

Narrative Strategies and Changes In *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf and *A Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man* by James Joyce

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The literary panorama of the 20th century reflects the complexity of the contemporary thoughts, the whirlpool of ideas, offering an overall image of the changes that have occurred in the mind of the individual due to several events: the world wars, the social structures threatened by the expansion of the industrialization in Europe, as well as the oscillating economy in Britain. Due to the existence of remarkable writers such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, we can better understand the changes that have occurred in literature and realize at the same time that novels such as “*To the Lighthouse*” or “*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*” offered new ways of interpreting reality, showing that the novel has continuously progressed and has become different from the traditional works belonging to the Enlightenment or to the Victorian Age.

Both “*To the Lighthouse*” and “*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*” are modern works which show from the very beginning that the mental space of the individual, the plot as well as the style of writing differ much from the traditional novels. Virginia Woolf starts off her book by presenting some of Freud’s ideas regarding the oedipal complex. This beginning proves to be an innovative one, as no reader would have expected for such a way of introducing and of giving a hint of what is going to happen in the novel. It seems that the writer wants to prove that everything starts from inward, things happen at the psychological level first, and it is the psyche the one which guides our actions. This hypothesis is best illustrated by the timing of the book. If it had been for a traditional novel, we would have expected to have a linear plot structure, individualized characters, as well as a strong feeling of realism. However, “*To the Lighthouse*” presents events that happen in two days but ten years apart, reality becomes a matter of subjectivity, because the writer uses the third person and describes the characters from her point of view or from the other characters’ points of view. Surprisingly innovative, as well, is the beginning of “*The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*” because Joyce uses a fairy tale formula for the beginning of his novel “once upon a time” which makes the reader imagine that he is going to enter a pure childish universe in which everything is touched by the veil of innocence. Conversely, the character can’t adopt this pure attitude throughout the entire narrative as he is corrupted by evils greater than himself and because he has to take decisions that will influence his entire life. This kind of plot, interspersed with moments of decay of Stephen Dedalus, as well as the shift in time that takes place while telling the events that occur in the life of the Ramsay family in “*To the Lighthouse*” suggest that, contrary to the model followed by the traditional novel, the modern novel brings changes not only at the linguistic form, but also in the development of the plot. If writers like Dickens dealt with lower classes presenting the slowness of justice, the doctrine of laissez-faire, adopting a sentimentalist vision and preferring to give his books a happy ending, or like Thackeray who was above the action, considering himself as the manager of the performance, playing the role of a puppeteer, or even like the Brontë sisters who showed a deep fascination for the Gothic, dealing with the somber parts of the human psyche, the modernists like Woolf or Joyce thought that the role that best fit them was the one of psychologists; they understood that not the plot is the most important aspect, but the sensations, memories and consciousness were the ones that mattered above all. The hero of the novel belonging to James Joyce feels how it is to be lonely, disintegrated, his portrait being in fact a fictional autobiography, all the events and feelings in the book being presented

by his perspective and point of view. In a cruel world in which each and every person has to manage on his own, Dedalus finds himself in the situation of taking up decisions which will mark his entire life. A great fight takes place in the soul and mind of the hero and, consequently, he turns inward and tries to see which attitude to life fits him best: the one of a fanatic religious man or the image of the artist devoted to art and beauty. The end of the book offers the solution to his dilemma, as he will become a mature artist, fully pleased with his status. Clearly, the book offers several narrative strategies in order to illustrate how Stephen arrives to choose to become an independent artist. Throughout the brief fragment in which the narrative is presented from the first point of view (Stephen's diary entries), we find out that the character is overwhelmed by contradictory feelings: he does not know whether he has to choose his family, his national identity, Church and religiosity or his vocation of an artist. Suffering several transformations, from childhood to adolescence, from innocence to sexuality, or from deep religiosity to a person devoted to art and beauty, the hero realizes that it is more important to reject the standards imposed by a rigid society and follow your own dreams. This is why he decides to give up the moral constraints and live freely and happily as an artist. One century earlier, no character would have dared to take life in his hands and reject the laws imposed by the society of the time. It seems then that during the 20th century, the individual has the power to act freely and rebel against society, he can choose his destiny.

Another essential aspect that must be taken into consideration is that the action of the novel "To the Lighthouse" belonging to Virginia Woolf takes place during the years immediately preceding and following the First World War. Obviously, under such circumstances the psyche of the characters is seriously affected. In a situation of crisis, the author presents a world without any Romantic or utopian elements, and especially in "Time Passes" we assist to a degrading universe, the Ramsay's house being completely devastated and almost fully destroyed by the war. Despite the image of this degrading space, each character tries to find hope and get out from this chaos. This is the moment when the stream of consciousness best operates, revealing moments of meditation as well as the inner most feelings and thoughts of the Ramsays, of Lily Briscoe, or of Charles Tansley.

The condition of the artist is a theme that does not only characterize James Joyce's hero Stephen Dedalus, but it is also a matter of high significance in Virginia Woolf's novel, as Lily Briscoe is the figure of the talented, passionate artist who wants to catch eternity in her painting. She finds out that through art she can find a way of immortalizing the present and a way of escaping the cruel reality. If Stephen Dedalus finds only by the end of the book that his real vocation is that of an artist who cherishes beauty, Lily Briscoe is constant in her passion for art throughout the entire development of the plot. She is aware of her beauty and power, and proves to Charles Tansley that women can be as good as men are. This image makes the reader step backwards in time and realize that modern literature offers a new vision regarding the status of women in the society. Thus, feminist power is sustained and women are finally seen as equal or even better as men are.

If the Victorian writers had had definitely adopted a bird's eye view technique, modernists like Woolf let their characters present reality from their own points of view. Lily Briscoe tries to deeply analyse Mrs. Ramsay from several angles and she even confesses in the beginning of the novel that her two eyes are definitely insufficient to be able to capture the complexity of the woman that is going to be painted, but she ends by the end of the book by becoming a fully developed artist who has succeeded in understanding the secrets of painting and, intrinsically, the secrets of life. Lily Briscoe is aware that she has to paint something that is in deep connection with her own perspective of reality. Moreover, this theme of the condition of the artist is innovative as no writer of traditional novels would have thought of expressing beauty through art especially through the painting of a talented woman.

The setting of the two novels offers extra hints in order to better understand the modernist view and proves that unique places as well as the mind of the individual are the refuges for the cruel external world. On the one hand, in "To the Lighthouse", the Isle of Skye, that place of complete loneliness and especially the lighthouse are symbols of certain things that we can not realize at that very moment. This means, James can fulfill his childhood dream only after a long period of time and succeeds in getting to the lighthouse only after time has left its mark on the building. James's desire of visiting the lighthouse and recollecting himself suggests an important modernist characteristic, namely the desire of the individual to escape the space of the war and isolate himself in a peaceful place. Moreover, the house of the Ramsays can be seen as a refuge against war, the house preserving the marks that war has left on it (it is visibly degraded), but reflecting at the same time the changes in thoughts and feelings of the members of the family. On the other hand, the setting in Joyce's novel, namely Dublin and the surrounding areas, shows that the modern character is attracted by the urban space, he wants to expand his knowledge, discover the world and its mysteries. The setting of the two novels draws a basic difference from the traditional novels in which writers preferred rural spaces, far away from the corrupt British institutions.

Both Virginia Woolf and James Joyce use several narrative strategies in order to emphasize certain traits of their characters or in order to offer a new vision over literature bringing a new way of interpreting reality. Thus, in Joyce's book language plays an important role, being at a certain moment even expressed by music. Stephen's song expresses in fact more intimate language, making reference to words that touch the soul. This proves the hero's talent and his inclination at a certain moment in the book to live his life to the fullest. The Irish song that appears by the end of the book also makes reference to the nationalistic attitude of Stephen and intrinsically of the writer. Moreover, Joyce uses the technique of foreshadowing in order to show the feelings that the character lives until he is ready to decide that he wants to become an artist. Due to epiphanies, we can better understand what happens in the hero's conscience and closely supervise his transformations, understand his shift from religious extremism to a life devoted to art and beauty.

In Woolf's novel, the technique of foreshadowing is also present as James's dream of visiting the lighthouse accomplishes only after a ten year span. In addition, due to the stream of consciousness we can understand the way of thinking of a world that has highly felt the effects of war and that tries to surmount the chaos in which it is found by the attempt of finding reasons for living. It is obvious that these characteristics that appear in the two novels are modern ways of interpreting reality. The authors appeal to the stream of consciousness, to backshifts in time, to impressionist visions in order to present a world ready to break traditional rules of writing. Both James Joyce and Virginia Woolf as well as the majority of modernists do not aim at presenting linear plot structures with a strong effect of realism anymore, do not focus on the characters' adventures almost at all, but they work mainly exclusively at the psychological level, insisting on the ideas and thoughts of the characters, the focus being concentrated on the mental space. Moreover, the historical past does not offer a utopian solution to daily problems anymore, as it is the individual the one that has to find a solution to his difficulties and learn how to surmount them.

All in all, the obvious conclusion to be drawn is that both Virginia Woolf's masterpiece "To the Lighthouse", as well as James Joyce's novel "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" are modern writings which present new narrative strategies such as the shift in time, the interior monologue, the appeal to the stream of consciousness, to memory, to realism in a certain degree in order to show that literature can do much more than only presenting the adventures of the individual, literature can, in fact, fathom the human psyche and find answers to several issues. Thus, these modernist novels bring effective changes from the

traditional novels and assert that people must reject the stereotypes and fight for their entry in a superior world, in a better universe.

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