ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF DEATH AND MOURNING IN VIRGINIA WOOLF’S TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

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Tez Danışmanı
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ABSTRACT

ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF DEATH AND MOURNING IN VIRGINIA WOOLF’S TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

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Süleyman Demirel University, Department of English Language and Literature
Master, 75 pages, August 2009

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Betüre MEMMEDOVA

This study examines Virginia Woolf’s masterpiece To the Lighthouse, the novel of manifold perspectives focusing on the concept of death and mourning.

The sources used for this research cover literary criticism from the early twentieth century to the present. During this process, periodicals, reference materials, and books, as well as other fiction by Woolf have been used. In this study, eclectic method has been basically used. Some elements of feminist criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, and predominantly biographical reference have shed light on this study as well.

In this study, we tried to prove that Virginia Woolf is a remarkable experimenter concerning the expression of death and mourning. She skillfully fuses the features of conventional pastoral elegy and her unique stream-of-consciousness technique.

One conclusion drawn from this study is that from the very beginning, death is a frequent and familiar theme in Virginia Woolf’s own family. Thus, it is obvious that death affected both Virginia Woolf’s own psychology and her fiction. Another conclusion is that Virginia Woolf’s novel To the Lighthouse is an elegiac work and it represents Virginia Woolf’s own mourning over her parents’ death to some extent. However, Virginia Woolf managed to represent quite a different representation of death and mourning not only from the traditional elegiac form but even from other contemporary modernist novels, including her own novel Mrs. Dalloway. As a final evaluation, Virginia Woolf never ignored the psychological impact of death on life and on her fiction.

Keywords: Death, Mourning, Elegy, Elegiac Work, Pastoral Elegy, The Great War, Modernism.
ÖZET

VIRGINIA WOOLF’UN TO THE LIGHTHOUSE (DENİZFENERİ) ROMANINDA ÖLÜM VE YAS KAVRAMLININ İNCELENMESİ

Esra İftet AYTAÇ

Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyat Bölümü
Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 75 sayfa, Ağustos 2009

Danışman: Doç. Dr. Betüre MEMMEDOVA

Bu çalışma, Virginia Woolf’un baş yaptığı To the Lighthouse (Denizfeneri)’ta ölüm ve yas kavramını farklı bakış açılardıyla incelemektedir.


Çalışmamızda, ölüm ve yas kavramıyla ilgili olarak Virginia Woolf’un göze çarpan bir temsilci olduğunu ortaya koymaya çalıştık. Virginia Woolf, geleneksel pastoral ağıt ve essiz bilinç akımı teknliğini ustalıkla birleştirmiştir.


Anahtar Kelimeler: Ölüm, Yas, Ağıt, Pastoral Ağıt, Büyük Savaş, Modernizm.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A large number of critical articles concerning the theme of death and mourning in *To the Lighthouse* have been studied.

By the fifties, more than a decade after Woolf’s death, she began to be seen as a master writer. By the sixties, Woolf was compared to Joyce, James, and other worthies, and her status as a literary giant was rarely questioned (Capo, 2000: 6).

Most critics acknowledge that Woolf never lost sight of death in her novels and that passing time presents thought of death, and unsettling realization and as a reason for hopelessness.

She never overlooked the fact that time moves human being toward death for Woolf, life characterized by endless variety and movements. Its exquisite beauty is enhanced that by knowing that we humans live short lives and lose everything when we die. We are terrified by thoughts of non-being and clever in our attempts to live for the moment, postponing our acknowledgement of death (Capo, 2000: 8).

Death is the main theme which captures the whole body of the novel. We see so many references about death throughout the novel. There are a number of critical articles agreeing on the elegiac properties of the novel.

In his article “*To the Lighthouse: The Novel As Elegy*” (1986), Peter Knox-Shaw focuses on that Virginia Woolf’s fiction is the essentially poetic form of elegy. And he also emphasizes why Virginia Woolf intended to write an elegy by giving references from Woolf’s diary. In addition, Shaw presents us the definitions of the elegy and pastoral elegy as a literary form and he also draws parallels between the elegiac structure of *To the Lighthouse* and pastoral elegy. Finally, he deals with the concept of mourning in *To the Lighthouse* considerably.

Stella McNichol is another significant critic who portrays Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* as elegy. In “*To the Lighthouse: An Elegy*, *Virginia Woolf and the Poetry of Fiction* (1990), McNichol depicts Virginia Woolf’s own thoughts about *To the Lighthouse* and she elaborately focuses on the poetic function of the novel. She also speaks of similarities between Roger Fry’s ideas about painting and Virginia Woolf’s about literature. Thus, she also points out Virginia Woolf’s essay
“The Narrow Bridge of Art”. McNichol claims that Virginia Woolf’s novels are works of art by virtue of the poetry in them (1990: 92).

Another remarkable critic who is concerned about elegiac form of To the Lighthouse is Gillian Beer. In his/ her essay, “Hume, Stephen, and Elegy in To the Lighthouse” (1984), s/he considerably draws parallels between a prominent eighteenth century philosopher and his thoughts and Virginia Woolf’s own father Leslie Stephen’s ideas. S/he also claims that several of Virginia Woolf’s books compose an absence. In her/ his essay, s/he focuses on the features of elegy. S/he also mentions death in Virginia Woolf’s own family. As a final evaluation, s/he emphasizes Hume is strongly identified with Mr. Ramsay’s thoughts. S/he also points out the elegiac triumph of the novel.

In her book Virginia Woolf (1997), Laura Marcus deals with the elegiac structure of Virginia Woolf’s two prominent novels in “The Novel as Elegy: Jacob’s Room and To the Lighthouse”. Marcus mentions that Woolf constructed her narrative around a central absence: Jacob and Mrs. Ramsay. She goes on to say that these novels are, in different ways, elegies for the death. Also, she focuses on “Woolf’s elegiac novels were, at one level, elegies for the conventions of the novel itself.” (1997: 82).

Sarah Benefiel also deals with life and death in Virginia Woolf’s prominent novels. In her article, “Life and Death in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse” (2003), Benefiel begins with Virginia Woolf’s own desire for death, and the relationship between her thoughts about death and the concept of death in her books. She also goes on to say that responses to death are important in Woolf’s fiction. Thus, mourning is a natural and necessary reaction to loss. From another perspective, she gives particular emphasis to the effects of the Great War on people and public mourning after World War I. Benefiel elaborately emphasizes Woolf’s biographical references and the themes in her works Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse.

Karen Smythe dwells on the elegiac structure of Virginia Woolf’s novels in her article “Virginia Woolf’s Elegiac Enterprise” (1992b). She gives us a number of definitions related to elegy such as “fiction- elegy, fiction- elegist, elegiac- fiction.”
(1992b, 65,70). She also focuses on elegy as a genre and she tries to demonstrate how Virginia Woolf uses elegiac conventions in her fiction.

Susan Bennett Smith is another critic who deals with the concept of death both in her dissertation and her article. In her dissertation, “Virginia Woolf and Death: A Feminist Cultural History” (1993), Smith studies on gender-related causes of death, Virginia Woolf’s grief works and death and gender in the 1990s. Smith concerns about the concept of mourning in Virginia Woolf’s grief works, Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse in her article “Reinventing Grief Work: Virginia Woolf’s Feminist Representations of Mourning in Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse” (1995). She claims that Virginia Woolf provides a positive model for grief work and she also emphasizes traditional mourning rituals and Woolf’s model of grief practices.

In his book review of Mark Spilka’s Virginia Woolf’s Quarrel with Grieving, James Naremore (1982) draws our attention to the author’s perspectives, according to which Woolf’s fiction provides therapy and consolation for her emotional crisis by offering plenty of evidence from Woolf’s biography.

In “Virginia Woolf and the Death of Modernism” (1998), Rose Jacqueline puts emphasis on Woolf’s agonizing life experiences from the very beginning and how her life was shadowed by death. She goes on to say that Virginia Woolf had a clear sense of the tragedy of her generation associated with the World War I.

Finally, Sandra Gilbert’s article “Rats’ Alley: The Great War, Modernism, and the (Anti) Pastoral Elegy” (1999) is a remarkable piece showing the effect of the Great War on Modernism and on Virginia Woolf’s literary activity. Sandra Gilbert emphasizes the effects of the Great War on people in the Modernist Era. She also points out the transformation of the elegy as a genre. In addition, she draws parallels between elegy and (anti) pastoral elegy. By using this source, we tried to consider To the Lighthouse as an elegy and its elegiac features with the transformation of the genre.

In the light of this review of literature about death and mourning in addition to a great many of critics and a number of studies on Virginia Woolf’s fiction, we
will try to analyze Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* in terms of the concept of death and mourning from various perspectives, adding our own comments.

In writing about this astonishingly gifted writer, Katherine Anne Porter writes, “Virginia Woolf was a great artist, one of the glories of our time…” Woolf, as Porter joyfully declares, “lived in the naturalness of her vocation. The world of the arts was her native territory; she ranged freely under her own sky, speaking her mother tongue fearlessly. She was at home in that place as much as anyone ever was.” (qtd. in Capo, 2000: 50). As Capo puts it, “Virginia Woolf was a master writer who gave the world enduring loveliness when she wrote *To the Lighthouse.*” (2000: 50).
A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

Virginia Woolf was born into what she once described as “a very communicative, literate, letter writing, visiting, articulate, late nineteenth century world.”1 Her parents, Leslie and Julia Stephen, both previously widowed, began their marriage in 1878 with four young children: Laura (1870 – 1945), the daughter of Leslie Stephen and his first wife, Harriet Thackeray (1840 – 1875); and George (1868 – 1934), Gerald (1870 – 1937), and Stella Duckworth (1869 – 1897), the children of Julia Prinsep (1846 – 1895) and Herbert Duckworth (1833 – 1870). In the first five years of their marriage, the Stephens had four more children. Their first child, Virginia, was born in 1882, the year her father began work on the monumental Dictionary of National Biography that would earn him a knighthood in 1902. Virginia, her sister, Vanessa (1879 – 1961), and her brothers, Thoby (1880 – 1906) and Adrian (1883 – 1948), all were born in the tall house at 22 Hyde Park Gate in London where the eight children lived with numerous servants, their eminent and irascible father, and their beautiful mother, who, in Woolf’s words, was “in the very centre of that great Cathedral space that was childhood.” (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, ix).

Leslie and Julia Stephen are the models for Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse. Beginning in the year Woolf was born, the entire Stephen family moved to Talland House in St. Ives, Cornwall, for the summer. There the younger children would spend their days playing cricket in the garden, frolicking on the beach, or taking walks along the coast, from where they could look out across the bay to the Godrevy lighthouse (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, x). And “it was Virginia’s memories of these long and happy holidays that are the basis for the family scenes in Part I of the novel, where they have been transferred to an island in Scotland.” (Mepham, 1987: 2).

The early years of Woolf’s life were marred by traumatic events. When she was thirteen, her mother, exhausted by a punishing schedule of charitable visits

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1 We have come across various sources on Virginia Woolf’s biography but we have mainly used the following ones throughout this part: Virginia Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own, Introduction by Susan Gubar (2005), The Northon Anthology of English Literature (2005), The Northon Anthology of World Masterpieces (1997), Macmillan Master Guides To the Lighthouse by Virginia Woolf (1987), and Virginia Woolf (2000).
among the sick and poor, died from a bout of influenza (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, x). The Stephen family was shattered by a series of deaths. Virginia’s step-sister Stella died soon after marrying in 1897, her father died after a long illness in 1904 and her older brother Thoby died of a fever contracted while travelling in Greece in 1906. Virginia was distressed to the point of mental instability by these traumatic events. “She suffered periods of severe mental ill-health and she attempted suicide on several occasions. All her life she remained vulnerable to the return of devastating emotions and to anxiety and uncertainty about her life in fragmented parts as both Cam, a child and later an adolescent who struggles to work out her relationship with her father, and as the artist Lily Briscoe who mourns Mrs. Ramsay and attempts to celebrate her in her work.” (Mepham, 1987: 2).

In addition to the premature death of her mother and half sister, there were other miseries in Woolf’s childhood. In autobiographical writings and letters, Woolf referred to the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her two older half brothers, George and Gerald Duckworth. George, in one instance, explained his behaviour to a family doctor as his effort to comfort his half sister for the fatal illness of their father. Sir Leslie died from cancer in 1904, and shortly thereafter the four Stephen children, Vanessa, Virginia, Thoby, and Adrian – moved together to the then-unfashionable London neighborhood of Bloomsbury. When Thoby Stephen began to bring his Cambridge University friends to the house on Thursday evenings, what would later become famous as the ‘Bloomsbury Group’ began to form (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xi). Bloomsbury Group is a gathering of writers, artists, and intellectuals impatient with conservative Edwardian society and eager to explore new modes of thought (Abrams, 1997: 2736).

As a young woman, Woolf wrote for the prestigious Times Literary Supplement, and as an adult she quickly found herself at the center of England’s most important literary community. This group of writers, artists, and philosophers emphasized nonconformity, aesthetic pleasure, and intellectual freedom. Some prominent members of “Bloomsbury Group” were the painter Lytton Strachey, the novelist E. M. Forster, the composer Benjamin Britten, and the economist John Maynard Keynes (http://www.sparknotes.com, March 12 2007).
Like most women of her time, Virginia Woolf received no formal education. From her earliest years, however, she was surrounded by books and she spent her teens reading in her father’s library. “She thus acquainted herself with the most important works of world literature and developed a love for them which provided a firm basis for her writing.” (Mackean, 2005: 162). In her diary, she recorded many different kinds of books her father recommended to her – biographies and memoirs, philosophy, history, and poetry. Although he believed that women should be “as well educated as men,” Woolf’s mother held that “to serve is the fulfillment of mother’s highest nature.” (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xi). The young Stephen children were first taught at home by their mother and father, with little success. Woolf herself received no formal education beyond some classes in Greek and Latin in the Ladies’ Department of King’s College in London, beginning in the fall of 1897. In 1899 she began lessons in Greek with Clara Pater, sister of the renowned Victorian critic Walter Pater, and in 1902 she was tutored in the classics by Janet Case (who also later involved her in work for women’s suffrage). Such homeschooling was a source of some bitterness later in her life, as she recognized the advantages that derived from the expensive educations her brothers and half brothers received at private schools and university. Yet she also realized that her father’s encouragement of her obviously keen intellect had given her an eclectic foundation. In the early years of Bloomsbury, she reveled in the opportunity to discuss ideas with her brother Thoby and his friends, among whom were Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, and E. M. Forster. From them, she heard, too, about an intense young man named Leonard Woolf, whom she had met briefly when visiting Thoby at Cambridge, and also in 1904 when she dined at Gordon Square just before leaving for Ceylon (now called Sri Lanka), where he was to administer a farflung outpost of the British Empire (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xii). In addition, ‘Bloomsbury Group’ contributed to “Woolf’s freedom of thinking about gender relations.” (Abrams, 2005a: 2080).

Virginia Woolf’s first publications were unsigned reviews and essays in an Anglo-Catholic newspaper called the Guardian, beginning in December 1904. In the fall of 1906, she and Vanessa went with a family friend, Violet Dickinson, to meet their brothers in Greece. The trip was spoiled by Vanessa’s falling ill, and when she
returned earlier – and her sister was seriously ill. After a misdiagnosis by his doctors, Thoby died from typhoid fever on November 20, leaving Virginia to maintain a cheerful front while her sister Violet Dickinson recovered from their own illnesses. Two days after Thoby’s death, Vanessa agreed to marry his close friend Clive Bell (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xii).

While living in Bloomsbury, Woolf had begun to write a novel that would go through many drafts before it was published in 1915 as *The Voyage Out*. In these early years of independence, her social circle widened. She became close to the art critic Roger Fry, organizer of the First Post-Impressionist Exhibition in London in 1910, and also entered the orbit of the famed literary hostess Lady Ottoline Morrell (cruelly caricatured as Hermione Roddice in D. H. Lawrence’s 1920 novel *Women in Love*). Her political consciousness also began to emerge. In 1910 she volunteered for the movement for women’s suffrage (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xii). “This circle of creative, modern thinkers and writers was the immediate context for Virginia Woolf’s work. More broadly, she read and was intrigued by James Joyce’s *Ulysses* when it was published in 1919. She also encountered the modern technique of stream-of-consciousness narration in the many-volumed novel *Pilgrimage* by Dorothy Richardson.” (Mepham, 1987: 3). Adapting the stream-of-consciousness technique inside a narrative style that “ranges from precise, mundane details to lyric elaboration, and keenly aware of the way perception is further shaped by cultural habits, Woolf shows the creative imagination to be as necessary in our lives as it is in the creation of artistic texts.” (Abrams, 1997: 2735).

To the British establishment, one of the most embarrassing aspects of the Dreadnought affair was that a woman had taken part in the hoax. Vanessa Bell was concerned at what might have happened to her sister had she been discovered on the ship. She was also increasingly worried about Virginia’s erratic health, and by the early summer 1910 had discussed with doctor George Savage, one of the family’s doctors, the debilitating headaches her sister suffered; Dr. Savage prescribed several weeks in a nursing home. Another element in Vanessa’s concern was that Virginia was twenty-eight and still unmarried. Clive Bell and Virginia had, in fact, engaged in a hurtful flirtation soon after the birth of Vanessa’s first child in 1908. Although she
had been proposed to twice in 1909 and once in 1911, Virginia had not taken these offers very seriously (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xiii).


By the end of that year, Woolf was again suffering from the tremendous headaches that afflicted her throughout her life, and in 1913 she was again sent to a nursing home for what was then called a “rest cure.” (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xiii). In September of that year, she took an overdose of a sleeping drug and was under care until the following spring. In early 1915 she suffered a severe breakdown and was ill throughout most of the year in which her first novel was published (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xiii).

Despite this difficult beginning, Virginia and Leonard Woolf’s marriage eventually settled into a pattern of immense productivity and mutual support. Leonard worked for a time for the Women’s Cooperative Guild, and became increasingly involved with advising the Labour Party and writing on international politics, as well as editing several periodicals. Virginia began to establish herself as an important novelist and influential critic. In 1917 the Woolfs set up their own publishing house, the Hogarth Press, in their home in Richmond (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xiv). Their first publication was Two Stories – Leonard’s “Three Jews” and Virginia’s experimental “The Mark on the Wall.” They
had decided to make their livings by writing, and in 1919, a few months before Woolf’s second novel, *Night and Day*, was published, they bought a cottage in the village of Rodmell in Sussex. After moving back into London from Richmond in 1923, Woolf would spend summers at Monk’s House, returning to the social whirl of the city in the fall (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xiv).

“The Mark on the Wall” was one of a number of what Woolf called “sketches” that she began to write around the time she and Leonard bought their printing press (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xiv). *Night and Day* was the last of her books to be published in England by another press. In 1919 Hogarth published her story *Kew Gardens*, with two woodcuts by Vanessa Bell, and two years later came *Monday and Tuesday*, the only collection of her short fiction published in Woolf’s lifetime. Her next novel was *Jacob’s Room* (1922), a slim elegy to the generation of 1914, and to her beloved brother Thoby, whose life of great promise had also been cut short so suddenly. Woolf had written to her friend Margaret Llewelyn Davies in 1916 that the Great War, as it was then called, was a “preposterous masculine fiction” that made her “steadily more feminist,” and in her fiction and nonfiction she began to articulate and illuminate the connections between the patriarchal status quo, the relatively subordinate position of women, and war making (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xiv). Thinking about a novel she was calling “The Hours,” Woolf wrote in her diary in 1923 that she wanted to criticize ‘the social system.’ Her inclusion in the novel of a shell-shocked war veteran named Septimus Warren Smith would confuse many of the early reviewers of her fourth novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), but others recognized that Woolf was breaking new ground in the way she rendered consciousness and her understanding of human subjectivity (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xv).

By the time she wrote *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf was also a sought-after essayist and reviewer who, like many of her celebrated contemporaries, was stalking out her own particular piece of modernist territory (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xv). The Hogarth Press published radical young writers like Katherine Mansfield, T.S. Eliot, and Gertrude Stein. Approached by Harriet Shaw Weaver with part of the manuscript of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in 1918, the Woolfs turned it down. Their own small press could not cope with the long and complex manuscript, nor

The staggering range of Woolf’s reading is reflected in the more than five hundred essays and reviews she published during her lifetime. Her critical writing is concerned not only with the canonical works of English literature from Chaucer to her contemporaries, but also ranges widely through lives of the obscure, memoirs, diaries, letters, and biographies. Models of the form, her essays comprise a body of work that has only recently begun to attract the kind of recognition her fiction has received (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xv).

In 1922 Woolf met “the lovely and gifted aristocrat” Vita Sackville-West, and already a well-known poet and novelist (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xv). Their close friendship slowly turned into a love affair, glowing most intensely from about 1925 to 1928, before modulating into friendship once more in the 1930s. The period of their intimacy was extremely creative for both writers, Woolf publishing essays such as “Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown” and “Letter to a Young Poet,” as well as three very different novels: *To the Lighthouse* (1927), which evoked her own childhood and had at its center the figure of a modernist woman artist, Lily Briscoe; *Orlando* (1928), a fantastic biography inspired by Vita’s own remarkable family history; and *The Waves* (1931), a mystical and profoundly meditative work that pushed Woolf’s concept of novel form to its limit. Woolf also published a second *Common Reader* in 1932, and the “biography” of *Flush*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s dog (1933). She went with Sackville-West to Cambridge in the fall of 1928 to deliver the second of the two lectures on which her great feminist essay *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) is based (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xvi).

Woolf was always keenly aware of the changes taking place in her own times. The events of the two wars she lived through tormented her, as did the deaths
among her family and friends, eventually reading to her taking her own life. Woolf expresses her attitude to war in *Three Guineas* (1938) (Mackean, 2005: 164). In this book, she argued that professional women should remain “outsiders” and should refuse to be drawn into the dominant male culture, a culture which she saw as arrogant, aggressive and militaristic (Mepham, 1987: 4). And it is clear that her despair with the way in which contemporary events were changing her world played a part in her suicide (Mackean, 2005: 164). Her work on *The Years* was grindingly slow and difficult. Ironically, given Woolf’s reputation as a highbrow, it became a bestseller in the United States, even being published in an Armed Services edition. While she labored over the novel in 1934, the news came of the death of Roger Fry, one of her oldest and closest friends and the former lover of her sister, Vanessa. Reluctantly, given her distaste for the conventions of biography, Woolf agreed to write his life, which was published in 1940 (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xvi).

In 1939, to relieve the strain of writing Fry’s biography, Woolf began to write a memoir, “A Sketch of the Past,” which remained unpublished until 1976, when the manuscripts were edited by Jeanne Schulkind for a collection of Woolf’s autobiographical writings, *Moments of Being*. Withdrawing with Leonard to Monk’s House in Sussex, where they could see the German airplanes flying low overhead on their way to bomb London, Woolf continued to write for peace and correspond with antiwar activists in Europe and the United States. She began to write her last novel, *Between the Acts*, in the spring of 1938, but by early 1941 was dissatisfied with it (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xvii). Before completing her final revisions, Woolf ended her own life, walking into the River Ouse on the morning of March 28, 1941. To her sister, Vanessa, she wrote, “I can hardly think clearly any more. If I could I would tell you what you and the children have meant to me. I think you know.” In her last note to Leonard, she told him he had given her “complete happiness,” and asked him to destroy all her papers (qtd. in Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xvii).

By the end of the twentieth century, Virginia Woolf had become an iconic figure, a touchstone for the feminism that revived in the 1960s as well as for the conservative backlash of the 1980s. Hailed by many as a radical writer of genius, she
has also been dismissed as a narrowly focused snob. Her image adorns T-shirts, postcards, and even a beer advertisement, while phrases from her writings occur in all kinds of contexts, from peace-march slogans to highbrow book reviews (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xvii). That Woolf is one of those figures upon whom the myriad competing narratives of twenty-first-century Western culture inscribe themselves is testified to by the enormous number of biographical works about her published in the decades since her nephew Quentin Bell broke the ground in 1972 with his two volume biography of his aunt (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xviii).

Argument continues about the work and life of Virginia Woolf: about her experience of incest, her madness, her class attitudes, her sexuality, the difficulty of her prose, her politics, her feminism, and her legacy. Perhaps, though, these words from her essay “How Should One Read a Book?” portray her own views about reading: “The only advice, indeed, that one person can give another about reading is to take no advice, to follow your own instincts, to use your own reason, to come to your own conclusions.” (qtd. in Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar, xviii).

Virginia Woolf’s life story will be incomplete if we do not mention her as a leading feminist writer of the twentieth century. A number of critics argue about Virginia Woolf’s feminist and modernist views. For instance, Lee considers “Woolf to be of both historical and contemporary importance, her ideas about issues such as modernism and feminism making her seem both near and far.” (qtd. in Mackean, 2005: 164).

In her essay “Modern Fiction”, Virginia Woolf defines the task of the novelist as looking within, as conveying the mind receiving “a myriad impressions,” as representing the “luminous halo” or semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.” (1948: 213). When it comes to her style, in her novels she abandoned linear narratives in favor of interior monologues and stream-of-consciousness narration, exploring with great subtlety problems of personal identity and personal relationships as well as the significance of time, change, loss, and memory for human personality (Abrams, 2005a: 2081). In this
respect, it is obvious that Woolf’s prominent novel To the Lighthouse is the representation of Woolf’s unique style by covering themes of ‘the significance of time, change, loss, and memory for human personality.’ From this perspective, we can clearly witness traces of Woolf’s stream-of-consciousness technique throughout the novel.

According to Bradbrook, Virginia Woolf intended to create new techniques and methods. Plot, character, comedy, tragedy, and the concentration on “love interest”, the old conventional themes and categories, were no longer adequate to communicate the stream of the modern consciousness (qtd. in Ford, 1973: 276). On the other hand, Virginia Woolf’s own concept of reality as a continuous merging of the past and the present moment in the individual’s mind seems to place her with the “moderns”. And her view of history as an ontological dimension is an expression of modern despair. In addition, Woolf’s Orlando and Between the Acts were considered as innovative examples of the modern historical novel.

As remarkable novelists of the period, Woolf and Joyce’s technical innovations were a result of their view of man’s nature. They were such that they wrecked the whole structure of the novel. The use of stream-of-consciousness technique obviously was derived from the new science of psychology, based on Jung’s invention of free-association tests as a tool in psycho-therapy. In such novels as in those of Woolf or Joyce there is no plot in the accepted sense, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe. The term stream-of-consciousness was a method of rendering consciousness in itself as it flows from moment to moment used by Woolf, Joyce, and Dorothy Richardson (Gültekin, 2000: 184). Though the term stream-of-consciousness has become common in literary criticism and has a certain intuitive appeal, there is no agreed precise definition of the term and no consensus has been arrived at in terms of its definition. This fact caused much confusion. Woolf was one of the leading representatives of this technique. Furthermore, Woolf’s main concern was the consciousness of her character which keeps flowing like a stream of thoughts. For this reason, we can presume that rather than attempting to formulate a precise definition, it seems more useful to understand just what it is that stream-of-consciousness writing tries to achieve and to see why there are so many technical variant of it.
As Gültekin puts it, by exploring in depth into consciousness and memory rather than proceeding lengthwise along the dimension of time, a novelist could write a novel concerned ostensibly with only one day of the hero’s life, but by plunging into his or her consciousness. He can render his whole life within the limits of a single day (Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*) (2000: 162). Gültekin also goes on saying that this view of multiple levels of consciousness existing simultaneously coupled with the view of time as a constant flow rather than a series of separate moments meant that a novelist preferred to plunge into the consciousness of his character in order to tell his story rather than to provide an external framework of chronological narrative.

The stream-of-consciousness technique², where the author tries to render directly the very fabric of his characters’ consciousness without reporting it in formal, quoted remarks, was developed in the 1920s as an important new technique of the English novel. It made the novel difficult to read especially those accustomed only to the methods of the traditional method. On the other hand, concentration on the stream-of-consciousness and on the association of ideas within the individual consciousness led inevitably to stress on the essential loneliness of the individual. In addition to this, “the theme of modern fiction is the possibility of love, the establishment of emotional communication, in a community of private consciousness. This is, in different ways, the theme of Joyce, Lawrence, Woolf, E. M. Forster, even Conrad.” (Gültekin, 2000: 163-164).

Another critic, Rosenberg points out: “It was the feminist movement of the 1970s and the work of feminist scholars like Jane Marcus, Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar that initiated the shift toward Woolf as feminist.” (2000: 1112). It was an important, crucial, and much needed shift, and while feminist criticism contributed to the establishment of Woolf as a major modernist writer, Woolf helped to establish feminist criticism as a legitimate critical method. What is

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² The term “stream-of-consciousness” was coined by William James in *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to denote the flow of inner experiences. Later it became a literary term referring to that technique which seeks to depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind. Some critics consider the term to be synonymous with the term “interior monologue”, others, however, point out the distinct differences between them. In fact, the terms are different. Some argue that it is erroneous to consider them as synonyms. Interior monologue is the direct quotation of character’s silent speech, though not necessarily marked with speech marks. There is no multiple-point-of-view in interior monologue, the latter focusing on one issue only, while in stream-of-consciousness, the multiple-point-of-view is one of the main ingredients.
implied in Meisel’s statement is that the “political tone” (i.e. feminism) of Woolf studies is separate from our concern with her “literary filiations” (i.e. literary history), that the emphasis on one has forced the exclusion of the other (qtd. in Rosenberg, 2000: 1112). On the other hand, feminist scholars have concentrated on defining a woman-centered literary history, often using Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* as precedent of their own theories. At this point, Woolf’s “room” is a metaphor for that place where the female writer feels free to express and articulate her unique experience. Showalter appropriates the metaphor to imply that there is a literature that belongs solely to the feminine and female. The subtitle of her book, “British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing,” clues us in to the intent of her book, to establish a linear and chronological progression from one female writer to the next. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *Madwoman in the Attic*, as well as their *Northon Anthology of Literature by Women* and *No Man’s Land*, takes the Woolfian metaphor to its logical extreme. Rosenberg also emphasizes that in the 1970s, women’s literary history began to be written and Woolf, according to these scholars, was its first author and in many ways its first subject (2000: 1113).

These readings of Woolf and her role as a woman writer always involve a discussion of her as woman, bringing in personal biography to construct her position within literary history. Margaret Ezell has written in persuasive detail about the writing of women’s literary history, and her analysis in one which serious Woolf scholars must acknowledge. She, too, sees the development of women’s literary history as grounded in *A Room of One’s Own* but claims there is a lack of historical awareness because of it. In addition, Woolf is considered as “the turning point in women’s history.” (Rosenberg, 2000: 1113).

Virginia Woolf’s father, Leslie Stephen, trained her as a literary historian and she would follow in his footsteps. As an historian, Woolf was influenced by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theories of historiography. In addition, Woolf’s literary history employs the concept of time, without thinking chronologically and temporarily. “In developing a relation between the present and the future, she articulates the inevitable connection between the two distinct historical moments.” (Rosenberg, 2000: 1115).
The constructed nature of literary history and its relation to the present moment is also found in Woolf’s statement that “masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice.” (qtd. in Rosenberg, 2000: 1122). All writers are connected, and the appearance of a masterpiece is always a function of the voices that precede it. Woolf moves through a discussion of Eliza Carter, Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and The Brontes to genderize the literary tradition, stating that as women we “think back through our mothers” and that it is “useless to go to the great men writers for help.” (qtd. in Rosenberg, 2000: 1122). She is not, however, trying to establish a definite literary progression between authors. The subjectivity of her narrative is found in her use of women’s history to define her own position within that history.

On the other hand, her book *A Room of One’s Own* tells us more about Woolf and her own subjective historical moment—what her literary values and goals are as an early twentieth-century writer. It is as though her narrative of literary history is really an autobiography, the writing of her own writing life (Rosenberg, 2000: 1122).

That Woolf is regarded as one of the most significant feminist writers is not questioned. Woolf wrote a number of essays on Austen and it is clear she had a complex and intense response to her work. Austen is one of the few canonized women writers, and so any discussion of Woolf’s connection to her might imply the privileging of a female literary tradition. On the other hand, a look at Woolf’s relationship with Austen also serves as a model for her understanding of literary tradition in general. “Jane Austen was a model for Woolf, and taught her how to create an internal, spiritual world in her fiction.” (Rosenberg, 2000: 1123)

As one of the most revered icons of the twentieth century feminism, Woolf has been celebrated not only for her fiction and non-fiction works but also in popular culture. Her introduction of new narrative methods and her encouragement of women’s writing have resulted in a wealth of still-treasured literature that continues to inspire generations of readers, writers, and scholars. Susan Gubar is more than right when she says “Her genius resides in allowing each of her readers to feel that
we are the words, we the music, we the thing itself.” (Woolf, 2005, Introduction by Susan Gubar)
1. Introduction

I am making up *To the Lighthouse* – the sea is to be heard all through it. I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant “novel”. A new – by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?

(Woolf, 1978: 34)

Death is one of the great themes of literature, perhaps more frequent even than love. “The myths of many ancient people centred on death and the afterlife ranging from Egyptian guidebooks to Sumerian stories from Gilgamesh to Homer.” (Ferber, 2007: 54). Dante, for example, devotes the whole of his *Divine Comedy* (*Divinia Comedia*) to a journey through death’s three realms. On the other hand, the modern spectatorial relationship to death was frequently voiced as a problem in the literature written around the period of the First World War. However, as a modernist writer, Virginia Woolf’s concern of the concept of death and mourning is different from her contemporaries.

Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1994) belongs to the period called ‘The explosion of Modernism’ covering 1910-1930. So, Virginia Woolf, roughly speaking, belongs to the second generation of Modernism. Woolf was fully aware that she was an innovator. From the beginning of her literary journey, she formulated her own ideas about the Modern novel. She searched for a new form to be made from the fragments of the old, but consisting of new patterns. Her aim was to fashion the English novel into an art form. In her essay “Modern Fiction”, Woolf clearly defines the way in which she was seeking to write:

> Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; but 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?

(Woolf, 1948: 213)

This quotation has been used by a great many critics in their attempts to analyze Virginia Woolf’s fiction and it has been a point of reference used to support different attitudes toward her work. This expression summarizes not only Woolf’s effort to create her own ‘modern fiction’ but also her whole point of view of life and
death. “Woolf was not the only writer to attempt a new kind of novel, but she was one of the first to articulate her aims, which helped to earn her a prominent place in contemporary literary circles.” (Mackean, 2005: 164).

Today, we know that the English Modernism came into being not only as a reaction against Victorian value. The World War I and II were also very effective. Virginia Woolf reconsiders the conventional traditions of the Victorian novel in a variety of ways. One of the traditions she tries to break up with is the expression of death and mourning, the themes that find a broad expression in the Victorian novel. In our thesis, we will examine the available literature on these themes and present different views of a large number of critics on death and mourning in modernist novel, and then in *To the Lighthouse*, in particular. Virginia Woolf supposed the novel to be an elegy from the very beginning when she decided to get rid of her mother’s haunting image and dedicate the novel to her. However, her presentation and expression of death and mourning are so different from those of other modernist writers that we thought to examine the subject matter at length.

Critics agree on the elegiac character of the novel. We will show what makes the novel really elegiac, and which works had a considerable influence on her while writing the novel. On the other hand, the novel exhibits a number of characteristics of the pastoral elegy. We will try to draw parallels between the novel and typical features of the pastoral elegy. In the section “*To the Lighthouse* as Elegy”, we will try to show what change the elegy genre has undergone since World War I.

No novel, even be it such an experimental one as Virginia Woolf’s, can be considered in isolation from the previous legacy of canon literature. In *To the Lighthouse*, we find the traces of various poets and writers from Shakespeare to John Milton. The novel also mentions remarkable artists and writers from Michaelangelo to Jane Austen, Sir Walter Scott, George Eliot, Balzac, and Tolstoy, as well as philosophers like Hume, scientists and other intellectual figures.

Definitely, Virginia Woolf’s works reflect the spirit of the Modernist Era. It seems that she was influenced by the current thoughts of the period such as Symbolism, Freudian Psychology and the stream- of- consciousness technique. On
the other hand, her biography and diary give us the clues that her early life was disturbed by a series of deaths in her family. At this point, death plays an important role in Virginia Woolf’s life from the very beginning. The concept of life and death, and the questioning of life are outstanding themes in her fiction. Louis Kronenberger observes that “Virginia Woolf was not really concerned with people but the poetic symbols, of life, the changing seasons, day and night, bread and wine, fire and cold, time and space, birth and death and change.” (http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/ VWoolf.htm> May 21 2008).

Virginia Woolf’s personal vision was greatly influenced by the members of her family. In writing *To the Lighthouse*, for example, she worked through difficulties that had been present in her relationship with her Victorian father and her mother. Life and death, the lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay, and many more sub-themes are tackled in the novel. Thanks to Virginia Woolf’s stream-of-consciousness technique, we realize the thoughts and feelings, the immediate perceptions, self-revelation, and consciousness of the characters in detail, but the issues go beyond the concerns of philosophy, psychology and gender.

Virginia Woolf was always aware of the changes taking place in her own times. The events of the Great War she experienced tormented her in addition to the deaths among her family and friends, eventually leading to her taking her own life. The effects of the destructions and slaughter of the Great War gave rise in Virginia Woolf’s generation to the feeling of mistrust towards civilization and existent truth and values. It is clear that Virginia Woolf was affected by the Great War as well. In this respect, we can witness footprints of the war and its destructive effects in Woolf’s fiction, and her despair with the way in which contemporary events were changing her world played a part in her suicide.

In this study, in the light of the information mentioned above, we will try to focus on the concept of death and mourning in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* within the framework of the significant events of the period, Woolf’s autobiographical references, and views of a number of critics. In the first chapter, we will try to depict the difference between Woolf’s own portrayal of the concept in her work and the concept of death and mourning in Modernist novels in general, the
effects of the Great War and the inevitable end on Virginia Woolf’s fiction. At this point, we aim to illustrate how Woolf was influenced by the events of her age. In the following chapter, we will try to demonstrate how Woolf considered *To the Lighthouse* as an elegiac work and what made the novel elegy by focusing on points of view of various critics. In the last chapter, we will try to emphasize how the concept of death and mourning was dealt with in *To the Lighthouse* based especially on the character of Lily Briscoe and her epiphanic experiences about both the meaning of life and the central figure Mrs. Ramsay.

Thus, thanks to Woolf, we can only imagine a “new vision of death; active, positive, like all the rest, exciting; and of great importance- as an experience.” (Woolf, 1978: 117). The way Virginia Woolf handles death is radically different from the conventional (Victorian) description with funeral ceremonies and mourners. Like other features of the novel genre, she experiments skillfully with the death phenomenon as well.
2. The Effects of the Great War and Death on Virginia Woolf’s Fiction and Modernism

O eloquent, just and mighty Death! Whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done, and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised; thou hast drawn together all the far stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with those two narrow words, Hic jacet.

(qtd. in Damrosch, 2003: 1192)

The war that was supposed to end all wars has become as crucial a turning point in the history of both death and elegy as it is in the history of warfare.

(Gilbert, 1999: 182)

Exactly when the modernist period in art and literature began is not entirely certain: most critics claim it first emerged in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, but as Virginia Woolf points out in her essay “Modern Fiction”, earlier nineteenth century writers such as French poet Charles Baudelaire and Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky are entirely “modern”. (1948: 214). Even the definition of the word ‘modern’ is uncertain, but generally speaking, any art or literature known as ‘modernist’ can be said to have certain elements in common. First, modernist works deal more freely with things that are not beautiful or pleasant, such as ugliness or violence, or previously taboo subjects such as sex and drugs. Also, modernist art and literature are very technically sophisticated as artists have discovered new expressive techniques; such techniques, however, often make great demands on the audience. Hand- in- hand with this, the meanings of modern art have also become more complex in order to be able to appropriately express the greater complexities of modern life. Modernism encourages the re- examination of every aspect of life. So, it is progressive. What can be safely called modernism? Modernism emerged in the middle of the last century and in France with Charles Baudelaire in literature and Monet in painting. On the other hand, Sigmund Freud’s ‘unconscious mind’, Carl Jung’s ‘collective unconscious’ were, of course, conducive and influential.

The World War I which lasted over four years shattered so many ideals about European civilisation. The experience was traumatic. It left throughout all
Europe a sense that the bases of civilisation had been destroyed, that all traditional values had been wiped out and we see this reflected in different ways in “The Waste Land” of Eliot and in the novels written in the first half of the century. “The Modern Civilisation and technology disappointed everybody especially those who had high hopes about the future. It brought tremendous slaughter, massacre and destruction instead of well-fare.” (Gültekin, 2000: 160). In this sense, many modernist writers dealt with the impact of World War I in their fiction. In other words, they actually reflected the destructive face of the Great War from different points of view in their works.

The public values of the Victorian novel gave way to more personally conceived notions of value, dependent on the novelist’s intuitions and sensibilities rather than on public agreement. The modern novelist had to draw his criterion of significance in human affairs from his own intuitions and therefore, he needed to find ways of convincing the reader that his own private criterion and his private sense of what was significant in experience was truly valid. A new technical burden was thus imposed on the novelist’s prose, for it had now to build up a world of values instead of drawing on an existing world of values. And one of the reasons for such a new attitude was the impact of World War I which resulted in the loss of all human values. There weren’t any traditional human values to rely on but disappointment. So the novelist had to turn to his personal, private intuition to create a world of values and vision. “Virginia Woolf tried to solve the problem by using some of the devices of poetry in order to suggest the novelist’s own sense of value and vision of the world.” (Gültekin, 2000: 161). From this perspective, Virginia Woolf’s purpose was to make her readers to plunge into her own ‘vision of the world’ by displaying her own ‘sense of value’. On the other hand, she used a unique technique while dealing with human relationships in addition to her own vision.

All through these years I was creeping about, like a rat struck on the head, and the aeroplanes were over London at night and the streets dark.

(Woolf, 1978: 120)

According to some critics, Virginia Woolf left little evidence in her Diary or Letters of her reaction to World War I. For example, Nigel Nicolson states that the
war “had little effect whatever upon her mental state, except to confirm her suspicions of a male dominated society” (qtd. in Hussey, 1991: 164).

Trumpener points out that a few days after the armistice, Woolf’s diary records her sense that the national community forged by the war is already dissolving: “Instead of feeling all day and going home through dark streets that the whole people, willing or not, were concentrated on a single point, one feels now that the whole bunch has burst asunder and flown off with the utmost vigour in different directions. We are once more a nation of individuals.” (2000: 1098). The July 1919 Peace Day celebrations strike Woolf as “calculated and politic and insincere.” (qtd. in Trumpener, 2000: 1098). She therefore stays home, while her servants spend a ‘triumphant morning’ watching the endless peace procession: “Generals and soldiers and tanks and nurses and bands. [...] But I don’t know- it seems to me a servants festival; some thing got up to pacify and placate ‘the people […]’” (Trumpener, 2000: 1098). To a certain extent, we feel the destructive power of war and its effects on people during the Great War. On the other hand, we can easily witness how the footprints of the war affected not only Woolf’s own psychology but also her fiction as she recorded in her diary.

After World War I, there was much sorrow in Europe. Public mourning is done on a larger scale, and includes despair, overall uncertainty, and confusion. The Great War had shaken the world, leaving the survivors confused and uncertain as to how to heal the wounds and mourn for so many losses. Writing in the 1920s, Virginia Woolf was keenly aware of the mood in Europe, time for public mourning had now passed, and life continued, though radically and forever altered. As one of the most prominent modernist writers, it is so obvious that Woolf was profoundly affected by the destructive power of the war and reflected the cold face of the Great War in her fiction. In a way, the section of “Time Passes” in To the Lighthouse is just like the representation of the changes and the chaos that the war brought. In this respect, as the Great War had a great impact on the face of the whole world, we see the traces of the war in the novel. In other words, the feeling of darkness, abandonment, and loneliness can be considered as the results of the war and death.
Woolf notes the great rift at this time (World War I) between established (nineteenth century) and new (twentieth century) ideas about what roles and occupations are proper for a woman of the upper class.

On one level, the work as a whole reflects the discontinuity of English life brought about by World War I, the shift from late Victorian security to the 1920s world of change and loss. Beginning with the absence of all light, in the “downpouring of immense darkness”, Virginia Woolf explores the nature of cosmic chaos and national disaster in which the death of Mrs. Ramsay is revealed in a parenthesis and the death of Andrew Ramsay in the war and of Prue Ramsay in childbirth are merely referred to in brackets. (Woolf, 1994: 93). Her theme of destruction and restoration is personified in the deterioration of the house.

Cramer claims that “Woolf frequently described history as story or play. This view is apparent in Woolf’s speech about the war.” (1993: 181). In her diary, for example, she once called the war a “monstrous masculine fiction,” and on 3 June 1940 she compares war to story-making: “We have now been hard at it hero-making. The laughing, heroic, Tommy—how can we be worthy of such men?—every paper, every BBC rises to that dreary false cheery hero-making strain…It’s the myth making stage of the war we’re in.” (Woolf, 1978: 292). We believe that by illustrating the war as a ‘masculine fiction’, Woolf intends to portray her attitude towards war from a feminist point of view. And we once again witness her feelings about the war in the following quotation:

Shall we lay the blame on the war? When the guns fired in August 1914, did the faces of men and women show so plain in each other’s eyes that romance was killed? Certainly it was a shock…to see the faces of our rulers in the light of the shell-fire. So ugly they looked—German, English, French—so stupid…

(qtd. in Abrams, 2005a: 2099)

Gültekin, in her lecture notes, expresses that the culture of the twentieth century was avant-garde culture. In avant-garde culture, there is a reaction against tradition and memory in favor of individual sensation, discontinuity, chance and the denial of form. Men lost faith in certain traditional ways of seeing the world. The term avant-garde denotes exploration, innovation and invention, something new,
something ahead of its time and revolutionary. Woolf, Joyce, Beckett, Plath are considered to be the best representatives of such a movement (2000: 171). Hence, as the nineteenth century drew to a close; reality became thoroughly personal, free from traditional values, due to the impossibility of finding absolute truth through the existing methods and values. The basic reason for such a quest of unchanging reality was man’s disappointment with modern civilisation. Man’s complete trust in civilisation and scientific progress for a happy, comfortable future was destroyed with the First World War in the early twentieth century. As Gültekin puts it, the World War did not only destroy hopes and illusions of people but also damaged traditional religious and moral beliefs and values. Thus, due to a void of beliefs and values, man was left all alone without any beliefs and values to depend on which means he was left without an unquestionable truth to rely on and man was not satisfied with the external objective realities of the world, that is to say, he cannot regard them as unchanging realities to rely on. Therefore, the new post-war generation believed that there was only one way left; it was to turn to the inner self. So man feeling alone and isolated in this chaotic world, retreated fully into himself (2000: 172). At this point, the themes of human relationships, loneliness, isolation, death, questioning life and death play an important role in Woolf’s fiction. In addition, the effects of the Great War and its negative results are quite obvious in her writing.

Death is absolute and without memorial, As in a season of autumn, When the wind stops…

(qtd. in Gilbert, 1999: 179)

Sandra Gilbert examines the Post War (World War I) mutations of the elegiac genre and the emergence of a new poetics of grief. As an example she examines Wallace Stevens’s famous poem “The Death of a Soldier”. In her opinion, in this poem the poet formulates a view of bereavement in which traditional funerary customs have been annihilated as definitively as the dead soldier (1999: 180). She even uses the word combinations such as modern death, monsters of elegy, and death modernity. She quotes a very striking statement from Lermercier:
Nothing new from our hilltop which we continue to organize... From time to time the pickaxe hits a wretched corpse that the war torments even in the ground.

(qtd. in Gilbert, 1999: 181)

As seen from the quotation, Lermercier is terrified at the image of death, dying, and the dead during the war. His expression ‘wretched corpse’ means that dead do not receive the homage ( burial, mourning, and lament) they deserve. All the rituals performed during death are violated and become outworn images. Wallace Stevens wants the writers and poets to

Take this new phrase
Of the truth of Death –

(qtd. in Gilbert, 1999: 181)

In To the Lighthouse (1994), the middle section of the novel, “Time Passes” focuses on the disintegration of the Ramsays’ summer home in their absence during the war and includes bracketed asides that tell the fate of family and friends. Initially, the “Time Passes” section of To the Lighthouse revealed men as violent and mindlessly destructive. Women, in the figure of the ancient charwoman and the ghost of Mrs. Ramsay, cooperated with nature to restore, repair, and advance the beauty that nature can but barely sustain in the face of such bestiality. In this respect, the evidence of Woolf’s attitude toward the war makes it clear that she wished to write a different kind of “history,” one that would be from “her point of view.” “Time Passes” fits the novel well, it is also an effective presentation of the “history” of the war that Woolf wanted someone to write. It is in direct opposition to the “historians’ histories” that so annoyed her in 1919. Her elimination of the very personal, often phallic references to masculine destructive power and her equally firm elimination of the stature of the charwomen move the section from the particular to the universal.
3. *To the Lighthouse as Elegy*

But can prose … chant the elegy, or hymn the love, or shriek in terror, praise the rose, the nightingale, or the beauty of the night? Can it leap at one spring at the heart of its subject as the poet does? I think not. That is the penalty it pays for having dispensed with the incantation and the mystery, with rhyme and metre.

(Woolf, 1966: 226)

Virginia Woolf, surprising as it is, completed no autobiography of hers, perhaps relying wholly on her diaries and letters which could replace them. She thought of writing her memoirs but she left them unfinished, and committed suicide by drowning herself in the River Ouse.

*To the Lighthouse* is considered to be a quasi-autobiographical novel but the term is ambiguous. John Mepham, for example, argues against the book having only “purely personal significance.” (1983: 143). However, critics agree on its elegiac properties modernized and modified by Woolf. Karen Smythe emphasizes the difference between “elegiac fiction” and the term “fiction elegy”, by the latter meaning “poetic elegy written for a fictional personage.” (1992b: 65). She goes on to say that “A digressive structure, the focus on the self (on the narrator – elegist or character – elegist as survivor), and a tendency towards self – reflexivity are characteristics of both modern and late modern fiction – elegies.” (Smythe, 1992a: 130). For Woolf, her elegy is a consolation, and the work of art is an immortal and idealized product achieved at the end of the work of mourning. However, Virginia Woolf’s transformation ability is conspicuous here again. “Her family and her past became altered as she shaped them into a work of fiction.” (McNichol, 1990: 96). Stella McNichol’s calling the novel “an autobiographical novel, not autobiography” is nearer to the truth (Ibid., 96). Though, while reading the book, Virginia Woolf’s sister Vanessa felt so overwhelmed that she fainted (Urgan, 2004: 131). Obviously, Virginia Woolf succeeded in conveying her mother’s spirit in the novel. Below is Vanessa’s impression of the book:

In the first part of the book you have given a portrait of mother which is more like her than anything I could have conceived of as possible. How made me feel the extraordinary beauty of her character… It was like meeting her again with oneself grown up and on equal terms.

(Bell, 1972: 127)
Virginia Woolf doubted the ability of prose to express things in a subtle way as poetry does, though she proved to be successful in making her novel poetic to the degree that Leonard Woolf called the novel “a psychological poem.” (Urgan, 2004: 126).

Peter Knox-Shaw calls the novel as elegy, and comparing tragedy with elegy points out “the darkening slope towards death” in the tragedy, while in elegy it is “the ascent from death.” He goes on to say that “by virtue of its relatively strict conventions it is the pastoral elegy that offers the only satisfactory paradigm of a highly variable literary form.” (1986: 32).

Gilbert rightly observes that “literature in English affords both reader and writer a variety of mourning traditions but we may consider the pastoral elegy paradigmatic.” (1999: 182). While the traditional pastoral elegy includes “consolation, reiterated questions… of vengeful anger or cursing, procession of mourners, movement from grief to consolation which does not take a long time and traditional images of resurrection”, the modern elegy has elaborated “a defiant contemporary poetics of grief” including “unbelief and desbelief” (Gilbert, 1999: 182).

According to Stella McNichol, Virginia Woolf, even while writing her previous novel Mrs. Dalloway, kept reading poetry and realizing that “the way in which she responds to the world around her, and at a more abstract and mystical level to a sense of the mystery of the universe, is essentially poetic.” (1990: 91).

Virginia Woolf had long thought to make To the Lighthouse poetic, calling it unambiguously “elegy”. Her experimentation craft achieves almost perfection in blending prose and poetry into one poetic fiction. In “The Narrow Bridge of Art”, she questions the term “novel”, calling it inadequate:

> We shall be forced to invent new names for the different books which masquerade under this one heading [novel].

(Woolf, 1966: 224)

Freud as well wrote something similar: “We cannot maintain our former attitude towards death” (in his 1915 meditation on the war), “and have not yet discovered a new one.” (1963: 113).
As a result of this, Woolf explicates and borrows from other genres and creates variations of the elegy. Still, Peter Knox-Shaw seems to be convinced that Virginia Woolf uses the main features of the pastoral elegy, and in his article “The Novel As Elegy”, he draws parallels between the novel and John Milton’s *Lycidas*. (1986: 33).

It is hard to disagree with Peter Knox-Shaw who claims that “Of the novel’s three parts, “Time Passes” is the most concentratedly lyrical.” (1986: 34). Equally, it is hard to agree with Mina Urgan who finds the part in question “not to be interesting for the absence of characters.” (2004: 130). There are no characters, indeed. Objects are personified in a fascinating way. They are seen through time, which is ruthless. The following passage contains lyricism as well as irony.

Loveliness and stillness clasped hands in the bedroom, and among the shrouded jugs and sheeted chairs even the prying of the wind, and the soft nose of the clammy sea airs, rubbing, snuffling, iterating, and reiterating their questions – “Will you fade? Will you perish?” – scarcely disturbed the peace, the indifference, the air of pure integrity, as if the question they asked scarcely needed that they should answer: we remain.

(Woolf, 1994: 94)

The questions “Will you fade? Will you perish?” are a little modified questions the main as well as secondary characters ask themselves throughout the novel. These were the questions that Virginia Woolf also asked herself. The passage seems to echo Mr. Ramsay’s cutting remark: “The very stone one kicks with one’s boot will outlast Shakespeare.” (Woolf, 1994: 26).

The “Time Passes” part seems to be the requiem for the dead. Andrew’s innocent remark at the very beginning “It’s almost too dark to see.” gives us a sort of premonition of what is to come soon (Woolf, 1994: 93). Just as “One by one the lamps were all extinguished”, we learn one by one about the death of the three characters in the novel, and “a downpouring of immense darkness began.” (Woolf, 1994: 93). Andrew’s expression about darkness is just like a foreshadowing for the death of three characters in the novel. At this point, we perceive a parallelism between darkness- the gloomy atmosphere and approach to death. We see the same parallelism in the works of various Greek writers. For example, in Greek literature
“death (thanatos) is dark.” (Ferber, 2007: 54). Ferber also goes on giving us the expressions about darkness and death as follows: The epithet melas (“dark” or “black”) modifies thanatos several times in Homer, and is found in Hesiod, Pindar, and the other early poets. Death is a dark cloud (Iliad 16.350) or shadow (a dozen times) or night: “dark night covered over his eyes” (5.310). A dead soul is a “shade.” In Euripides death is “dark-robed” (Alcertis 843); in Sophocles the “dark eyes” of Eurydice mean she is dead (Antigone 1302). Hades (the realm) is dark as well (Sophocles, Oedipus Tyrannus 29); no sun shines in it (Odyssey 12.383). To die is to leave the light (Hesiod, Works 155). Likewise, the following first passage concerning “darkness” indirectly foreshadows the central figure Mrs. Ramsay’s death in *To the Lighthouse*:

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

(Woolf, 1994: 93)

Virginia Woolf tells of the deaths of the characters in brackets. In her diary, Woolf describes this as “the flight of time and the consequent break of unity in my design.” As Benefiel puts it, Helen Storm Corsa observes that the deserted house embodies the typical “phenomena” of mourning, “despondency, depression, detachment from the world, withdraw of interest from reality.” (qtd. in Benefiel, 2003: 5). At this point, it is really hard to disagree with Corsa’s perspective. The empty, desolate house is a symbol for what is happening to the characters during this time. In a way, it gives us the feeling of loneliness, disorder, desolation, and chaos.

Furthermore, “Time Passes” is a literary experiment of Woolf’s conception that takes us through ten dark years. The family departs for the summer and certain circumstances prevent them from returning. Their house is left to the forces of time; darkness covers the house. Dust settles, books yellow, and silence ascends, “filling” the rooms with emptiness. The desolate house foreshadows the deaths in the family. We feel the gloomy atmosphere and abandonment after Mrs. Ramsay’s death in the following passage:
When darkness fell, the stroke of the Lighthouse, which had laid itself with such authority upon the carpet in the darkness, tracing its pattern, came now in the softer light of spring mixed with moonlight gliding gently as if it laid its caress and lingered stealthily and looked and came lovingly again. But in the very lull of this loving caress, as the long stroke leant upon the bed, the rock was rent asunder; another fold of the shawl loosened; there it hung, and swayed.


*Dictionary of Literary Terms* gives the following definition of ‘Pastoral Elegy’:

The conventions of pastoral elegy are approximately as follows: (a) The scene is pastoral. The poet and the person he mourns are represented as shepherds. (b) The poet begins with an invocation to the Muses and refers to diverse mythological characters during the poem. (c) Nature is involved in mourning the shepherd’s death. Nature feels the wound, so to speak. (d) The poet inquires of the guardians of the dead shepherd where they were when death came. (e) There is a procession of mourners. (f) The poet reflects on divine justice and contemporary evils. (g) There is a “flower” passage, describing the decoration of the bier, etc. (h) At the end there is a renewal of hope and joy, with the idea expressed that death is the beginning of life (Cuddon, 1999: 254).

The conventions of pastoral elegy are vividly reflected (but still modified) in *To the Lighthouse*:

The first convention of pastoral elegy the pastoral scene is apparent in the novel. As Smythe points out: “The fiction-elegist can explore the psychology of mourning through the extensive study of character, as well. The elements of the process can be followed at a slower pace, and in detail, from shock and grief to narcissistic digressions to eventual consolation.” (1992b: 65). In Pastoral Elegy, the poet and the person he mourns are represented as shepherds. There are also mythological references. Likewise, in Woolf’s work, we see Mrs. Ramsay as a ‘nymph.’ In addition, in the novel we witness that Mrs. Ramsay is compared to ‘Helen’ of Troy in the books given to her by Mr. Ramsay and family friends, and which she never reads.
Books, she thought, grew of themselves. She never had time to read them. Alas! even the books that had been given her, and inscribed by the hand of the poet himself: “For her whose wishes must be obeyed”… "The happier Helen of our days”… disgraceful to say, she had never read them.


When it comes to another remarkable convention of pastoral elegy, we can see that nature is involved in mourning. Pastoral elegy relates human death to the natural order. Knox- Shaw observes that it serves a bond between nature and man. He goes on to say that pastoral elegy presents nature as involving the entire world in mourning, the sequence of the seasons, and also the cruel effect of the natural forces (1986: 32). Similarly, nature plays a great role in the novel. It is interesting to note that we see the notion of a nature in sympathy with man.

In spring the garden urns, casually filled with wind-blown plants, were gay as ever. Violets came and daffodils. But the stillness and the brightness of the day were as strange as the chaos and tumult of night, with the trees standing there, and the flowers standing there, looking before them, looking up, yet beholding nothing, eyeless, and thus terrible.


As seen in the quotation, we feel the effects of death on nature and we feel disorder, desolation, chaos, ‘tumult of night’, and grief. Furthermore, the destructive force of the sea is apparent in To the Lighthouse. The sound of the waves is heard throughout the novel, sometimes louder, sometimes softer.

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. Then, up behind the great black rock, almost every evening spurted irregularly, 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.

(Woolf, 1994: 12-13).

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 and impulse of terror.

(Woolf, 1994: 10).

We are often reminded of the presence of the sea – through, for example, Mrs. Ramsay’s anxiety over Andrew (she fears a “holocaust”), the quotation from “The Castaway”, and Macalister’s tale of the storm, and also the quotation from Grimm’s tale (“The Fisherman and his Wife”). It is important to note that the description of chaos in “Time Passes” represents the destructive force of the sea and nature right after Andrew’s death in France.

From the upper rooms of the empty house only gigantic chaos streaked with lightning could have been heard tumbling and tossing, as the winds and waves disported themselves like the amorphous bulks of leviathans whose brows are pierced by no light of reason, and mounted one on top of another, and lunged and plunged in the darkness or the daylight (for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together) in idiot games, until it seemed as if the universe were battling and tumbling, in brute confusion and wanton lust aimlessly by itself.


As defined in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, one of the conventional features of the pastoral elegy is “the poet raises questions about the justice of fate, or else of Providence, and adverts to the corrupt conditions of his own times.” (Abrams, 2005b: 78). We also encounter this convention of pastoral elegy especially in Mrs. Ramsay’s expressions throughout the novel. Only once she utters:

But alas, divine goodness, twitching the cord, draws the curtain; it does not please him; he covers his treasures in a drench of hail, and so breaks them, so confuses them that it seems impossible that their calm should ever return or that we should ever compose from their fragments a perfect whole or read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth. For our sentence deserves a glimpse only; our toil respite only.


Kenneth Tighe claims that isolation of individual characters in the novel is compounded by the absence of God. “Without a Creator to provide order in the
universe, the task falls upon the individual. Order, meaning, a sense of unity, in a chaotic world, are best realized through art.” (1997: n.p.).

Mrs. Ramsay has a kind of mystical experience in which her entire being absorbs, becomes one with, the lighthouse beam. She suddenly questions: “We are in the hands of the Lord?” (1994: 44). Some time later she is still angry:

How could any Lord have made this world? She asked. With her mind she had always seized the fact that there is no reason, order, justice: but suffering, death, the poor. There was no treachery too base for the world to commit; she knew that. No happiness lasted; she knew that.

(Woolf, 1994: 44).

Mrs. Ramsay’s distress over the matter is such that her disbelief seems a point of honor, a matter of personal pride. At this point, it is important to note the difference between the unbelief and disbelief. “Unbelief includes an afterlife, a resurrection, a transmigration in traditional strategies of consolation. On the other hand, disbelief includes in the reality of the individual death itself.” (Gilbert, 1999: 182).

According to Naremore, the problem of impacted grief may seem an odd thing to discuss in relation to Virginia Woolf, because critics have long agreed that her novels are essentially elegiac. Her work could be described as an extended grieving. He goes on saying that Mark Spilka simply believes that neurosis or psychosis can result from blocked emotion, and he offers plenty of evidence from Woolf’s biography and novels to show that she suffered from just such a problem (Naremore, 1982: 84).

Lily Briscoe’s painting, which “frames” the whole novel, with its line down the centre enacting a simultaneous joining and division of the two sides of the canvas, a “break of unity” and a “hold[ing] together”. The temporality of To the Lighthouse is that of two days separated by a gap or “passage” of ten years. In the first part of the novel, “The Window”, The Ramsay family and assorted guests are depicted during a day on the Hebridean island which is their summer home. In the novel’s central section, “Time Passes”, Mrs. Ramsay dies and the First World War fractures history and reality. In the novel’s final section, “The Lighthouse”, Lily
completes the painting whose “vision” had formerly eluded her and Mr. Ramsay and his two youngest children, James and Cam, reach the lighthouse, having finally made the journey planned with the first words of the novel. The title of the novel suggests its dual temporality and status as elegy and as quest- narrative- “to” the lighthouse. Thus, though Virginia Woolf employs some conventions of the traditional pastoral elegy, the elegiac properties of her novel are modified significantly in her work.
4. “Death and Mourning” in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*

Until I was in the forties – I could settle the date by seeing when I wrote *To the Lighthouse*, but am too casual here to bother to do it – the presence of my mother obsessed me. I could hear her voice, see her, imagine what she would do or say as I went about my day’s doings. She was one of the invisible presences who after all play so important a part in every life… Then one day walking round Tavistock square I made up, as I sometimes make up my books, *To the Lighthouse*, in a great, apparently involuntary, rush. One thing burst into another… I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her. I suppose that I did for myself what psycho- analysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest. But what is the meaning of ‘explained’ it?

(Woolf, 1985: 80-81)

As we know, Virginia Woolf’s life was shadowed by death from an early age. In the years between 1895 and 1904 she lost her mother, her sister, and her father. Less than a decade later, Europe was consumed by war, and public mourning became a part of her life. Attempting suicide twice, and finally succeeding in 1941, Woolf was acutely aware of the shadow in her life. She, like Septimus the poet in *Mrs. Dalloway*, condemned herself to death. In this respect, the dominance of death in Virginia Woolf’s life from the very beginning is unquestionable. In fact, she perceives suicide as an escape from the harsh realities and burdens of life. As Marder puts it, we can realize Woolf’s attitude to death in the lines of the letter she left for her husband right before her tragic death.

[Virginia to Leonard, March 18 1941] Tuesday Dearest, I feel certain that I am going mad again: I feel we cant go through another of those terrible times. And I shant recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and cant concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I don’t think two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came. I cant fight it any longer, I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I cant even write this properly. I cant read. What I want to say is that I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that
— everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can't go on spoiling your life any longer... I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been. V.

(qtd. in Marder, 2000: 342)

It is obvious from Virginia Woolf's reply to her sister Vanessa's letter (before her death) that she is trying to cope with both the mental illness and her desire for death. Eventually, she is defeated by her wish to die. In a sense, death is like a release for her. And the letter is just like a suicide note:

“... gone too far this time to come back again. I am certain now that I am going mad... I am always hearing voices, and I know I shant get over it now.”

She insisted that Leonard had been entirely good, no one could have done more, but he would be better off without her. “I can hardly think clearly any more,” she wrote. “I have fought against it, but I can't any longer.” A deceptly plain last sentence that leaves a large ambiguity: Fought against what? — against mental illness or the wish to die? Which was stronger, fear or desire? Or were they equally blended? “I have fought against it” — words one speaks at a moment of self- abandonment, implying surrender to temptation or necessity, looking forward to the moment of release.

(qtd. in Marder, 2000: 335-336)

The themes of suicide and death are striking points in Virginia Woolf's fiction. For instance, especially Septimus Smith's suicide in *Mrs. Dalloway* and the death of the three characters (Mrs. Ramsay, Andrew, and Prue) in *To the Lighthouse* are good examples of foreshadowing of Woolf's inner desire for death.

*To the Lighthouse* is a long meditation on time, death, and the ‘work’ of mourning. The relationship between the three is clear; in dealing with death, time must pass and mourning must be done. In fact, the novel is a part of Virginia Woolf's own process of understanding her own preoccupation with death and trouble with mourning. Thus, from the very beginning, the relationship between death and life is a central theme that dominates Woolf's fiction in various ways. From this perspective, Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* can be interpreted as a mirror of Woolf's inner world in terms of portraying her own views about death and mourning.
The major reason why Virginia Woolf was so affected by the feeling of death is undoubtedly the death of her mother, Julia Duckworth Stephen. When Virginia Woolf was thirteen years old, she was led into a family bedroom to view the dead mother’s body. It is so ironic that she broke into compulsive laughter and hid her face behind her hands. Her reaction was troubling enough to be recalled in her diary almost thirty years later, and ultimately she wrote about it in an autobiographical essay (recently published in the collection entitled *Moments of Being*). “[W]as afraid I was not feeling enough,” she says in her diary, and when she thought about the event later she explained it as a reaction against the morbid ceremoniousness of Victorian death (Naremore, 1982: 84).

Susan Bennett Smith points out that:

Freud, in his studies of hysterics, and the contemporary nerve specialists George Savage and Silas Weir Mitchell, in case studies, treat bereaved women as mentally unbalanced. They assume a casual link between grief and madness without any analysis or explicit justification. Because women had traditionally been the primary mourners, they became the primary patients of rest cures and talking cures. As one of Savage’s patients and as the subject of much biographical writing, Virginia Woolf embodies the effects of this easy correlation between madness and grief. In Woolf’s case, the issue becomes crystallized in a specific moment: why was the family physician called in to treat the thirteen-year-old Virginia Stephen after her mother died. That moment marks a break with Victorian mourning ritual, and makes vivid the transition from social grief practices to medical and psychological therapies. Her own writings, both autobiographical and fictional, offer a critique of this transition and describe a post-Freudian form of grief work. For instance, in *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf removes mourning from the realms of femininity and medicine, and provides a positive model for grief work.

(1995: 310)

As we mentioned before, her mother’s death triggered Virginia’s first breakdown; her father’s death when she was twenty-two caused a severe breakdown and a suicide attempt. According to recent theorists, eating and sleeping disorders, hallucinations, anger, and depression are nonpathological manifestations of grief. Smith states that in “Reminiscences”, Woolf compares her father’s grief unfavorably
to her own and that of her sisters and brothers (1995: 311). “In her analysis it is Leslie’s grief that is transgressive. She felt that the “Oriental gloom” which her Victorian father imposed on the household was excessive: his “groans [and] passionate lamentations … passed the normal limits of sorrow” (qtd. in Smith, 1995: 311). But Woolf’s notion of “the normal limits of sorrow” is very different from her father’s Victorian idea. In this respect, Woolf’s insistence on the strangeness of her father’s behavior manifests her complete rejection of nineteenth century modes of grief as emotionally oppressive, excessive, and perhaps even pathological (Smith, 1995: 311).

Virginia Woolf’s mother’s death unquestionably had great effects on her own inner world. Woolf’s mother died at exactly the moment when the girl was entering adolescence, and the death had been preceded by a number of anxious moments which Virginia never revealed to her parents: her half brother Gerald Duckworth had sexually molested her, and her half sister Laura Stephen was a constant reminder of a strain of madness in the family. Spilka is able to link the repressed horror, shame, guilt, and anger in the young Virginia to her lack of feeling when the mother died. Even more interestingly, he believes she must have thought unconsciously that her mother was deserting her in order to join a long dead lover. It seems that Virginia imagined, in the midst of the slightly hallucinatory ceremony of household grieving over Julia Stephen, that she could see a man sitting on the edge of her mother’s deathbed. Spilka boldly suggests that this figure was none other than Herbert Duckworth, “robber in the bedroom,” who had stolen a mother’s love from her daughter. The “patient ghostly lover,” he writes, “became the model for the passion Virginia too withheld from all living men, and gave only fleetingly to living women… Thus her lifelong inability to love- to achieve anything like richly passionate fulfillment- seems to have been particularly intertwined with her lifelong inability to grieve; and the neglected Duckworth legend- along with the now famous triflings of Duckworth’s surviving sons- goes a long way toward explaining that apparent entanglement.” (Naremore, 1982: 85).

We can also see Woolf’s mother’s portrait in her fiction. For many years afterward Virginia Woolf’s mother was to appear regularly in her novels, exerting a powerful hold on her daughter’s imagination. There are elements of her in Mrs.
Hillbery, in Mrs. Flanders, in Mrs. Dalloway, and of course most of all in Mrs. Ramsay, who represents Woolf’s most direct attempt to deal with unresolved grief. Although Virginia Woolf once wrote that she began *To the Lighthouse* in order to express a vision of her father, it is obviously the mother’s death that preoccupies her and gives the novel its emotional power. In fact, Woolf admits in *Moments of Being* that until she wrote *To the Lighthouse* she had been obsessed by her mother, and that “I suppose I did for myself what psychoanalysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt end deeply felt emotion.” (Naremore, 1982: 86).

The profound difference between Leslie’s and Virginia’s bereavements was both gendered and generational. Woolf’s rejection of her father’s Victorian bereavement is characteristic of her generation’s wholesale rejection of things Victorian, but to her family and to many of her critics Virginia’s grief was a disease; Leslie’s was normal. On the other hand, death in the Stephen family causes a kind of gendered grief. That is, no one suggests that Adrian or Thoby were traumatized by the deaths in the family, but Stella, Vanessa, and Virginia were, some argue, tragically affected. “Critics’ failure to examine the boys’ reactions to the deaths reflects the bias that women are more likely to suffer from pathological grief than are men.” (Smith, 1995: 312).

The family doctor was called in to treat Virginia’s nervousness, excitability, and depression after her mother’s death. “Dr. Seton … put a stop to all lessons, ordered a simple life and prescribed outdoor exercise.” (Bell, 1972: 45). Considerations of medicine, not mourning, decree that Virginia is to rest her mind and exercise her body. On the other hand, as Susan Bennett Smith claims that Virginia suffered from grief after her father’s death in a more natural way. When Virginia wrote a letter to Violet Dickinson seven months after Leslie’s death, she reflects on her bereavement. “Sorrow, such as I feel now for Father, is soothing and natural, and makes life more worth having, if sadder” (Woolf, 1976: 143).

You will be glad to hear that your Sparrow feels herself a recovered bird. I think the blood has really been getting into my brain at last. It is the oddest feeling, as though a dead part of me were coming to life. I can’t tell you how delightful it is- and I don’t mind how much I eat to keep it going. All the voices I used to hear telling me to do all kinds of wild things
have gone— and Nessa says they were always only my imagination.

(Woolf, 1976: 142)

Smith notes that Virginia Woolf was never psychoanalyzed, but she did claim to have undergone a successful talking cure. By writing *To the Lighthouse*, “I suppose I did for myself what psychoanalysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest.” In this sense, Virginia Woolf considers her work as a psychoanalysis to a certain extent. She goes on saying that what she laid to rest was her mother’s ghost: “When it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her” (1985: 81). “Woolf viewed the writing of *To the Lighthouse* as grief work which freed her from obsession. Her assessment corresponds to Freud’s idea of grief work as freeing the libido from the lost love object. The novel itself, however, describes varieties of grief work which establish some distance between the dead and the living without completely severing the connections.” (Smith, 1995: 318).

Woolf, like the nerve specialists and psychoanalysts, borrows from traditional mourning ritual for her model of grief practices. The characters of the novel are having their holiday in a remote seaside, far from the noise and turmoil of the city life. Virginia Woolf does not present women as chief mourners, nor does she feminize Mrs. Ramsay’s or James’s mourning. For example, in *To the Lighthouse*, traditional burden of comforter is on Lily Briscoe, but she refuses it. “Cam and James object to their father’s selfish grief, but it is clear that this is a generational difference rather than one of mental health.” (Smith, 1995: 319).

We believe that another important reason for the considerable effect of death on Virginia Woolf is that there were several other funeral occasions in her life (so many that Henry James once described the Stephen family as a “house of all the Deaths”), but the first was surely traumatic, was complicated by her psychological relationship to both her parents (Naremore, 1982: 85). On the one hand, her mother spent years grieving inwardly over the loss of her first husband, Herbert Duckworth. On the other hand, Leslie Stephen’s first wife had also died; this fact, in addition to his deep philosophical pessimism, made him the perfect companion for Julia
Duckworth’s sorrow, and bequeathed to Virginia at least a sad legacy—what Spilka calls “an undercurrent of romantic melancholy and a latent expectation of sudden loss.” (Naremore, 1982: 85).

As Benefiel points out, *To the Lighthouse* depicts mourning as a process to be worked through, which Woolf had experienced herself. As fictionalized representations of Woolf’s own family, the characters act out this process. While working on the novel, Woolf wrote in her diary that it would have “father’s character done complete in it; and mother’s; and St. Ives; and childhood; and all the usual things I try to put in – life, death, etc.” Like the Stephens, the Ramsays are a family of ten (two parents, eight children), which hints at Woolf’s need to dig out the skeletons of the past and therapeutically release them, mourning years after the fact. Drawing inspiration for Mrs. Ramsay from her mother, and Mr. Ramsay from her father, Woolf set out to work through her own pain by transferring it to the characters, and subsequently allowing them to mourn in her place (2003: 4).

Woolf herself was explicit about the autobiographical dimension of the novel, and the intense interest in all aspects of Woolf’s life, fuelled by the publication of her diaries, letters, and memoirs, means that *To the Lighthouse* has received a great deal of critical and biographical attention. The figure of Mrs. Ramsay is most often at the centre of discussion, and where earlier critics tended to celebrate her creativity in human relations. From this perspective, the novel is, as mentioned before, an elegy for her parents, her mother in particular. At this point, it is important to note that *To the Lighthouse* is considered as an autobiographical novel according to a great many critics in terms of reflecting Virginia Woolf’s own elegy for her parents and the parallelism between her characters in the novel and her own family. So, it is not an autobiography, but an autobiographical novel.

We have to emphasize that the form of lamentation and bereavement in the novel is radically different from those of Virginia Woolf’s father and herself. Alma Halbert Bond claims that Virginia Woolf’s father got rid of his agony by keeping his wife alive through writing his book, *The Mausoleum Book*. In this way, Leslie Stephen demonstrates his creative manner of transforming grief into a work of art (1989: 63). From this perspective, the book is a catharsis for Woolf. It can be suggested that Virginia Woolf inherited this feature from her father. It served as a
model for Virginia Woolf’s novel, *To the Lighthouse*. In this book, Virginia Woolf proved that she mourned the loss of and overcame her ‘obsession’ with her mother.

Dunn claims that in her unpublished diary written as her father was dying, Virginia Woolf wrote a piece identifying closely with a woman who had drowned herself in the Serpentine in Hyde park, leaving the message, “No father, no mother, no work”. Virginia wrote that she could not get the words out of her head, the sense of yearning for the dead mother and father, the realisation how irredeemable and absolute was their loss to their child. Husbands can be replaced, more children can be born, but a mother and father once lost, “the longest life can never bring again”. She also goes on saying that it was painful for Virginia Woolf to come to terms with the realisation that no one and no thing would ever be able to take the place of that lost fundamental tie (1990: 81). A terrible sense of her father being cheated by death of a fulfilling relationship with his children, and she herself being left with so much that had to remain unsaid, undone, made Virginia unable to relinquish him. There were many times when she said she felt he was with her still. In this respect, we clearly witness how Virginia Woolf suffered a deep grief and was profoundly obsessed with her parents. Virginia once said “the burden of her father’s grief had condemned her to live in an intellectual and emotional hothouse. She had no chance as a girl to play games or tramp through the woods, and so she had formed the habit of turning inward, which had become second nature to her” (Marder, 2000: 333). In spite of everything, Woolf considers her parents as ‘irreplaceable’.

In her diaries, her letters, and her memoir “A Sketch of the Past”, Virginia Woolf emphasizes that the writing of *To the Lighthouse* was a way of laying to rest her past and, in particular, the “continuing presences” of her parents. Woolf’s diaries and memoirs are full of references to the ghost of her past, chief among them her mother, and she often describes the hold of Victorian ideals of femininity as a haunting: “haunted by great ghosts, we insisted that to be like mother, or like Stella, was to achieve the height of human perfection” (1985: 62). Woolf describes “the influence of my mother” as the most significant of the “invisible presences”, amongst which she includes social and cultural as well as psychological realities, which define her.
As Spilka puts it, the novel is marked by a “compulsive need to cope with death,” despite the fact that its elegiac tone is muted, as if she were afraid to express her mourning directly (1980: 74). In this respect, we think it is important to note that this is the proof why Virginia Woolf avoids giving death directly, instead, she prefers to depict death scenes obscurely and coldly, in brackets. We learn that Mrs. Ramsay is dead: “[Mr. Ramsay stumbling along a passage stretched his arms out one dark morning, but, Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, he stretched his arms out. They remained empty.]” (Woolf, 1994: 93). Prue, the most beautiful of Mrs. Ramsay’s children, looked lovely at her wedding, but she too is dead: “[Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said. They said nobody deserved happiness more.]” (Woolf, 1994: 96). Andrew has been killed in the war: “[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.]” (Woolf, 1994: 97).

There is a consensus among the critics that To the Lighthouse is Virginia Woolf’s masterpiece. “The combination of autobiographical material with the poetic method of presentation and the larger structural pattern results in the final reconciliation between life and art.” (qtd. in Ford, 1973: 283). Bradbrook states that there is, of course, a danger in making a comparison between a sonnet of Shakespeare and an image used in a modern novel. However, the themes of To the Lighthouse are those of the sonnets- time, beauty, the survival of beauty through the means of art, absence, and death. He gives the following examples from Shakespeare’s sonnets: “Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore, So do our minutes hasten to their end …” (No. 60). “From you have I been absent in the spring, When proud- pied April, dress’d in all his trim, Hath put a spirit of youth in everything …” (No. 98) (qtd. in Ford, 1973: 283).

At this point, it is important to note that we feel ‘poetic spirit’, together with the concern with the meaning of destiny and life. This had been characteristic of Virginia Woolf’s fiction from the very first. When it comes to the rhythms and themes, they appear at significant moments during the novels. During isolated moments of intense experience, when the “the miracle happens”, life takes on the intensity of art. The long steady stroke of the lighthouse beam is Mrs. Ramsay’s
stroke, and symbolizes the stability and security which her presence imposes on the flux of life. The flashing of the beam is the equivalent in life to the movements of the painter’s brush – Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe are equally artists – and the novel ends with the long steady stroke of the brush that also completes Lily Briscoe’s picture in the mind, of the perfect woman whom she loves. Both in the novel and in painting, formality and discipline are imposed on the chaos of experience. According to Bradbrook, to make, Virginia Woolf seems to be saying, something of permanent importance out of one’s momentary experiences is the aim of the poet, such as Shakespeare in his sonnets, the novelist, the artist in living, such as Mrs. Ramsay, and the painter; and in order to express one’s personality, one must lose it by absorbing it in something larger and seeing its place in the artistic pattern of the whole (qtd. in Ford, 1973: 284).

A primary Woolfian theme is that time is an element with recognizable characteristics. An inseparable component of this theme is that human beings are along in this stream of time until they encounter death and are annihilated. While they live, humans experience glory and grief in a series of complex moments that may occur anywhere in time. For every mortal, carried toward the future both joy and suffering are sharpened by awareness of time’s inexorable forward movement, a movement that will result in an eventual end of consciousness (Capo, 2000: 3). From this point of view, when we consider Woolf’s own ideas about death, we can clearly conclude that she emphasizes life as a long journey full of struggles including both the good and the bad resulting inevitable end.

For Virginia Woolf, death creates meaning in life, and without death there would be nothing to cherish and nothing to live for. Woolf gives us a good description of the characters as they experience epiphanies into the meaning of life and death. “What is the meaning of life?” is an unanswered question throughout the novel. As a response to her own question, “What is the meaning of life?”, Lily thinks “The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily

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3 However, it must be born in mind that the lighthouse as a symbol has a large variety of interpretations such as ups and downs of life, Mrs. Ramsay, life itself, lack of attainability, contradictory nature of truth, and many others.
miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark.” (Woolf, 1994: 120). To illustrate, Lily’s questioning of life is a good example in *To the Lighthouse*.

What is the meaning of life? That was all – a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come… In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said. “Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!” she repeated. She owed this revelation to her.

(Woolf, 1994: 120)

In *To the Lighthouse*, Mr. Ramsay worries that his writings will some day be read as infrequently as those of Sir Walter Scott. When that happens, he will have vanished entirely. Thus he worries and frets about the quality of his writing. He is longing not for talent but for immortality in fact.

“That’s what they’ll say of me”; so he went and got one of his books. And if he came to the conclusion “That’s true” what Charles Tansley said, he would accept it about Scott. (She could see that he was weighing, considering, putting this with that as he read.) But not about himself. He was always uneasy about himself. That troubled her. He would always be worrying about his own books – will they be read, are they good, why aren’t they better, what do people think of me? Not liking to think of him so, and wondering if they had guessed at dinner why he suddenly became irritable when they talked about fame and books lasting, wondering if the children were laughing at that…

(Woolf, 1994: 82)

Immortality is also the concern of Mrs. Ramsay, Charles Tansley, Mr. Bankes, and Lily Briscoe. Throughout the novel, these characters question the meaning of life.

What does one live for? Why, one asked oneself, does one take all these pains for the human race to go on? Is it so very desirable? Are we attractive as a species? … Foolish questions, vain questions, questions one never asked if one was occupied. Is human life this? Is human life that? One never had time to think about it. But here he was asking himself that sort of question…

(Woolf, 1994: 64- 65)
Woolf herself wonders whether human beings maintain their sanity when they are terrified of the inevitability of death. Caught in the flow of time, carried unwillingly toward that, Woolf’s character, according to Irrene Simon, “try to find permanence or stability, something that endures in the midst of the flow” (1960: 126). In *To the Lighthouse* Woolf’s characters live within chronological as well as psychological time.

In the novel, Mrs. Ramsay maintains an illusion of permanence by bringing people together, for an evening at the dinner table or an afternoon at the beach, the shaping memories that may endure in the minds of others. Mrs. Ramsay is well aware that her work compared to her husband’s or Tansley’s or Lily’s work is not to be rewarded by the posterity. She hopes to live in memories of the people she knows by bringing them together doing charity work, trying to create harmony and having people next to her live and experience unforgettable moments. In addition, Mrs. Ramsay relies on morality to protect those she loves and she fulfills her role as wife and mother and nurturing friend. She understands her husband’s self-absorbed moods and is eager to serve as his complement; she also protects her children from grief and fear, and she dedicates herself to make others happy, for example, she does when she inquires whether Mr. Carmichael one of her borders, would like her to bring back to him from town “stamps, writing – paper, or tobacco?” (Woolf, 1994: 5). Mrs. Ramsay’s life is pledged to others and she is exhausted by her efforts (Woolf, 1994: 41), but she is like “a sailor not without weariness who sees the wind fill his sail and yet hardly wants to be off aging and thinks how, had the ship sunk, he would have whirled round and round and found rest on the floor of the sea” (Woolf, 1994: 87). From this perspective, she may be physically and emotionally depleted, but she will not quit life voluntarily.

Mrs. Ramsay is quite disturbed by the nonsense of “inventing differences, when people, heaven knows, were different enough without that.” (Woolf, 1994: 4). During the dinner Mrs. Ramsay’s altruism is very apparent: “She had in mind at the moment, rich and poor, high and low…” (Woolf, 1994: 5). To Woolf, Mrs. Ramsay’s mind is ‘untrained’, and thus all this work done by her is not considered as something similar to the work done by Mr. Ramsay and Lily. For Simon, whose concern is with the flux of life, Mrs. Ramsay’s importance lies in “her ability to
impose order.” (1960: 132). Mrs. Ramsay herself takes responsibilities at times voluntarily and at times coincidentally (such as matchmaking people around her, setting the table for her guests with great care, lighting the candles and wanting his son James to go to the lighthouse). She once thought: “William must marry Lily. They have so many things in common. Lily is so fond of flowers. They are both cold and aloof and rather self-sufficing. She must arrange for them to take a long walk together.” (Woolf, 1994: 75). During the dinner party, she feels so peaceful and contented because she realizes the harmony among her family and friends. She senses the order and unity so profoundly that even the smoke of the meal gathers people within the atmosphere of a common confidence:

… just now she had reached security; she hovered like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy which filled every nerve of her body fully and sweetly, not noisily, solemnly rather, for it arose, she thought, looking at them all eating there, from husband and children and friends; all of which rising in this profound stillness… seemed now for no special reason to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together. Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all around them. It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity; as she had already felt about something different once before that afternoon; there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had had once today already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that remains for ever after. This would remain.

(Woolf, 1994: 75-76)

Naremore claims that Spilka is correct in maintaining that Woolf evades some of her most important concerns, presenting Mrs. Ramsay’s death indirectly in the “Time Passes” section of the novel, and dramatizing grief through the belated feelings of a daughter once removed, Lily Briscoe, rather than through the actual daughter in the fiction, Cam Ramsay (1982: 86). In the third section of To the Lighthouse, after Mrs. Ramsay’s death, Lily Briscoe the artist who has been struggling with disproportion in the same painting since the beginning of the novel,
suffers from “the pain of the want” when she remembers Mrs. Ramsay (Woolf, 1994: 132). After crying out in anguish, “Mrs. Ramsay!” she is consoled by a vision of her friend “stoping with her usual quickness across the fields…” (Woolf, 1994: 132). A bit later Lily solves the problem of balance in her painting by adding the final, perfect brush stroke. Illusions of permanence, provided by social ceremonies, governing powers, and recollections, imply immortality and save us temporarily from the paralysis that might freeze all movement before death’s unblinking stare…

“Mrs. Ramsay’s intention at dinner is merely to function in an expected manner as wife, mother, and hostess, Mrs. Ramsay as a character contributes to the formation of illusion of permanence. Life has a semblance to meaningful activities at these times.” (Capo, 2000: 37-38).

In To the Lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay is a fully-dimensional character in the first section of “The Window”. Although in the lyrical “Time Passes”, Mrs. Ramsay and the fact of her death is an afterthought, a parenthetical, bracketed aside, she is still omnipresent. Mrs. McNab remembers her vividly, and by the third part, “The Lighthouse”, she is only a memory in Lily’s mind:

… What was she to do with them? They had the moth in them - Mrs. Ramsay’s things. Poor lady! She would never want them again. She was dead, they said; years ago, in London. There was the old grey cloak she wore gardening (Mrs. McNab fingered it). She could see her, as she came up the drive with the washing, stooping over her flowers (the garden was a pitiful sight now, all run to riot, and rabbits scuttling at you out of the beds) – she could see her with one of the children by her in that grey cloak… Why the dressing-table drawers were full of things (she pulled them open), handkerchiefs, bits of ribbon. Yes, she could see Mrs. Ramsay as she came up the drive with the washing.

(Woolf, 1994: 98-99)

Mrs. Ramsay, in To the Lighthouse, lives, dies, and then begins to disintegrate, blurring to a memory existing only in the minds of those who once knew her. As she paints, Lily ponders the dead and thinks:

Oh the dead! she murmured, one pitied them, one brushed them aside, one had even a little contempt for them. They are at our mercy. Mrs. Ramsay has faded and gone, she thought. We can override her wishes,
improve away her limited, old-fashioned ideas. She recedes further and further from us.

(Woolf, 1994: 127)

Mrs. Ramsay’s hope that her created moments would cast meaning on life seems more than wishful thinking. In “Time Passes”, “Certain airs, detached from the body of the wind.” (Woolf, 1994: 91) explore the house with intelligent purpose, looking for sleeping humans. Their personification and the dispassionate rendering of matters related to human affairs serve to diminish the significance of human lives. In *To the Lighthouse*, it seems as if Mrs. Ramsay had not died.

In the second section of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf describes the state of existence within the Ramsays’ abandoned, rotting summer house. In this section, time streams through “the rites of passage that mark human growth, through the seasons of measurement between birth and death or like spring and fall.” (Capo, 2000: 22). In this respect, we see the parallelism between birth and death and the seasons- spring and fall. As spring symbolises rebirth and refreshment, fall gives us the idea of chaos, destruction, and loneliness. So, the readers can clearly feel this parallelism throughout the novel. In this novel, time streams through seasons of hope and promise; for example, within a single year, it moves through spring; within a single lifetime, it moves through marriage. At this point, passing of time symbolizes both human growth and the parallelism between seasons and lifetime, and eventually the inevitable end.

The third section of the novel, “The Lighthouse” is told in chronological time and encompasses the events of a single day, one that takes place ten years after the first day. But it is September again. Mr. Ramsay fullfills his wife’s and son’s wish of years ago to go to the lighthouse. His daughter Cam, James and Mr. Ramsay himself make the voyage together, but the trip is nothing like what had been planned originally. Mrs. Ramsay is dead. James is forced to go. Nothing is as it was meant to be. At first, James and Cam do not want to go to the lighthouse. When James eventually sails to the lighthouse with his father, he is moody like Mr. Ramsay. By the time the boat lands, James’s attitude toward his father has changed considerably. Throughout the journey, Mr. Ramsay treats James in a positive way and praises his son for his seamanship. As James softens toward Mr. Ramsay, he achieves a rare
moment in which the world seems whole and complete. It seems “for nothing was simply one thing.” (Woolf, 1994: 135).

In *To the Lighthouse*, there is a mood of hopelessness, resulting, as described by Johnson, from “the implication of cosmic disinterest in human affairs” that “darkens the novel” (qtd. in Capo, 2000: 23). In “The Window”, Woolf uses an animal skull to foreshadow death. The pig’s skull is nailed to the wall and casts terrifying shadows for Cam, who is too watchful to relax. Mrs. Ramsay removes her shawl and wraps the skull in it, and metaphorically transforming death. Her shawl will remain in place for years after her death until, in “Time Passes”, the unraveling of time within the empty house, the slight shifting of the house with decay, cause the shawl to begin to unfold and hang against the wall. Death, Woolf seems to imply, is always the winner. According to Woolf, death is the main theme that captures the whole body of the novel. We witness so many references to death throughout the novel. Furthermore, in our opinion, Woolf’s purpose is to indicate that death is the leading figure covering all our lives.

Woolf’s characters are never entirely free from an anxiety. They must balance precariously on the narrow edge of life and try not to look over its edge. Quickly, they must recover themselves or something terrible will happen. Of course, ‘something terrible’ will happen in the future: they will be annihilated by death just as Mrs. Ramsay is within a few years after she appears in the beginning of *To the Lighthouse* with her young son James. In the meantime, if Woolf’s characters wish to live sanely, they must master self-deception by ignoring their awareness of death. Theme of death – its inevitability and with it, the absolute end to all happiness – is what makes Woolf’s novels sad and gloomy.

In the novel, Mr. Ramsay sees his wife and son, as though from a great distance, in the window. Like all the characters in this novel, they appear “divinely innocent” and “defenceless against a doom” (Woolf, 1994: 32). On the other hand, in the section “Time Passes” we feel that there is reason to be suspicious of the future. Though James will be alive, Mrs. Ramsay will have arbitrarily been selected for death. Yet while she lives, Mrs. Ramsay struggles to survive; she wants all that can be had of “the little strip of time presented itself to her eyes – her fifty years.”
(Woolf, 1994: 40). She takes a negative view of life to some extent and she intends to be vigilant:

There it was before her – life. Life, she thought – but did not finish her thought. She took a look at life, for she had a clear sense of it there, something real, something private, which she shared neither with her children nor with her husband… for the most part, oddly enough, she must admit that she felt this thing she called life terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you if you gave it a chance. There were the eternal problems: suffering; death; the poor…

(Woolf, 1994: 40- 41)

As Naremore puts it, there are two plausible reasons for Woolf’s indirect, ‘poetic’ style in the middle section of the novel, and they both refer to Virginia Woolf’s inhibited or postponed grief. One of the reasons is social: throughout the composition of the novel, Virginia Woolf worried that critics would accuse her of being “sentimental” or “soft”; she said that she wanted to write a “hard, muscular book.” (1982: 86). The other reason why she was not more direct in rendering a fictional death was of course her own personal grief, which at many points she was able to meet courageously (after all, the novel remains one of the most effective modern elegies), but which she also strategically muffled (Naremore, 1982: 86). In this sense, the novel is considered as an elegy in many ways in addition to a number of different perspectives.

As a modernist writer, Woolf managed to create a novel (To the Lighthouse) that showed the inner reality of the mind to contrast with the outer reality of events. To achieve this, she brilliantly uses stream-of-consciousness technique in which montage element prevails. By using stream-of-consciousness technique, Virginia Woolf leads her readers to plunge into the minds and emotions of the characters, the moments of painful grievances. We witness the epiphanies of Mrs. Ramsay, and then the lonely darkness as time passes, and finally the process of mourning as the characters struggle to come to grips with their losses. Life continues as the characters grieve and finally detach themselves from the lost loved ones. In other words, by using flashback technique, Woolf intends to indicate that significant line between life and death.
“The Lighthouse”, the final part in the novel, begins with the line, “What does it mean then, what can it all mean?” (Woolf, 1994: 109) as Lily Briscoe sits up in bed and asks herself how she could react to the passing of Mrs. Ramsay. “What did she feel…? Nothing, nothing – nothing that she could express at all.” (Woolf, 1994: 109). “Returning to a place that holds so many memories (good and bad), she is overwhelmed by her own feelings of sorrow and confusion. Her inner monologue describes the turmoil she experiences in attempting to lay Mrs. Ramsay to rest in her own mind.” (Benefiel, 2003: 5).

Much of the final section is devoted to Lily’s difficult acceptance of the death and her subsequent mourning for a woman whom she admired and loved, but at times criticized. In some of the most profound passages in the novel, Lily reveals this deep love. She cries out “Mrs. Ramsay!” in agony. Before the survivors of death may continue living, they must first mourn and distance themselves from the events.

For one moment she felt that if they both got up, here, now on the lawn, and demanded an explanation, why was it so short, why was it so inexplicable… “Mrs. Ramsay!” she said aloud, “Mrs. Ramsay!” The tears ran down her face.

(Woolf, 1994: 131)

“MRS. RAMSAY!” Lily cried, “Mrs. Ramsay!” But nothing happened. The pain increased. That anguish could reduce one to such a pitch of imbecility, she thought!... Heaven be praised, no one had heard her cry that ignominious cry, stop pain, stop!....

(Woolf, 1994: 132)

People often grieve together, providing support during the process of mourning, but no one in the house clearly discusses the deaths, as if they had never occurred. Each character tries to learn to deal with death alone, thus each of them performs a private ceremony of farewell which allows Mrs. Ramsay to fade away. Mepham claims that for Mr. Ramsay, 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 vanishing ghost of his wife with whom he has finally settled his accounts so that he can now leap as if released onto the rock. On the other hand, after his mother’s death, James has a very powerful muddle of emotions such as hatred and resentment, anger,
love and admiration. His feelings about his father can only be resolved, after so many years, he can trace them back to the scenes in his childhood. In particular, he separates out his anger at his father’s tyranny from his anger at his mother’s disappearance (Mepham, 1987: 31-32). However, in Lily’s case there are extra details of the process of mourning. Perhaps what is most striking in Lily’s case is that she experiences the sudden effects of grief as shocking and surprising (Mepham, 1987: 33). So, Lily, painting in the yard, cannot simply overcome this feeling. She searches for a way to put upon the canvas ‘the shape’ which is blurry in her mind. Directly related to her own blocked emotions, she experiences an artist’s block and is unable to complete the painting until her feelings are worked through. The character struggles with the reality of death, and learns to accept it through art without religious console. Lily’s recollections begin to fade as the grieving process works to put those memories in the past. While struggling with the reality of death, Lily accepts it through art. We witness her epiphany as a result of her revelation of death. In this sense, she completes the stage of mourning when she puts the final brush stroke on her canvas.

Putting herself into her characters, Woolf dealt with death through art. In To the Lighthouse, Lily Briscoe, the artist, has similar moments of clarity when she sees things through a different light. Her painting reflects this change in perspective. “With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought… I have had my vision” (Woolf, 1994: 151). Dealing with death in her own life, Lily has an enlightening epiphany that allows her to complete the work of mourning, and physically complete the painting.

The work of memory is inseparable from Lily’s art. “And as she dipped into the blue paint, she dipped too into the past there. Now Mrs Ramsay got up, she remembered.” (Woolf, 1994: 126). Lily envisions Mrs. Ramsay knitting in her chair, at work on charity socks. The woman artist invokes not her beauty but her work. Lily’s vision is simultaneously the extremity of her grief. The fact of Mrs. Ramsay’s death is now “part of ordinary experience.”; the work of mourning is done (Woolf, 1994: 142). All that is left is to put the final stroke on the painting in concert with the arrival of the Ramsays at the lighthouse. “Of course Lily’s painting is not a
conventional portrait of Mrs. Ramsay. Instead she produces a respectful depiction of Mrs. Ramsay as an abstract shape which expresses her grief without clothing it in the hated Victorian conventions. Lily is a modernist in both art and mourning.” (Smith, 1995: 322). So, she wants to express “the thing itself before it has been made anything.” (Woolf, 1994: 145). In this respect, we can unambiguously perceive Virginia Woolf’s rejection of Victorian conventions represented in Lily’s painting. As a self-portrait of Woolf, Lily feels the most profound mourning that Virginia Woolf suffered for her own mother.

Lily Briscoe’s role in the novel is significant for the way in which her new kind of painting, not a representational work but one in which reality is presented structurally, reflects what Virginia Woolf was herself attempting to do through language in her novel *To the Lighthouse*. It is interesting to note that it is not Cam, Mrs. Ramsay’s daughter, but Lily Briscoe who mourns after Mrs. Ramsay. At this point, it is obvious that Virginia Woolf identified herself with Lily Briscoe. In addition to this, Lily is the character who mourns after the death of the central image of the novel, the figure of Mrs. Ramsay, who is based on Woolf’s own mother. This is another point that Virginia Woolf represented herself by depicting the character of Lily in her work.

Although certainly the fact that Lily is an artist relates her to Vanessa Stephen, Lily is generally considered a model of Woolf herself. Mitchell Leaska calls Lily a “silhouette” of Virginia Woolf who thinks in terms of painting where Woolf thought in terms of writing the novel (Hussey, 1991: 143). Hermione Lee points out that Lily acts out Virginia’s own difficulties. “The impossibility of [Woolf’s] translating her mother from the past in to the present is deep inside the story of Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay.” (1997: 81). Hussey cites Mark Spilka’s observation that Woolf’s using Lily as a self-portrait explains Lily’s grief over Mrs. Ramsay at the end of the book (1991: 309).

According to Smith, Woolf makes the work of mourning literal in *To the Lighthouse*. “The Window” establishes the gendered opposition between work and sympathy, which will later be resolved in a new idea of grief work (1995: 319). Despite the setting at a summer house, Mr. Ramsay, Charles Tansley, William Bankes have all brought their work with them. Lily, too, has brought her work,
although given the social devaluation of the work women do, it comes as a revelation to her “that she had her work.” (Woolf, 1994: 130).

Most critics focus mainly on Lily Briscoe’s grief. However, Mrs. McNab also does the work of mourning. While cleaning the house, she cannot help remembering Mrs. Ramsay:

She could see her now, stooping over her flowers; and faint and flickering like a yellow beam or the circle at the end of a telescope, a lady in a grey cloak, stooping over her flowers, went wandering over the bedroom wall, up the dressing- table, across the wash- stand, as Mrs. McNab hobbled and ambled, dusting, straightening.

(Woolf, 1994: 99)

While Mrs. McNab’s vision of Mrs. Ramsay is not an artist’s epiphany, hers is a kind of grief work which evokes the dead as a welcome presence by means of tasks related to them (Smith, 1995: 320). In the figure of Mrs. McNab, Woolf represents an unmediated and unconscious ideal of grief work which salvages the past in the interests of the present. The slow and painful work of Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast allows the others to do theirs.

Lily takes over the work of mourning from Mrs. McNab; unlike the weary, witless “care- taking woman” (Woolf, 1994: 97), she is “Awake” (Woolf, 1994: 103). But Lily does not at first know what to do with her mourning; she is in a quandary, “wondering whether, since she had been left alone, it behooved her to go to the kitchen to fetch another cup of coffee or wait here…” (Woolf, 1994: 109). Sitting at the table reminds Lily of the “moment of revelation” she had had ten years previously about her painting: “she would paint that picture now” (Woolf, 1994: 121). A desire to escape Mr. Ramsay’s emotional demands triggers her memory: “She must escape somewhere. Suddenly she remembered” (Woolf, 1994: 121). She thinks of her work as a haven from sympathy, but it becomes clear that the two are necessary to each other.

To the Lighthouse struggles over the ‘vision’ of Mrs. Ramsay, both before and after her death – a struggle between the ‘vision’ of beauty, the feminine ideal, the lady in grey who comes all too readily – and Lily’s desire for “her” Mrs. Ramsay, who does finally appear. “There she sat” (Woolf, 1994: 147). At the end of the novel,
Lily Briscoe finds balance and resolution in her painting with a single stroke, and she thinks, “laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision” (Woolf, 1994: 151), and thus the novel ends. Perhaps the gloominess of Woolf’s fiction is due to the fact that she entertained no hope of spiritual existence beyond death.

Marcus suggests that the complexity of past-future relationships runs throughout *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf also constructs a ‘passage’ in the novel through which the past travels to the present and the present to the past. This “passage” is of profound importance for Woolf (1997: 92). In doing so, Virginia Woolf’s aim is to build a bridge between ‘past and present’ by drawing the readers into the ‘passage’ in the minds of the characters. She explores the ‘passage’ between experience and representation and she writes of Lily Briscoe that:

> It was in that moment’s flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set on her who often brought her to the verge of tears and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child.

(Woolf, 1994: 23)

The ‘passage’ is also the corridor along which Mr. Ramsay stumbles after Mrs. Ramsay’s death: “[Mr. Ramsay stumbling along a passage stretched his arms out one dark morning, but, Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, he stretched his arms out. They remained empty]” (Woolf, 1994: 93). Mr. Ramsay could not get over his grief, but he reconciles with it when he thinks about sailors’ frequent death.

No doubt that Mrs. Ramsay’s death is a turning point in *To the Lighthouse*. From the very beginning, Mrs. Ramsay is considered as a dominant mother figure, who is responsible for the order in the house. According to some critics, Mrs. Ramsay symbolizes the ‘lighthouse’ enlightening the house. However, as a result of her death, all the unity and order disappears in the house and the characters feel as if they lost their hopes about the future. Since she serves as a leading figure, they realize that the ‘light’ in the ‘house’ fades away and they lose their guide in life. Meanwhile, it is important to note that it is not a coincidence to encounter Mrs. Ramsay’s death in “Time Passes” section. This section presents the readers the destructive face of the war and death resulting in darkness, despair, and fear.
The Ramsays in *To the Lighthouse* are also engaged in a work of mourning. The trip to the lighthouse fulfills the aborted journey discussed in “The Window”, and in doing so honors both Mrs. Ramsay’s beauty and her social work. James has the work of steering the boat and remembering his mother, in the same scene that Lily remembers, but the focus for James is on his father’s interruption of his shared moment with his mother (Woolf, 1994: 122). James’s resentment of his father is overcome when Mr. Ramsay praises his skillful handling of the boat.

The action in *To the Lighthouse* takes place in a single symbolic day: it begins in the afternoon and ends at noon after a long, dark night that spans ten years and many deaths. The work of mourning takes place, appropriately, in the morning. That the novel ends in the full light of day enhances the optimistic consummations of Lily’s and Mr. Ramsay’s projects. Woolf aimed at the effect of simultaneity, which suggests that their projects are fundamentally the same (Woolf, 1978: 106). The works of mourning are complete at the end of the novel.

Smith claims that in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf defines a new mode of mourning. She rejects the gendered role-playing of conventional sympathy, as well as the psychoanalytic concept of grief work which demands complete detachment from the dead. Instead, she advocates meaningful work, as appropriate to both the bereaved and the dead. “Women are no longer to be merely the objects of art, or the servants of men; Woolf’s feminist consciousness shapes her conception of the work of mourning. Lily Briscoe and Mr. Ramsay take separate journeys, not because of gender difference, but because of their differing talents and interests. Both a work of art and artful work allow grief to be expressed and worked through.” (Smith, 1995: 323). It is really hard to disagree with Smith’s remark in terms of Virginia Woolf’s conception of the work of mourning. As she intends to introduce her own mode of fiction, similarly, she creates her own concept of mourning, too.

It is important to note that we witness different representations of grief in Virginia Woolf’s fiction. For example, grief and mourning practices in *To the Lighthouse* are totally different from the ones expressed in her other works. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf expresses grief without conventions, without doctors and without therapists. She expresses grief in work. Overriding concerns of *To the Lighthouse* and all of its characters are death, mourning, and the inexorable passage of time.
When Mrs. Ramsay dies, she takes with her the sense of order in the family; children die, Lily and Mr. Ramsay fall into abiding grief, and even the house itself declines into despair. The consummation of the trip to the lighthouse and Lily’s completion of her painting, with a single line down the center representing Mrs. Ramsay, signify the triumph of order over disorder and life over death and grief. As a final evaluation, we observe that Virginia Woolf deals with the concept of death and mourning in her own style in *To the Lighthouse*.

To conclude, we tried to put emphasis on the reasons for Woolf’s presentation of death in square brackets in particular. Each character mourns in his/her own way in the novel. And it is not death but its legacy that is important for the characters. The dead appears in the minds of the characters in different ways. Another reason is that giving death events in brackets, Virginia Woolf aims to avoid speaking about death, trying to resist it. In addition, it is her way to fight with grief. Woolf also rejects Victorian rhetoric of death. Mourning is complete through work.
5. Conclusion

Landefeld rightly observes that “more than sixty years after her death, Virginia Woolf continues to interest students and scholars.” (2005: 1). We have chosen the best novel by Woolf to examine the concept of death and mourning. Virginia Woolf’s treatment of this theme is quite modernist in that she rejects traditional Victorian funeral ceremonies and rituals. It is common knowledge that Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* evades unambiguous interpretation. We tried to review the available literature on the issue adding our own comments to the concept of death and mourning.

Though some critics, post-structuralists, in particular, question the novel’s being “a much more open text than simply a family triangle” (Landefeld 2005: 10), *To the Lighthouse* is accepted by most critics to be the most autobiographical of Virginia Woolf’s novels. It is based on her own early experiences, and while it touches on childhood and children’s perceptions and desires, it also deals with adult relationships, marriage and the changing class-structure in the period of the Great War. On the other hand, *To the Lighthouse* is partly based on the writer’s family background, significant for its vivid characters, its effective use of stream-of-consciousness technique. In addition to many vital topics, we believe that what is striking in *To the Lighthouse* is Woolf’s unique portrayal of life and death, the questioning of life and the approach toward death and life.

In this study, we tried to prove that Virginia Woolf is a remarkable experimenter concerning the expression of death and mourning. She skillfully fuses the features of conventional pastoral elegy and her unique stream-of-consciousness technique. From the very beginning, death is a frequent theme in Virginia Woolf’s own family. Thus, it is obvious that death affected both Virginia Woolf’s own psychology and her fiction. Furthermore, *To the Lighthouse* is an elegiac work and it represents Virginia Woolf’s own mourning over her parents’ death to some extent.

A number of critics agree on the elegiac properties of the novel. We tried to show the elegiac character of the novel and emphasize the works that influenced Virginia Woolf considerably while writing the novel. On the other hand, the novel
exhibits a number of characteristics of the pastoral elegy. We also tried to point out the similarities between the novel and typical features of the pastoral elegy.

In introduction we stated the aim of our study, which is to examine the concept of death and mourning in *To the Lighthouse*, and how this theme is handled in various critical articles. In the second chapter, we tried to demonstrate the difference between the concept of death and mourning from Woolf’s perspective and the portrayal of the concept in Modernist novels, in general, and the effects of the Great War and the prominent events of the period on Virginia Woolf’s fiction. In this light, Sandra Gilbert’s “Rats’ Alley: The Great War, Modernism, and the (Anti) Pastoral Elegy” (1999) and Karen Levenback’s *Virginia Woolf and the Great War* (1999) are very remarkable. The former points out the consequences of the war on people’s psychology and the war’s effect on modernist writing. The latter deals with the effects of the war in Virginia Woolf’s previous novel *Mrs. Dalloway*.

As mentioned before in our study, elegy as a genre that has undergone considerable modifications after the Great War. Sandra Gilbert introduces new concepts such as “modern death, monsters of elegy, and death modernity” (1999: 180). Virginia Woolf’s experimentation craft shows itself at its best in her different interpretations of the issue. The writer does not address death directly in her novel, she is rather concerned with its legacy, and the legacy of the dead. In chapter three, we tried to draw parallels between traditional pastoral elegy and the way Woolf views it. We agree with Gilbert for considering the novel partly to be anti-elegiac too, in that the death in the novel is not described directly (actually it is avoided), by which Virginia Woolf seems to fight grief and resist it. The second part of the novel (“Time Passes”) vividly reflects many conventions of pastoral elegy such as a pastoral scene, various representations of grief and mourning, and the involvement of nature in mourning the dead. The whole nature seems to mourn Mrs. Ramsay. By personifying the inanimate objects, Virginia Woolf creates a requiem not only for Mrs. Ramsay but for all the dead in the Great War.

In the last chapter, we tried to focus on how Virginia Woolf dealt with the concept of death and mourning in *To the Lighthouse* with the representations of the characters’ questioning of life and death. Virginia Woolf is far from idealizing death
in her novel. She does show in detail how her characters are concerned about this last journey and the question of immortality and she devotes a number of pages to after death musings not only of the Ramsays but Mr. Bankes, Mr. Tansley and, Lily in particular question the meaning of life and wonder whether it is worth living if everything ends in death. They try to find the ways to remain in the memory of the posterity though their ways to achieve immortality vary. Mrs. Ramsay’s death is a sort of revelation for Lily. She reassesses her attitude to her and at the end of the novel, she approves of things she used to disapprove. She is more mature now, she learned some lessons and now she is ready to use them. That is the legacy of Mrs. Ramsay’s death. She resurrects to remind Lily of the meaning of life and its worthiness.

Death is the journey to the unknown, eternity. As human beings, is it not our overall purpose in life to find out the reasons for living and dying or do we not try to realize our existence and the meaning of life? Furthermore, do we not question the final destination throughout our lives? In conclusion, life is a long path which leads us to the uncertain destination in some ways. As a result of our experiences during the research, we have come to the conclusion that by using ‘life and death’ as the central theme in her fiction, Woolf aimed to make her readers realize the meaning of life and the reality of inevitable end.

To conclude, the presentation of death and mourning reflects modernist features though not rejecting the previous literary legacy. However, we think despite its optimistic tone (reaching to the lighthouse, Lily’s completion of her painting, and Lily’s vision), it does not reach a definite conclusion. Some questions such as “What’s the meaning of life?”, “What does it mean?”, “What did it mean?” are unanswered in the novel. And it is not Woolf’s aim to give unambiguous answers. “Have I power of conveying the true reality? Or do I write essays about myself?” She asks herself in her diary. And Woolf herself considers them to be “insoluble” (Woolf, 1994: 5). The whole novel is a doubt about man’s significance and his values. We, together with Woolf, begin doubting things, too.

This study offers a general view of the author’s treatment of the concept of death and mourning. Basically, it is meant to illuminate Virginia Woolf’s attitude
within the novel *To the Lighthouse* towards life and death from a number of different perspectives. Though a great deal of research has been done on Virginia Woolf and the prominent issues in her fiction, no significant analysis has been written on her use of the concept of death and mourning. Since this is the first study on this issue primarily, it can include shortcomings. However, we strongly believe that it will shed light on significant points concerning Virginia Woolf’s fiction in details for future researchers. Furthermore, it can be of use to the students who intend to write about the twentieth century literature with the focus on topics such as stream-of-consciousness technique, modernist fiction or even on philosophical and psychological issues. This study could also be helpful to the scholar who wishes to write about the influence of particular events such as the Great War and death and the relationship between the Great War and Modernism. We hope that this thesis will be a guide to students of literature who focus on issues such as elegy, grief work, despair, loneliness, bereavement in early twentieth century fiction.
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