “As for the soul... the truth is, one can’t write directly about the soul. Looked at, it vanishes; but look at the ceiling, at Grizzle [the dog], at the cheaper beasts in the Zoo which are exposed to walkers in Regent’s Park, and the soul slips in. It slipped in this afternoon’” (Woolf 84). The opening pages of the novel rapidly delineate the masculinity of Mr. Ramsay and the budding masculinity of his son. Virginia Woolf does not achieve this through explicit assertion and argument, but by description and images and ironic mimicry.

Mr. Ramsay is lean as a knife, and he stands straight and strong and uncompromisingly faces the facts. His masculinity is always being performed in his postures and gestures. When he becomes engrossed in ideas, Mr. Ramsay discards personal vanity:

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 his mind, and so to stand on his little ledge facing the dark of human experience, how we know nothing and the sea eats away the ground we stand on- that was his fate, his gift...not only fame but even his own name was forgotten by him, he kept even in that desolation a vigilance which spared no phantom and luxuriated in no vision[...] (Woolf 72)

Mrs. Ramsay is in general attuned to the needs of others, and particularly those of men whom she has under her protection. She can rest her head on a frightened child’s pillow and turn an imagined world of horrors into “a bird’s nest [...] a beautiful mountain [...] with alleys and flowers and bells singing and little goats and antelopes [...]” (Woolf 177). She can make a prig like Charles Tansley feel happy and proud to be walking “with a beautiful woman for the first time in his life” (Woolf
or a young booby like Paul Rayley feel he can do anything: “They came to her, naturally, since she was a woman, all day long with this and that; one wanting this, another that; the children were growing up; she often felt she was nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotions” (Woolf 54-5). Lily protests and resists the social convention that says that as a woman it is her job to watch after the needs of men, but she does the role to help Mrs. Ramsay.

**Representation of the characters**

Woolf’s mature career began in 1925 with the publication of “Mrs. Dalloway” and “To the Lighthouse”. As a modern author, she utilizes the narrative technique conventionally called stream of consciousness in the novel “To the Lighthouse”.

Woolf tends to equate the moralization and propaganda with the Victorian era and modern world without, which she calls “the burden of preaching.” In her essay “The Leaning Tower,” for example, she distances herself from a literary tradition she associates with Jane Austen’s “dominion of hedges,” or the propagation of class hierarchies, and hopes that a future poet living in a classless society might use a new vocabulary to transcend propaganda (qtd. in Wollaeger xv).

This novel splits into three sections and focuses on the fragmentation of Ramsey’s summer trip. As a matter of fact, these three sections deeply rely on symbolic representation which not merely reflect weighty issues related to each individual, but also reverberate the entire mindsets of the characters.

**Mrs. Ramsay**

Mrs. Ramsay represented by the sign of the window and house in which she acts selflessly to fulfill expectations of the members of the family, actually she wishes to achieve eternity by stopping the moments of time. Passing of the time and shapes of the wave in the ocean remind her ephemerality of the human life. Her vision reveals the complex reciprocity of the Woolf’s characters who are breaking the conventional narrative forms:

Mrs. Ramsay’s and Lily’s experiences with near and distant vision do not give them the complete picture that would require even more than “fifty pairs of eyes” really to see (198), nor do their adventures in seeing necessarily even grant them glimpses of anything universal. But their capacity to shuttle swiftly between the near and the far is nonetheless instinctive and necessary. It affords them moments of power in domestic happiness, in freedom from the tyranny and judgments of other characters, and in acts of artistic creation energized
by Woolf’s Emersonian exploration of the dynamic oscillation of visionary perception (qtd. in Luttrell 79). As a result, she explores the connection between moments of her present time and the permanent notion of the future by the intense effect of ever-present standing of the lighthouse.

**Lily**

Lily as a female painter hopes to find a market for her works and attain a reputation. Her painting becomes a prominent symbol of her life, so Lily is entangled with the struggling of the ego for exposing a true character as a self. The famous metaphor of Woolf’s life is luminous halo and the focus of her novel is not to turn to the intimate and private interior, but to transcend consciousness while maintaining continuity. Many of Woolf’s characters emphasis on inner life:

In Virginia Woolf’s case, the exterior events have actually lost their hegemony, they serve to release and interpret inner events. With reference to the stocking-measuring incident in To the Lighthouse, Auerbach stresses the randomness and contingency of the exterior occasion . . . which releases the much more significant inner process. This is a reading which focuses on essences and interiority, minimizing the exterior occasion by considering it only as a point of departure. (Koppen,381)

The halo of their lives is a boundary space in which their characters are created and created by each other and the world around them. The convention of Lily’s society intensely prevented her from being an artist, especially as a woman who wishes for unachievable goals through her entire artistic career. She directly goes to the contrary side, in which Mrs. Ramsay played a selfless role.

**Mr. Ramsay**

Mr. Ramsay wants to contribute a new theory to the philosophical effort of the past. He did not accept different versions of reality because consciousness in Woolf’s experimental novel switches from one character to another one:

the chronology of the action, its relatively small localization in space, multiplied by the perception of the world only through the prism of different consciousnesses that coexist with each other inevitably give the narrative a metaphysical dimension, trying to answer the question "what is reality?" not so much by the text itself, but by emphasizing the inferiority of the text as such in relation to reality or, more generally, the fundamental non-transferability of the meaning of its expression.(Fayzullaeva,2)
That is why he read Lord Tennyson to reflect ideas transferred from generation to generation without any interference of the individual.

**James**
Jame is characterized as a resentful child toward his father’s authority. He experienced some kind of affinity with his mother because James also identified with the everlasting symbol of the lighthouse. As a child, James constantly gazed on the lighthouse from the window of the house. His goal also is bounded with Lily.

**Conclusion**
Consequently, the central sign of the lighthouse which is located farther than all the characters became an indicator of the inaccessible reality, the unattainable meaning of life and unfulfilled desires. All the characters possess their own subjective reality which led them in to astray, especially in the present time of their life. Every individual represented as a pilgrim who undergone a crisis of faith; they cannot believe anymore to the complex experience of life.

This pilgrimage actually elected as a distance which must be measured to reach to the lighthouse; the title of the novel also proves this point, called “To the lighthouse” not at the lighthouse. Therefore, travelers searching for their quest, but just two of them can achieve self-fulfillment: James and Lily. Moreover, Woolf portrays the characters based on the series of images which deal with the central notion of the novel, which is the intuitive realization of the soul.

**Works Cited**


VERS CHEZ SOI : LE MOUVEMENT CENTRIPETE DES SYMBOLES DANS LA PROMENADE AU PHARE\textsuperscript{3} DE VIRGINIA WOOLF

Le modernisme est un mouvement littéraire dont les origines remontent aux années 1914. Les nouvelles technologies et les effets terribles et désastreux de la Grande Guerre ont provoqué de nombreux auteurs à mettre en question l’avenir de cette machine moderne (être humain) qui, à l’affût de nouveaux sentiments, refusait toutes sortes de tradition. Ainsi, le récit moderne se dote de deux outils importants : le premier, c’est le courant de conscience qui permet de révéler la mentalité des personnages ; le deuxième, c’est l’utilisation des signes qui nous aide à refléter la réalité cachée de la vie des personnages.

Virginia Woolf est l’une des écrivaines illustres du courant moderne qui a eu recours dans ses récits, \textit{La Promenade au phare} entre autres, aux diverses techniques modernes. Alors, l’objectif de cet article se résume en deux étapes différentes : d’abord, nous analysons à travers une étude détaillée, le rôle des signes et des symboles variés afin de repérer leurs utilités dans le roman en tant que réseau de signes ; ensuite, nous examinons le mouvement centripète des couleurs et des symboles pour représenter la notion inatteignable de réalité dans la vie moderne.

\textbf{Mots-clés} : littérature moderne, courant de conscience, symbolisme, notion de réalité, mouvement centripète, soi